

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 41/009/2005

UA 75/05

Fear for safety

31 March 2005

MEXICO

Leonel Rivero Rodríguez, (m) human rights lawyer

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Human rights lawyer, Leonel Rivero Rodríguez has reportedly recently received threatening telephone calls at his office in Mexico City. Amnesty International is concerned for his safety as it is not the first time that attempts have been made to intimidate him.

On 15 March, Leonel Rivero answered a phone call in which a young girl allegedly told him: "You will die" (*Te vas a morir*). The next day, four voicemail messages were recorded in his office over a period of eight minutes. The first three messages allegedly by the same caller, asked him to dial a particular telephone number. Whilst in the last voicemail message he was reportedly threatened that he would be killed if he did not dial the number. The voice allegedly said: "Just because I'm a girl doesn't mean that I don't know how to kill you" (*No porque sea una niña no sabre matarte*).

Leonel Rivero has been threatened in the past. On 18 February 2003 a voicemail message from a young boy was left in his office which reportedly said "I think we will get you" (*Creo que te vamos a ir a dar*). The State Attorney General's Office (*Procuraduría General de Justicia del Distrito Federal*) reportedly investigated the threat and concluded that the message was intended to be a joke. In March 2000, his home was broken into, and in May of the same year rocks were thrown the windows. These acts of intimidation were reportedly linked to his defence work in behalf of protesting university students.

In 2001, Leonel Rivero shared an office with the leading human rights lawyer Digna Ochoa, who was shot dead in October of the same year. After her death, the Mexican government assigned bodyguards to Leonel Rivero and two other lawyers, at the request of the Inter-American Court of Justice. On 6 April 2002, the two bodyguards assigned to Leonel Rivero were assaulted by three men outside his home in Mexico City. The men took the bodyguards guns, handcuffed one and locked the other in the trunk of their car. They were also reportedly told that they were going to "do him in" (*llevarlo a la chingada*), in a reference to Leonel Rivero. No investigation has allegedly been carried out into the attacks.

Following these recent threats, the Centre for Justice and International Law (*Centro por la Justicia y el Derecho Internacional, CEJIL*) has asked the Inter- American Court on Human Rights to petition the Mexican government to have the protection measures Leonel Rivero is currently receiving kept in place and if necessary to strengthen them. Leonel Rivero has also submitted a formal complaint before the State Attorney General's Office (*Procuraduría General de Justicia del Distrito Federal*) with regard to the recent threatening telephone calls.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Human rights lawyers and other human rights defenders have frequently been the target of threats, harassment and smear campaigns. Those responsible are rarely brought to justice. The authorities have never effectively investigated these incidents or clearly demonstrated their commitment to the legitimate role of human rights defenders in the country.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Leonel Rivero Rodríguez following telephone death threats against him on 15 and 16 March 2005;
- urging the authorities to ensure Leonel Rivero's safety by strengthening the protection he is receiving, in accordance with his wishes;

- calling for a prompt, full and impartial investigation into the threats on 15 and 16 March 2005 and past intimidations, for the results to be made public and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- reminding the authorities that the UN Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of Individuals, Groups and Institutions to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Liberties recognizes the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders and their right to carry out their activities without restriction or fear of reprisals.

Attorney General of the Federal District

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**Salutation: Señor Procurador /Dear Attorney General**

Director of Human Rights - Interior Ministry

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**Salutation: Estimado Maestro/Dear Sir**

**COPIES TO:**

Human Rights Commission of the Federal District

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**Salutation: Señor Presidente/Dear President**

and diplomatic representatives of Mexico accredited to your country

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 12 May 2005.