

via fax: 011 502 2251 2746 Lic. Marvin Cifuentes Special Prosecutor for Crimes Against Journalists in Guatemala	via fax: 011 502 2413 8658 Lic. Carlos Menocal Minister of the Interior of Guatemala
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November 26, 2011

Dear Sirs:

We are gravely concerned for the safety of **Lucia Escobar** and **Gustavo Girón**, two journalists reporting on the activities and arrests of members of a local citizen security group that functions independently of state security forces in Panajachel, Solola Department.

On October 19 Lucia Escobar wrote an article alleging that crimes, including lynchings, torture, beatings, and the disappearance of a citizen of Panajachel, have been committed in the town by groups of masked men. She named the leaders of the local citizen security group and accused them of controlling these groups of masked men. On October 24, members of the local citizen security group made threats against her on a local cable TV channel, saying that she deserved to be left in a rubbish bin for making accusations about the group in a newspaper.. Between October 30 and November 2, she reported receiving five intimidating text messages, sent via an anonymous web-based service, that were intended to implicate her in illegal activities with a local drug-trafficker.

On October 31, two of the leaders of the local citizen security group were arrested. Another journalist, Gustavo Giron, reported on the arrest of the two men on a Guatemalan TV channel. Moments after the news program was broadcast, he received a threatening phone call saying that he would regret making this report. We believe his life is in danger.

These events are further evidence of widespread attacks on human rights workers. During 2010, Amnesty International and other human rights organizations documented 305 incidents of intimidation, threats and attacks against human rights defenders, including eight killings. The authorities failed to hold anybody accountable for the vast majority of these and previous crimes.

Therefore, we **strongly urge** you to

- take immediate steps to provide full and appropriate protection to Lucia Escobar and Gustavo Giron, in strict accordance with their wishes;
- conduct an independent, thorough and impartial investigation into the threats made against Lucia Escobar and Gustavo Giron, make the results public and bring those responsible to justice;
- conduct an independent, thorough and impartial investigation into all allegations of lynchings, torture, beatings, and disappearances attributed to the local citizen security group.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Coordinator

cc: UDEFEGUA ~ via email
 Francisco Villagran de Leon, Guatemalan Ambassador to the US ~ via fax: 202 745 1908
 Stephen McFarland, US Ambassador to Guatemala ~ via fax: 011-502-2331-2348
 Dinah Shelton, US member of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights~ via fax: (202)458-3992
 Siobhan Sheils, Guatemala Desk, US State Dept ~ via fax: 202-647-2597
 Christopher Johnson, Diplomacy Officer for Central America, US State Dept. ~ via email
 US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Latta, Renacci, Ryan, Sutton ~ via email

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