

PUBLIC

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19 April 2005

UA 93/05 Fear for safety/death threats

ECUADOR Dr Santiago Guarderas (m), Dean of the *Universidad Católica*, Catholic University, in Quito
Staff at the *Universidad Católica*

Dr Santiago Guarderas, Dean of the *Universidad Católica*, Catholic University, in the capital Quito, and staff at the university have received a series of threatening telephone calls, after some staff spoke out against the decision by President Lucio Gutiérrez to dismiss all Supreme Court judges. Amnesty International believes that Dr Guarderas and staff at the *Universidad Católica* may be in grave danger.

The most recent threat was reportedly received on 15 April, when an anonymous telephone message was received in the university's administrative office. The caller apparently warned, "*Dígale a Guarderas que no salga a las calles porque sino le vamos a dar el vire*" ("tell Guarderas not to go out or we will kill him"). On 11 April, the administrative office reportedly received several anonymous telephone calls also threatening the lives of staff at the university if they left the campus.

The threats are an apparent attempt to prevent staff at the *Universidad Católica* from taking part in demonstrations in Quito calling for the resignation of President Gutiérrez, after Congress ratified his decision to dismiss all the Supreme Court's judges. Some university staff have reportedly been campaigning to raise awareness nationally and internationally about the deterioration of the rule of law and independence of the judiciary in Ecuador.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Lucio Gutiérrez took office as President in January 2003 with the support of the Pachakutic Movement, the political party backed by the indigenous communities. However, by August 2003 the Pachakutic Movement broke ranks split from the government amid accusations that the government was continuing to implement economic policies that did not serve the interests of the majority of the population. Trade unions and grassroots organizations, including those based in the indigenous communities, staged demonstrations against growing poverty and government economic policies.

The latest demonstrations against President Gutiérrez began in Quito on 13 April, and led him to declare a state of emergency in the city two days later: this suspended the rights to freedom of expression, association and movement. Following national and international pressure the state of emergency was suspended on 16 April. The demonstrations in front of the presidential palace continued, and were broken up by police using tear gas. (See UA 89/05, AMR 28/007/2005, 18 April 2005.)

Amnesty International has recently 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 (see UA 51/05, AMR 28/009/2005, 3 March 2005 and UA 54/05, AMR 28/003/2005, 7 March 2005). 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.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Dr. Santiago Guaraderas and staff at the *Universidad Católica* in Quito;
- expressing concern that there have been several threats against staff at the *Universidad Católica*;
- urging the authorities to do everything in their power to guarantee the safety of Dr Santiago Guaraderas and staff at the *Universidad Católica*, in accordance with their wishes;
- calling for a prompt and impartial investigation into the anonymous telephone threats against Dr Santiago Guaraderas and staff at the Catholic University and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- calling on the authorities to guarantee that they will respect the right of demonstrators to exercise freedom of expression, association and movement.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of the Interior

Dr. Oscar Ayerve
Ministro de Gobierno, Policía,
Justicia, Cultos y Municipalidades
Ministerio de Gobierno y Policía
Benalcázar y Espejo
Quito, Ecuador

Fax: + 593 2 295 8360 (If someone answers, please say: "Tono de fax, por favor")

Salutation: Dear Minister/Señor Ministro

Acting Attorney General

Dra. Cecilia Armas
Ministra Fiscal Subrogante
Fiscalía General del Estado
Av. Eloy Alfaro N°32-240 y República
Quito
Ecuador

Fax: + 593 2 2558 565 (If someone answers say: "Tono de fax, por favor")

Salutation: Dear Acting Attorney General

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 (If someone answers say: 'tono de fax, por favor')

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 31 May 2005.