

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Death Threats

18 July 1991

GUATEMALA:

Bruce Harris, Staff & street children of Covenant House
(Casa Alianza)

At approximately 1.00 am on 18 July 1991, four unidentified gunmen opened fire on Covenant House's Crisis Centre (Covenant House, Casa Alianza, is a refuge for street children in Guatemala), in Zone 1 of Guatemala city. Nobody was hurt in the shooting, but Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Covenant House staff and street children resident in the Centre.

According to information received from Guatemala, a blue four-door BMW with polarized windows containing four unidentified armed men drove down a one-way street and stopped outside the Crisis Centre. One of the men shouted "Vamos a ametrallar a Bruce Harris y tomar fotos de todo el personal para matarlos a ellos y a los niños." ("We are going to shoot Bruce Harris and take photographs of all the staff and we are going to shoot them and the children"). [Bruce Harris is the Executive Director of Covenant House for Latin America]. They drove around the block, returned, and fired at least four shots at the front of the building. According to the night watchman who witnessed the incident, nobody was injured.

In a previous incident on 12 July 1991, Covenant House reported that a similar car, also blue in colour and with polarized windows, fired two shots into the air as they passed by Covenant House's Legal Office, also in Zone 1 of Guatemala City. Covenant House only recently established its Legal Office and has been in the forefront of efforts to investigate recent police abuses against street children, including harassment, torture, "disappearance" and killings.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Over the past year, Amnesty International has received an escalating number of reports of human rights violations against street children in Guatemala City, including beatings, torture, "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions, reportedly carried out by official security force agents, particularly the police, acting sometimes in plain clothes and sometimes in uniform. In other cases abuses have been carried out by agents of private security firms. In July 1990, Amnesty International published Guatemala: Extrajudicial Executions and Human Rights Violations against Street Children (AMR 34/37/90), which documented many of these cases.

Approximately 39 legal suits against more than 50 National Police, are currently pending with the Guatemalan courts and only in isolated cases have investigations resulted in prosecution and conviction of those responsible (See Criminal Proceedings: Human Rights Violations against Street Children, AI Index: AMR 34/20/91 of May 1991). Children who have witnessed or given information concerning abuses directed against other street children have been subjected to reprisals. Those working with street children have also been subjected to harassment and intimidation. In a recent incident, Axel Mejía, a worker in Covenant House, received a series of threatening phone calls against his life. Axel Mejía is a key witness to the beating of three street children by 18 members of the security forces in Guatemala city in November 1990. (See Urgent Action 499/90, AI Index: AMR 34/78/90, 13 December 1990 and AMR 34/15/91

of 2 May 1991). Because of the continuing threats against him Axel Mejía was forced to leave the country, pending investigation of the beatings by the courts.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters:

- expressing concern at the attack on the Covenant House Crisis Centre in Guatemala City and the threats made against Bruce Harris, the staff and street children;
- asking for an investigation into the attack, and that those responsible be brought to justice;
- asking that urgent measures be taken to guarantee the safety of Bruce Harris, Covenant House staff and street children.

APPEALS TO:

S.E. Jorge Serrano Elías
(Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente)
Presidente de la República de Guatemala
Palacio Nacional
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Telegrams: Presidente Serrano Guatemala, Guatemala
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Señor Acisclo Valladares
(Salutation: Señor Procurador General)
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Lic. Fernando Hurtado Prem
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Ministro de Gobernación
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COPIES TO:

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Dr. Edmundo Vásquez Martínez

Cnel. Julio Enrique Paiz Bolaños
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Sr. Edgar de León Siguenza
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6 Avenida 13-71
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Telegrams: Primer Jefe, Oficina Responsabilidad Profesional Policia Nacional Guatemala, Guatemala

Presidente de la Corte Suprema de Justicia
Centro Cívico
21a Calle y 7a Avenida
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Casa Alianza
(Salutation: Señores)
Apartado 400,
Gautemala, Guatemala

Diario Siglo XXI
7a Avenida 11-79
Edificio Galerias España, 6o piso
Zona 9, Guatemala, Guatemala
and to diplomatic representatives of Guatemala in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 29 August 1991.