



LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION

September 5, 2007

To Whom It May Concern:

We are shocked and dismayed over the recent assassination of José Emanuel "Pepe" Méndez Dardón, son of prominent human rights defender Amílcar Méndez Urizar in Guatemala. On Friday, August 17, 2007, 28 year-old José Emanuel "Pepe" Méndez Dardón was shot multiple times at close range as he was leaving his work. He was accompanied by a co-worker, Edwin Omar Gudiel Arias, who was seriously wounded in the attack.

Less than 24 hours before Pepe Méndez was assassinated, he and his father submitted an urgent communiqué to the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Human Rights Center at the request of Unidad Nacional de la Esperanza party (UNE) vice-presidential candidate Dr. Rafael Espada who believed his own assassination was imminent. The communiqué describes the overall level of violence that has accompanied the current campaign season in Guatemala, including a growing number of politically-motivated murders that have taken place in light of Guatemala's September 9 elections.

There is concern in the international community that the murder of Pepe Méndez is retribution for his – and his father's – activism and was intended to intimidate others who stand up for human rights in Guatemala. In the past year, both Pepe and Amílcar Méndez had received a number of death threats directed at them as well as other members of their immediate family. Some of those threats occurred within the last month and were reported to the Human Rights Prosecutor at the Public Prosecutors Office.

Amílcar Medez's courage and dedication to human rights were recognized internationally with the Carter Center Award for Human Rights, the Kennedy Award for Human Rights and the Mitterand Award for Human Rights. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights had ordered the Guatemalan government to undertake measures to protect Amílcar Méndez, after determining that he faced "grave and imminent risk of harm." In response to this order, the government provided him with physical accompaniment. Similar protection was not extended to other members of his immediate family, including Pepe.

We express our profound sorrow and extend our sympathies to the family and friends of Pepe Méndez. We demand a prompt, thorough, and impartial investigation into the assassination of José Emanuel "Pepe" Méndez Dardón. As an international community of social scientists and concerned citizens, we will continue to monitor the development of the investigation into Pepe Méndez's assassination as well as the prosecution of those responsible for this heinous act.

Sincerely,

Charles R. Hale

President, Latin American Studies Association, April 2006 to October 2007