

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Death threats

2 December 1993

EL SALVADOR

Dr José María MÉNDEZ, lawyer  
Esther de Méndez, wife of above  
Dr José María MÉNDEZ, hijo, son of above, lawyer  
Dr Francisco LIMA, lawyer, opposition candidate

Dr José María Méndez, a prominent lawyer and driving force behind the process of judicial reform in El Salvador, has received death threats from a so-called "death squad". His wife and son have also received threats, as has, indirectly, Dr Francisco Lima.

José María Méndez received two letters from individuals identifying themselves as members of the notorious "death squad", *Brigada Maximiliano Hernández Martínez*. On 25 November the second letter told José María Méndez to put pressure on his friend, Dr Francisco Lima, also a lawyer, who is standing as a candidate for the opposition in the presidential elections, to withdraw his candidature by 15 December. Dr Francisco Lima is standing for the coalition composed of the *Convergencia Democrática* (CD) Democratic Convergence and the *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional* (FMLN) Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, the former armed opposition group which became a political party after signing a peace accord with the government in January 1992. Dr Francisco Lima has declared that he will not resign his election candidature.

The second letter also contained threats against his wife, Esther de Méndez, and his son. It told him to persuade his son, himself a prominent lawyer, to withdraw from a case in which he is representing the FMLN in a land dispute. The letter called his family "communists" and warned: "*Don't worry, old man, nothing will happen to you, the executions will start with Esther and continue downwards*".

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Since the end of the war in January 1992, the *Brigada Maximiliano Hernández Martínez* and other so-called "death squads" have continued to issue numerous death threats against people it identifies as sympathetic to the FMLN. Several unclarified killings of FMLN and other left wing activists this year have been attributed to shadowy "death squads", believed to be associated with hardline sectors of the military, the ruling party and the oligarchy.

These threats are the latest in a series of attacks and numerous death threats against members of the opposition, including seven killings in recent months in the context of the official opening of the electoral campaign. Most of these cases remain unresolved as thorough investigations have not been carried out. The pattern and circumstances of the killings suggest the involvement of government forces operating clandestinely, recalling the government "death squads" which have been so notorious in the past. During the war, these clandestine groups or individuals, inextricably linked to state structures, systematically carried out killings and "disappearances" of suspected FMLN members.

Amnesty International has also been calling for an urgent investigation into the continuing activities of the "death squads" since the end of the war. The need for such an inquiry was highlighted by the Truth Commission, a body appointed by the United Nations to investigate grave human rights violations during the war (1980-92).

☎ (44)(71) 413 5500 Telegrams: Amnesty London WC1 Telex: 28502 FAX: 956 1157

**Amnesty International is an independent worldwide movement working for the international protection of human rights. It seeks the release of men and women detained anywhere because of their beliefs, colour, sex, ethnic origin, language or religious creed, provided they have not used or advocated violence. These are termed prisoners of conscience. It works for fair and prompt trials for all political prisoners and works on behalf of such people detained without charge or trial. It opposes the death penalty and torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment of all prisoners.**

The government has announced that such a commission of inquiry will be set up, with the assistance of ONUSAL and the governmental *Procurador Nacional para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos* (National Counsel for the Defence of Human Rights). However, its creation has reportedly been delayed due to disagreement over its composition.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION** Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes and airmail letters in Spanish, English or your own language:

- expressing concern at the death threats received by José María Méndez and his family, and urging that steps be taken to ensure their safety;
- asking that immediate steps be taken to identify those responsible and bring them to justice;
- urging the authorities to proceed immediately with the commission of inquiry into the "death squads", which should clarify all "death squad"-style killings since the end of the war, bring to justice those responsible and dismantle "death squad" structures;
- stating that the eradication of "death squads" is necessary to ensure the security of the Peace Accords and forthcoming elections and to guarantee the safeguarding human rights for the future.

**APPEALS TO:**

President

Lic. Alfredo Cristiani  
Presidente de la República de El Salvador  
San Salvador, El Salvador  
Telegrams: President Cristiani, San Salvador, El Salvador  
Faxes: + 503 81 0018 / 71 0950  
Telexes: 20245 RS SAL or 20522 PRES SAL  
Salutation: Su Excelencia/Your Excellency

Dr René Hernández Valiente

Ministro de Justicia  
Ministerio de Justicia  
Av. Masferrer N° 612-b  
Colonia Lomas Verde, San Salvador, El Salvador  
Telegrams: Ministro de Justicia, San Salvador, El Salvador  
Faxes: + 503 23 2611  
Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

Comisión Nacional para la Consolidación de la Paz (COPAZ)

Asamblea Legislativa  
6ª Planta  
Edificio Centro de Gobierno, San Salvador, El Salvador  
Fax: (503) 71-3588

**COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:**

Convergencia Democrática

Calle Guadalupe 1313, San Salvador, El Salvador  
Fax: +503 71 0517

Centro de Estudios para la Aplicación del Derecho (CESPAD)

Apartado Postal 2806, San Salvador, El Salvador

Diario Latino

6ª Avda. Norte 325, San Salvador, El Salvador  
Faxes: + 503 71 0971

and to diplomatic representatives of EL SALVADOR accredited to your country

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 13 January 1994.

— Please take action as soon as you receive this Urgent Action appeal. Carefully read the recommended actions. If possible, send a telegram, telex, fax or express letter immediately to one or more of the addresses given. Other letters can be sent afterwards.

— Telegrams and letters should be brief and courteous. Stress that your concern for human rights is not in any way politically partisan. Refer to relevant provisions in international law, such as the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

Article 3 — "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person."

Article 5 — "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

Article 9 — "No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile."

— The name of Amnesty International may be used, although letters written in a private or personal capacity may be more effective.

— Copies of appeals should be sent to relevant diplomatic representatives in your country.

— In Urgent Actions cases, Amnesty International has to act rapidly on behalf of victims of grave human rights violations. An appeal is issued when Amnesty International believes it has received reliable and accurate information in such cases. It is not always possible to verify all details independently and in some instances the situation outlined in the appeal may change. Urgent Action participants are always notified of any significant new facts.

— Copies of any replies received from government authorities should be sent immediately to your section's Urgent Action coordinator or direct to the Campaign and Membership Department of the International Secretariat. If appropriate, thank the official who has replied and ask to be kept informed about the case.