

**PUBLIC**

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**15 November 2005**

**UA 291/05**

**Fear for Safety**

**GUATEMALA**

**Staff and volunteers of the *Asociación de Mujeres Ixqik*,  
Ixqik Women's Association**

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The Ixqik Women's Association is supporting a rape victim in a high-profile court case. The organization's offices have been raided three times in nine days in what appears to be a deliberate attempt to intimidate the staff, and the police have failed to protect them. The burglars took personal details of all the staff of the Association, and Amnesty International believes they are in serious danger.

The Ixqik Women's Association has developed a programme to assist rape victims in their efforts to obtain justice, based in Petén department, in the north-east of the country. The Association is currently providing legal support to eight rape victims seeking justice through the courts in Petén. On 27 October, the Association led a march in the capital of Petén, Santa Elena, in support of a 50-year-old woman with learning difficulties who had been raped.

At noon on 31 October staff came to the offices of the Association to find that the lock had been broken and the door forced open. The burglars had taken a camera with pictures of the 27 October march, along with two tape recorders, but ignored the organization's six computers, as well as cash and a credit card that a staff member had left on a desk. Staff of the Association presented a formal written complaint to police, who turned up at around 5pm to inspect the crime scene.

At 8am on 7 November staff found that the office door had been forced again. They found that nothing had been stolen, but many files had been searched, including a list of all staff members' home addresses and telephone numbers, and files relating to the Association's work of lobbying on women's issues. The burglars had attempted to open the secure filing cabinet which contained copies of files of rape cases, but had been unsuccessful.

Two days later, at 8am, staff arrived to find that their office had been raided again. This time the burglars had broken down a door to the Association's warehouse, which adjoins the office, and broken in to the office from there via a connecting window, opening the main door from the inside. This time they stole a television set and DVD player but, as before, left the six computers. They searched all the files relating to other criminal proceedings (mostly domestic violence) in which the Association is supporting the plaintiffs, as well as all the files relating to rape cases, after they found the keys to the secure filing cabinet in a desk.

Acting on a request from another NGO, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights is presently considering a request to implement "precautionary measures" on behalf of the Association, which would most probably include a police presence outside the office. The organization has not yet received any protection. All three raids on their offices took place on days when the court was due to hear closing arguments in the case of the 50-year-old rape victim whom the Association is supporting. A verdict of not guilty was delivered on 11 November. The Association has already been given leave to appeal.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Violence against women is widespread in Guatemala. Research conducted by Amnesty International has shown that many investigations into violence against women are flawed and inadequate, with those responsible rarely brought to justice. For further information see the report *No protection, No Justice: killings of women in Guatemala* (AMR 34/017/2005).

The Ixqik Women's Association of Peten was set up in 1999, and has been working in support of rape victims since 2002. The Association also works on lobbying in support of women's rights and providing training to other women's organisations.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of the *Asociación de Mujeres Ixqik*, whose offices have been raided three times since 31 October;
- calling for an immediate and thorough investigation into the raids by the Public Prosecutor's Office and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- asking the authorities to provide protection to the *Asociación de Mujeres Ixqik* immediately, including a police presence outside the office.

**APPEALS TO:**

Minister of the Interior

Ministro de Gobernación

Carlos Vielman

6a.Avenida 4-64, zona 4, nivel 3

Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

**Fax: +502 2362 0237**

**+502 2361 5657**

**Salutation: Estimado Ministro/Dear Minister**

Director General of the National Civil

Director General de la Policía Nacional Civil

Edwin Johann Spirisen

6ª Avenida 13-71, Zona 1, 1er nivel

Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

**Fax: +502 2251 9382**

**Salutation: Estimado Director General/Dear Director General**

**COPIES TO:**

Ixqik Women's Association

Asociación de Mujeres de Petén Ixqik

1ª av 4ª calle esquina, 2º nivel Banco G&T zona 1,

Santa Elena,

Petén, GUATEMALA

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 27 December 2005.