

IRTF

InterReligious Task Force on Central America
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Lic. Juan Luis Florido

Attorney General and Chief of Public Security, Guatemala

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Sr. Eduardo Stein Barillas

Vice-President of Guatemala

January 24, 2007

We are extremely concerned for the safety of environmental activists **Carlos Albacete Rosales and Piedad Espinosa Albacete**, a married couple, who work for the Guatemalan environmental organization Trópico Verde (Green Tropic), which works to protect the Mayan Biosphere Reserve (a nature reserve in the Petén region in northern Guatemala).

An attempt was made on their lives at 12:20 am on January 10 as they returned home in a taxi from La Aurora National Airport in Guatemala City. A grey Volkswagen Golf overtook the taxi and partially blocked the road. At least three men began shooting at the taxi with handguns. The taxi escaped. The three men wore black woolen hats, dark-colored bullet-proof vests, and black clothing similar to that used by the police but without the identifying insignia. Carlos Albacete was injured by broken glass from shattered windows. Police arrived and counted six bullet holes, but they placed the recovered bullets directly into their pockets instead of into evidence bags.

At 6 pm on January 12, Carlos Albacete and Piedad Albacete received a phone call at their home, but the caller hung up. Shortly thereafter they were followed by a black car with tinted windows as they drove to a relative's home.

During the last four years Trópico Verde has been active in denouncing cattle ranchers' and alleged drug traffickers' usurpation of land inside the Mayan Reserve. Carlos Albacete and Piedad Albacete have been the victims of many previous attacks and acts of intimidation, including:

Aug-Dec 2005: due to verbal threats, Tropic Verde's office in the Peten was forced to close until it could safely re-open elsewhere

Sep 12 2006: machine gun fire on the Albacete house

Sep 24 2006: Albacete house surveilled by suspicious vehicle

Nov 13 2006: Carlos Albacete watched by four occupants of a vehicle

Dec 18 -20 2006: rumors circulated in the Peten that there would be an attempt on the lives of Carlos Albacete and Piedad Albacete.

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

- order a thorough and independent investigation into the attempt on the lives of Carlos Albacete and Piedad Albacete, and into the threats and acts of intimidation suffered by them and their organization previously; and
- bring those responsible to justice.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Coordinator

cc: Ambassador Jose Guillermo Castillo~via fax: 1 202 745 1908
Movimiento Nacional de Derechos Humanos~via fax: 011 502 2232 2651
James Dirham, Ambassador ~ via fax: 011-502-2326-8477
Courtney Turner, Guatemala Desk Officer via fax: 202-647-2597
Paolo Carozza, US member of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: (202)458-3992
U.S. Senators Brown and Voinovich ~ via email
U.S. Representatives Gillmor, Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Regula, Ryan, Sutton, 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: