

7 February 2002

Further information on UA 377/00 (AMR 34/51/00, 12 December 2000) - Fear for safety

GUATEMALA Mario Polanco (m)

Dionisio Camajá Sánchez (m)

Other members of the human rights organisation GAM

Human rights activist Dionisio Camajá Sánchez has received a further death threat, and Amnesty International is deeply concerned for his safety. He is a member of the prominent human rights group *El Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo* (GAM), Mutual Support Group, a Guatemalan NGO formed by relatives of the disappeared.

Dionisio Camajá Sánchez is a teacher at his local primary school, in Uspantán, El Quiché department. On 7 February 2002 he reported that an anonymous handwritten note had been slipped under his door warning him to leave Uspantán, or "*será quemado a pura gasolina*" (you will be doused in petrol and burned alive).

The name of another GAM member was mentioned in the note which may indicate that she is also in danger, but she was not specifically threatened in the message.

Camajá has reported this threat to the Public Prosecutor's Office in El Quiché, which is responsible for overseeing inquiries into illegal acts, the local judge in Uspantán and the police. GAM has also reported it to the United Nations Human Rights Verification Mission to Guatemala (MINUGUA), and the governmental Human Rights Procurator (Ombudsman) as well as other international bodies.

In December 2000 a man known to have collaborated with the army for nearly 20 years reportedly attacked and beat Camajá in the street in Uspantán. A few days later, a letter was sent to the GAM offices in Guatemala City, saying "*Dile a Dionisio que tenga cuidado y que mejor no regrese a Uspantán porque algo malo le puede pasar*" (Tell Dionisio to be careful and not to come back to Uspantán because something bad may happen to him"). Around the same time other GAM members in the capital and elsewhere reported receiving death threats and being watched, including GAM Director Mario Polanco, whose car was stolen and who was warned that "*estaba siendo vigilado*" (you are being watched).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

GAM is one of Guatemala's oldest human rights groups, formed in the 1980s by people trying to establish what had happened to their relatives, and thousands of others, who "disappeared" during Guatemala's civil conflict. The conflict, which lasted over a period of more than 30 years, was formally ended by the 1996 Peace Accords.

Since President Alfonso Portillo came to power at the beginning of 2000, human rights activists have faced increasing threats and intimidation. President Portillo appointed a number of hardline military officials to senior positions in his administration, some of whom had held office in the military government during the civil conflict. A number of highly placed officials in President Portillo's government have attacked Guatemala's human rights NGOs, accusing them of trying to destabilize the country.

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

- calling on the authorities to guarantee the safety of Dionisio Camajá Sánchez, and other GAM members and anyone involved in legitimate human rights work;
- urging them to immediately investigate this and all other reported threats against Guatemala's human rights organisations, making the results public and bringing those responsible to justice;
- pointing out that the Guatemalan Government is obliged to support the work of human rights defenders, referring to the principles in the resolution "Human Rights Defenders in the Americas" supported by Guatemala and adopted by the General Assembly of the Organization of American States, in Guatemala, in June 1999.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic of Guatemala
Lic. Alfonso Portillo Cabrera
Presidente de la República de Guatemala
6a. Avenida "A" 4-41, Zona 1,
Ciudad de Guatemala , GUATEMALA
Fax: +502 239 0090
Email: mensajes@presidenteportillo.gob.gt
Salutation: Dear President/Señor Presidente

Minister of the Interior
Eduardo Arévalo Lacs
Ministro de Gobernación
Ministerio de Gobernación
6ª Avenida 4-64, Zona 4
Ciudad de Guatemala , GUATEMALA
Fax: +502 362 0239/ 362 0237
Email: monica24@intelnet.net.gt
Salutation: Dear Minister/Señor Ministro

Director General of the National Civil Police
Comisario Luis Arturo Paniagua Galicia
6ª Avenida 13-71, Zona 1
Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA
Fax: +502 251 9382
Salutation: Dear Director/Señor Director

Local Judge
Juez de Paz
Uspantán
El Quiché
Guatemala
Salutation: Estimado Lic.

COPIES TO:

Human Rights Group
Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo (GAM)
8a. Calle 3-11, Zona 1
Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA
Fax: +502 2320454/220 0606

E-mail:apoyomutuo@intelgua.com
gam@concyt.gob.gt
gamali@concyt.gob.gt
Salutation:Estimados Amigos

Newspaper

CERIGUA

2a calle 1-42, Zona 1

Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala

Fax:+ 502 221 2521

E-mail:cerigua@guate.net

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 20 March 2002.