

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 34/042/2003

8 July 2003

UA 198/03

Death threats/fear for safety

GUATEMALA

Luis Alberto Pérez Barillas (m), journalist
María del Rosario Pérez Barillas (f), his sister
The children of María del Rosario Pérez Barillas, names unknown

Amnesty International is extremely concerned for the safety of Luis Alberto Pérez Barillas, a journalist in Rabinal, Baja Verapaz department, his sister María del Rosario Pérez Barillas and her children, after they were threatened and intimidated, allegedly as a result of his journalistic work.

Early on the morning of 4 July, a home-made bomb was thrown into Luis Alberto Pérez Barillas's home in the municipal centre of Rabinal, Baja Verapaz. Nobody was injured in the explosion. It is not known who was responsible. On 5 July, an anonymous note was slipped under the door of the home of his sister, María del Rosario Pérez Barillas, where she lives with her family. The note threatened that if María del Rosario Pérez Barillas failed to keep her brother quiet, her children would be killed.

Luis Alberto Pérez Barillas had previously received two anonymous telephone calls on 23 and 24 June, in which the caller told him that he would be killed if he did not keep quiet. Following these threats and the bombing of his home, Luis Alberto Pérez Barillas has left his home in fear for his life. He is reportedly receiving some protection from the police, though Amnesty International is concerned that this protection does not in itself guarantee his safety. María del Rosario Pérez Barillas and her children are not receiving any protection.

In the last few weeks, Luis Alberto Pérez Barillas has been reporting extensively in newspapers and on the radio on events surrounding the 14 June incident in which the current president of Congress, Efraín Ríos Montt, prospective presidential candidate for the ruling party *Frente Republicano Guatemalteco* (FRG), Guatemalan Republican Front, was forced to abandon a rally in the municipal centre of Rabinal after stones were thrown at the stage. The rally had begun at the same time as a ceremony to re-bury those massacred during the military government's counterinsurgency strategy of the 1980s. Efraín Ríos Montt presided over one of the worst phases of this counterinsurgency campaign in rural areas during the early 1980s, when tens of thousands of non-combatant indigenous men, women and children were killed in hundreds of army massacres. Human rights organizations have filed cases of genocide and war crimes against both Efraín Ríos Montt and former president Romeo Lucas Garcías, and their military high commands, in Guatemala and abroad.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

According to the Guatemalan press, at least eight journalists have reported being intimidated in the last few weeks, in what appears to be a systematic attempt to intimidate journalists into stopping their reporting on sensitive issues. Amnesty International fears that such incidents represent a systematic pattern of intimidation which may increase in the run up to the presidential elections, due to take place in November.

In recent months Amnesty International has received information on several serious acts of intimidation, including that against journalist Carmen Judith Morán Cruz from the news agency, *Centro de Reportes Informativos sobre Guatemala* (CERIGUA) in the town of Salamá, Baja Verapaz (see UA 195/03, AMR 34/040/2003, 3 July 2003 and follow-up AMR 34/041/2003, 7 July 2003) and the attack against Rubén Zamora, editor of *El Periódico*, a major Guatemalan newspaper which has been outspoken in its denunciation of corruption amongst high level officials of the current administration (see news release 154,

AMR 34/037/2003, 28 June 2003). The attack came the day after Rubén Zamora had published an opinion piece which charged Efraín Ríos Montt with being an integral part of the so-called "parallel power structure" which Rubén Zamora said had not only run the country for the last twenty years, but also headed up the country's extensive organised crime network.

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

- expressing grave concern for the safety of Luis Alberto Pérez Barillas, his sister, María del Rosario Pérez Barillas, and her children, and urging that immediate measures be taken to ensure their safety, in accordance with their wishes;
- pressing the authorities to carry out an immediate, impartial and exhaustive investigation into the threats and intimidation, to make the results public and bring those responsible to justice;
- expressing concern at the recent escalation of attacks against and intimidation of human rights defenders following the signing of the *Comisión para la Investigación de Cuerpos Illegales y Aparatos Clandestinos de Seguridad* (CICIACS), document, which will lead to the formation of a commission to investigate human rights abuses allegedly committed by illegal armed groups and clandestine security apparatus;
- urging the government to collaborate fully with the work of the proposed CICIACS, ensuring that it comes quickly into being, that its work is unhindered; and that its conclusions result in the complete dismantling of these groups and the prosecution of those responsible for their operations.

APPEALS TO:

Special Prosecutor for Crimes against Journalists and Union Members

Lic. Marco Antonio Cortez Sis

Fiscal de delitos contra periodistas y sindicalistas

7ª. Avenida 11-20 Zona 1, Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala.

Fax: + 502 220 6873 (if someone answers please say "fax por favor")

Salutation: Señor Fiscal Especial/Dear Special Prosecutor

Regional offices of Public Prosecutor's Office

Nicolaz García Fuentes

Ministerio Público

2a Calle, 3-74 Zona 2, Barrio San José Salamá

Baja Verapaz, Guatemala

Fax: + 502 940 2023/4/5 (if someone answers please say "fax por favor")

Salutation: Señor Fiscal/Dear Prosecutor

Regional Police Chief

Hugo Rene Godoy Najera

Jefe Comisario 52 Policía Nacional Civil (Salamá)

7a Avenida , 39, Zona 1, Salamá, Baja Verapaz, Guatemala

Fax: + 502 940 0168 (if someone answers please say "fax por favor")

Salutation: Estimado Señor Jefe/ Dear Sir

Attorney General

Lic. Carlos David de León Argueta

Fiscal General de la República, Fiscalía General del Ministerio Público

8a. Avenida 10-57, Tercer nivel, Zona 1

Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala

Fax: + 502 221 2718 (please keep trying)

E-mail: fiscaldeleon@mp.lex.gob.gt

Salutation: Dear Attorney General/Senor Fiscal General

COPIES TO:

Human Rights Procurator

Dr. Sergio Fernando Morales Alvarado

Procurador de los Derechos Humanos

12 Avenida, 12-72, Zona 1#Guatemala, CA, Guatemala

Fax: + 502 2381 734

Press Agency

Diario Prensa Libre

13 Calle 9-31, Zona I, Ciudad de Guatemala 01001, GUATEMALA

Fax: + 502 251 8768/ 230 2193/ 230 2257

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 19 August 2003.