

UA 309/00

Possible disappearance/Fear for safety

6 October 2000

GUATEMALA

**Carlos Ignacio Orellana
Other members of FREPOGUA**

The son of a leading campaigner for the rights of shanty-town dwellers has been kidnapped, and his captors have told his family they are torturing him.

Carlos Ignacio Orellana was snatched from the Avenida Bolivar, in Zona 3 of Guatemala City, on 18 September. His captors have used his mobile phone to call his mother and describe how they are torturing him.

Carlos Ignacio's mother, Albertina Castillo Pérez, is one of the leaders of the *Frente de Pobladores de Guatemala* (FREPOGUA), Guatemalan Shanty-town Dwellers' Association. She is the president of the 17 December Shanty-town Neighbours' Committee.

FREPOGUA members campaigning for the right to decent housing for more than 5,800 families, have been on hunger strike outside the President's official residence in Guatemala City since 25 September. They have faced serious intimidation. Early on 3 October, while it was still dark, they were shot at from a car with tinted windows. At about 1.00pm that day they were attacked by a large group of ex-civil patrollers. The civil patrols operated as the army's auxiliary during Guatemala's civil conflict and were involved in many human rights violations, including massacres of entire villages. They were formally disbanded after the Peace Accords which ended the conflict were signed, but are still said to be active in several areas of the country.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The government has recently made a number of very worrying statements, implying that human rights activists are part of a campaign to destabilise the country, and also that they may be attacked by these same people. Analysts in Guatemala believe that these statements may have served, intentionally or not, as a signal that NGOs and human rights activists are fair targets for attack, putting them at particular risk.

On 28 September, the Minister of the Interior declared that "there are groups that want to cause instability, to create chaos and anarchy." Such groups, he said, "plan to set off bombs that will scatter propaganda leaflets when they explode...they will also burn the central offices of NGOs". The Vice-president of the Guatemalan Congress, Leonel Soto Arango, declared two days later: "The Minister of the Interior and the director of the National Civil Police have informed us that there are some individuals, who claim to be human rights activists, that want to create instability in the country by causing confrontations."

A few days after these statements, two heavily-armed men attacked members of an organisation involved in exhuming the mass graves of villagers killed during Guatemala's civil conflict and stole one their pick-up trucks. The following day, the offices of the Students' Association at the Autonomous State University of Guatemala (USAC) were broken into. The Students' Association has been outspoken on political and human rights issues.

The wave of common crime currently afflicting Guatemala makes it difficult to be certain who lay behind these two incidents. However, as described above, they come in a context of threats and abuses against members of human rights organizations.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Carlos Ignacio Orellana, who was abducted on 18 September in Guatemala City;
- urging the authorities to conduct a prompt and independent investigation into his abduction;
- asking that if he is found to be in police custody he be promptly brought before a competent court or else released;
- calling on the authorities to immediately investigate the attacks on FREPOGUA demonstrators, and bring those responsible to justice.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic

Lic. Alfonso Portillo Cabrera
Presidente de la República de Guatemala
6a. Avenida "A" 4-18, Zona 1
Ciudad de Guatemala , GUATEMALA
Fax: + 502 221 4423/ 221 4537

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/ Dear President

Minister of the Interior

Sr. Byron Barrientos
Ministro de Gobernación
Ministerio de Gobernación
6ª Avenida 4-64, Zona 4
Ciudad de Guatemala , GUATEMALA
Fax: 502 362 0239/ 362 0237
Salutation: Señor Ministro / Dear Minister

President of Congress

Gral. Efraín Ríos Montt
9ª Avenida 9-44, Zona 1
Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA
Fax: + 502 220 4024
Salutation: Dear President of the Congress/ Señor Presidente del Congreso

COPIES TO:

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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 17 November 2000.