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# *amnesty international*

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## EL SALVADOR @Aids Worker in Danger

DECEMBER 1994

EXTERNAL

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Amnesty International is concerned for the physical safety of **Wilfredo Valencia Palacios**, Deputy Director of The Oscar Romero AIDS Project in El Salvador, following reports that he has been subjected to several death threats during October and November 1994. The Oscar Romero Aids Project is a non-governmental organization operating in El Salvador since 1993 conducting HIV preventive education and health work with male and female prostitutes and transvestites in shanty towns and marginalized communities of San Salvador.

When carrying out his street education work on 29 October, Wilfredo Valencia Palacios was allegedly stopped by two unidentified men wearing civilian clothes who beat him up while telling him that his work was "against God's designs" and that if Aids did not kill the "faggots", they would do it. They warned him not to come back to the area and not to look at them, otherwise he would be a "dead man".

Again, on 5 November when returning from his work in the area known as the Public Market (Mercado Público) in the capital San Salvador, two unidentified men approached showing him a box of condoms and demanded to know whether he was the one distributing them. Wilfredo Valencia Palacios answered affirmatively and explained that it was part of his street education to prevent AIDS. On hearing his reply the men reminded him of their initial warning. When one of the men made a movement, as though to remove something from his jacket, Wilfredo Valencia Palacios ran away. His escape was followed by a number of gunshots by the assailants. Later on the same day Wilfredo Valencia Palacios noticed that he was being followed by a vehicle. Two men descended from the vehicle and warned him that he had 30 days to leave the country otherwise he would be killed. Although the men did not disclose their identity, it is believed that they belong to an anti-gay death squad.

The threats were denounced to the National Procurator for human rights and the United Nations Verification Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL) as well as to national and international human rights and Aids organizations abroad. Alfredo Valencia Palacios went into hiding for a while but he is now back carrying out his work.

Although this is the first denunciation received by Amnesty International regarding death threats to an AIDS worker, it is a disturbing development in the activities of death squads which allegedly have continued in the country since the end of the war in January 1992. Amnesty International is urging the authorities to investigate the death threats against Wilfredo Valencia Palacios, to bring to justice those found responsible for the threats and to ensure his physical safety and that of all those involved in work related to education and dissemination of information on the prevention of AIDS.

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Death squads, largely made up of police and military personnel, were an instrument of large scale governmental repression against the opposition during El Salvador's armed conflict. Although the end of the conflict in 1992 brought radical reforms to the police and army, clandestine structures carrying out death squad style killings appear to have persisted.

In its report published in July 1994 the UN-appointed commission known as Grupo Conjunto, set up to investigate the activities of illegal armed groups with political motivation, concluded that organized groups carrying out political violence continued to operate, although their relation to state structures were more obscure than those of the "death squads" of the past. Both the Grupo Conjunto and ONUSAL consider that the nature and activities of these groups are different from those of the "death squads during the war. Rather than acting as organized instruments of political repression under senior military command, these groups appear to be carrying out "private justice", the settling of old political scores and "social cleansing" operations against marginalized sectors.

Many of these groups are composed of former or current members of the army or police, as well as in some cases ex-combatants of the former armed opposition.

The Grupo Conjunto stated that although it had concluded its mission in el Salvador, the death-squad chapter was still not closed and reminded the authorities of its responsibility to continue investigating and applying justice to those who have been involved in such activities. He also established that such responsibility now falls on the Attorney-General's Office and on the Policia Nacional Civil (PNC), National Civilian Police.

See overleaf for recommended actions and government authorities to write to

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

- expressing concern at the death threats and attack against Wilfredo Valencia Palacios, calling for a prompt, impartial and thorough investigation which results in those found responsible being brought to justice;  
-requesting that measures be taken to guarantee the safety of Wilfredo Valencia Palacios and other Aids workers in the country;  
-asking what steps have been taken to implement the recommendations of the Grupo Conjunto with regard to the eradication of "dead squad"-style groups.

#### **APPEALS TO**

##### 1. President of the Republic

S.E. Dr Armando Calderón Sol  
Presidente de la República, Casa Presidencial  
San Salvador, El Salvador

**Telegrams: Presidente Calderón Sol/S. Salvador/El Salvador**

**Faxes: +5032 71-0950 / Telexes: 20814 RS SAL**

##### 2. National Counsel for the Defence of Human Rights

Dr. Carlos M. Molina Fonseca  
Procurador para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos  
Procuraduría para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos  
9ª Avda. Norte y 5ª Calle Pte. Edificio AMSA N° 535  
San Salvador, EL Salvador

**Telegrams: Procurador DDHH, San Salvador, El Salvador**

**Fax: +5032 71-2886**

##### 3. Minister for Foreign Affairs

Dr. Oscar Alfredo Santamaria  
Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores  
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores  
Boulevard Manuel Enrique Aratujo Km.6  
San Salvador, El Salvador

**Telegrams: Ministro Relaciones Exteriores, San Salvador, El Salvador**

**Faxes: + 5032 98-0334 / 98-0314 Telexes: 20179 RREE SAL**

#### **COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:**

##### Human Rights Organization

CODEFAM

Lic. Emilia Guerra  
Colonia Centroamerica  
Calle Gabriela Mistral No. 614  
San Salvador, El Salvador

and to diplomatic representatives of El Salvador accredited to your country

This document is **EXTERNAL** and it is being sent to **El Salvador** and **CASA** Coordinators for immediate action as **CASA 09/94**. It is being sent to Sections for information. Please check with Central America Sub-region at the International Secretariat if sending appeals after 31 March 1995.

**KEYWORDS:** HARASSMENT1 / HEALTH WORKERS1 / AIDS/HIV / PARAMILITARIES /

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