

PUBLIC

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26 January 2007

UA 20/07 Fear for safety

GUATEMALA Flaviano Bianchini (m), environmental activist

Environmental activist Flaviano Bianchini has reportedly received a series of anonymous telephone calls, and has been kept under surveillance. Amnesty International believes that his life may be in danger.

Flaviano Bianchini, an Italian national, is working as a volunteer for the Guatemalan environmental group Colectivo MadreSelva, which is investigating the effects of mining on the environment. At a press conference in Guatemala City on 5 January, he presented a report on the contamination allegedly caused by a gold mine to the Tzalá River in Sipakapa, San Marcos department. The report alleges that the river, which is the main source of water for indigenous people in the region, has been contaminated with heavy metals. This was reported in the national press the following day.

On 10 January allegedly at a press conference, a government official reportedly told journalists that five criminal charges against Flaviano Bianchini and MadreSelva were going to be presented to the Public Prosecutor's Office.

Two days later Flaviano Bianchini received an anonymous call to his mobile phone from a man who asked repeatedly, *Quién es? Quién es?* ("Who is it? Who is it?"). On 13 January he received another anonymous call to his mobile phone, from a man who repeated the word *Cuidado, cuidado* ("Be careful, be careful") before hanging up.

On 14 and 16 January, he received identical calls. After the second of these calls, when Flaviano Bianchini returned to his home at 8pm he noticed a grey Hyundai car with tinted windows parked directly outside his apartment. He went in, and went up to the roof to look at the car again, but when he got to the roof the car was already pulling away.

On 17 January Flaviano Bianchini received a third identical call. When he left his house at 8.30am the next morning he found the same grey Hyundai car outside. As soon as Flaviano Bianchini opened his front door it drove off.

He received a fourth identical call on 19 January at 4pm. At 6pm, while he was shopping in Guatemala City, he noticed a man dressed in black with a cap pulled down to hide his face. Fearing that he was being followed, he took a roundabout route to the next shop he was going to, but the man allegedly followed him all the way. Flaviano Bianchini remained inside the shop for half an hour, and when he went back out onto the street, the man was gone.

On 21 January Flaviano Bianchini returned to his apartment at around 9pm, and noticed the same grey Hyundai car parked on the corner of his street, level with his apartment block. He went up to the roof to look again, and as before, saw the car pulling away.

On 24 January Flaviano Bianchini returned home at 8pm, and found the same car parked opposite his apartment, which again pulled away as he reached the roof. The next morning he received another anonymous phone call. This time the caller told him, *deje de chingar* ("Stop fucking around").

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Flaviano Bianchini has been investigating the effects of mining on the environment in Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. On 19 December 2006 the Madre Selva Collective presented a complaint to relevant ministries regarding the alleged contamination of the Tzalá River, based on Flaviano Bianchini's study.

The Inter-American Human Rights Commission ordered the government to provide police protection to members of Madre Selva in October 2005, after the organisation suffered intimidation, threats and attacks as a result of their work to protect the environment. They have campaigned actively on issues relating to the alleged damaging effects of mining in Guatemala.

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

- expressing grave concern for the safety of Flaviano Bianchini;
- calling on the authorities to order a full and prompt investigation into the threatening telephone calls and alleged surveillance made to Flaviano Bianchini;
- urging the authorities to take action to ensure his safety, in strict accordance with his own wishes;
- reminding the authorities that human rights defenders have the right to carry out their activities without any restrictions or fear of reprisals, as set out in the UN Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Institutions to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

APPEALS TO:

Attorney General and Head of the Public Prosecutor's office

Lic. Juan Luis Florido

Fiscal General de la República y Jefe del Ministerio Público

Edificio Ministerio Público

15 Avenida 15-16, Zona 1, Barrio Gerona, 8vo. nivel

Guatemala, Guatemala

Fax: + 502 2411 9124/ 9326

Salutation: Dear Attorney General/Estimado Sr. Fiscal General

Minister of Interior

Ing. Carlos Roberto Vielmann Montes

Ministro de Gobernación

6a. Avenida 13-71, Zona 1,

Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Fax: +502 2413 8658

Salutation: Dear Minister/Estimado Sr. Ministro

COPIES TO:

Colectivo MadreSelva

3 Calle 2-60, Zona 10, Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

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 9 March 2007.