

PUBLIC

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Fear for Safety / Death Threats

3 March 2000

HONDURAS

Coronado Avila] Leaders of the Coordinating
Lombardo Lacayo] Body of Popular Organizations
Horacio Martínez] of Aguán (COPA)

Amnesty International is very concerned for the safety of the three grassroots leaders named above who are being threatened with death, allegedly by armed groups with links to the authorities.

Lombardo Lacayo has received death threats in the past and there have been a number of attempts to kill him. In April 1999 he was shot at three times in his pick-up truck and in September he escaped another shooting and his house was set on fire.

The three men all belong to the *Coordinadora de Organizaciones Populares del Aguán* (COPA), Coordinating Body of Popular Organisations of Aguán, which is involved in defending the land rights of peasant farmers, protecting the environment and promoting participation in elections.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The above is part of a pattern of human rights abuses against grassroots activists, including indigenous people, involved in defending their land rights. The armed groups responsible, sometimes referred to as "death squads", are also often reported to have links to local landowners. Amnesty International takes no position on disputes over land, but it campaigns against human rights violations within its mandate that occur in such contexts.

These abuses, and the failure of the authorities to take action, has been of great concern to Amnesty International: (see Honduras: Justice fails indigenous people, AMR 37/10/99, September 1999). According to reports, at least 25 indigenous leaders have been killed in the last ten years. Impunity prevails in all cases.

Five COPA leaders have been killed in the last three years: Carlos Escaleras, Víctor Manuel Gómez, Oscar David Reyes, Ramón Bejarano and Jairo Ayala. The authorities have failed to investigate any of these murders or bring those responsible to justice. Amnesty International is concerned that the impunity enjoyed by those responsible encourages them to continue to commit human rights abuses in the knowledge that no action will be taken.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Coronado Avila, Lombardo Lacayo and Horacio Martínez, from the *Coordinadora de Organizaciones Populares del Aguán* (COPA), who have been attacked and threatened with death;
- urging the authorities to take all necessary measures, in consultation with those at risk, to guarantee their safety;
- calling on the authorities to ensure that thorough and independent investigations are carried out into the killings of COPA leaders Carlos Escaleras, Víctor Manuel Gómez, Oscar David Reyes, Ramón Bejarano and Jairo Ayala, that the results be made public, and that those responsible be brought to justice.

APPEALS TO:

Attorney General

Dr. Roy Edmundo Medina
Fiscal General de la República
Fiscalía General, Ministerio Público
Edificio Castillo Poujol, 4 Avd,
Colonia Palmira, Boulevard Morazán
Tegucigalpa, HONDURAS

Telegrams: Fiscal General, Honduras

Faxes: + 504 239 4750 / 239 3698

Salutation: Sr. Fiscal General / Dear Attorney General

Special Prosecutor for Human Rights

Licda. Sandra Ponce
Fiscal Especial de Derechos Humanos
Fiscalía de los Derechos Humanos
Boulevard Suyapa, Col Florencia Sur
Edificio Discua Estrada
2a Calle, casa #3801
Tegucigalpa, HONDURAS

Telegrams: Fiscal Derechos Humanos, Honduras

Faxes: + 504 235 6243. (If someone answers, say: "Me da el tono de fax por favor")

Salutation: Sra. Fiscal / Dear Special Prosecutor

Minister of Defence and Public Security

Elizabeth Chiuz Sierra
Ministra de Defensa Nacional y Seguridad Pública
Ministerio de Defensa Nacional y Seguridad Pública
Palacio de los Ministerios, 2° piso
Tegucigalpa, HONDURAS

Telegrams: Ministra Defensa Nacional, Honduras

Faxes: + 504 239 6892

Salutation: Sra. Ministra / Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Human Rights group

Lic. Andrés Pavón, Presidente del Comité para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos en Honduras (CODEH)

Apartado Postal 3189

Tegucigalpa, HONDURAS

Faxes: + 504 237 9238

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National Commissioner for the Protection of Human Rights

Dr Leo Valladares Lanza

Comisionado Nacional de Protección de los Derechos Humanos

Avda. La Paz No. 2444

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National Newspaper

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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 18 April 2000.