

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety

GUATEMALA

Leaders of the Movement of United Vendors of the Streets of Coatepeque (Movimiento de Comerciantes Unidos de las Calles de Coatepeque)

Killed:

**Amado Corazón Monzón (m), one of the leaders of this movement
Armando Donald Sánchez Betancurt (m), independent lawyer and advisor to the leadership of the movement**

A leader of the street vendors' movement of the city of Coatepeque, in the western department of Quetzaltenango, has been killed. His death may have been related to a dispute with the local government over the relocation of the municipal market. An independent lawyer assisting the vendors' movement in the negotiations with the government has also been killed. Other leaders of the street vendors' movement, approximately 20 people, are at risk.

At around 6am on 12 January, unknown men killed Amado Monzón, one of the leaders of the Movement of United Vendors of the Streets of Coatepeque, as he was opening his grocery shop. The men shot Amado Monzón in the head three times.

On 23 December 2008, unknown men shot lawyer Armando Sánchez four times and killed him as he was parking his car. His killing took place moments after a meeting between representatives of the vendors and the local government, during which he had been assisting the vendors' movement. Negotiations failed during that meeting.

On 21 December, during a speech broadcast on two local radio stations, the mayor of Coatepeque is reported to have said "the vendors will have a nice surprise on the 23rd or 24th" (los comerciantes van a tener una linda sorpresa el 23 o 24).

Street vendors allege that the relocation of the municipal market will jeopardize their jobs. They also argue that the site chosen for the new market is polluted and constitutes a hazard to their health.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The conflict over the future location of the municipal market dates back to 1993 and involves more than 5,000 street vendors. Several eviction orders have been issued and the vendors have filed injunctions against such orders. Some vendors have protested violently on occasions. In October 2008, the national government decreed the state of emergency in Coatepeque. At the time of writing, the state of emergency remained in place.

According to local human rights organizations, the number of attacks against human rights defenders in Guatemala reached 221 in 2008, compared to 195 in 2007.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of the leaders of the Coatepeque informal vendors, two of whom were murdered on 23 December and 12 January;

- urging the authorities to ensure that immediate, effective and appropriate measures are taken to guarantee the safety of the leaders of the informal vendors' organizations, in strict accordance with their wishes;
- calling on the authorities to order a swift, full and impartial investigation into the killings of street vendors' leader Amado Monzón and lawyer Armando Sánchez;
- reminding the authorities of the right of human rights defenders to carry out their activities without any restrictions or fear of reprisals, as set out in the UN Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities 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. José Amílcar Velásquez Zárate

Fiscal General de la República y Jefe del Ministerio Público

8ª Avenida 10-67, Zona 1, Antiguo Edificio del Banco de los Trabajadores,

Ciudad de Guatemala

GUATEMALA

Fax: +502 2411 9124

Salutation: Dear Attorney General/Estimado Sr. Fiscal General

Minister of the Interior

Salvador Gándara

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:

Street Vendors' Movement

Movimiento de Comerciantes Unidos de las calles de Coatepeque

c/o Comité de Unidad Campesina

31 Avenida A 14-46, Zona 7, Ciudad de Plata 2

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 27 February 2009.