

PUBLIC

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UA 227/08 Fear for safety

GUATEMALA **Fifteen volunteers for the Guatemalan Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) (*Asociación Christiana de Jóvenes de Guatemala, ACJ*) in the town of Amatitlán**

Three volunteers for the Guatemalan YMCA, who were working with youths at risk of joining gangs, were killed near the town of Amatitlán, south of Guatemala City, on 10 August. The 15 remaining YMCA members working in the same programme are now in grave danger.

The three volunteers, Eliazar Hernández, Mario Gámez and Juan Navarro, finished work at the YMCA offices at around 9pm on 10 August. They went to Eliazar Hernández's home. Late that night they received a phone call and told others at the house that they were going out and would be back soon. They got on Eliazar Hernández's motorbike.

The three young men's bodies were found by farm workers early the next morning on a farm approximately 10km south of Amatitlán. They had been cut with machetes, and severely beaten. The two who had worked the longest for the YMCA had been more severely beaten than the third. All three had been killed by a single shot to the head.

Amnesty International is conducting research into killings in the area of Amatitlán. Other killings have also involved abduction, torture, death by a shot to the head and the abandonment of the body away from the scene of the abduction. This pattern is repeated more widely in Guatemala. Members or those suspected of being members of street gangs, known as *maras*, who are often extremely violent, are the targets of such killings.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In 2007, according to police records, 5,781 people were murdered. In November 2007, the Vice-President told Amnesty International that approximately one per cent of all killings resulted in a conviction, although other estimates range from less to two per cent. In February 2007 The UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions issued a report criticizing Guatemala for fostering impunity for killings and noted the involvement of the police in killings of those deemed to be "socially undesirable."

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

- expressing concern for the safety of YMCA members in Amatitlán, three of whom were murdered on the night of 10 August;
- urging the Minister of the Interior to ensure that immediate measures are taken to guarantee the safety of the 15 remaining YMCA members, in strict accordance with their wishes;
- calling on the Attorney General to order a full, thorough and swift investigation into these killings, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- asking the authorities not to make any statements about the killings or the victims which could prejudice the investigation.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of the Interior

Francisco José Jiménez Iruugaray
Ministro de Gobernación
6ª Avenida 13-71, Zona 1,
Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Fax: +502 2413 8658

Salutation: Dear Minister/Estimado Sr. Ministro

Attorney General and Head of the Public Prosecutor's Office

Lic. José Amílcar Velásquez Zárate
Fiscal General de la República y Jefe del Ministerio Público
8ª Avenida 10-67, Zona 1, Antiguo Edificio del Banco de los Trabajadores,
Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Fax: +502 2411 9124

+502 2411 9326

Salutation: Dear Attorney General / Estimado Sr. Fiscal General

COPIES TO:

Guatemalan YMCA

Asociación Cristiana de Jóvenes
2 avenida 34-70, zona 12
Colonia El Carmen
Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

and to diplomatic representatives of Guatemala accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 25 September 2008.