

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety

ST. VINCENT
AND THE GRENADINES

Nicole Sylvester (f), President of the St Vincent and
the Grenadines Human Rights Association (SVGHRA)
Kay Bacchus-Browne (f), member of the SVGHRA
Other members of the SVGHRA

Nicole Sylvester, President of the St Vincent and the Grenadines Human Rights Association (SVGHRA), has been threatened and intimidated, apparently in relation to the SVGHRA's work on behalf of the alleged victim in a high profile rape case. The vehicle of one of her colleagues has also reportedly been followed.

On the evening of 25 January, Nicole Sylvester received an anonymous telephone call at her home. A male voice warned her: "The case you are working on, you had better drop it – remember you have a family". On the evening of 2 February as she was driving to a meeting, Nicole Sylvester, who is also the President of the St. Vincent the Grenadines Bar Association, was followed by a white jeep, of the type used by the police's Special Services Unit. On 4 February she was approached near her office by a police officer who advised her: "Be careful, you are being followed". Kay Bacchus-Browne, a lawyer and member of the SVGHRA was also followed by a white jeep on the morning of 4 February as she was driving to a meeting.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Nicole Sylvester and other lawyers from the SVGHRA have been representing a woman police officer who has alleged that she was raped by the Prime Minister of St Vincent and the Grenadines on 3 January 2008. The police reportedly refused to take her complaint and advised her to leave the country for a while. Her lawyers filed two private criminal complaints (for indecent assault and unlawful sexual intercourse without consent) at the Magistrate's Court on 31 January. The Director of Public Prosecutions halted investigation of the complaints, as he is permitted to do under the country's Constitution. He claimed there was not sufficient evidence for the complaints to go to court. However, the woman's lawyers have stated that the police showed no interest in undertaking an investigation.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Nicole Sylvester and Kay Bacchus-Browne from the St. Vincent and the Grenadines Human Rights Association, who have been threatened and intimidated;
- urging the authorities to ensure that she and her colleagues receive protection, in accordance with their wishes;
- calling for a thorough and impartial investigation into the threats and intimidation received by Nicole Sylvester and her colleagues;
- reminding the authorities that the UN Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of Individuals, Groups and Institutions to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Liberties recognizes the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders and their right to carry out their activities without any fear of reprisals.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Commerce and Trade

Hon. Sir Louis Straker
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
3rd Floor Administrative Building
Bay Street
Kingstown
St. Vincent
Fax: + 1 784 456 2610
Salutation: Dear Minister

Commissioner of Police

Mr Keith Miller
Police Headquarters
Kingstown
St. Vincent
Fax: +1 784 456 2816
Salutation: Dear Commissioner

Police Public Relations Office

Mr. Artis Davis
Police Public Relations Officer
Central Kingstown
P.O Box 835
St. Vincent
Fax: +1 784 456 2816
Salutation: Dear Sir

COPIES TO:

Human rights organization

St. Vincent and the Grenadines Human Rights Association
P.O. Box 951
Grenville Street
Kingstown
St. Vincent

and to diplomatic representatives of St. Vincent and the Grenadines accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 20 March 2008.