



Guatemala Human Rights **UPDATE**

Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA

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DEATH THREATS AND OTHER INTIMIDATIONS

Plan to Assassinate Ramazzini Uncovered

1/30/05 - A former member of the now dismantled Presidential High Guard (EMP) revealed that an unidentified group attempted to contract him to assassinate the bishop of San Marcos, Álvaro Ramazzini. According to an official source, the groups contacted the former EMP member approximately one month ago and offered him \$50,000 to kill the bishop; however, the former intelligence officer opted to inform the government rather than follow through with the assassination attempt. Currently, the former EMP member is in Guatemala's witness protection program, and his family fled the country before he came forward with the information.

The officer first notified the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office (PDH) about the plan, which in turn notified the Interior Ministry. The Human Rights Ombudsman, Sergio Morales, stated the he had heard rumors of the assassination plot weeks ago, but it was not until recently that he had enough evidence to consider the threats real.

According to Interior Minister Carlos Vielmann, the government offered Monsignor Ramazzini protection from the National Civil Police (PNC) or the Secretariat of Administrative Affairs and Security (SAAS), or the bishop could personally select his security agents. Agents from the Criminal Investigation Services (SIC) of the PNC are initiating an investigation into the failed plan and are positioned near Ramazzini's home and the church where he officiates.

Frank LaRue expressed his concern for the seriousness of this crime and stated that the perpetrators might be connected to organized crime, or the plan could be in response to the bishop's work to empower landless campesinos.

Monsignor Ramazzini is an internationally-recognized human rights activist who advocates for the poor and marginalized of Guatemala, particularly campesinos,

immigrants, and the landless. In his fight against poverty, Ramazzini has played a fundamental role in developing policy to bring about justice and equality in the land problem in Guatemala and in promoting rural development. Along with other bishops, he also played a pivotal role in the 1996 Peace Accords, and he is active with the promotion of the Recovery of Historical Memory Project in San Marcos (REMHI).

In addition, Ramazzini is the director of the Catholic Church's Land Pastoral that aims to resolve agrarian conflicts and advocates for more equitable solutions to Guatemala's land problem. Ramazzini and the Land Pastoral have strongly opposed the controversial mining projects in San Marcos where the Canadian mining company, Montaña, and the Guatemalan government have personal interests. He also strongly opposes the violent eviction in Nueva Linda where seven campesinos and four police officers were killed. (See insert.)

CC Under Pressure Due to Ex-PAC Threats

1/27/05 - Due to threats from former Civil Defense Patrolers (ex-PACs), five out of nine members of Guatemala's Constitutional Court (CC) decided to indefinitely postpone a ruling on the constitutionality of payments to the former paramilitaries. For security reasons, the judges opted to make the ruling in a Guatemala City hotel rather than at the Constitutional Court, where a group of ex-PACs were awaiting the resolution.

However the session in the hotel was cut short after the discovery of the circulation of flyers that threatened justices Rodolfo Rohmoser Valdeavellano, Nery Saúl Dighero, Juan Francisco Flores, and Carlos Luna Villacorta should they rule against the ex-PACs. Judge Cipriano Soto stated that the CC will not rule on the constitutionality of the payments until adequate security can be assured for all the justices. No specific date was mentioned. "As long as they [the ex-PACs] continue to threaten us, attack us, and protest aggressively at the CC headquarters, we will not resolve the case," added Soto.

On November 3, Congress passed a law in favor of the former militiamen while under extreme pressure from ex-PAC groups. The law established a payment of Q5,241.60 (approximately \$655) to each ex-PAC member or widow, to be distributed in three payments. Some 497,000 ex-PACs have already received the first of three checks, leaving the executive branch approximately Q900 million (\$112.5 million) left to pay out. In addition, civil society groups have expressed that funding would be better invested in education or social service projects.

An injunction against the \$110 million indemnification plan was filed by civil society groups in mid-November. While the CC provisionally suspended those payments on December 9, it was set to make a final ruling on the injunction this week.

FUNDAMENTAL VIOLATIONS

Daughter of REMHI Activist Murdered

1/25/05 - At around 8:00 PM on January 22, various armed perpetrators violently entered the home of GUMERCINDA ARGUETA. Gumercinda was not at home, and the masked men beat his wife and then strangled his two-year old daughter, YIRA ARGUETA LOPEZ, to death. Argueta's wife was severely beaten and attended her daughter's funeral in a wheelchair due to her injuries.

Argueta is an activist with the Recovery of Historical Memory Project (REMHI) in Chimaltenango where he coordinates the promotion and circulation of the REMHI report and is REMHI's delegate to the National Human Rights Movement (MNDH). While common crime is being considered as a motive, the MNDH believes the attack was a threat against human right defenders, especially since valuables such as a computer and a television were left behind by the assailants.

The REMHI report was published by the Archbishop's Human Rights Office of Guatemala (ODHAG) to document the human rights violations that took place during the internal armed conflict. The report concluded that state agents perpetrated nearly ninety percent of human rights violations. Two days after the report was published, the Coordinator of ODHAG, Bishop Juan Gerardi, was bludgeoned to death in retaliation.

Human rights organizations are calling for a comprehensive investigation and for the perpetrators to be brought to justice in this case, which has caused international outrage.

Seven Killed at Plantation in Suchitepéquez

1/28/05 - Seven people were killed in a dispute that started on January 21 between local campesinos and the owner of the El Corozo ranch in Samayac, Suchitepéquez. Private security guards captured a twenty-two-year old campesino, PEDRO MARIANO TAMBRIZ ITZEP, on the ranch on January 21 as he and two teenage friends were allegedly gathering fruit without permission. His body was found on January 22 in San Andres Villa Seca in nearby Retalhuleu department, with three bullet wounds, although relatives did not positively identify the body until January 28.

Apparently not knowing that Tambriz's body had been found, several hundred campesinos went to El Corozo on January 24 to demand his return. A confrontation broke out, in which five campesinos and one other person, presumably a guard, were killed. Six people were wounded, reportedly including a police agent. Public security forces arrived, used tear gas on the campesinos, and arrested four of them. Tambriz and the five campesinos who were killed came from the villages of Sampojo and Santa Maria Ixtahuacan, north of Samayac in the department of Sololá. On January 25, the Committee of United Campesinos (CODECA) turned a funeral march for the five campesino victims in the two villages into a massive protest to demand a full investigation of the incident.

El Corozo's owner is Jorge Fernández, the son of former presidential candidate José Fernández. The campesinos hold the owner's son, Jorge Fernández Alejos, responsible for the killings. While four campesinos were jailed, Fernández Alejos, who claimed to be injured in the clash, was kept under police guard in a hospital. The El Corozo incident is similar in many aspects to the confrontation at the Nueva Linda Plantation. In Nueva Linda on August 31, 2004, heavily armed police, military, and plantation security agents violently evicted campesinos who were claiming the land in response to allegations that plantation administration was involved in the kidnapping of campesino leader Héctor Reyes. According to CODECA's Mauro Bay, the owners of the two plantations are related.

Three More Women Killed, One Found Dismembered

1/23/05 - On January 22, a bus driver and his assistant found the severed head of a woman in a piece of luggage left on their bus, said Carlos Calju, spokesman for the

national police. Police were searching for missing parts of a dismembered body the following day after the head was discovered at a bus station in Guatemala City. Authorities discovered severed arms and legs in the Guatemala City's Carolingia neighborhood early on January 23 but had not yet confirmed they were from the same person. Calju declined to comment further on circumstances surrounding the dismembered body.

So far this year, seventeen women have been killed in Guatemala, according to officials from a network of women's support groups in Guatemala. Two more women were killed this week. On January 17, in a neighborhood of Chiquimula, twenty-four year old Gladys Mateo was shot to death, according to the National Civil Police (PNC). Two unknown men attacked the victim, who was a vendor at the local market; motives are unknown. On the same day, in a neighborhood in the southeastern part of Guatemala City, Johana Villalta, also twenty-four years old, was murdered inside the home where she was employed as a domestic worker. Voluntary firefighters report that Villalta suffered a bullet wound to the head and was killed instantly. According to authorities and emergency services, by January 17, fifteen women have been violently murdered in Guatemala. As indicated by official statistics, 527 women were killed in 2004, while 383 were murdered in 2003.

Nueva Linda Owner Abducts Three Campesinos

1/24/05 - On January 23, the co-owner of the Nueva Linda plantation, Virgilio Casado, and four of his bodyguards violently abducted campesinos Armando Poma, Enrique Tuc Sánchez, and Jorge Armando López, members of the Southwest Campesino Coordination. In response, campesinos requested assistance from the local Human Rights Ombudsman's Office (PDH) and from the Public Prosecutor's Office (MP). Due to pressure from these two institutions, Casado turned the three laborers over to the National Civil police, claiming they were responsible for some unspecified misdemeanor.

In an act of public outrage, approximately one hundred campesinos gathered by the highway to Champerico, Retalhuleu to demand that authorities investigate the kidnapping of their community members. The August 31 confrontation at the Nueva Linda plantation near Retalhuleu left twelve dead, including eight campesinos.

Chixoy Activist Illegally Detained

1/25/05 - On January 20, land rights activist Carlos Chen Osorio, a leader of the Coordinator of Communities Affected by the Chixoy Dam (COCAICH), was illegally detained at 10:00 AM in Salamá, Baja Verapaz. He was arrested on charges of 1) illegal detention, with threats and coercion, of two Chixoy dam operators; 2) false entry into the National Electricity Institute (INDE) offices; 3) actions against public services; and 4) actions against the internal security of the nation. While Carlos Chen was later given conditional release, the charges against the community leader have not been dropped.

Chen Osorio was a member of the Chixoy dam negotiating commission, who signed an agreement in September 2004 that was not to the liking of INDE. The Association of Victims of the Armed Conflict in the Verapaces (ADIVIMA) is therefore concerned for the safety of seven other signers of that agreement: Antonio Vásquez Xitumul, Julio Santiago, Domingo Sic, Rafael Santiago Fernández, Félix Alfonso Raymundo, Víctor Lem Colorado, and Juan de Dios García.

According to a Canadian based human rights group, Rights Action, "acted upon or not, the charges are weakening the efforts of the 'Coordinator of Communities Affected by the Chixoy Dam' in their just demands for reparations and compensation from the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, and Guatemala government."

On September 7, 2004, over one thousand members of Mayan-Achi communities negatively affected and/or forcibly displaced by the Chixoy hydroelectric dam project participated in a peaceful protest at the site of the Chixoy dam. The following day, the communities peacefully ended the protest after signing an agreement with representatives of INDE, the State Electricity Institute, other government authorities, and observers from the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office (PDH). This agreement was, ostensibly, to set up a "discussion table" to assess the damages and losses caused by the Chixoy dam.

Then, on September 14, INDE representatives formally presented a complaint to the Public Prosecutor's Office in Cobán against the leaders of the "Coordinator of Communities Affected by the Chixoy Dam" - the same leaders with whom they had signed the agreement.

The 1975-1985 Chixoy dam project was funded and overseen by the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, in partnership with the military regimes controlling Guatemala at the time. Repression, re-

lated to the construction of the dam, included the massacres and killings of over 400 children, elderly, women, and men; forced displacements from home and community; and loss of land.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Femicide in Guatemala Reaches International Media

1/18/05 - The violent situation against Guatemalan women has recently garnered international press coverage, most notably in a report published by the French newspaper *Le Monde Diplomatique*. Other publications covering the issue were the Pacifica Radio station in Los Angeles, the Mexican Women's Communication and Information Agency, Mexico's Education Radio, and the Brazilian organization Disarmament.

Last year, there were 527 known cases of femicide in Guatemala, while only two violent deaths of women occurred in Colombia; four in Chile; fifteen each in Ciudad Juárez, Costa Rica, and Uruguay; seventeen in Perú; and thirty-one in Puerto Rico, according to statistics provided by Isis International. The Human Rights Ombudsman's Office (PDH) reports of 1, 650 female deaths in Guatemala since 1999.

This week, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, published that the violence has affected women between the ages of two and thirty and of all social spheres, including housewives, professionals, factory employees, workers, and students.

Women's Commission Cites Institutional Deficiencies

1/28/05 - According to a report presented to the Guatemalan Congress by the Women's Congressional Commission at a plenary session on January 27, no institution currently has institutional policies to investigate, provide security, or prevent the murders of women.

The report, signed by Aura Marina Otzoy, who is president of the Women's Commission and a member of the Guatemalan Republican Front party, indicated that statistics on the number of women murdered does not correlate among institutions. The report emphasized that institutions duplicate efforts, lack coordination, and do not provide sufficient attention to the problem, yielding minimal results in the prevention, investigation, and prosecution of those responsible for the killing of women.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS

Thousands Protest Mining in San Marcos

1/27/05 - Thousands of campesinos, indigenous Guatemalans, unionists, and women, as well as Catholic and Protestant protestors came together for the "March for Life" to demonstrate against strip mining operations. The strip mining operations pose grave environmental threats, as well as constituting a literal "legal" looting of local natural resources.

The march began in front of the General Cemetery of the department capital of San Marcos and ended in front of the Maya Palace, the seat of the local level governing bodies. The march consisted of residents of various local municipalities of San Marcos, Quetzaltenango, and Quiché, as well as representatives from Guatemala City.

The protest, headed by Monsignor Álvaro Ramazzini, bishop of San Marcos, was organized to oppose strip mining operations aimed at extracting gold and silver by use of dynamite and cyanide in San Miguel Ixtahuacan and Sipacapa, San Marcos.

Vitalino Similox, a representative from the Conference of Evangelical Churches of Guatemala (CIEDEG), aided the cause as well by indicating that mining operations in Guatemala are important for all Guatemalans and not just for transnational companies and the government. Therefore, it is necessary that a meeting be called in order for the local residents to express their approval or rejection of mining operations.

Ramazzini said that the presence of nearly two thousand people for the sole purpose of protesting mining operations is a demonstration of the local population's discontent to yield to the power of developed countries. For this reason he will continue to defend dispossessed sectors of the country and to promote sustainable development among the rural populations of Guatemala.

The director of the Presidential Human Rights Commission (COPREDEH) Frank LaRue, said that Óscar Berger's government would hold a meeting with local residents of San Marcos in order to determine if they will accept the continuance of a mining project being developed by the Montana mining company.

Nevertheless, several hours later, Berger confirmed that he will not break "the legal certainty" that was offered to the transnational company and said that in future concessions, "nothing will be done if the people do not want it."

Eusebio Juarez, of the Association of the Indigenous Groups of San Marcos, is sure that “not even a fourth of the [local] population gained a job with the mining company and only those that live in the immediate area have noticed a change in their quality of life.”

Alfredo de León, a legislator with the New Nation Alliance (ANN), also present at the protest, declared that Congress will review the reforms made to the Mining Law approved in 1996. Bishop Ramazzini, accompanied by LaRue during the march, has also been the target of threats for his opposition to the mining operations [see Plan to Assassinate Ramazzini Uncovered above and insert]. An agent from Secretariat for Administrative Affairs and Security (SAAS) was at the bishop’s side the entire time. “It’s my responsibility to look out for myself, due to the seriousness of the threats,” declared the bishop.

HEALTH RIGHTS

Guatemala to Acquiesce on Data Protection Issue

1/21/05 - By the end of next week, Guatemala plans to make good on its promise to the United States and other parties to the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) to offer five years of protection for clinical trial data used to secure marketing approval for patented drugs, which the US has argued Guatemala is obligated to do under the free trade deal. However, Guatemala has not yet decided which one of three options it will use to settle the issue.

In December, Guatemala’s Congress approved a law that the US argues essentially eliminates the five-year clinical data protection period, allowing generic drugs to use the data to secure marketing approval in Guatemala. The US has warned that a failure to change the law would delay congressional consideration of Guatemala’s participation in CAFTA.

The first option Guatemala is considering would be for Guatemalan President Óscar Berger to issue an executive order implementing the data protection law in a way that reinstates the five year protection period for clinical trial data. While the Guatemalan Congress adopts laws, the president is responsible for issuing an executive order, which details how the law will be implemented.

A second potential solution is for the Guatemalan Congress to pass a law that reinstates the five-year data

protection period as spelled out under the country’s CAFTA obligations.

Finally, Guatemala could ratify the free trade package. Under this third option, the government could argue that CAFTA is a treaty that trumps domestic law. As a result, the treaty would reinstate data protection because it was ratified after the data protection law the Guatemalan Congress overwhelmingly passed late last month.

The Bush Administration argues that the law approved by the Guatemalan Congress essentially kills a five-year period of data protection that Guatemala used to offer for patented drug companies’ clinical trial data. It does so by stipulating that Guatemala will offer five years worth of protection to “new” pharmaceutical products, according to a fact sheet issued by the US Embassy in Guatemala.

However, the law defines new products as those that have never before received marketing approval in Guatemala and the rest of the world, according to the embassy. This means that unless a drug secures marketing approval in Guatemala before coming on the market in any other country, including the country where the drug is invented, it would not receive the five-year data protection period in Guatemala.

The CAFTA deal obligates countries to provide five year’s worth of protection for clinical trial information used to secure approval for patented drugs. The five-year period begins once the drug company with a patent receives approval to market the drug in a country subject to the trade agreement, which typically would be the US.

At issue is when companies producing generic drugs will have access to the clinical trial data used by patented drugs to secure their own marketing approval. Unless generics can rely on this information to demonstrate that the drug they have manufactured is safe, they must conduct their own tests, which generally prove too costly to pursue, NGO sources said. Generic companies are also responsible for proving their drug is biologically equivalent to the brand named drug in order to secure marketing approval.

Meanwhile, House Democrats will likely express opposition to the inclusion of data protection provisions in the CAFTA by circulating a dear colleague letter, sources said. According to these sources, imposing this data protection requirement on developing countries such as Guatemala could impede their access to affordable medicine.

JUSTICE AND RECONCILIATION

PDH Requests Protection for Indigenous Leaders

1/29/05 - The Human Rights Ombudsman's Office (PDH) requested precautionary measures from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to protect indigenous mayor, DOMINGA VÁSQUEZ and five other leaders against arrest orders against them, according to Ovidio Paz, from the PDH office in Sololá.

The measure is in response to harassment that the leaders suffered due to their public opposition to the mining concessions in Sololá on January 11, an event that precipitated the death of one campesino and caused several injuries.

Persecution against the indigenous leaders violates human rights and the collective rights of the Mayan population.

Ex-PACs Arrested for Abducting Journalists

1/27/05 - On January 26, former Civil Defense Patrolers (Ex-PACs) Francisco Martínez López and Arnaldo Rubeín Castillo Méndez were arrested for their participation in taking four journalists hostage in October 2003. The arrest warrant was issued by a court in Huehuetenango, which has ten days to sentence the former patrolers. Five other arrest warrants are pending.

Journalists from the daily newspaper Prensa Libre, Émerson Díaz, Alberto Ramírez, Fredy López, and Mario Linares were taken hostage while en route to cover a political rally by the Guatemalan Republic Front. The ex-PACs assaulted the journalists and demanded that in exchange for their safe return, the then Portillo administration would have to promise to compensate the ex-patrolers for involvement in Guatemala's thirty-six year armed conflict.

PEACE ACCORDS

Creation of UN Human Rights Office Delayed

1/25/05 - The creation of the office of the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) has been delayed longer than expected. When asked the reason for the delay in sending the agreement to Congress, despite the fact that it was scheduled to do so this week, foreign minister Jorge Briz explained "there are consultations being done."

European ambassadors, led by Holland's Bea Ten Tusscher, have placed the creation of the office at the top of their priorities.

The agreement had to be re-written due to Congressional opposition, which questioned the publication of a specific report regarding the human rights situation in the country. Antonio Arenales from the Guatemalan Republican Front party, who was the main opponent of the project, stated that the new agreement resolves the majority of his previous objections.

OTHER INFORMATION

US Human Rights Group Demands Guatemalan Government Stop Violence

1/15/05 - The US based human rights group Network for Peace and Development in Guatemala issued a press release on January 15 that called for the Guatemalan State to take action to stop the escalating trends of violence in Guatemala.

According to General Coordinator Raúl Molina, two recent events demonstrate the unacceptable climate of violence in Guatemala. The first was the excessive use of police and military force against campesino protesters in Sololá that resulted in a campesino death. The second case was the assassination of community leader Florentín Gudiel Ramos in Santa Lucia Cotzumalguapa in December and the subsequent death threats against his daughter, Makrina Gudiel. Molina stressed that the government needs to uphold the 1996 Peace Accords and vehemently denounce human rights abuses. Molina called for people to take action now, as 2004 was the most violent year since the armed conflict ended; there were 1,960 violent deaths, of which 527 were women.

In addition, the press release criticized the Guatemalan State's failure to protect the rights of its people. It blamed part of the violence on state actors' involvement in social cleansing campaigns, their abuse of power, and excessive use of force. It also attributed the violence to clandestine groups, organized crime, and youth gangs noting that the later is a result of larger social problems such as poverty and marginalization.

Numerous demands were outlined. It called for the immediate acceptance of UN support in the creation of CICIACS to eliminate clandestine groups. Regarding citizen security, the press release stated that a public forum should be held between State and diverse sectors of

civil society to propose solutions to citizen insecurity; this forum should be presided over by a Peace and Harmony Commission. Additionally, the judicial system should be strengthened so that adequate resources are put into investigating crimes and prosecuting those responsible. Lastly, the release called for completion of agreements specified in the Peace Accords, including constitutional reforms, protection of indigenous rights, reparations for victims of the conflict, and the strengthening of civil society.

PDH Presents Report on Police Brutality

1/24/05 - The Human Rights Ombudsman's Office (PDH) presented the Interior Ministry with a report concerning the police reports for 2004 charging police officers and prison guards with human rights violations.

Ombudsman Sergio Morales noted the number of police reported was 639, 607 of whom were reported for only one incident and thirty-two of whom were reported on more than one count. Six were reported to have been involved in homicides. Of the 639 reported, 589 are from the National Civil Police (PNC) and fifty are from the penitentiary system, explained Morales.

The departments with the largest number of reports against police officers are Guatemala with 311, Escuintla, sixty; Retalhuleu, thirty-three; and Jalapa, twenty-six. The department of Santa Rosa reported twenty-three cases of human rights violations by state police; and Huehuetenango and Izabal both registered seventeen.

Among the most reported precincts were Precinct 34 in Retalhuleu; Precincts 11, 12, and 14 in Guatemala City; station 41 of Quetzaltenango; and the Villa Nueva station. Violations also took place at the stations in Cobán and Sololá and at the Centro Preventivo for men in zone 18 of Guatemala City, Morales added.

PDH Presents Annual Report to Congress

1/27/05 - On January 27, Human Rights Ombudsman (PDH) Sergio Morales presented his annual report before a session of the Congress, in which he stressed that in 2004 there had been no advances in human rights.

In a full session of Congress, Morales read his report in less than twenty minutes, in which he referred to fundamental problems that have carried Guatemalan society to high rates of violence.

The Ombudsman stated that the majority of the basic rights of the Guatemalan people did not improve during the first year of Óscar Berger's presidency, and

during the period, many serious violations of human rights were reported.

Among his gravest concerns, Morales mentioned citizen insecurity, discrimination, and the existence of clandestine armed groups. Regarding the subject of women, Morales stated, "there is discrimination against women which provokes murders."

He also expressed that the rise in prices during the previous months and the rate of inflation are violations of economic rights.

Morales stressed the need for reintroducing the Peace Accords in order to resolve social disputes and to create new methods to control firearms.

In addition to presenting the PDH report, Sergio Morales called for the government to hold a national dialogue on human rights "to see what kind of country we want."

Progressive congressional representative Nineth Montenegro said that she felt Morales' report was accurate, and Presidential Human Rights Commissioner Frank LaRue commented that there is deterioration in citizen security and an increase in conflict, which he attributes to the existence of illegal clandestine groups.

Gang Presence Expands to Rural Areas

1/31/05 - According to statistics from the National Civil Police (PNC) gang activity has spread outside of Guatemala City. Although Interior Minister Carlos Vielmann stated that it is difficult to confirm the exact number of youths involved in gang related activities, statistics from the institution show a presence of gangs in almost all departments of the country. The presence is especially noted in the departments of Huehuetenango with some 2,061 gang members, Sololá with 474, and Quetzaltenango with 349 members. According to police statistics, there are over 8,000 gang members in the country.

Gang members tend to move to all parts of the country, Vielmann noted, partly due to gang members returning to their rural homes after pursuing an unsuccessful life in Guatemala City.

According to Emilio Goubad, director of the Alliance for the Prevention of Crime, the actual number of gang members in Guatemala could exceed 160 thousand, although he differs in opinion to Vielmann with respect to the cause for the rise and spread of gang activity. The sharp rise of incidences in gang participation in the villages and towns all over Guatemala is due in part to rampant domestic violence that breaks homes and families,

said Goubad. They leave broken homes for the streets in search of some other alternative; with nowhere else to

turn, they look for acceptance by gang members who often welcome them, he explained.



The Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA, based in Washington D.C., has been on the forefront of the struggle for peace and human rights in Guatemala since it was founded in 1982. GHRC/USA is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, humanitarian organization committed to monitoring, documenting and reporting on the human rights situation in Guatemala while advocating for victims of human rights violations.

Information in the Update that is not gathered directly is culled from various sources including ; the Guatemalan Human Rights Commission , Casa Alianza, Amnesty International, Associated Press, Reuters and the Guatemalan Press, including Cerigua, La Cuerda, Incidencia Democrática, Prensa Libre, La Hora, Guatemala Hoy, Siglo Veintiuno, and Patrullaje Informativo.

**Dates written before the text indicate when the incidents were reported.*

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