

PUBLIC

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UA 04/01

Fear for

GUATEMALA Mynor Melgar (m), lawyer
Members of *Oficina de Derechos Humanos del*
Arzobispado de Guatemala (ODHAG)

A high-profile human rights lawyer working for the *Oficina de Derechos Humanos del Arzobispado de Guatemala* (ODHAG), the Archbishop's Human Rights Office in Guatemala, has received death threats. Amnesty International is concerned for his safety, and for that of other ODHAG members.

On 22 December 2000 at midday, two unidentified armed men called at Mynor Melgar's home. When answering the front door, he was ordered to the bathroom at gunpoint. The two men tied him, his wife and his two sons up and said to them: "*Este es un aviso, y la próxima...; a nosotros nos mandaron*", "This is only a warning, but the next time ...; we were sent here". They then took some valuables and important documents and made off with Mynor Melgar's car.

The incident happened only two days after Mynor Melgar publicly announced that ODHAG is preparing to charge retired general Efraín Ríos Montt with genocide. General Ríos Montt was president of Guatemala from 1982 to 1983, during which time a number of serious human rights violations were perpetrated. He is currently the leader of Congress. The Minister of the Interior, Byron Barrientos, has said that this incident is just another case of common crime.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In recent months, human rights defenders and critics of the President Portillo's government have increasingly been threatened or abused. The Guatemalan authorities have done nothing to investigate or prevent such harassment. Instead, they have issued a number of statements accusing human rights defenders and other activists of seeking to destabilise the country. They have also suggested that human rights organisations risk being attacked by unknown forces, in effect declaring open season on activists (See UA 315/00 and follow-up, UA 314/00, UA 310/00 and UA 265/00).

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

- urging the authorities to guarantee the safety of Mynor Melgar and other ODHAG members;
- calling on the authorities to immediately investigate this and all other recent cases of intimidation directed at Guatemala's human rights community, making the results public and bringing those responsible to justice;
- stressing the Guatemalan Government's obligation to support and promote the rights and work of human rights defenders, in line with international agreements such as the Organization of American States' declaration "Human Rights Defenders in the Americas" adopted in Guatemala in June 1999.

APPEALS TO:

It can be difficult to get through to Guatemalan fax numbers. Please be patient and keep trying. If a voice answers, say 'Fax por favor' and wait for the signal.

President of the Republic

Lic. Alfonso Portillo Cabrera

Presidente de la República de Guatemala
6a. Avenida "A" 4-18, Zona 1
Ciudad de Guatemala , GUATEMALA
Fax: + 502 238 3579 / 221 4423 / 221 4537
Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente / Dear President

Minister of the Interior

Sr. Byron Barrientos
Ministro de Gobernación
Ministerio de Gobernación
6ª Avenida 4-64, Zona 4
Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA
Fax: + 502 362 0239
Salutation: Señor Ministro / Dear Minister

Director General of the National Civil Police

Sr. Rudio Lección Mérida
Director General de la Policía Nacional Civil
6ª Avenida 13-71, Zona 1
Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA
Fax: + 502 251 9382
Salutation: Señor Director / Dear Director

COPIES TO:

Oficina de Derechos Humanos del
Arzobispado de Guatemala (ODHAG)
6a Calle 7-70,
Zona 1, Guatemala 01001 GUATEMALA
Apartado Postal 723
Fax: +502 232 8384
E-mail: ddhh@odhag.org.gt
Salutation: Estimados amigos/ Dear friends

Newspapers

CERIGUA

2a calle 1-42, Zona 1
Guatemala, Guatemala
Tel/Fax: + 502 238 1456/ 221 2521
E-mail:cerigua@guate.net

Diario "Prensa Libre"

13 Calle 9-31
Zona 1, Guatemala
GUATEMALA
Fax: + 502 251 8768

and to diplomatic representatives of Guatemala accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 16 February 2001.