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Fear for safety

29 March 2000

NICARAGUA

Vilma Núñez de Escorcia (f), human rights
organisation president

Government ministers have accused human rights worker Vilma Núñez de Escorcia of obstructing the police, and pro-government newspapers and radio stations have said that her death might be the answer to the unrest in northeast Nicaragua. Amnesty International is deeply concerned for her safety, and for that of her colleagues and their families.

Vilma Núñez de Escorcia is President of the *Centro Nicaraguense de Derechos Humanos* (CENIDH), Nicaraguan Centre for Human Rights. The organisation has been investigating the killings of three men, one in January and two on 16 March. In the second attack, near Boaco, 70 km northeast of the capital, Managua, the wife of one of the two men shot dead was seriously wounded.

All three men were former members of an armed group of ex-soldiers, the Andres Castro United Front (*Frente Unido Andrés Castro* (FUAC)). The FUAC had agreed to disarm in 1997, in exchange for land and other help from the government, but neither side appears to have honoured the agreement.

In the last few days high-ranking officials in the National Police (*Policía Nacional*) and the Ministry of the Interior (*Ministerio de Gobernación*) have made public statements accusing CENIDH and Vilma Núñez of causing a "fifty percent" obstruction to the police investigation of the killings. This has been followed by open hostility from pro-government newspapers and radio stations, which have accused Vilma Núñez and CENIDH of attempting to "incite social unrest" ("*alterar la paz social*") and even suggested that the elimination of Dr Vilma Núñez could be the solution to the lawlessness in the northern part of the country ("*la eliminación física de la Dra Vilma Núñez podría ser la solución al conflicto que se vive en la zona norte del país*").

The work of CENIDH over the years has been very important for the protection and respect of human rights in Nicaragua, at times under difficult conditions.

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

- expressing serious concern about the attacks against Vilma Núñez and CENIDH;
- urging the government of Nicaragua to take steps to protect Vilma Núñez and other members of CENIDH and their families;
- reminding the government of its obligation to support human rights defenders in their work for the protection and promotion of the respect of human rights, as set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, of 9 December 1998.

APPEALS TO:

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and to diplomatic representatives of Nicaragua accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 10 May 2000.