

UA 143/97

Fear for safety

15 May 1997

GUATEMALA Alberto Godínez, former member of the Guatemala National Revolutionary Unity (URNG, *Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca*) and local leader of the Committee of Peasant Unity (CUC, *Comité de Unidad Campesina*)

At 1am on 11 May 1997 six former members of the now disbanded Voluntary Civil Defence Committees (CVDC, *Comités Voluntarios de Defensa Civil*) forced Alberto Godínez out of his home in the hamlet of El Chorro near Colotenango, department of Huehuetenango. Three blocks from his home they hit him with an axe and beat him with sticks. He managed to avoid the first blow from the axe, but the second landed on his hand.

Alberto Godínez' son, Rudy García, ran after the men, as did various neighbours who managed to catch hold of three of them. Rudy García and at least one of his neighbours were injured in the process. Alberto Godínez was taken to the General Hospital in Huehuetenango to undergo an emergency operation to repair damage to tendons in his left hand.

Following the attack, the six men fled towards the village of Xemal where three of them were arrested by the police. The other three are still at large. Amnesty International remains seriously concerned for the safety of Alberto Godínez. The day before the attack, he had been threatened with death at a party.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The CVDCs, some 300,000 armed men under the control of the army, were set up in the 1980s, and together with the military commissioners, were responsible for innumerable human rights violations. The disbanding of the CVDCs began in August 1996 and was expected to have been completed by the end of that year.

In September 1996, under Decree Law 390-96, President Álvaro Arzú awarded medals to a number of CVDCs, including some in Huehuetenango, for "having distinguished themselves in an exceptional way, since in one way or another they have offered their valuable, timely and selfless collaboration with the armed forces, showing with their bravery their unconditional support, high degree of friendship and loyalty for the Fatherland ..." ("*haberse distinguido de manera excepcional, puesto que de una u otra forma han brindado su valiosa, oportuna y desinteresada colaboración a la Institucion Armada, demostrando con sus actos de valor su apoyo incondicional, alto grado de amistad y lealtad por la Patria ...*").

In a demobilization ceremony in October 1996 in Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, department of Alta Verapaz, the commander of Military Zone 21 stated that "the high command, in particular our commander-in-chief, Álvaro Arzú Irigoyen, would like to thank you for your participation in the struggle to defend national sovereignty and in this case the physical integrity of the population". In response to this speech, the CVDC commander stated that "if circumstances so require, we will always be ready to serve the army again" Human Rights Procurator, Jorge García Laguardia, stated that the demobilization had "turned into a string of tributes" and represented "a reward for violence".

However positive the disbanding of the military commissioners and the Voluntary Civil Defence Committees is - to the extent that it eliminates from State structures the army auxiliary bodies

responsible for serious human rights violations - it is nonetheless of concern that former military commissioners and CVDC members continue to commit serious human rights violations with the guaranteed protection of the army. Nor has demobilization resulted in investigations into human rights violations. The majority of human rights violations committed by the CVDC and military commissioners in the past have gone unpunished.

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

- expressing serious concern at the attack on Alberto Godínez, his son and at least one of his neighbours;
- calling for immediate and adequate measures to ensure the safety of Alberto Godínez;
- calling for an immediate and thorough investigation into the attack and urging that those responsible be brought to justice.

APPEALS TO:

1) President of the Republic

S.E. Álvaro Arzú Irigoyen
 Presidente de la República de Guatemala
 Palacio Nacional,
 6ª Calle y 7ª Avenida, Zona 1
 Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Fax: +502 221 4537

Telegrams: Presidente, Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Salutation: Sr. Presidente / Dear President

2) Attorney General

Lic. Héctor Hugo Pérez Aguilera
 Fiscal General de la Nación, Ministerio Público
 18 Calle 10-36, Zona 1
 Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Telefax: +502 331 7066

Telegrams: Fiscal General, Guatemala, Guatemala

Salutation: Sr. Fiscal General / Dear Attorney General

3) Minister of Defence:

Gral. Julio Arnoldo Balconi Turcios
 Ministro de Defensa
 Ministerio de Defensa
 Palacio Nacional
 6ª Calle y 7ª Avenida, Zona 1
 Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Fax: +502 332 5118 (if voice, ask "me puede dar tono de fax, por favor")

Telegrams: Ministro de Defensa, Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

4) Huehuetenango District Attorney

Lic. Sergio Federico Morales
 Fiscal Distrital de Huehuetenango
 Ministerio Publico
 5a Avenida "A" 255-31
 Colonia "El Centro", Zona 1

Huehuetenango, Huehuetenango, GUATEMALA
Telegrams: Fiscal Distrital, Huehuetenango, Guatemala
Salutation: Senor Fiscal Distrital

COPIES TO:

Human Rights Procurator

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COPREDEH

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CUC

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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 3 July 1997.