

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety/Death threats

HONDURAS

José Andrés Tamayo (m), priest and environmental activist
Gilberto Flores (m)] community leaders from Gualaco
Orlando Nájera (m),] municipality, Olancho department

Priest José Andrés Tamayo has reportedly been threatened with death due to his activism in protection of the environment in Olancho department, northern Honduras. Community leaders Gilberto Flores and Orlando Nájera have also reportedly been harassed. Amnesty International is seriously concerned for their safety.

José Andrés Tamayo, priest of the municipality of Salamá, Olancho department, has reportedly been warned to leave the country by the end of May. The warning allegedly comes from a group of powerful men involved in the logging business (*madereros*) in the department. According to reports, on 19 May they agreed to call on the authorities to take action in order to force the priest to leave Honduras. On 5 and 6 May, the mayor of Salamá reportedly said on four occasions that "the environmental problem in Olancho will be only resolved by ordering the killing of Father Tamayo" ("*el problema ambiental en Olancho solamente se va a resolver mandando a matar al Padre Tamayo*"). These statements were allegedly made in front of two members of *Comité de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos en Honduras*, (COFADEH), Committee of Relatives of the Disappeared in Honduras, an organization working with community leaders in Olancho department.

Community leaders Gilberto Flores and Orlando Nájera, who are campaigning against the construction of a hydroelectric dam in Olancho department, have also been intimidated by the police guards and local authorities. According to reports, police guards have recently fired shots in the air outside the house of Orlando Nájera in the community of Ocotal, in Gualaco municipality.

Father José Andrés Tamayo has been actively campaigning with local communities in northern Olancho against intense deforestation and logging in the area. He has been intimidated and threatened several times. In October 2001 a police officer reportedly pointed his gun at Father José Andrés Tamayo during a demonstration calling for the protection of the environment. He was also under threat from local criminals who had reportedly been offered money to kill him because of his legitimate and peaceful environmental activism (see UA 169/01, AMR 37/013/2001, 14 November 2001 and follow-ups).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The campaign against Father José Andrés Tamayo and grassroots activists, including indigenous people, is part of a pattern of human rights abuses against those involved in defending the environment. Illegal logging of the forests in Honduras and the construction of dams is causing grave environmental damage. In October 2002 the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights acknowledged that environmental degradation has a serious impact on human rights. On 30 June 2001 Carlos Roberto Flores, a community leader and environmental activist protesting against the construction of a hydroelectric dam, was shot dead in the municipality of Gualaco, Olancho department. He was reportedly killed by security guards hired by Energisa, the firm building the dam. Although five of the security guards were charged and warrants issued for their arrest, they still have not been brought before a court.

In 2001 another priest involved in helping communities in the area, Peter Marchetti, was also reportedly threatened and harassed by landowners, and eventually had to leave Honduras for his own protection.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Father José Andrés Tamayo following reports that he has been receiving death threats;
- expressing concern for the safety of Gilberto Flores, and Orlando Nájera after reports that they have been intimidated by local authorities and police guards;
- urging the authorities to take action to protect Father José Andrés Tamayo, Gilberto Flores and Orlando Nájera according to their wishes;
- requesting an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the campaign of harassment and threats to those named above, and that the results be made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- reminding the authorities of the right of human rights defenders to carry out their activities without any restrictions or fear of reprisals, as set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of Individuals, Groups and Institutions to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Liberties, and in the equivalent declaration from the Organization of American States.

APPEALS TO:

President of Honduras

Lic. Ricardo Maduro, Presidente de la República de Honduras, Casa Presidencial, Boulevard Juan Pablo Segundo, Palacio José Cecilio del Valle, Tegucigalpa, Honduras

Telegram: Presidente de Honduras, Tegucigalpa, Honduras

Fax: +504 2214552

Salutation: Dear President/ Sr. Presidente

Minister of Security

Dr. Oscar Alvarez, Ministro de Seguridad Pública

Ministerio de Seguridad Pública. Edificio Poujol, 4o piso, Col. Palmira (Blvd. Morazán) Tegucigalpa, Honduras

Telegram: Ministro de Seguridad, Tegucigalpa, Honduras

Fax: + 504 220 4352

Salutation: Dear Minister/Señor Ministro

Attorney General

Dr. Roy Edmundo Medina, Fiscal General de la República, Fiscalía General de la República, Colonia Loma del Guijaro, Tegucigalpa, Honduras

Telegram: Fiscal General de la Republica, Tegucigalpa, Honduras

Fax: + 504 221 5666

Salutation: Dear Attorney General/ Señor Fiscal General

COPIES TO:

National Commissioner for the Protection of Human Rights

Comisionado Nacional de Protección de los Derechos Humanos, Ramón Custodio López, Avda. La Paz No. 2444, Contiguo a Galerías La Paz, Tegucigalpa, Honduras

Fax: + 504 232 6894

Committee of Relatives of the Disappeared of Honduras

Comité de Familiares de Desaparecidos de Honduras (COFADEH), Apartado Postal 1243, Barrio La Plazuela, Ave. Cervantes, Casa 1301, a la par de JM Stereo, Tegucigalpa, Honduras

Fax: + 504 220 5280 (if someone answers ask for the fax: "me da tono de fax, por favor")

and to diplomatic representatives of Honduras accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 2 July 2003.