

EXTERNAL

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Death threats / Fear for safety

25 March 1997

**PERUMiguel Real, journalist
and other journalists covering the MRTA hostage crisis**

Amnesty International is seriously concerned about death threats reportedly received by Miguel Real, a Peruvian journalist assigned to cover the ongoing hostage crisis in Lima, the capital, in which 72 people are currently being held captive by an armed unit of the *Movimiento Revolucionario Túpac Amaru* (MRTA), Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement. The organization is also concerned for the physical safety of other Peruvian and foreign journalists covering the hostage crisis.

According to the *Asociación de Prensa Extranjera en el Perú* (APEP), Association of Foreign Press in Peru, Miguel Real, a correspondent covering the hostage crisis for the British television network Worldwide Television News (WTN), received veiled threats on 5 and 6 March 1997. As a result, WTN's management in London, UK, ordered Miguel Real to leave Peru.

At a press conference just before leaving the country on 7 March, Miguel Real spoke of having received death threats in which he was told that "his days were numbered" ("*tenía las horas contadas*"). He also told journalists that he had received information that Peru's *Servicio de Inteligencia Nacional* (SIN), National Intelligence Service, was building up a profile of him with the aim of implicating him as a collaborator of international terrorist organizations.

Miguel Real has been living and working as a journalist in Peru for several years. Over the past three months, international news organizations, including WTN, have conducted several interviews with the MRTA hostage-takers via short wave radio. It was in an interview with Miguel Real that Néstor Cerpa Cartolini, who leads the MRTA unit holding the hostages in the Japanese Ambassador's residence in Lima, condemned the existence of a tunnel which he alleged the security forces were intending to use to enter the residence. In the wake of these allegations, Néstor Cerpa suspended talks with Domingo Palermo, the government's negotiator in the hostage crisis.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Ever since the clandestine armed opposition groups MRTA and the *Partido Comunista del Perú* (*Sendero Luminoso*) (PCP), Communist Party of Peru (Shining Path), initiated their respective campaigns during the first half of the 1980s, Peru has witnessed human rights abuses by members of both organizations. Amnesty International has repeatedly opposed and condemned such abuses and appealed to the PCP and MRTA to abide by internationally recognized humanitarian standards.

The Peruvian authorities have responded to the campaigns of the PCP and MRTA by implementing a range of counter-insurgency measures, including declaring states of emergency, mobilizing the security forces, and applying special anti-terrorism legislation and procedures. It is in this context that, since 1980, Amnesty International has documented thousands of "disappearances", extrajudicial executions, cases of torture, death threats, unfair trials and arbitrary detentions. The vast majority of the victims have been peasants, although Amnesty International has also documented numerous cases of journalists who have been victims. Over the years the organization has published

reports about these human rights violations and appealed to the Peruvian authorities to abide by internationally recognized human rights standards.

It was against the background of Peru's internal armed conflict that, on the evening of 17 December 1996, a heavily armed unit of the MRTA broke into the Japanese Ambassador's residence in Lima, during a function to celebrate the birthday of Japan's Emperor Akihito. The MRTA unit took some 700 people hostage, including scores of Peruvian government officials, representatives of non-governmental organizations, foreign ambassadors, diplomats, businessmen and journalists. By the end of the evening the MRTA had released some 250 women and elderly persons and 50 men, including domestic staff. The hostage-takers, who include among their demands the release of imprisoned MRTA members, initially threatened to kill their captives.

In the following six weeks some 320 further people were released by the MRTA unit. However, 72 people remain hostage. They include Peru's ministers of Foreign Affairs and Agriculture, other Peruvian authorities, a brother of President Alberto Fujimori, the Japanese and Bolivian Ambassadors, and prominent Japanese businessmen. They have now been held captive for 98 days.

Amnesty International, in two separate news releases, has unequivocally condemned the MRTA for taking the hostages, has appealed to the MRTA to immediately and unconditionally release them, and has called on the MRTA and the Peruvian authorities to bring about a solution designed to ensure the prompt and safe release of the hostages (see *Peru: Amnesty International alarmed at MRTA taking of hostages*, News Service 244/96, AI Index: AMR 46/01/97, 18 December 1997 and *Peru: Amnesty International reiterates call for safe and immediate release of MRTA hostages*, News Service 11/97, AI Index: AMR 46/01/97, 28 January 1997).

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in Spanish or your own language:

- expressing concern about the reported death threats against journalist Miguel Real on 5 and 6 March 1997, following his interview with the MRTA leader Néstor Cerpa Cartolini;
- urging the authorities to conduct a prompt, thorough and independent investigation into the threats, to make the findings public, and to bring the perpetrators to justice;
- calling on the authorities to guarantee the right of journalists to conduct their legitimate duties without intimidation;
- reiterating Amnesty International's unequivocal condemnation of human rights abuses by the MRTA and PCP, including the taking of hostages by the MRTA in December 1997;
- stating that human rights abuses by the PCP and MRTA can never justify human rights violations by the authorities.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic
 Presidente Alberto Fujimori
 President de la República
 Plaza de Armas
 Lima 1, PERU

Fax: +511 426 6770 / 426 6930

Telegrams: Presidente Fujimori, Lima, Peru

Telex: 20167 pe palacio / 20331 pe sec pre

Salutation: Sr. Presidente / Dear President

Minister of the Interior
General EP (r) Juan Briones Dávila
Ministro del Interior
Ministerio del Interior
Plaza 30 de Agosto 150
San Isidro - Urb. Córpac, PERU
Fax: + 511 224 2407
Telegrams: Ministro Interior, San Isidro, Peru
Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

human rights organization
Coordinadora Nacional de Derechos Humanos
Jr. Túpac Amaru 2467
Lince
Lima 14, PERU

and to diplomatic representatives of Peru accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 6 May 1997.