

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety

10 October 2000

GUATEMALA

Ricardo Lobo

Members of Human Rights organizations

A human rights defender has been shot at by unidentified individuals in the wake of government statements implying that human rights activists are trying to destabilize the country and that they are fair targets for attack.

Unidentified individuals driving a pick-up truck attacked Ricardo Lobo and his travel companion on 7 September. As they drove by in the opposite direction, the attackers yelled insults and fired at Ricardo Lobo. The car was hit, but Ricardo Lobo threw himself on the floor of the car and was not injured.

Ricardo Lobo works for the *Centro de Estudios, Información y Bases para la Acción Social* (CEIBAS), Centre for Studies, Information and Basis for Social Action, an non-governmental organization (NGO) campaigning for the implementation of social, economic and cultural rights that were agreed under the Peace Accords which formally ended Guatemala's long-term civil conflict. He is also involved with the *Movimiento Ciudadano por la Justicia y la Democracia*, Civic Movement for Justice and Democracy, a coalition of NGOs and members of specific society, who are demanding that ex-dictator Efraín Ríos Montt and 19 others should be expelled from the Congress and stripped of immunity because of their involvement with the illegal alteration of a law on alcohol taxes.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Lately, members of human rights organizations, journalists and others involved in human rights activism have increasingly been threatened or abused (see UA 310/00, UA 265/00, UA 256/00, UA 223/00, UA 212/00, and UA 199/00). The increased abuse has followed in the wake of recent government statements appearing to declare "open season" on human rights defenders, suggesting that they are trying to destabilize the country, and that they risk being attacked by unknown forces.

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 "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."

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.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Ricardo Lobo and other members of CEIBAS and the *Movimiento Ciudadano por la Justicia y la Democracia*;

- expressing concern that recent government statements appear to legitimise attacks on human rights activists;
- calling on the authorities to investigate this latest attack and all other recent incidents and bring those responsible to justice;
- urging the authorities to take all necessary steps to ensure the security of all of those involved in legitimate NGO and human rights work.

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 the Congress

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

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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 21 November 2000.