

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 34/061/2002

UA 293/02

Fear for safety 27 Septe

GUATEMALA Staff of Human Rights Procurator's Auxiliary Offices in the towns of Barillas, Nentón, and Huehuetenango (department of Huehuetenango), Santa Cruz del Quiché (department of El Quiché), Salamá (department of Baja Verapaz), Sololá, (department of Sololá), San Marcos, (department of San Marcos), Cobán (department of Alta Verapaz) and Santa Elena and Poptún (department of El Petén).

Amnesty International is deeply concerned for the safety of staff at the above named local offices of Guatemala's human rights ombudsman, *Procuraduría de Derechos Humanos* (PDH), Human Rights Procurator's Office. Former civil patrol members have threatened to first occupy and then burn down their offices if their demands for compensation for their patrol service during Guatemala's long-term civil conflict are not fully met within 30 days.

For instance, in San Marcos, after former civil patrol members carried out a series of recent demonstrations, PDH staff recently received telephone calls stating that the civil patrollers would first occupy and then burn down the San Marcos offices if their demands for compensation were not met. Last week intimidation intensified after PDH staff received a written threat.

Former members of the *Patrullas de Auto-Defensa Civil* (PAC), Civil Defence Patrols, were responsible for mass human rights violations during Guatemala's long-running internal conflict. They have accused several auxiliary offices of the PDH of attempting to prevent the government from compensating them for their service during the civil conflict. An initial offer made by the Guatemalan authorities of 12 Quetzales (approximately \$1.50) per month served in the civil patrols was rejected as inadequate. Fierce opposition exists from many sectors and organizations spanning the political spectrum, who are seriously concerned that the government has not implemented the reparations program for the victims of human rights violations agreed in the Peace Accords, while at the same time acceding at least partially to the demands of the patrollers, who were perpetrators of some of the worst human rights atrocities during the conflict years.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Civil patrols were initiated in 1981 under the Presidency of General Romero Lucas García (1978-1982). Operating under military orders they were charged by the army to act as their civilian adjuncts and 'protect' their communities from the armed opposition. Participation was obligatory and some of those who carried out abuses were coerced into doing so under threat of death to themselves and their families. The 1996 Peace Accords, brokered under the auspices of the United Nations, provided for the disbanding of the patrols. However, they have continued to operate in various areas of the country and have allegedly been responsible for new human rights abuses.

During 2002, former patrol members have been particularly forceful in their demands for compensation for the service they rendered while serving in the patrols. Demonstrations of up to 20,000 former patrollers have taken place throughout the country. Their activities have been most visible and insistent in areas where the patrols were most aggressively mobilized by the army to support its scorched earth

counter-insurgency campaign in which over 200,000 Guatemalans were killed or “disappeared” (see report, *The Civil Defence Patrols Re-Emerge*, AMR 34/053/2002, 4 September 2002).

The PDH is the main Guatemalan state institution mandated to protect human rights. The body has major financial backing from many cooperation programs, particularly from the Consultative Group of principal donor countries and international as well as 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, AMR 34/050/2002, 28 August 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 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 all staff members of the PDH offices named above (naming them);
- pressing the government to investigate the former patrol members responsible for the threats, make the results public and bring those responsible to justice;
- reminding the authorities that the civil patrols were to have been abolished under the peace accords, and that countries and international organizations that have supported the peace process in Guatemala - through membership in the Group of Friendly Countries and the Consultative Group - are monitoring the government's reaction to the re-surfacing of the patrols and new abuses by them.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic of Guatemala
Lic. Alfonso Portillo Cabrera
Presidente de la República de Guatemala
6a. Avenida “A” 4-41, Zona 1, Guatemala,
Guatemala
Telegram: Presidente de la República de
Guatemala, Guatemala City, Guatemala
Fax: + 502 253 0801
Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente

Antigua Escuela Politécnica
Avenida Reforma 1-45, Zona 10, Guatemala,
Guatemala
Telegram: Ministro de Defensa de Guatemala,
Guatemala City, Guatemala
Telefax: + 502 360 9909
Salutation: Don Ministro/Señor Ministro

COPIES TO:

Human Rights Procurator

Secretary of Strategic Affairs

Lic. Edgar A. Gutiérrez
Secretario de Asuntos Estratégicos
Secretaría de Asuntos Estratégicos
6a Avenida “A” 3-55, Zona 1
Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala
Telegram: Secretario de Asuntos
Estratégicos, Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala
Fax: + 502 232 2886
Salutation: Don Secretario/Señor Secretario

Minister of Defence

General Robín Maeloni Morán Muñoz
Ministro de Defensa Nacional
Ministerio de Defensa

Procurador de Derechos Humanos

Procuraduría de los Derechos Humanos
12 Avenida 12-72, Zona 1
Ciudad de Guatemala 01001, Guatemala
Fax: + 502 238 1734 / 230 0874 / 0876

and to diplomatic representatives of
Guatemala accredited to your country.

PLEASE

APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check
with the International Secretariat, or your
section office, if sending appeals after 8
November 2002.

SEND