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Deborah Tyroler

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Guatemala: Relatives Of Rigoberta Menchu Denounce Threats

by Deborah Tyroler

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In Nov. 13 comments to reporters from the Associated Press, Nicolas Menchu, brother of Nobel Peace Prize laureate Rigoberta Menchu, said he has been receiving death threats. He added that other relatives of Rigoberta Menchu have also been living in fear of reprisals from the military since announcement of the Nobel in October. "Members of the Civil Defense Patrols (PAC) have sent word," Nicolas Menchu declared, "that they want to end the Menchu lineage and will start with the oldest surviving brother first...I fear for my life." Nicolas Menchu said that On Oct. 29, while on his way to farm a small family plot in a village in Uspantan, El Quiche department, a group of men armed with machetes and guns approached him. He said the men, all PAC members, accused his sister of being a guerrilla and threatened to kill him if he returned to the area. Uspantan is Rigoberto Menchu's place of origin and her relatives continue to live there. The deputy mayor in Uspantan, Alejandro Lopezus, confirmed that the local town council received anonymous, threatening letters after it began to express concerns regarding the situation faced by Nicolas Menchu. Lopezus said other threats came from men he knows to be PAC members. On Nov. 17, in New York, Rigoberta Menchu delivered an address to a UN General Assembly committee. She then held a news conference. The essence of Menchu's message was that the UN and its affiliated organizations should expend greater effort helping victims of human rights abuse, as opposed to solely investigating governments accused of abusing rights. Menchu said that often, complaints against certain governments have been shelved following promises to adopt reforms that were never subsequently implemented, or after carrying out ineffective human rights inquiries. In the future, Menchu said, "priority should be given to the victims." Menchu characterized the human rights situation in Guatemala as horrendous, indicating that killings and forced disappearances are still commonplace. (Source: Associated Press, 11/13/92, 11/18/92)

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