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Fear for safety

29 April 1999

EL SALVADOR Miguel Montenegro, human rights defender, and his family

On 26 April 1999, Miguel Montenegro, the President of the *Comisión de Derechos Humanos de El Salvador, CDHES* (Commission on Human Rights of El Salvador), was kidnapped by several heavily armed men from his van in the capital, San Salvador. Amnesty International is gravely concerned for the safety of Miguel Montenegro and his family.

The men, who were travelling in two vehicles with darkened windows, drove Miguel Montenegro around for about two hours and finally dropped him in the east side of San Salvador at 10.00 pm. They insulted him and threatened him with death. The men warned him not to report the kidnapping, saying that they knew where he worked and lived and would take retaliatory measures against him and his family if he talked. They also claimed to have contacts within the police force.

In the last few months other similar attacks have taken place in El Salvador. In March, the President of the *Centro para la Defensa del Consumidor* (Centre for the Defence of the Consumer), a group working on behalf of the poor, was kidnapped in similar circumstances and detained for about 19 hours. In addition, the Department of Human Rights of the Lutheran Church and a number of other organizations have recently suffered break-ins.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The CDHES, founded in 1978 with the support of Archbishop Oscar Romero (assassinated in 1980), has been a target of attacks since its inception. Several of its members have been killed or "disappeared" as a result of their work. Other NGOs working on behalf of victims of human rights violations, and for the promotion and defence of human rights, have also been repeatedly targeted over the years.

Death squads and paramilitary groups were responsible for the systematic secret murder, torture and "disappearance" of suspected government opponents during the 1980s and early 1990s, but benefitted from total impunity. After the 1992 Peace Accords, which ended 12 years of armed conflict between the government and the *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional, FMLN*, a non-governmental opposition entity, the hope was that they would be held accountable and cease to exist. In 1993, a resurgence of violence led to the creation of the *Grupo Conjunto para la Investigación de Grupos Armados Ilegales con Motivación Política en El Salvador* (Joint Group to investigate politically motivated illegal armed groups). The Joint Group concluded that organized groups carrying out political violence continued to operate, although their relation to state structures was less evident than in the past; it made several recommendations to investigate and adopt preventive measures, which have not been implemented. The CDHES has denounced the existence of "extermination groups or death squads" and calling for the implementation of the recommendations of the Joint Group.

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

- expressing serious concern about reports of the kidnapping and death threats against Miguel Montenegro, President of the Commission on Human Rights in El Salvador, and his family;
- calling for an immediate, impartial and thorough investigation into the kidnapping and threats and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- calling for immediate and effective measures to ensure his protection in order to enable him to carry out his legal human rights activities without fear for his safety and that of his family.
- expressing your support for the work of the Commission on Human Rights in El Salvador and all those who work to protect human rights.

APPEALS TO:

S.E. Dr Armando Calderón Sol
Presidente de la República de El Salvador
Avda. Los Diplomáticos, B° San Jacinto
San Salvador, El Salvador
Fax: + 503 281 0018
E-mail: presidente@casapres.gob.sv
Salutation: Sr Presidente / Dear President

Sr. Manuel Córdoba Castellanos (Attorney General)
Fiscal General
Centro de Gobierno, 5° Piso
San Salvador, El Salvador
Fax: + 503 225 6171
Salutation: Sr Fiscal General /Dear Attorney General

Eduardo Peñate Polanco (Human Rights Procurator)
Procurador para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos
9ª Av. Norte y 5° Calle Poniente
Edificio AMSA N° 535
San Salvador, El Salvador
Fax:+ 503 271-2886
Salutation: Sr Procurador de Derechos Humanos/Dear Human Rights Procurator

COPIES TO:

Ing. Rodrigo Ávila (Director General of the National Civilian Police)
Director General de la Policía Nacional Civil
Calle Rubén Darío 930
San Salvador, El Salvador
Fax: + 503 222 1981
Salutation: Sr Director General / Dear Director General

Comisión de Derechos Humanos de El Salvador (CDHES) Human Rights Commission
Urbanización La Esperanza
Pasaje 1, N° 117
San Salvador, El Salvador
Tel/Fax: + 503 225-9906

Consortio ONGs de Derechos Humanos de El Salvador
Residencial San Luis
Calle 2, Pasaje 1, Apto No 20
San Salvador, El Salvador
Tel/fax: + 503 274 6625

El Diario De Hoy

Fax: + 503 2712270
E-mail: eldiariodehoy2@ejje.com

REUTERS

Fax: + 503-2 24-6487

Agencia Centroamericana de Noticias S.A.(ACAN-EFE)

Fax: + 503-2 26-6877

and 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 10 June 1999.