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## **HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS NETWORK ACTION**

### **Honduras**

#### **Witnesses to killing of human rights defender at risk**

To: Human Rights Defenders Network (Americas)  
From: Human Rights Defenders Program (Americas)

Amnesty International is concerned to learn of the killing of Edickson Roberto Lemus on 24 May 2005. Edickson was the regional coordinator of one of the main peasant farmer organizations in Honduras, the *Central Nacional de Trabajadores del Campo* (CNTC). There were reportedly five witnesses to the killing and Amnesty International is concerned for their safety and that of others calling for an investigation into the killing.

Edickson Roberto Lemus was travelling by bus on his way to visit the peasant group *Renacer* (Rebirth) in the community El Pajuiles; this community was subject to an eviction on 19 May 2005 by order of the Criminal Court in El Progreso, Yoro.

According to information received by Amnesty International, an unidentified man boarded the bus at approximately 11.30am and shot at Edickson four times, killing him immediately. The man reportedly fled to a vehicle that appeared to be waiting for him nearby, however, the supposed killer was detained shortly thereafter, initially for illegal possession of firearms, but he was later identified by witnesses as Edickson's killer.

Amnesty International understands that the witnesses have already provided testimony in the initial investigations into Edickson's death (*campo administrativo*); however their testimony is still required before the courts. While they are reportedly willing to serve as witnesses, they are concerned for their safety given possible retaliation by those involved and previous threats against Edickson Roberto Lemus. As such they reportedly will only give their testimony if they receive adequate protection. Without this protection they may not testify and the killing of human rights defender and rural activist, Edickson Roberto Lemus may remain in impunity.

Amnesty International understands that the witness protection programme in Honduras is limited. The first steps towards a witness protection programme began in 2003. The programme has been included in the New Procedural Penal Code, *Nuevo Codigo Procesal Penal*, but due to a reported lack of resources, the program has been ineffective.

### **Background**

According to reports received by Amnesty International, on the day of the eviction of the *Renacer* group, Edickson Roberto Lemus received threats that he would be killed if he returned to the community. The threats were reportedly denounced to the relevant authorities, who indicated that they were unable to take any measures. Edickson had previously been coordinating solidarity initiatives and had been supporting other cases of threats against community leaders, including calls for investigations into the killing of two CNTC activists in 2003 and as a result received death threats.

### **TAKE ACTION!**

Amnesty International calls on the Honduran authorities to:

- Ensure that prompt, thorough and impartial investigations are conducted into the killing of Edickson Roberto Lemus and all human rights violations committed against human rights

defenders, that those responsible are brought to justice and the victims or their relatives provided with adequate reparation, and that the results of such investigations should be made public;

- Ensure immediate and adequate protection for the witnesses to Edickson Roberto Lemus's killing and to any others involved in investigations or other proceedings against those accused in this case;
- Adopt integrated programs for the protection of human rights defenders that include preventative measures, such as thorough criminal investigations into attacks and threats against human rights defenders and security measures to assist human rights defenders and their families with immediate safety issues. Such programs should ensure that all measures to protect human rights defenders are adopted in accordance with the wishes of the person receiving protection.

**Please send urgent appeals to arrive by Friday 10 June 2005, to the President of Honduras copying the other authorities list below:**

- Urging the authorities to provide immediate and adequate protection to the witnesses of the killing of Edickson Roberto Lemus;
- Urging the authorities to ensure that prompt, thorough and impartial investigations are conducted into the killing of Edickson Roberto Lemus, that those responsible are brought to justice and the victims or their relatives provided with adequate reparation, and that the results of such investigations should be made public;

**Addresses:**

President of the Honduras Republic

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

**Fax: +504 221 4570**

**Salutation: Dear President/Señor Presidente**

Attorney General of the Republic

Sr. Ramón Ovidio Navarro Duarte  
Fiscal General de la República  
Colonia Loma del Guijaro  
Tegucigalpa, Honduras

**Fax: + 504 221 5667**

**Salutation: Dear Attorney General/ Estimado Fiscal General**

**Copies to:**

Judge, El Progreso

Sr. Hernesto Flores  
**Telefax: + 504 647 4452/647 1220**

**Salutation: Dear Judge / Estimado Juez**

Special Prosecutor for human rights

Licda Aida Romero  
Fiscal Especial de Derechos Humanos  
Colonia Loma del Guijaro  
Tegucigalpa, Honduras

**Fax : + 504 221 5620**

**Salutation: Dear Special Prosecutor / Sra. Fiscal de Derechos Humanos**