

via fax: 011 502 251 2218 Juan Luis Florido Attorney General, GUATEMALA	via fax: 011 502 2332 8302 Alvaro Aguilar Prado Minister of Agriculture, Livestock and Nutrition
via fax 011 502 362 0237 Carlos Vielman Minister of the Interior, GUATEMALA	

July 19, 2005

Dear Sirs:

We, members of the InterReligious Task Force, are deeply concerned for the safety of **José Ernesto Menchú Tojib** and his family. As a consequence of his work as a member of the Committee for Campesino Unity (CUC) and the Movement of Victims of the Internal Armed Conflict in Uspantán, Department of Quiché, Menchú received a death threat which we feel has placed him in grave danger and caused him to go into hiding.

On June 19, at 11:45 A.M., four armed men came into his workshop in the village of Chamac, Uspantán, Quiché where he makes leather clothing. Only his pregnant wife and ten-year-old daughter were in the workshop at the time. The men repeatedly asked Menchú's wife where he was, but she said she did not know. The men took 500 quetzales and Ernesto Menchú's mobile phone. On leaving, they told Ernesto's wife, "We will find him eventually and we will kill him." When Ernesto Menchú returned, he saw a man in front of the workshop who had been a military commissioner during the armed conflict and is now working as a security guard at the nearby San Sigüan farm. This man walked past the workshop twice, staring at Menchú in an intimidating manner.

With CUC, Ernesto Menchú has been campaigning on behalf of 112 farm worker families who have been living and working on the San Sigüan farm since 1950. They are at risk of being driven from the land assigned to them for their houses and crops. In his work with the Movement of Victims of the Internal Armed Conflict, he has been promoting exhumations of mass graves in El Quiché that contain the remains of people executed during Guatemala's internal armed conflict. As a result, he has been the target of intimidation and death threats.

In light of these facts, **we strongly urge you to**

- Conduct an immediate and thorough investigation into the death threat made against José Ernesto Menchú Tojib, make the results public and bring those responsible to justice;
- See that the authorities take immediate measures to ensure the security of José Ernesto Menchú Tojib and his family;
- Take immediate measures to ensure that all those involved in the exhumation of mass graves are able to carry out their legitimate work without fear of harassment;
- Implement the land-related aspects of the 1996 Peace Accords as a necessary step towards eliminating the tensions that have led to many abuses against rural workers and their leaders in recent years in Guatemala.

For Peace with Justice,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai  
 Coordinator

cc: Comité de Unidad Campesina ~ fax: 011 502 2434 9754  
 Ambassador José Guillermo Castillo ~ fax: 1 202 745 1908  
 Ambassador John Hamilton ~ fax: 011 502 334 8477  
 Richard Boynton, Guatemala Desk Officer, US State Dept. ~ fax: 202 647 2597  
 U.S. Senators DeWine and Voinovich ~ via email  
 U.S. Representatives Brown, Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Ryan, Tubbs Jones ~ via email

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**The following people hereby urge that you take action on this matter as indicated in this letter:**