

via fax: 011 502 2251 2218 Licenciado Juan Luis Florido Attorney General of Guatemala	via fax: 011 502 2239 0090 Licenciado Oscar Berger Perdomo President of Guatemala
via fax: 011 502 2362 0237 Carlos Vielman Minister of the Interior, Guatemala	

September 16, 2006

Dear Sirs:

We, members of the InterReligious Task Force, are very concerned for the safety of **Maynor Roberto Berganza Bethancourt** who has received a series of death threats in an effort to dissuade him from his work as a long-standing human rights lawyer. He was appointed to make a public statement on August 22 to the UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial Executions denouncing the 1989 incidents of the disappearance and execution of student leaders. He has also been working recently on the defense of the archaeological site Tulam Tzu and the defense of the indigenous leader Dominga Vásquez in the complaint presented against her by the governor of Sololá in April 2005. (The governor of Sololá and his bodyguard were later killed on May 26, 2006 by heavily armed men in an attack attributed to organized crime by the Minister of the Interior.)

(We wrote to Guatemalan officials April 21, 2005 with concern for the safety of Dominga Vásquez, Alfonso Guárquez and Carlos Humberto Guárquez, whose lives were being threatened because of their efforts to stop their opposition to mining expansion near their homes.)

At 7:36 pm on August 22, Maynor Roberto Berganza Bethancourt received a phone call from a man asking for an interview with him. After a brief exchange, the man told Berganza: "let's talk straight; I am member of organized crime and we have been hired to kill you."

At 10:30 am on August 24, an unidentified man asked for Berganza at his office and showed a membership card from "Central Action Committee." When asked the location of the headquarters of the Central Action Committee, the man said "The Presidential House" and immediately left the room.

Also on August 24, Berganza received two anonymous phone calls. One said: "there are two people here with me asking to kill [your family]." In a call to his office, an unidentified man told the secretary "we have a message for him" and hung up.

Human rights defenders have a right to carry out their activities without any restrictions or fear of reprisals as set out in the UN Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Institutions to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. Therefore, **we strongly urge you to**

- take action to ensure the safety of Maynor Roberto Berganza Bethancourt;
- order a full and impartial investigation into the death threats against him and bring those responsible to justice

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai, Coordinator

Copies: Dr. Sergio Fernando Morales Alvarado, Human Rights Ombudsman ~ via fax: 011 502 2424 1714
 Human Rights Defenders Protection Unit ~ via fax: 011 502 2232 2651
 Ambassador Jose Guillermo Castillo ~ via fax: 202 745 1908
 Ambassador James Derham ~ via fax: 011-502-2334-8477
 Paolo Carozza US member of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights~ fax: (202)458-3992
 Courtney Turner, Guatemala Desk, US State Dept ~ via fax: 202-647-2597
 U.S. Senators DeWine and Voinovich ~ via email
 U.S. Representatives Brown, Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Ryan, Tubbs Jones ~ via email

UA 236/06 Guatemala

The following people hereby urge you to take action on this matter as indicated in this letter