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Search

- Home
- News Releases
- About HRW
- Get Involved
- Publications
- Info by Country

- Africa
- Americas
- Asia
- Europe/Central Asia
- Middle East/N. Africa
- United States

- Global Issues
- Arms
- Business
- Children's Rights
- Counterterrorism
- Economic, Social & Cultural Rights
- HIV/AIDS
- International Justice
- LGBT Rights
- Prisons
- Refugees
- United Nations
- Women's Rights
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- Commentary
- Film Festival
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- Permissions
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Guatemala: Investigate Killing of Activist's Son

(Washington, DC, August 22, 2007) – The Guatemalan authorities should promptly and thoroughly investigate the killing of José Emanuel Méndez Dardón, the son of a prominent human rights advocate, Human Rights Watch said today.

“We have worked closely with Amílcar Méndez for decades, and know that he and his family have repeatedly been targets of threats and intimidation. It is crucial that a rigorous investigation be conducted to determine whether this horrible crime was politically motivated and to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice.”

José Miguel Vivanco, Americas Director of Human Rights Watch

Méndez Dardón, 28 and the son of Amílcar Méndez Urizar, was shot dead in the evening of August 17 by a group of unidentified assailants who ambushed his vehicle at an intersection near the Guatemala City airport, where he worked as a technician. He died at the scene of the crime from multiple bullet wounds. Omar Gudiel Arias, a 27-year-old co-worker who was with him in the car, was badly injured.

Méndez Dardón's father has been very active in promoting human rights in Guatemala since the 1980s.

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“We have worked closely with Amílcar Méndez for decades, and know that he and his family have repeatedly been targets of threats and intimidation,” said José Miguel Vivanco, Americas Director of Human Rights Watch. “It is crucial that a rigorous investigation be conducted to determine whether this horrible crime was politically motivated and to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice.”

Amílcar Méndez became a prominent advocate for human rights in Guatemala in the 1980s. He helped found and lead the Council of Ethnic Communities “We Are All Equal” (CERJ), a group that documented human rights violations directed at Guatemala’s indigenous population, and also directed the Committee on Displaced People of Guatemala.

Amílcar Mendez served in the Guatemalan parliament as a Frente Democrático Nueva Guatemala (FDNG) party representative. In recent weeks, he had been involved in supporting the campaign of Rafael España, the vice-presidential candidate from the Unidad Nacional de la Esperanza party. Elections are scheduled to be held on September 9.

Amílcar Méndez was honored for his work, along with other leading human rights advocates from around the world, at the Human Rights Watch 10th anniversary celebration in 1988.

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