

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety

25 January 2002

HONDURAS

Dr Leo Valladares Lanza (m), National Commissioner for  
Human Rights  
Sonia Marlina Dubón (f), Deputy Commissioner

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The National Commissioner for Human Rights in Honduras, Dr Leo Valladares Lanza, and the Deputy Commissioner, Sonia Marlina Dubón, have received anonymous telephone death threats. The threats are thought to be linked to the fact that the Commissioner has wide powers to investigate official corruption, and is also involved in the appointment of the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court and the judicial system are widely perceived as the most corrupt institution in the country. A new system for appointing the Supreme Court's 15 judges was recently introduced, which was intended to end this apparent corruption. Under the new system, a Nominating Board (*Junta Nominadora*) draws up a shortlist of 45 candidates, from which the parliament, the National Congress (*Congreso Nacional*) chooses the final 15, who sit on the Supreme Court for seven years.

Sonia Marlina Dubón was one of a shortlist of candidates for appointment to the Supreme Court. Dr Valladares was one of the seven-member Nominating Board which drew up the shortlist, from 169 applicants. On 22 January one of the rejected applicants appealed to the Supreme Court, which ruled in his favour within hours: the list was nullified, and the Board was dissolved.

This decision has caused dismay among human rights organisations and business groups, as it appears to confirm the widespread perception of the Court and the judicial system as corrupt. The Court was to have been appointed by 26 January. The new president, Ricardo Maduro, takes office the following day.

On 21 January Dr Valladares published a report on the right to information and freedom of expression in Honduras (called the *Primer informe sobre el derecho a la información y la libertad de expresión en Honduras*) which points to the high level of control exerted by the government and economic interests on journalists and the media.

In June 1998, Hurricane Mitch left hundreds of thousands homeless and destroyed much of the country's infrastructure. Dr Valladares accused the government of corruption in its management of the foreign aid intended to help the survivors. The government responded by attempting to limit his powers and reduce his period in office, but backed down after an international outcry.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Spanish, English or your own language:**

- expressing serious concern about reports that Dr Leo Valladares, National Commissioner for Human Rights and his Deputy Sonia Marlina Dubón have received death threats;
- 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 their protection in order to enable them to carry out their activities without fear for their safety.

**APPEALS TO:**

**Until 26 January:**

President

S.E. Carlos Roberto Flores Facussé  
Presidente de la República de Honduras  
Casa Presidencial  
Boulevard Juan Pablo Segundo  
Palacio José Cecilio del Valle  
Tegucigalpa, Honduras

**Telegrams: Presidente, Tegucigalpa, Honduras**

**Fax: + 504 234 1484**

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

**From 27 January onwards**

S.E. Ricardo Maduro  
Presidente de la República de Honduras  
[address as above]

Attorney General

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

**Telegrams: Fiscal General, Tegucigalpa, Honduras**

**Fax: + 504 221 5667**

**Salutation: Sr. Fiscal General/Attorney General**

**COPIES TO:**

National Human Rights Organization

Coordinadora Nacional contra la Impunidad  
Apartado Postal 1243  
Tegucigalpa, Honduras

Oficina del Comisionado Nacional de Protección  
de los Derechos Humanos (CONADEH)  
Avda. La Paz No. 2444  
Contiguo a Galerías La Paz  
Tegucigalpa, Honduras

**Fax: +504 221 0536**

**Salutation: Dear Commissioner/Sr. Comisionado**

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 8 March 2002.