

EXTERNAL (for general distribution) AI Index: AMR 34/66/90
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UA 434/90 Possible Extrajudicial Execution/
Threat of Extrajudicial Execution

GUATEMALA: ~~Byron BARRERA ORTIZ, aged 37~~
Refugio Araceli Villanueva de BARRERA, aged 39
and one other (name unknown)

Byron Barrera Ortiz, a journalist, together with his wife, Refugio Araceli Villanueva de Barrera, and a friend who remains unidentified were shot by two men on a motorcycle on Friday 26 October, as their car stopped at a traffic light at the corner of the 35th street and the Calzada Aguilar Batres in Zone 11 of Guatemala City. Refugio Villanueva de Barreras was instantly killed; her husband and their friend were injured, and had to be treated in hospital.

Byron Barrera Ortiz, a father of two, had returned to Guatemala in 1985 after several years in exile. He is the director of the Agencia Centroamericana de Noticias (ACEN-SIAG) Central American News Agency, and the vice-president of the Guatemalan Journalists Association. Until June 1988, he had been the editor of the magazine La Epoca, whose officers were fire bombed by men believed to be members of the security forces. After the attack on La Epoca, Byron Barrera left the country for several months.

In an interview from his hospital bed, Byron Barrera said that on Thursday 25 October he became aware that he was being followed by the same men who shot him, and that he had informed the Secretary of Public Relations of the Presidency of Guatemala about the incident, and gave her the number plates of the motorbike in which the men were travelling. Byron Barrera had fixed an appointment to see the Public Relations Secretary on 30 October 1990.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International has been gravely concerned at what appears to be a serious deterioration in the human rights situation in Guatemala in the months prior to the general elections scheduled for 11 November. Victims have included trade unionists, grass roots organizations, human rights workers, journalists, students, peasants, displaced persons, and members of religious and opposition groups. In recent months at least nine politicians have been killed and many others have received threats or been harassed. On 15 October Humberto González Gamarra, a 42-year-old journalist and owner of several radio stations, and secretary general of the Unión Revolucionaria Democrática (URD), Democratic Revolutionary Union, and Miguel Angel Cospín, aged 70, a founder member of the Guatemalan Journalists' Association, were killed in two separate attacks. Although the identity of the perpetrators of the abuses has not been established, the choice of victim, the manner in which the abuses were carried out, and the weapons used in many cases indicated that official security forces were involved, acting in the guise of the so-called "death squads". Amnesty International has also been concerned at the failure of the government to vigorously investigate human rights abuses, and fears that this failure has been a contributing factor in the escalating violence.

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

- expressing concern at the killing of Refugio Villanueva de Barrera and the wounding of Byron Barrera Ortiz and their friend in circumstances suggesting the possible involvement of the security forces;
- urging that full impartial investigations be opened into the incident, that their findings be made public and that those responsible be brought to justice;
- seeking guarantees that the physical integrity of Byron Barrera Ortiz, and his friend, and the security of other members of the Guatemalan Journalists Association be protected.

APPEALS TO:

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Brig. Gral. Juan Leonel Bolaños
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(Association of Journalists)

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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 15 December 1990.