

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AMR 29/10/97

UA 352/97

Death threats / Fear for safety

7 November 1997

EL SALVADOR

Victoria Marina Velásquez de Avilés (f), National Human Rights Procurator

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Since last week, Dra Victoria Marina Velásquez de Avilés, *Procuradora para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos de El Salvador*, National Human Rights Procurator, has been receiving anonymous death threats.

The threats have been made by phone calls to various departments of the *Procuraduría* and her own personal phone; in one of them the caller warned that next year the "first victims will start falling and she would be the first one".

Since taking up her post in 1995, Dra Velásquez de Avilés has been widely praised for the conscientious and brave way in which she has performed her duties. She has denounced the existence of clandestine groups within the security forces and the involvement of members of the National Civil Police in human rights violations. In a recent poll she and the institution she heads were considered the most trusted public figure and organization by the population at large.

Dra Velásquez de Avilés has received death threats previously, including threats against her daughters (see UA 273/96, AMR 29/14/96, 21 November 1996).

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

El Salvador is emerging from an armed conflict during which the activities of "death squads" were of great concern to Amnesty International, as they were responsible for the deaths of hundreds of people (see *Peace without justice*, AMR 29/12/93, 1993). Although there have been important improvements since the end of the war, the continued existence of these clandestine armed groups is still of concern. Throughout 1995 and 1996, Amnesty International received further reports of harassment and threats against members of non-governmental human rights and civil organizations by such groups (see UA 241/96, AMR 29/12/96, 21 October 1996).

During 1997 there have been allegations from various groups in El Salvador, including the church, that such clandestine armed groups - or similar ones - operating from within the police force, are working in "social cleansing" squads where members of juvenile gangs and common criminals are the targets.

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

- expressing serious concern about reports of continuing death threats against Victoria Marina Velásquez de Avilés, National Human Rights Procurator;
- calling for an immediate, impartial and thorough investigation into these threats and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- calling for immediate and effective measures to ensure her protection in order to enable her to carry out her activities without fearing for her safety.

**APPEALS TO:**

President of El Salvador

Dr. Armando Calderón Sol  
Presidente de la República de El Salvador  
Casa Presidencial  
San Salvador, El Salvador

**Telegrams: Presidente Calderón, San Salvador, El Salvador**

**Telexes: 20245 RS SAL; 20522 PRESS SAL**

**Faxes: +503 271 0950**

**Salutation: Sr. Presidente / Dear President**

Minister of the Interior

Lic. Mario Acosta Oertel  
Ministro del Interior  
Ministerio del Interior  
Centro de Gobierno  
San Salvador, El Salvador

**Telegrams: Ministro Interior, San Salvador, El Salvador**

**Faxes: +503 271 2484**

**Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister**

**COPIES TO:**

Dra Victoria Marina Velásquez de Avilés  
Procuradora para la defensa de los derechos humanos de El Salvador  
9a. Avenida Nte. y Calle Poniente  
Edificio Amsa No. 535, San Salvador  
El Salvador

Newspaper

Sr. Jefe de Redacción

*Diario Latino*

23 Av. Sur No. 225

Apartado Postal 96,

San Salvador, El Salvador

**Faxes: 503 271 0971 (if voice ask, "me puede dar tono de fax, por favor")**

**If possible, send copies to:**

TV Channels

*Canal 12 de TV*

**Faxes: +503 278 5046**

*Canal 4 de TV*

**Faxes: +503 224 5708**

Radio station

*Radio YSUCA*

**Faxes: +503 243 1302 (if voice ask, "me puede dar tono de fax, por favor")**

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 30 December 1997.