

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AMR 29/12/96

UA 241/96

Death threats / Fear for safety

21 October 1996

**EL SALVADOREliezar Ambelis, 20, human rights worker  
and other members of the Centro para la Promoción de los Derechos Humanos  
"Madeleine Lagadec"**

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Reports indicate that, on 8 October 1996, two unidentified masked men attempted to kidnap Eliezar Ambelis, a human rights worker (*promotor de derechos humanos*) at the *Centro para la Promoción de los Derechos Humanos "Madeleine Lagadec"*, Madeleine Lagadec Human Rights Centre, on the road from Santa Clara to the community of El Rosario, department of San Vicente, El Salvador.

The two men reportedly grabbed Eliezar Ambelis in the middle of the road and tried to blindfold him and bundle him into a car, but he managed to escape and ran away through a field. The men reportedly shot at Eliezar Ambelis as he was running away. He was not hurt.

An hour after the attempted kidnapping, members of the Madeleine Lagadec Human Rights Centre in San Salvador received a threatening phone call, in which the caller said "I want you to know that your office has to disappear. Be careful. The man in Santa Clara is already ours. Pray for him." ("*Quiero que sepan que esa oficina tiene que desaparecer, tengan cuidado. El que está en Santa Clara ya está en nuestro poder. Recen por él.*"). It is believed that the caller was not aware that Eliezar Ambelis had managed to escape from his captors.

Also on 8 October, in the evening, unidentified persons left a written death threat outside the Santa Clara office of the Madeleine Lagadec Human Rights Centre. The note read: "Be careful. Your day is getting near." ("*...cuidense, pues ya luego llegará el día de ustedes.*")

The Centre's offices in Santa Ana were broken into on 12 October and office materials taken, as well as files containing human rights cases and materials to promote citizenship rights among the rural population.

It is believed that these threats, which have been made known to the *Policía Nacional Civil* (National Civil Police), may be related to the work of the Madeleine Lagadec Human Rights Centre in promoting voting rights and in campaigning against the death penalty in El Salvador.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Eliezar Ambelis has been working on the promotion of voting rights with a number of rural communities. He had received another death threat on 27 September 1996, which warned him against continuing this work: "we don't like you fucking about with your talks in the communities... Don't get involved in other people's business... we have tolerated you up to now... Be careful, you big asshole... leave your work, it only brings you danger" ("*No nos gusta que estés jodiendo con esas tus charlas en las comunidades... No te metás en lo que no te importa... hasta hoy te soportamos... Tené mucho cuidado gran pendejo... Deja el trabajo que solo te trae peligro.*").

On 13 August, workers at the Madeleine Lagadec Human Rights Centre office in San Salvador found an anonymous note stating that they would be burgled and that they should prepare themselves as they were going to be killed ("*...así que prepárense porque les vamos a matar*").

The Centre has also been highly vocal against the expansion of the scope of the death penalty in El Salvador. The Salvadorean Legislative Assembly approved an extension to the death penalty on 10 October 1996 (see EXTRA 154/96, AMR 29/09/96, 3 October 1996 and further information, AMR 29/10/96, 11 October 1996).

Although no group has claimed responsibility for these threats, Amnesty International fears that they may be the work of clandestine armed groups acting in a manner similar to the death squads which were active during the period of armed conflict in El Salvador (1980-1992). These groups were responsible for the deaths of hundreds of people. Although there have been important improvements since the end of the war, the continued existence of these clandestine armed groups is still of concern (see UA 176/96, AMR 29/08/96, 10 July 1996). Throughout 1995 and the first half of 1996, Amnesty International has received further reports of harassment and threats against members of non-governmental organizations by such groups.

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

- expressing serious concern about reports of the attempted kidnapping of Eliezar Ambelis, of the *Centro para la Protección de los Derechos Humanos "Madeleine Lagadec"*, on 8 October 1996, in the municipality of Santa Clara, San Vicente, El Salvador;
- requesting an immediate, impartial and thorough investigation into this and other threats suffered by members of the aforementioned Human Rights Centre in San Salvador, Santa Ana and Santa Clara, and that those found responsible are brought to justice;
- calling for immediate and effective measures to ensure their protection to enable them to carry out their activities without fearing for their safety.

**APPEALS TO:**

President of El Salvador  
 Dr. Armando Calderón Sol  
 Presidente de la República de El Salvador  
 Casa Presidencial  
 San Salvador, El Salvador

**Telegrams: Presidente Calderón, San Salvador, El Salvador**

**Telex: 20245 RS SAL; 20522 PRESS SAL**

**Fax: +503 271 0950**

**Salutation: Sr. Presidente / Dear President**

Minister of the Interior  
 Lic. Mario Acosta Oertel  
 Ministro del Interior  
 Ministerio del Interior  
 Centro de Gobierno  
 San Salvador, El Salvador

**Telegrams: Ministro Interior, San Salvador, El Salvador**

**Fax: +503 271 2484**

**Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister**

**COPIES TO:**

Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman  
 Dra. Victoria Marina Velásquez de Avilés

Procuradora para la defensa  
de los derechos humanos de El Salvador  
9a. Avenida Nte. y Calle Poniente  
Edificio Amsa No. 535, San Salvador  
El Salvador

Madeleine Lagadec Human Rights Centre  
Centro para la Promoción de los Derechos Humanos  
"Madeleine Lagadec"  
Colonia Jardín, Pasaje 6, Casa No. 12,  
Mejicanos, San Salvador, El Salvador  
**Fax: +503 282 0973**

Sr. Jefe de Redacción  
*Diario Latino*  
23 Av. Sur No. 225  
Apartado Postal 96,  
San Salvador, El Salvador  
**Fax: 503 271 0971**

**If possible, also send a copy to one or more of the following:**

*Canal 12 de TV*  
**Fax: +503 278 5046**

*Radio YSUCA*  
**Fax: +503 243 1302**

*Canal 4 de TV*  
**Fax: +503 224 5708**

and to diplomatic representatives of El Salvador accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat,  
or your section office, if sending appeals after 2 December 1996.