

Via fax: 011 502 2221 4423/2238 3579 Lic. Alvaro Colom President of the Republic of Guatemala	Via Fax: 011 502 2411 9124 Lic. José Amilcar Velaszuez Zarate Attorney General and Head of Public Prosecutor's Office of Guatemala
via Fax: 011 502 2413 8658 Sr. Salvador Gandara Minister of the Interior of Guatemala	

May 25, 2009

Dear Sirs:

We are very concerned for the lives of staff members of the **Association for the Study and Promotion of Security under Democracy** (SEDEM) and the **Human Rights Defenders Protection Unit** (UDEFEQUA). Between April 30 and May 5 over 40 SMS text messages were received by nine members of their staffs. In some cases the same message was sent to several staff members. For example, on May 2 two staff members received the following message: "You've got 1 hour, this is the last warning. Stop messing with us, military declassified files. We'll kill your kids first, then you."

On May 4, two unidentified men in a deep green car with tinted windows parked outside the house of one of the staff members. The police, called by the staff member, interviewed the suspects on the spot, later informed the victim that the two men were armed, that they had a valid license to carry the weapons and that they let them go because there was no evidence to think that they were posing a threat. On the same morning two other staff members received an SMS text message, which read: "I am watching you. It's good that you didn't go to work, I have my sight set on you."

The spate of death threats and intimidation seems to be linked to the campaign that SEDEM and other Guatemalan human rights organizations have carried out to secure the release of all military files containing information about human rights violations committed during the internal armed conflict (1960-1996). On February 9, 2009, after an almost 3-year-long judicial battle, the Constitutional Court ordered the Guatemalan authorities to hand over some of these files. On March 6, the government partly complied with the order but said that the rest of the files were missing. The Public Prosecutor's Office has been charged with an investigation into the loss of the remaining files.

Since 2000, UDEFEGUA which works with and for human rights defenders in Guatemala, has documented thousands of attacks, threats, acts of intimidation and killings against Guatemalan activists in connection with their legitimate work. It has also supported them with the legal procedures and follow-up with the authorities.

We strongly urge that you

- provide effective protection for all members of staff working for the Guatemalan human rights organizations SEDEM and UDEFEGUA, in strict accordance with their wishes;
- order a swift, full and impartial investigation into the incidents described above, make the results public and bring those responsible to justice;
- allow human rights defenders to carry out their activities without any restrictions or fear of reprisals, as set out in the UN Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of Individuals, Groups and Institutions to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights.

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
 Coordinator

cc: SEDEM ~ via US mail
 Jose Guillermo Castillo, Guatemalan Ambassador to the US ~ via fax: 202 745 1908
 Stephen McFarland, US Ambassador to Guatemala ~ via fax: 011-502-2334-8477
 Paolo Carozza, US member of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights~ via fax: (202)458-3992
 Skye Justice, Guatemala Desk, US State Dept ~ via fax: 202-647-2597
 US Senators Brown & Voinovich ~ via email
 US Representatives Bocchieri, Fudge, Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Latta, Ryan, Sutton, Wilson, Space ~ via email

UA121/09Guatemala

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