

PUBLIC

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8 April 2003

UA 94/03 Fear for Safety

**GUATEMALA Waldemar Barrera (m), Regional Representative of the *Procuraduría de los Derechos Humanos* (PDH), Human Rights Ombudsman's Office, Izabal department
Other staff of the PDH in Izabal**

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Waldemar Barrera, regional representative of the *Procuraduría de los Derechos Humanos* (PDH), Human Rights Ombudsman's Office in the Department of Izabal, after his office was raided and his car was broken into. Other PDH staff may also be in danger.

On 4 April, unidentified individuals broke into Waldemar Barrera's car while it was parked in the town of Puerto Barrios, Izabal department. His briefcase, containing documents relating to the work of the PDH, was stolen, along with the car radio. On 6 April, the PDH offices and Waldemar Barrera's own office in Puerto Barrios were broken into and raided by an unknown group of people. No one was in the office at the time. A substantial number of files, computers and other equipment were taken in the raid. Other valuable items in the office including a camera were not stolen. It is feared that this may be the latest in a series of attacks on PDH premises and staff, aimed at obstructing their legitimate human rights work.

Last year the PDH Auxiliary office in Izabal worked on more than 90 cases of human rights violations, including those carried out by local authorities and agents of the state security forces. Recently it has been working on a number of high profile cases, including the killing of the journalist Mynor Alegría (UA 225/01, 7 September 2001, AMR 34/036/2001); the Chocón case involving former members of the *Departamento de Operaciones Antinarcóticas* (DOAN), the department of Anti-Narcotics Operations (UA 65/02, 28 February 2002, AMR 34/012/2002); and cases of extra-judicial execution of and attacks against land activists and members of communities involved in land conflicts (UA 38/03, 7 February 2002, AMR 34/005/2002, UA 200/02, 2 July 2002, AMR 34/041/2002, 205/02, 8 July 2002, AMR 34/042/2002).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The PDH is the main state institution mandated to protect human rights. It has major financial backing from international governments and inter-governmental organizations that have supported the peace process in Guatemala. However, despite being a state institution and having international backing, staff from a number of regional PDH offices have increasingly been targets in what appears to be a systematic pattern of threats and intimidation over the past two years, in reprisal for their work (see for example UA 265/02, 28 August 2002, AMR 34/050/2002). The Guatemalan government has repeatedly failed to investigate and bring to justice those responsible.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Spanish or English or your own language:

- expressing serious concern that staff of government offices mandated to protect human rights and investigate abuses have been threatened and intimidated;
- urging the authorities to take all the necessary measures to ensure the safety of Waldemar Barrera and all staff members of the Izabal PDH offices;
- pressing the government to carry out and immediate, impartial and exhaustive investigation into the incidents involving Barrera and the raid on the PDH offices, to make the results public and bring those responsible to justice;
- urging the authorities to provide the PDH with political support, as well as all of the necessary logistical support for it to carry out its constitutionally recognised function.

APPEALS TO:

Human Rights Procurator

Lic. Sergio Morales

Procuraduría de los Derechos Humanos

12 Avenida 12-72, Zona 1

Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala

Fax: +502 230 0874 / 0875 / 0876 / 238 1734

Salutation: Dear Procurator/Señor Procurador

Vice-president of the Republic of Guatemala

Lic. Juan Francisco Reyes López

6ª Avenida 'A' 4-18

Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala

Fax: + 502 239 0090 (please keep trying)

Salutation: Dear Vice-president/Señor Vicepresidente

Public Prosecutor's Office, Izabal

Fiscal Auxiliar

Oficina del Ministerio Público

8 Calle, 9 Avenida, Puerto Barrios, Izabal, Guatemala

Fax: + 502 948 0112/1193 (if a voice answers, please say, "fax por favor")

Salutation: Estimado Fiscal /Dear Public Prosecutor

Local Police

Comisario Escribá Zamora

Jefe de Comisaria, Policía Nacional Civil

6 Avenida, 15-6 Calle, Puerto Barrios, Izabal, Guatemala

Fax: + 502 9487 614 (if a voice answers, please say, "fax por favor")

Salutation: Estimado Jefe de Comisaria/Dear Chief of Police

COPIES TO:

Auxiliary Office of the PDH, Izabal

Lic. Waldemar Barrera

4ª Avenida, 11 Calle, Puerto Barrios, Izabal, Guatemala

Fax: + 502 948 0028 (if a voice answers, please say, "fax por favor")

Press Agency

Cerigua

2a calle 1-42, Zona 1

Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala

Fax: + 502 238 1456/ 221 2521/ 251 1289

and to diplomatic representatives of Guatemala accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 20 May 2003.