



May 12, 2009

Lic. Álvaro Colom Caballeros
President of the Republic of Guatemala
Casa Presidencial
6a Avenida, 4-18 zona 1
Guatemala City
Guatemala

Dear Excellency,

Death Threats Received by SEDEM and UDEFEGUA

We write to express our profound concern about the series of threats recently received by staff members of Security in Democracy (SEDEM) and the Unit for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders in Guatemala (UDEFEGUA). We respectfully urge you to: publicly repudiate the threats; urge the Attorney General's Office (*Ministerio Público*) to promptly investigate and prosecute those responsible; and urge the Interior Ministry to strengthen the protection measures provided to members of SEDEM and UDEFEGUA.

From April 30 to May 5, 2009, Iduvina Hernández (Director), and four others who work for SEDEM, as well as Claudia Samayoa (Coordinator), and two others that work for UDEFEGUA, received more than 40 text messages containing death threats and other intimidating language on their cellular phones. On May 4, two armed men parked their car in front of a SEDEM member's house. At the same time, other members of SEDEM and UDEFEGUA received a threatening text message saying that they were being watched. When the police arrived at the SEDEM worker's house, the two armed men left the area. Several hours later, members of SEDEM and UDEFEGUA received another threatening message referring to their decision to call the police. We fear that the likely connection between the text messages and the surveillance of these individuals demonstrates a concerning pattern of persecution.

According to the content of the messages, the threats may be linked to the organizations' efforts to promote the declassification of military archives pertaining to the internal armed conflict. The attacks also took place while progress is finally being made in criminal investigations for human rights violations committed during Guatemala's

internal armed conflict and which could implicate the State or former members of the security forces.

Since 2000, SEDEM has promoted security sector reform and free access to information, particularly for victims of the internal armed conflict. In its work to monitor and verify threats and attacks against human rights defenders, UDEFEGUA has accompanied the members of SEDEM, among other organizations.

These most recent threats are alarming, and we urge the Guatemalan government to respond with immediate action, as well as to guarantee that the process to declassify the military archives continues. We urge you to ensure that the Attorney General's Office, in particular the human rights prosecutor and the unit for crimes against human rights defenders, promptly investigates these threats and prosecutes those responsible.

In addition, we urge the Interior Ministry to strengthen the protective measures it provides to members of SEDEM and UDEFEGUA. We also reiterate our [previous call](#) to the Interior Ministry to fortify, rather than weaken, state institutions that focus on the protection of human rights defenders and the investigation of threats against them, such as the Institute of Analysis of Attacks against Human Rights Defenders and the Human Rights Unit of the Criminal Investigation Division (DINC) of the National Civil Police. It is precisely these institutions that should investigate the threats against the members of SEDEM and UDEFEGUA.

We thank you for your attention in this matter and would appreciate an update on the status of the investigation in this case.

Sincerely,

Sylvia Romo
Executive Director
Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala (NISGUA)

Andrew Hudson
Senior Associate
Human Rights Defenders Program
Human Rights First

Amanda Martin
Director
Guatemala Human Rights Commission (GHRC)

Maureen Meyer
Coordinator of the Mexico and Central America Program
Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)

Nikhil Aziz

Executive Director
Grassroots International

Kate Kroeger
Director of Grants
American Jewish World Service

Travis Wheeler
Program Assistant
Latin America Working Group Education Fund

Lisa Haugaard
Executive Director
Latin America Working Group Education Fund

Elena McCollim
Program Officer
Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice

CC.

Dr. José Amílcar Velásquez Zárate
Attorney General y Chief of Public Prosecutors
15 Avenida 15-16, 8o Nivel
Zona 1 Barrio Gerona
Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Sr. Salvador Gándara
Interior Minister
6ª Avenida 13-71, Zona 1
Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

For further information contact Andrew Hudson: 333 7th Avenue, 13th Floor, New York, NY, 10001, United States Fax: +1 212 845 5200 Phone: +1 212 845 5200