

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 34/008/2005

09 February 2005

UA 30/05 Fear for safety

GUATEMALA Sara Poroj (f)] Members of human rights organization *Grupo de Apoyo*
 Sergio Rivera (m)] *Mutuo (GAM), Group of Mutual Support*

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Sara Poroj and Sergio Rivera, who work for the Exhumations Programme of human rights organization *Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo (GAM), Group of Mutual Support*. They have been intimidated and threatened, in what appears to be an effort to stop their work to exhume secret mass graves.

On 3 February, Sara Poroj, the head of GAM's Exhumations Programme, and Sergio Rivera were staying at a hotel in the town of Playa Grande, Ixcán municipality, Quiché department. They were inspecting the site of a secret mass grave found within a former military base in Playa Grande and seeking permission from the Public Prosecutor's Office for its exhumation. At 3am on 3 February, a man armed with a gun entered the hotel room where Sara Poroj was sleeping and searched her documents and belongings, while keeping his gun pointed towards her head. According to eye witnesses, two other armed men were keeping watch outside the room. The three men left after about five minutes.

The following day, as Sara Poroj and Sergio Rivera were inspecting the site of the secret mass grave, a car stopped in front of the exhumation site and the occupants watched them for approximately four hours. As they returned to the hotel, the car followed them, and parked outside the hotel. Another car drew up, and armed men from both vehicles got out and walked around the outside of the hotel. Sara Poroj then telephoned GAM's main office in the capital, Guatemala City. Despite a request by GAM to the Presidential Human Rights Office (COPREDEH) to send police to the hotel, no police arrived. The GAM office managed to contact other human rights and social organizations close to Playa Grande, who mobilized some 25 people to get Sara Poroj and Sergio Rivera safely out of the hotel. The police eventually arrived at around 7.30pm, by which time the incident was over. On 5 February, Sara Poroj and Sergio Rivera drove to the GAM office in Guatemala City. The same car that they had seen at the exhumation site reportedly followed them for approximately three hours.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The military base in Playa Grande was the largest military base in the country, before being dismantled on 11 May 2004 as part of government measures to reduce the size of the army. According to local human rights organisations, approximately 30 mass graves exist within the military compound. The graves reportedly contain the remains of victims executed during Guatemala's internal armed conflict, which lasted for over 30 years until the signing of the 1996 Peace Accords. Some 200,000 people were killed or "disappeared" during the conflict, including the husband of Sara Poroj. According to the United Nation's Truth Commission, the Historical Clarification Commission, the department of Quiché was the worst hit during the internal armed conflict, suffering 344 of the 669 massacres documented in its final report, *Memory of Silence*.

GAM is one of Guatemala's oldest human rights groups, formed in the 1980s by people trying to establish what happened to their relatives, and thousands of others who "disappeared" during Guatemala's civil conflict. Sara Poroj was one of the founding members of GAM, and helped to organize the first exhumation within the former military base at Playa Grande in September 2004.

GAM and other organisations involved in the exhumation of clandestine cemeteries have been subject to numerous acts of intimidation in what appears to be an effort to stop their work (see for example UA 137/02, AMR 34/033/2002, 10 May 2002 and UA 68/02, AMR 34,014/2002, 5 March 2002).

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Sara Poroj and Sergio Rivera, members of the human rights organization *Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo* (GAM), following the attempts to intimidate them as they carried out their work for GAM's Exhumations Programme;
- calling on the authorities to take immediate measures to guarantee their safety, and that of other individuals involved in the exhumation of secret mass graves;
- urging the authorities to immediately investigate the recent acts of intimidation against Sara Poroj and Sergio Rivera, to make the results public and bring the perpetrators to justice;
- urging the authorities to take immediate measures to ensure that all those involved in the exhumation of secret mass graves are able to carry out their legitimate work without fear of harassment.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of Defence

Ministro de Defensa Nacional

Carlos Aldana Villanueva

Avenida Reforma, 1-45, zona 10

Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Fax: + 502 2360 9909 (ask for "tono de fax por favor")

Salutation: Señor Ministro/Dear Minister

Attorney General

Juan Luis Florido

Fiscal General

Fiscalía General del Ministerio Público

8a. Avenida 10-67, Zona 1,

Ciudad Guatemala, Guatemala

Fax: + 502 2251 2218

Salutation: Estimado Fiscal General/Dear Sir

COPIES TO:

Human rights organization

Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo (GAM)

8a Calle 3-11 Zona 1, Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala

Fax: + 502 2220 0606

Minister of the Interior

Carlos Vielman

Ministerio de Gobernación

6a. Avenida 4-64, zona 4

nivel 3. Ciudad de Guatemala. GUATEMALA

Fax: +502 2362 0237

Newspaper

El Periódico

Fax: + 502 2332 9761

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 23 March 2005.