



# Guatemala Human Rights Commission / USA

## Fact Sheet

### Human Rights Defenders

**THE PROBLEM:** *In the face of the deteriorating rule of law and pervading impunity for past and present crimes, human rights defenders are targets for violence. In the last eight years, assaults against human rights defenders have increased significantly. Indigenous leaders, community organizers, environmentalists, justice officials, journalists, union representatives, women's rights advocates, and church leaders have all suffered from these increased abuses while promoting and defending human rights in Guatemala. Many have been verbally threatened, physically assaulted, kidnapped, tortured, shot at, and killed.*

#### KEY FACTS

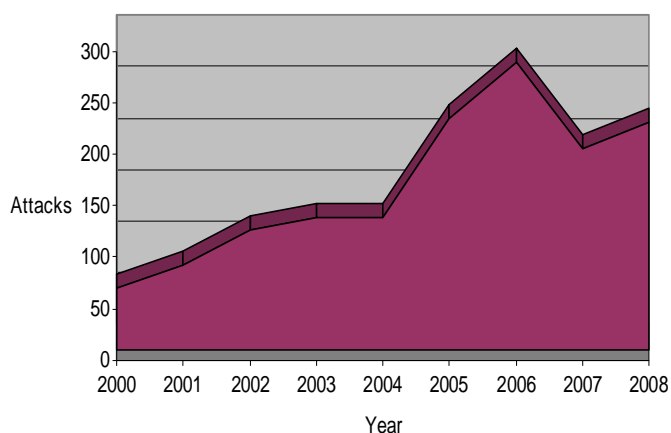
- ◆ Increase in attacks from 2000-2008: **273%**
- ◆ Highest number of attacks: **278 in 2006**
- ◆ Number of cases prosecuted: **2.2%**
- ◆ Number of prosecutors murdered in 2008: **6**
- ◆ Number of journalists killed since 2006: **5**
- ◆ Number of telephone threats 2000-2008: **230**
- ◆ Number of murders of HR defenders in 2008: **11**
- ◆ Number of written threats in 2008: **57**
- ◆ Most attacked defenders: **Union members (47 in 2008)**
- ◆ Number of convictions for crimes against Human Rights Defenders: **4 out of 100**

#### WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP:

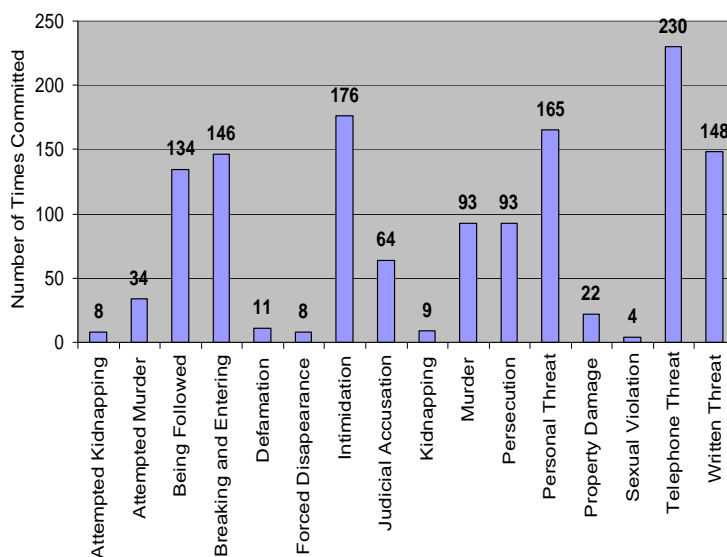
Support the work of the Guatemalan Human Rights Commission:

- ◆ Sign up on our website to receive **URGENT ACTION** alerts about attacks on Human Rights Defenders.
- ◆ Support this program with a tax-deductible donation.
- ◆ Host a presentation on this topic at your university, high school, church, or in your community.
- ◆ Volunteer with GHRC

**Number of Attacks against Human Rights Defenders in Guatemala 2000-2008**



**Types of Crimes against HR Defenders 2000-2008**



GHRC  
Human Rights Defenders  
Program

Founded in 1982, the Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA (GHRC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, humanitarian organization that monitors, documents, and reports on the human rights situation in Guatemala, advocates for survivors of human rights abuses in Guatemala, and works toward positive, systemic change.

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# ATTACKED! Human Rights Defenders: Targets of **Violence**

## Attack at Midnight:

*Carlos Albacete Rosales and  
Piedad Espinosa Albacete*

Environmental activists Carlos Albacete Rosales and Piedad Espinosa Albacete, a married couple, were the subjects of an apparent attempt on their lives as they returned home from La Aurora National Airport in Guatemala City in a taxi at 12.20am on January 10, 2007.

As they approached their house in the area known as Carretera a El Salvador, they saw a gray Volkswagen Golf parked by a bridge around 1km from their house. The car pulled out behind them and followed them until overtaking the taxi and making a 180-degree turn a few meters further on, partially blocking the road. At least three men then got out of the car, drawing handguns as they did so.

They were wearing black woolen hats and dark-colored bulletproof vests, dressed in black clothing similar to that used by the police but without the identifying insignia. They began to shoot immediately, forcing the taxi driver to accelerate to escape. They continued shooting from behind once the taxi cleared them, but did not pursue it any further. Carlos Albacete was left slightly injured by broken glass as a total of six bullet holes were counted.



## Death Threats and an Assassination Attempt:

*Monsignor Alvaro Ramazzini and  
Miguel Arturo Albizures Pedrosa*

Ramazzini is the leader of the San Marcos diocese, which has been active in land rights issues by supporting rural communities in conflicts over land use; environmental issues related to a mining project operating locally, and in raising the profile of the human rights of migrants.

At approximately 11am, on March 31, 2008 a member of the diocese who works closely with Monsignor Alvaro Ramazzini, was approached by a gray pick-up truck as they walked in the town of San Marcos. An unknown man wearing a hat and sunglasses got down from the truck and grabbed the diocese worker by the arm whilst revealing a handgun. He then said, "tell that son of a bitch priest not to get involved in things that do not concern him, his days are numbered."



Miguel Arturo Albizures Pedrosa is the vice-president of the Association for Communication and Art, a media organization that has produced videos on human rights issues for over 18 years. Several of their documentaries have been used in court cases dealing with the massacres of the civil war. He filmed a large protest that sought justice for the

violation of human rights in the past and has been involved in interrupting government commemorations. On October 30, 2008 at 8:00 PM, heavily armed men entered the Pedrosa house and attempted to assassinate him. They fired 50 rounds into the house as his son hid in terror.



## Shot: *Yuri Melini*

Yuri Melini, environmental activist, lawyer, and Director of Center of Legal Action in Environment and Social issues (CALAS) was shot outside his house in Guatemala city at 7:30am on September 4 by masked gunmen; the bullets entered his stomach, knee, and leg.

In June 2008, CALAS won a legal process in the Constitutional Court of Guatemala to change and censure the mining law that violates Guatemalans' land, environmental, and health rights. The attack against Yuri Melini can be attributed to his role in CALAS and the work of the organization.

