

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 28/002/2005

03 March 2005

UA 51/05 Fear for safety/Death threat

ECUADOR Orlando Pérez Torres (m), journalist and university professor

Orlando Pérez Torres, a journalist for *Hoy* (Today) newspaper and a professor at the *Universidad de las Américas* (University of the Americas) in the capital Quito, has received a death threat. The authorities have apparently not acted to protect him or investigate the threat, and he may be in grave danger.

On 25 January, Orlando Pérez Torres was walking to the *Universidad de las Américas* when he was approached by two men. They pushed him against a wall, and one of the men put a gun to his stomach, saying, "*Deja de joder, de fastidiar, de escribir pendejadas, sino te vamos a matar*", ("Stop fucking bothering writing bullshit or you will get killed").

The threat is the most serious of a number of apparent attempts to intimidate Orlando Pérez Torres. He has also reportedly received a number of anonymous telephone calls to his home, asking him to reveal his address. These calls and the death threat may be linked to articles he has written, criticising President Lucio Gutiérrez and members of the judiciary in Ecuador.

Orlando Pérez Torres has reported these incidents to the police. To date Amnesty International is not aware that any investigation into this alleged intimidation has been opened.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International has expressed its deep concern about the continued threatening and harassment of those who are critical of the authorities; including human rights defenders, journalists and indigenous community leaders. The organization has urged Ecuadorian authorities on several occasions to send a clear message that such threats will not be tolerated, to ensure that human rights defenders, community leaders and journalists are able to work without fear of intimidation. It has also called upon the authorities to investigate these threats and bring perpetrators to justice. However, nobody has been charged in connection with these acts of intimidation.

On 17 February, Francisco Peña, director of the *Fundación Mariana de Jesús*, (Mariana de Jesús Foundation), a religious organization working on behalf of the disadvantaged in Ecuador, was reportedly attacked. The *Fundación Mariana de Jesús* had recently criticised the way the government's Ministry of Social Welfare was run. Following the attack, Amnesty International urged the authorities to investigate this incident and to take the necessary steps to guarantee that all human rights defenders and activists can carry out their work without fear of reprisal (see AI press release, AMR 28/001/2005, 18 February 2005).

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Orlando Pérez Torres, who has reportedly been threatened and intimidated;
- urging the authorities to do everything in their power to guarantee his safety, in accordance with his wishes;
- calling for a prompt and impartial investigation into the threats against Orlando Pérez Torres and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- calling on the authorities to guarantee that the right to freedom of expression is fully respected.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of the Interior

Dr. Javier Ledesma

Ministro de Gobierno, Policía,
Justicia, Cultos y Municipalidades
Ministerio de Gobierno y Policía
Benalcázar y Espejo

Quito, Ecuador

Fax: + 593 2 2581 030

Salutation: Dear Minister/ Señor Ministro

COPIES TO:

Human rights organization

Comisión Ecuménica de Derechos Humanos - CEDHU

Carlos Ibarra 176 y 10 de Agosto

Edif. Yuraj Pirca, 9no. piso

Quito, Ecuador

Fax: + 593 2 258 9272

and to diplomatic representatives of Ecuador accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 14 April 2005.