



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 (HRDs) are targets for violence. In the last ten 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, or killed.*

KEY FACTS

Since 2000, there have been:

- ❖ 2,028 aggressive attacks against HRDs
- ❖ 118 HRDs murdered

In 2009 alone, there were:

- ❖ 343 attacks against HRDs, the most violent year since the Peace Accords
- ❖ 96 cases of attacks on truth and justice HRDs
- ❖ 120 union members attacked and 16 killed; most attacked sector of HRDs

In 2010, there were:

- ❖ 305 attacks against HRDs
- ❖ 101 attacks against defenders of women's rights

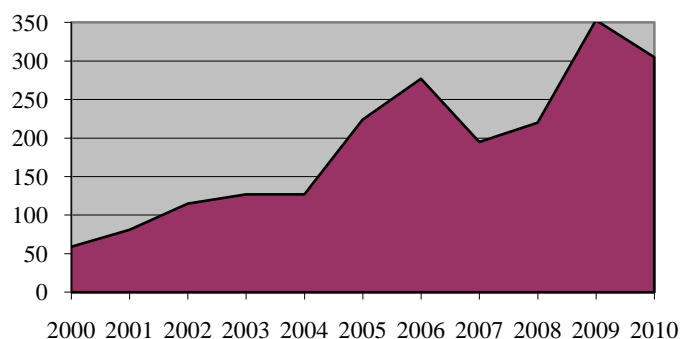
Why are HRDs Important?

- ❖ The judicial system does not function
- ❖ HRDs are the key mechanism to:
 - Protect basic human rights
 - Promote justice
 - Make the government comply with its obligations

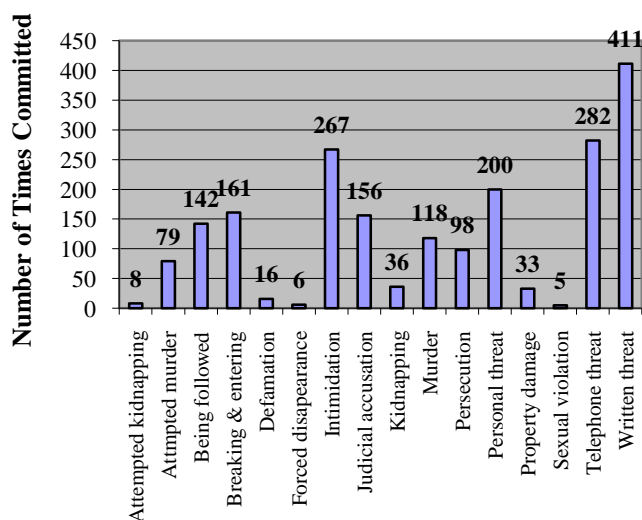
What you can do to help:

- ❖ Sign up on GHRC's website to receive **URGENT ACTION** alerts about HRDs
- ❖ Support this program with a tax-deductible donation

Number of Attacks Against HRDs 2000-2010



Types of Crimes Against HRDs 2000-2010



Source: Guatemalan Human Rights Defenders Unit (UDEFEUGA)



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Human Rights Defenders: Targets of Violence

Anti-Mining Activist Shot

Indigenous activist **Diodora Antonia Hernandez Cinto** was shot because she belongs to an indigenous movement that is fighting against the Marlin Mine for land and water rights. The mine is owned by Canadian mining company Goldcorp's local subsidiary, Montana Exploradora.

On July 7, 2010, two men entered Diodora's house in San Jose Nueva Esperanza in San Miguel Ixtahuacán, San Marcos, asking for a cup of coffee. While she was handing them the cup, they shot her in the head, near her right eye. They then ran off towards the village of San Jose Ixcaniche.

After 3 months in a hospital in Guatemala City, Diodora returned to her community to live with her daughter. She has a full-time security guard provided by the government, but she still lives in a state of constant threat from pro-mining neighbors. She does not know whether she can trust her armed guard, but she has no other options. The two men suspected of the shooting were released after being questioned by police. No charges were filed.



On May 20, 2010, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) requested that the government take measures to safeguard the 18 indigenous Mayan communities in the municipalities of San Miguel Ixtahuacán and Sipacapa, San Marcos, and suspend operation of the Marlin mine.

Danger for Trade Unionists

Sixteen trade unionists were murdered in Guatemala in 2009; nine were killed in 2008; and two in 2007, making Guatemala the second most dangerous country in Latin America for unionists.

Despite protections of labor rights included in Chapter 16 of DR-CAFTA, murders have all been committed since the trade agreement took effect in Guatemala in 2006. Murder continues to be a strategic weapon that silences unionists, and intimidates and suppresses the defense of labor rights.

On October 6, 2009, unionist **Miguel Chacaj Jax**, (CGTG and MSICG unions) was shot eight times in Coatepeque and died one week later.



Víctor Gálvez (pictured above) was shot 18 times and killed on October 25, 2009. Gálvez was a member of the National Resources Protection and Resistance Front (FRENA).

Pedro Ramírez de la Cruz, director of the Indigenous Defenders of the Verapaces, was shot three times and killed on November 29, 2009.

Olga Marina Ramirez Sanse, member of the Merchants Union of the Oriente, was shot four times and killed on December 5, 2009.

The majority of attacks and murders of trade unionists remain in impunity.

Culture Leader Tortured and Murdered

On August 25, 2010, Maya Kaq'chikel teacher and artist **Leonardo Lisandro Guarcax**, age 32, was kidnapped en route to work. He was tortured and killed; his body was found the next day.

Leonardo was the director of a school in Chuacruz, Sololá and coordinator for the Sotz'il Jay Cultural Center. He became a Mayan spiritual guide in 2001.

The acts of intimidation began in 2008 in the village of El Tablón, Sololá. Delinquent groups and kidnapping gangs are present in the region, and several human rights defenders have filed reports denouncing their crimes. Two of Leonardo's family members were killed in May 2009; Jesús Ernesto and Carlos Emilio Guarcax González, both of whom worked at the Sotz'il Jay Cultural Center. The crimes remain unsolved and the perpetrators enjoy impunity despite several months of investigation.

Leonardo was a promoter and researcher of prehispanic art through theater, music, and Kaq'chikel dance, and a tireless promoter of indigenous art at the national level. He founded an indigenous youth movement that promotes the art of the Mayan people.

