

UA 159/98

Fear for Safety

21 May 1998

GUATEMALA Ricardo Sulugi, director of the Defensoria Maya regional office in Sololá

Juan León, director of Defensoria Maya

Ovido Paz, lawyer working for Defensoria Maya
and other members of Defensoria Maya

There is serious concern for the safety of members of Defensoria Maya, a Maya indigenous rights organization working to defend indigenous and human rights in Guatemala, after death threats were received by some of its members.

On 16 May 1998 Ovido Paz was approached by two armed men in the town of Sololá, department of Sololá, who informed him that they intended to kill Ricardo Sulugi, Juan León and himself: "*de un balazo a la cabeza*", "with a bullet to the head".

The death threats are likely to be connected to Defensoria Maya's current attempts to bring former military commissioners (demobilized in 1996) to trial for human rights violations they are believed to have carried out in the early 1980s.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Juan León has been active in negotiations for the implementation of the Accord on the Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples, one component of the peace agreement signed between the Guatemalan Government and the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG) Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity, in December 1996. An article of this Accord states that: "Mayan, Garífuna and Xinca peoples have the right to create and direct their own institutions, to control their own development and to fully exercise their political rights".

Juan León also recently attended the 1998 session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva, Switzerland, to lobby for continued international scrutiny of the human rights situation in Guatemala and was a candidate for Vice-President in Guatemala's last elections in 1995.

The recent murder of Monseñor Juan Gerardi, a Guatemalan Auxiliary Bishop and long-term human rights advocate, on 26 April and death threats against others involved in the Historical Clarification Process, have led to renewed concerns that the lives of human rights defenders in this country are at great risk.

The Historical Clarification Process aims to identify and prosecute those responsible for massive human rights abuses perpetrated against non-combatant civilians during Guatemala's dirty war, mainly by the army but also by URNG, during the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Recent events contravene the Global Human Rights Accord, signed on 23 March 1994 between the URNG and the Guatemalan Government, which states that: "The Government of the Republic of Guatemala shall take special protection measures in favour of persons ... working in the field of human rights. Furthermore, it shall make timely, exhaustive investigations of complaints presented to it regarding acts or threats which could affect them. The Government of the Republic of Guatemala reaffirms its commitment to effectively guarantee and protect the work of individuals and entities working in defence of human rights."

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/E-mails/faxes/express/airmail letters in Spanish or your own language:

- urging the authorities to take immediate steps to guarantee the safety of members of the indigenous rights organization Defensoria Maya;
- appealing for an inquiry into the intimidation and death threats of members of Defensoria Maya on 16 May 1998 in Sololá, department of Sololá;
- urging the authorities to effectively implement their pledge as laid out in the Global Human Rights Accord.

APPEALS TO:

Note: fax tones may only be available during office hours local time. If voice answers ask: "me puede dar tono de fax por favor".

President of the Republic of Guatemala

S.E. Álvaro Arzú Irigoyen

Presidente de la República de Guatemala

Palacio Nacional, 6ª Calle y 7ª Avenida, Zona 1

Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

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E-mails: alvaroarzu@guateconnect.com / alvaroarzu@guate.net

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Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente / Dear President

Minister of Interior

Lic. Rodolfo Mendoza Rosales

Ministro de Gobernación

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Despacho Ministerial, Of. N° 8

Palacio Nacional, 6ª Calle y 7ª Avenida, Zona 1

Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Telegrams: Ministro Gobernación, Guatemala, Guatemala

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Salutation: Señor Ministro / Dear Minister

Private Secretary to the President

Sr. Gustavo Porras

Secretario Privado del Presidente de la República

Palacio Nacional, 6ª Calle y 7ª Avenida, Zona 1

Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Telegrams: Gustavo Porras, Guatemala, Guatemala

Salutation: Señor Secretario / Dear Secretary

Governor of Sololá

Lic. Luis Alberto Amézquita Ruiz

Gobernador de Sololá, 6ª Avenida y 10ª Calle esquina, Zona 2

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Telefax: + 502 762 1473

Salutation: Señor Gobernador / Dear Governor

COPIES TO:

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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 2 July 1998.