

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 53/012/2004

UA 230/04 Fear for safety/Death threats

22 July 2004

VENEZUELA **Mariela Mendoza (f)**
Members of her family

Amnesty International is extremely concerned for the safety of Mariela Mendoza and that of her family after she was shot outside her home on 16 July by an unidentified gunman. She had been a witness to the alleged police killings of her three brothers and prior to the shooting had received death threats presumably from the police officers implicated in the case or individuals acting on their behalf.

On the afternoon of 16 July, Mariela Mendoza was sitting in front of her house with one of her brothers in the Baraure de Araure sector of Portuguesa State when a gunman shot her three times, wounding her in the shoulder, hand and forearm. The attack against her coincided with the recent release from prison of a police officer accused of another murder carried out in the state.

Mariela Mendoza had been an eyewitness to the killings of her three brothers Ender, Gonzalo and Alexander Mendoza on 28 November 2000, which were allegedly carried out by members of the Portuguesa state police. Several police officers accused of the murders of the Mendoza brothers have been in detention since 2001 but the case against them has yet to be brought to trial.

These killings and that of more than a further 100 individuals which occurred between 1999 and 2002 are alleged to have been carried out by a so-called "extermination group" ("*grupo exterminio*") that operated inside the Portuguesa state police force.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) granted precautionary measures to Mariela Mendoza and other members of her family on 15 October 2002 which called on the Venezuelan authorities to guarantee their safety. These measures have never been implemented.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Venezuelan state of Portuguesa has a history of extra-judicial executions carried out by the police and a failure to protect witnesses and family members of the victims.

The IACHR issues precautionary measures requesting that the relevant State guarantees the physical and mental integrity of persons who find themselves in situations of extreme gravity and urgency and when it becomes necessary to avoid irreparable harm to those persons. These measures and others by the IACHR requesting investigations into abuses of police power in Portuguesa as well the states of Aragua, Bolívar, Anzóatequi, and Falcón have not, in most cases, been carried out effectively.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Mariela Mendoza following the recent attempt on her life, and other members of her family;
- urging the authorities to provide her and her family with adequate protection and to guarantee their safety;
- calling on the authorities to carry out a full, prompt and impartial investigation into the armed attack against Mariela Mendoza and into the death threats and harassment she and her family have suffered, to make the results public and bring those responsible to justice;
- calling on the authorities for information on the progress of judicial investigations into the murders of Ender Mendoza, Gonzalo Mendoza and Alexander Mendoza.

APPEALS TO:

Attorney General

Fiscal General de la República,
Dr. Isaías Rodríguez
Avenida Universidad, Esquina Pele el ojo a Misericordia,
Frente a Parque Carabobo, Caracas, VENEZUELA

Fax: + 58 212 576 44 19

Salutation: Estimado Señor Fiscal General/Dear Attorney General

Human Rights Ombudsman

Defensoría del Pueblo,
Dr. Germán Mundaraín
Bellas Artes comienzo Avenida México frente al Ateneo de Caracas
Plaza Morelos, Caracas, VENEZUELA

Fax: + 58 212 575 4467 (if a voice answers, say "tono de fax por favor")

Email: gmundarain@defensoria.gov.ve

Salutation: Estimado Señor/Dear Sir

Governor of Portuguesa State

Sra. Gobernadora del estado de Portuguesa
Sra. Antonia Muñoz
Palacio de Gobierno
Carrera Quinta
Frente a la Plaza Bolívar
Guanare

Estado de Portuguesa, VENEZUELA

Fax: + 58 257 253 0693

Salutation: Estimado Señora Gobernadora/Dear Governor

COPIES TO:

Human Rights Organization.

COFAVIC,
Apdo Postal 16150
La Candelaria
Caracas 1010-A
VENEZUELA

and to diplomatic representatives of VENEZUELA accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 2 September 2004.