

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety/Death Threats

11 April 2002

NICARAGUA

María Luisa Acosta (f)- lawyer

killed:

Francisco José García Valle (m) aged 44

There are grave concerns for the safety of María Luisa Acosta, following the murder of her husband Francisco José García Valle on 8 April. Prior to his death, María Luisa Acosta had reportedly received death threats, which may be connected to her work as a lawyer who defends indigenous communities in the Autonomous South Atlantic Region of Nicaragua.

Francisco José García Valle, a university lecturer and President of the Chamber of Commerce of Bluefields, was shot dead at his home. He was found by his wife, when she returned home from work on the evening of 8 April. He was lying face down among furniture with a gunshot to the chest. His hands had been tied behind his back. Although there were valuables in the house nothing was taken, indicating that theft was not the motive of the attack. It is feared that María Luisa Acosta was the actual target of the attack.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Indigenous communities in Nicaragua have long faced land rights problems involving both powerful private interests and state initiatives. María Luisa Acosta coordinates the *Centro de Asistencia Legal a los Pueblos Indígenas* (CALPI), Legal Aid Centre for Indigenous Peoples. She had recently been defending the rights of indigenous groups against private interests. These groups were also concerned about the lack of consultation regarding major state initiatives, which would directly affect them. One such initiative, concerns the construction of a dry canal joining the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean, which would go through sacred indigenous land.

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

- expressing deep concern for the safety of María Luisa Acosta following the murder of her husband;
- urging the authorities to take immediate measures to protect her and her family from any further attacks;
- while acknowledging the steps already taken by the police, seek assurances that a full, impartial and prompt investigation is carried out into the murder of Francisco José García Valle, that the results are made public and that those who planned, ordered and carried out this crime are brought to justice;
- reminding the government of its obligation to support human rights defenders in their work for the protection and promotion of the respect for 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, and the Resolution adopted by the General Assembly of the Organization of American States in June 1999 in support of the work of human rights defenders.

APPEALS TO:

You may experience problems if dialling the numbers below from an extension but they work from a direct line.

President of the Republic

Sr. Enrique Bolaños
Presidente de la República de Nicaragua
Casa de la Presidencia
Avenida Bolívar y Dupla Sur.
Managua, Nicaragua
Telegram: Presidente de la República de Nicaragua, Managua, Nicaragua
Fax: + 505 228 7911
E-mail: presidente@presidencia.gob.ni
Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/ Dear President Bolaños

Attorney General

Oscar Herdocia Lacayo
Procurador General de Justicia
Procuraduría General de Justicia
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Managua, Nicaragua
Telegram: Procurador General de Justicia, Managua, Nicaragua
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Salutation: Estimado Sr. Herdocia Lacayo/ Dear Mr. Herdocia Lacayo

COPIES TO:

Human Rights Ombudsman

Dr Benjamín Pérez Fonseca
Procurador de los Derechos Humanos
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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 23 May 2002.