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Jesuit, media colleagues in Honduras threatened

by Dennis Coday

Fearing for the lives of Jesuit Fr. Ismael Moreno and his media colleagues, Jesuit leaders in Honduras have issued a global call for concern. Moreno, know as Padre Melo, has gone into hiding because of death threats that he has received by phone and text messages, according to a statement dated April 19 from the Jesuit superiors in Honduras.

Over the last 10 months, Moreno has used his position as director of the independent radio station Radio Progreso to become an outspoken participant in the movement against the forced removal last July of President Manuel Zelaya of Honduras.

The political situation Honduras has remained tense, with demonstrations against the new president and allegations of abuse of those who opposed the ouster. A March 8 report by an Organization of American States commission cited more than 50 detentions, eight cases of torture, two kidnappings, and two rapes against members of the opposition during the month of February.

The Jesuit statement says that threats against Moreno "are related to the humanitarian decision to provide protection for the young woman Irma Melissa Villanueva in a case already known by the Public Ministry's District Attorney's office and by various national and international human rights organizations."

Villanueva is a journalist from Radio Progreso who has reported that she was savagely beaten and sexually assaulted by four policemen during an Aug. 14 demonstration against the regime that ousted Zelaya. Human rights groups have reported that judicial authorities have not acted on Villanueva's reporting of the assault.

Gerardo Chévez, another Radio Progreso reporter, also is receiving threats because of his work on the radio, the Jesuit statement says.

On April 17, Jesuit Fr. Valentín Menéndez, the superior in El Progreso, Yoro, Honduras filed a formal complaint with the special district attorney for human rights asking for an official investigation into the threats against Moreno and his colleagues.

The Jesuit superiors' statement ends: "We demand that the national authorities conduct a diligent and effective investigation of the deeds which have been denounced and we make an urgent appeal to national and international human rights organizations to follow up on this case."

The statement is signed by Jesuit Fathers Valentín Menéndez, Carlos Solano and Juan José Colato.

In early March, Moreno was in Chicago on a short U.S. speaking tour. He talked with *NCR* by phone: Divisions in Honduras also split the church.

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