

PUBLIC

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22 July 2003

Further Information on UA 144/03 (AMR 37/009/2003, 21 May 2003) - Fear for safety/Death Threats

HONDURAS José Andrés Tamayo (m), priest and environmental activist
Gilberto Flores (m), community leader
Orlando Nájera (m), community leader
New names: Father Osmin Flores (m), priest and environmental activist
Carlos Arturo ("Oscar") Reyes (m, aged 23, *killed*)
Other environmental activists in Olancho department

Amnesty International remains gravely concerned for the safety of environmental activists in Olancho, northern Honduras, following continued death threats and the murder of activist Carlos Arturo Reyes on 18 July. The activists are thought to be under attack because of their work to protect the local environment against the interests of loggers and other commercial exploitation.

On Monday 14 July, armed men inside a dark blue car without license plates and with blacked-out windows were seen taking aim at Gilberto Flores as he entered the offices of the Catholic Church's *Pastoral Social* offices in Juticalpa. The men were unable to carry out the assassination, however, as they were reportedly distracted by a young child who approached Flores to greet him. Over the next two days, the same vehicle and another with similar characteristics were seen parked outside the same offices. Although police protection had been ordered for Gilberto Flores by the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights in May, following a campaign of harassment against him (see UA 144/03), this protection was withdrawn on 20 June 2003 by the Ministry of Security.

On 18 July, environmental activist Carlos Arturo Reyes (also referred to as Oscar) was murdered at his home in the municipality of El Rosario. Having just arrived home at 8pm, he went outside to his backyard to wash his face when six gunshots were fired from the darkness. One of the shots entered his right temple, killing him instantly. Three heavily-armed men were seen fleeing from the scene via a canal that leads to a local river. Carlos Arturo Reyes, who worked to defend the environment with the *Pastoral Social*, had been transferred by the organization from the municipality of Guata to El Rosario following death threats.

At the same time as Carlos Arturo Reyes' murder, the home of environmental activist Father Osmin Flores was under surveillance by men armed with AK-47 guns who were parked outside. Following a telephone call by Father Flores to the police, two officers came to his residence, in the municipality of Catacamas. However, they said that although the car looked suspicious they could not arrest the occupants as they had not done anything illegal.

Father Andrés Tamayo continues to be active in his efforts to protect the environment and was one of the leaders of the "*Marcha por la Vida*" ("March for Life", see *Background* below). As such, he remains in a position of great personal danger.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The continuing attacks are believed to be connected with a list of environmentalists who have been placed under threat of death for their activism. The list, which was allegedly drawn up by sawmill owners in Olancho, appeared following a 2,500-strong march in June 2003 by environmental and religious groups from Olancho to the capital, Tegucigalpa. On the 200-kilometre, seven-day "*Marcha por la Vida*" ("March for Life"), demonstrators called for a moratorium on further logging in central Honduras until a "forest audit" can be

conducted and plans developed for sustainable use of forest resources. They claim indiscriminate logging has dried up water sources and worsened poverty in the region. The names of Carlos Arturo Reyes, Osmín Flores and Gilberto Flores all appeared on the death threat list.

The killing of environmental 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 are 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.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Father Osmín Flores, Gilberto Flores, José Andrés Tamayo, Orlando Nájera and other environmental activists placed under threat of death;
- urging the authorities to take action to protect these persons 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;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into the killing of Carlos Arturo Reyes, with the results 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 Declarations from the United Nations and the Organization of American States;
- asking for the Honduran authorities to reply to the concerns made by community leaders on the recent *Marcha por la Vida*.

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

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 September 2003.