

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 Velasquez 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, nine staff members received over 40 threatening text messages, such as: "...Stop messing with us, military declassified files. We'll kill your kids first, then you."

On May 4, two unidentified men in a car with tinted windows parked outside the house of one staff member, who called the police. The police interviewed the suspects but allowed them to leave because they had a valid license to carry their weapons. On the same morning two other staff members received a text message: "I am watching you...It's good that you didn't go to work, I have my sight set on you. . ."

This outburst 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, 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.

We strongly urge that you

- provide effective protection for all members of staff working for the Guatemalan human rights organizations SEDEM and UDEFEQUA, 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.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai,
Coordinator

cc: SEDEM ~ via US mail
Francisco Villagran de Leon, 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 and US Representatives Boccieri, Fudge, Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Latta, Ryan, Space, Sutton, Wilson ~ via email

UA121/09Guatemala

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