

UA 224/98

Fear for Safety / Legal concern

18 August 1998

BOLIVIA

Padre Hugo ORTIZ - President Permanent Assembly for Human Rights in Caranavi and Catholic priest  
Padre Ginés Mateo ROCAMORA - Catholic priest, Chaplain of Chonchocoro prison and national representative of the Prisons' Pastoral at the Bolivian Bishops Conference  
(*delegado de la Pastoral Penitenciaria de la Conferencia Episcopal Boliviana*)

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There is concern for the safety of the two above-named human rights defenders and church members who, Amnesty International has recently learned, have been threatened and, in the case of Padre Hugo Ortíz, physically beaten.

On 9 July 1998 several people reportedly witnessed Catholic priest Padre Hugo Ortíz being beaten by members of *Unidad Movil de Patrullaje Rural* (UMOPAR), Mobile Rural Patrol Unit. This happened as he was travelling to Coroico to attend a diocesan meeting. The attack is believed to be related to his human rights work, as president of the *Asamblea Permanente de Derechos Humanos de Bolivia* (APDH), Permanent Assembly for Human Rights in Caranavi, La Paz Department, on behalf of the people of the region. A report on the incident has been submitted to the Minister of Government.

On 19 July, Padre Ginés Mateo Rocamora, Chaplain of the *Penal de Chonchocoro*, Chonchocoro prison in La Paz, was threatened and insulted by former general and ex-President Luis García Meza, currently serving 30 years for human rights violations committed during his government which came into power after a coup d'état. Following the Sunday service, prison police reportedly confiscated Father Ginés Rocamora's identity documents and proceeded to take him to see Luis García Meza and then to stand by as the attack took place.

Amnesty International believes that the incidents described above place the legitimate pastoral and human rights work of Padre Hugo Ortíz and Padre Ginés Mateo Rocamora in jeopardy.

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International is concerned at the increasing level of harassment and human rights violations directed at human rights defenders and church members in Bolivia. Another lay member, Serafín Hendrich, President of the APDH in Beni is also known to have been recently harassed. On 24 July the *Director de la Policía Técnica Judicial* (PTJ), Head of the Judicial Police, in Trinidad, reportedly threatened Serafín Hendrich with legal proceedings for defamation (*iniciara un juicio por propagar calumnias*). This was after Serafín Hendrich had made public and called for an inquiry into allegations that two detainees had been tortured at the PTJ. Amnesty International will continue to monitor this case closely.

Active members and supporters of the APDH, a leading non-governmental human rights organization in the country, have been threatened and harassed on previous occasions. In January 1997, Waldo Albarracín, the national president of the APDH was abducted and tortured by members of the police (see UA 27/97, AMR 18/02/97, 28 January 1997 and follow ups and Amnesty

International report: "Bolivia: Undermining Human Rights Work" AI Index 18/10/97, May 1997). The investigation into the attack and the subsequent threats to his family is yet to be completed.

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

- expressing deep concern at the reported attack on Padre Hugo Ortíz by the Mobile Rural Patrol Unit on 9 July 1998 and asking for information of any action being taken by the authorities to investigate the attack and to guarantee his safety;
- expressing deep concern about the reported participation of police prison guards at Chonchocoro prison in facilitating the verbal attack and threats against Padre Ginés Rocamora on 19 July by former general Luis Garcia Meza;
- asking for information of any action being taken to investigate the incident, to ensure it does not occur again, and to guarantee his safety while carrying out his pastoral duties at the prison;
- expressing concern at the harassment of members of the APDH as a result of their legitimate human rights work and the impact this could have on other human rights defenders in the country;
- urging that the findings of any inquiries be made public and that those responsible be brought to justice.

**APPEALS TO: (please note that if a fax number is answered in person to ask: "me puede dar tono de fax por favor"):**

President

Excmo Sr. Presidente  
Gral. Hugo Banzer  
Palacio de Gobierno, La Paz, Bolivia  
**Telegrams: Presidente, La Paz, Bolivia**  
**Faxes: + 5912 391216**  
**Salutation: Sr. Presidente / Dear President**

Minister of Government

Sr. Ministro de Gobierno  
Sr. Guido Nayar  
Ministerio de Gobierno  
Av. Arce esq. Belisario Salinas La Paz, Bolivia  
**Telegrams: Ministro Gobierno, La Paz, Bolivia**  
**Faxes: + 5912 371334**  
**Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister**

President of Congress

President Congress  
Sr. Jorge Quiroga Ramirez  
Palacio Legislativo  
Plaza Murillo,  
La Paz, Bolivia  
**Telegrams: Presidente, Congress, La Paz, Bolivia**  
**Faxes: + 5912 392178**  
**Salutation: Honorable Presidente / Dear President**

**COPIES TO:**

Human Rights Organization

Asamblea Permanente de Derechos Humanos  
Cajon Postal 9282

La Paz, Bolivia

**Faxes:** + 5912 327761/ 365148

Bolivian Bishops Conference

Conferencia Episcopal Boliviana

Presidente

Monseñor Julio Terrazas

Casilla 877, La paz, Bolivia

**Faxes:** + 5912 392326

Newspaper

Presencia

Av. Mariscal Santa Cruz 2150

La Paz, Bolivia

**Faxes:** + 5912 391040

and to diplomatic representatives of BOLIVIA accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 29 September 1998.