

NICARAGUA **Vilma Núñez de Escorcia (f), president of human rights organisation**
Centro Nicaragüense de Derechos Humanos (CENIDH), Nicaraguan
Centre for Human Rights
Other CENIDH staff

The Nicaraguan government has recently intensified a smear campaign against Vilma Núñez de Escorcia and the human rights organization she leads, and Amnesty International fears there may be direct attacks on her, her colleagues and their families. From January to March this year she also received repeated telephone death threats.

Vilma Núñez is the president of the *Centro Nicaragüense de Derechos Humanos* (CENIDH), Nicaraguan Centre for Human Rights. Since 1999 the government has claimed that she and CENIDH have links with the illegal armed group *Frente Unido Andrés Castro* (FUAC), the Andres Castro United Front. Nicaraguan radio and newspapers reported these allegations as fact. CENIDH repeatedly challenged the government to hand over any evidence it had to the Attorney General (*Fiscal General*), so that they could answer these allegations in court. When it finally did so, the Attorney General officially dismissed the government's claims as unfounded, on 8 May 2001. Despite this, the government has not retracted its claims, and is continuing its smear campaign against CENIDH.

Vilma Núñez has also been threatened and harassed by anonymous phone calls and letters, and repeated rumours of plots to kill her. In the past pro-government newspapers and radio stations have said that "her death might be the answer to the unrest in northern Nicaragua" ("*la eliminación física de la Dra Vilma Núñez podría ser la solución al conflicto que se vive en la zona norte del país*").

In December 2000 the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (ICHR) asked the Nicaraguan authorities to provide protection for Vilma Núñez and CENIDH. They have now been given police protection, but the police investigation into the campaign of death threats has reportedly been inadequate.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The work of CENIDH over the years, at times under difficult conditions, has been very important for the protection and respect of human rights in Nicaragua. They have mediated for the release of hostages held by FUAC, but also investigated extrajudicial executions of FUAC leaders. They also took up the case of nurse Dorothy Virginia Granada, a US citizen whom the authorities accused of having links with FUAC and carrying out abortions, which are illegal in Nicaragua. The Ministry of the Interior attempted to deport her but failed after CENIDH appealed before the courts (see UA 380/00, AMR 43/03/00, 15 December 2000).

CENIDH has recently received reports that the Ministry of Interior has been attempting to discredit a number of other non-governmental organisations, or threatened to close them.

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

- expressing grave concern at the government's continuing public campaign to discredit Vilma Núñez de Escorcia and CENIDH;

- expressing concern that Vilma Núñez and CENIDH have also suffered a campaign of anonymous death threats;
- reminding the authorities of their responsibility to ensure the safety of Vilma Núñez, CENIDH workers and their families;
- asking what progress the investigation into the death threats against Vilma Núñez de Escorcia and CENIDH has made;
- reminding the government of its obligation to support human rights defenders in their work for the protection and promotion of the respect for human rights, as set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, of 9 December 1998;
- calling on the authorities to make clear and unequivocal public statements in support of human rights workers and their legitimate activities.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic of Nicaragua

S.E. Arnaldo Alemán

Presidente de la República de Nicaragua

Casa de la Presidencia

Avenida Bolívar y Dupla Sur.

Managua, Nicaragua

Fax: + 505 2 287 911

E-mail: presidente@presidencia.gob.ni

Salutation: Sr. Presidente/ Dear Mr President

Minister of the Interior

Ingeniero José Bosco Marenco Cardenal

Ministerio de Gobernación

Del Redentor 1c y ½ abajo

Apartado 68

Managua, Nicaragua

Fax: + 505 2 227 778

E-mail: dmingob@alphanumeric.com.ni

Salutation: Sr. Ministro/ Dear Minister

Human Rights Procurator

Dr Benjamín Pérez Fonseca

Procurador de los Derechos Humanos

Procuraduría de los Derechos Humanos

Estatua de Montoya, 2 cuadas arriba, a mano derecha

Managua, NICARAGUA

Fax: + 505 2 664 141 (Please say "Me da tono da fax, por favor)

Salutation: Sr Procurador/ Mr Pérez

COPIES TO:

Nicaraguan Centre for Human Rights

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Newspapers

Diario La Tribuna

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and to diplomatic representatives of Nicaragua accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 29 June 2001.