



El Quetzal

A Quarterly Publication

Issue #6

GHRC

March 2010

Three FRENA Leaders Murdered in Five Months

Three organizers working to broaden public access to electric power in a desperately poor area of Guatemala have been murdered in the past five months, as entrenched power companies resist grassroots efforts to create a municipal electricity company. None of the murderers has been apprehended, while martial law has been declared in the area under the pretense of preventing further violence.



"Get out of the country" Community members from San Marcos protest excessive price hikes of Spanish energy company Union Fenosa and subsidiaries DEORSA-DEOCSA (image: <http://ongmana.wordpress.com/2010/02/18/cuarto-asesinato-de-un-activista-en-guatemala-anti-union-fenosa-gas-natural/>)

The conflict is focused around Malacatán, San Marcos, near the border with Mexico, an area which suffers from an epidemic of poverty, kidnapping, drug trafficking and other social ills. FRENA, the Natural Resources Protection and Resistance Movement, has organized and mobilized the people in San Marcos to oppose the excessive price hikes on electricity and the poor quality of service provided by the Spanish electric company, Union FENOSA, and its Guatemalan subsidiaries, DEOCSA and DEORSA. The three

murder victims were well known FRENA leaders in San Marcos.

The electric company, Union FENOSA, came to Guatemala in 1998 as part of the government's Rural Electrification Program to provide 90% of Guatemalans with electricity by 2004. It currently provides electricity for 20 of Guatemala's

22 departments. However, only 60% of the San Marcos population of 800,000 now has access to electricity, with frequent power outages.

And San Marcos desperately needs reliable and affordable electric power. Presently, San Marcos has a primarily rural population (78%), 80% of its people living in poverty (less than \$2/day), 46% illiteracy, and the highest kidnapping rate in Guatemala.¹ It is known for drug trafficking (en route from Colombia to Mexico), drug related violence, human trafficking, and poppy and marijuana cultivation (and recent eradication). It was the homeland of the ORPA guerrilla group during the war.

Fed up with poor service and high prices for electricity, FRENA organized protests and roadblocks demanding government response to over 90,000 complaints filed between January-May 2009 against DEOCSA and DEORSA, and 78 com-

Continued on Page 12

IN THIS ISSUE

Bámaca Case Begins Anew.....2
 Government Documents Prove Priceless.....3
 GHRC Leads American University Delegation.....4
 Historic Immigration Rally.....6
 Update on Pochih Case.....7
 IAWA Introduced in Congress.....8
 Voiceless Speak Recipient Addresses Femicide.....9

Ixhil Women's Network Opens Shelter.....10
 US Seeks to Extradite Ex-President Portillo.....10
 SITRAPETEN Unionists Attacked.....11
 Domestic Violence Victim Granted Asylum.....11
 Human Rights Update.....13
 Events and Announcements.....15

GHRC Mission

Founded in 1982, the Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA (GHRC) is a non-profit, 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.

Board of Directors

Kathy Ogle
President

Christina del Castillo
Vice President

Joan Dawson
Secretary

Jack McHale
Treasurer

América Calderón

Renata Eustis

Gloria Jean Garland

Amy Kunz

John Leary

Karl Wolf

Advisory Board

Kit Gage

Jennifer Harbury

Sr. Dianna Ortiz

Sr. Alice Zachmann

Raul Molina

Staff

Amanda Martin
Director

Kelsey Alford-Jones
Program Associate

Interns

Kristin Bevilacqua

Tania Guerrero

Nayrobi Rodríguez

Breaking the Impunity: Bámaca Case Begins Anew in Guatemala

The torture-murder case of Efraín Bámaca Velásquez is suddenly moving forward. It is scheduled to be investigated and prosecuted in Guatemala. The United Nations judicial team will closely monitor the proceedings.

Given the unique political situation in Guatemala, this creates the possibility of establishing Nuremberg-like advances in national human rights efforts. However, it also raises grave concerns for the safety and welfare of the witnesses, attorneys, and others involved in high profile cases in which suspects include high ranking military officers. Retaliation in similar cases has included death threats, attacks, and murder.

Efraín Bámaca, known as Comandante Everardo, was a Mayan leader of the URNG (Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity) for 17 years before he was captured alive by the military on March 12, 1992. He was secretly detained and severely tortured by senior intelligence officials for nearly three years. His wife, US citizen and attorney Jennifer Harbury, carried out three hunger strikes in Guatemala in an effort to save his life; the longest of these lasted 32 days. The strikes resulted in the startling official disclosure by the US that his torturers were paid CIA informants, or “assets”.

Many of the Guatemalan officials involved were also graduates of the School of the Americas. Moreover, it was disclosed that Department of State officials had known of Mr. Bámaca’s situation since his capture. However, throughout the three year period, they had falsely informed Ms. Harbury as well as concerned members of Congress that they had no information as to his fate. “He could have been saved,” Harbury said. Instead, the government files indicate that he was battered, drugged, injected with a toxic substance that caused his body to swell grotesquely, and held in a full body cast to prevent his escape. He was either thrown from a helicopter or dismembered and scattered across a sugar cane field to prevent identification of his remains.

“US officials also knew of three hundred other secretly detained prisoners of war enduring the

same fate. By the time the truth was told, all were dead,” Harbury said.

The case was successfully litigated against the Guatemalan government in the Inter-American Court on Human Rights, resulting in a unanimous landmark decision in 2000. It is one of the illustrative cases set forth in the UN Truth Commission report, “Memory of Silence.” However, the prosecution was blocked for many years, and met with ferocious reprisals. Ms. Harbury continues to seek justice against the implicated CIA officials as well.

In February 2009 the Inter-American Court issued several strongly worded orders requiring the Guatemalan government to investigate and prosecute certain key human rights cases, including that of Mr. Bámaca. The current administration of President Colom has sought to comply, permitting these cases to steadily progress. In December 2009, the Supreme Court of Guatemala ruled in favor of full investigatory and prosecutorial proceedings.

The Bámaca case was one of the first fought on behalf of a captured resistance leader in Central America, and the first to result in official U.S. admissions as to the close relationship between the CIA and Central American torturers. Harbury writes about the case as a forerunner of ongoing U.S. abuses of detainees in the war on terror in her book *Truth, Torture, and the American Way: The History and Consequences of U.S. Involvement in Torture* (2005). See www.ghrc-usa.org to order your signed copy today.



Harbury’s Case has recently been a focus of the Guatemalan news media.

Hear Jennifer speak in Washington, DC on **May 6th**. Details on the GHRC website.

Government Documents Prove Priceless in Seeking Justice

A 359-page bound collection of Guatemalan army records with information about the planning and execution of the military's scorched earth campaign of the early 1980s, titled *Operation Sofia*, has become key evidence in the Guatemalan genocide case being heard in Spain.

On December 2, 2009, the National Security Archive (NSA) presented the *Operation Sofia* document in the National Court in Spain. "The documents record the military's genocidal assault against indigenous populations in Guatemala," said the NSA's Kate Doyle, who testified to the document's authenticity. Since the first day of the Historical Clarification Commission investigations, the Guatemalan state denied the existence of these military records, and violated citizens' rights by withholding information on state-sponsored crimes committed during the war.

Operation Sofia, part of a larger military campaign, was executed against indigenous communities near Nebaj, El Quiché in July and August of 1982. It resulted in the destruction of hundreds of Mayan villages during the bloodiest years of the internal armed conflict. As the military advanced through the region, they destroyed food crops, homes, livestock, community infrastructure, drinking water, and massacred entire communities.

The document includes the printed command calling for the creation of the military plan, as well as a letter requesting the implementation of "psychological operations" in order to decrease guerrilla support in rural areas. Handwritten patrol reports record the murder of civilians, including women and children.

The legal case began in 1999 when Nobel Laureate Rigoberta Menchú and other petitioners filed a criminal suit against eight senior Guatemalan officials in Spain. Judge Santiago Pedraz opened the hearings in February of 2008 with the testimony of indigenous survivors of the military's scorched earth policies against the Mayan communities.

Other key cases from Guatemala's internal conflict have benefited immensely from efforts to uncover government records. The documents, once accessible to the public, provide unprecedented opportunities to hold governments and senior officials accountable for human rights violations, both at home and abroad.

In 1999 the Death Squad Dossier (*Diario Militar*), an internal military log book with names and photos of 183 disappeared persons, was smuggled out of the Guatemalan army's intelligence files. Entries in the log book provide evidence as to how government officials monitored, captured,

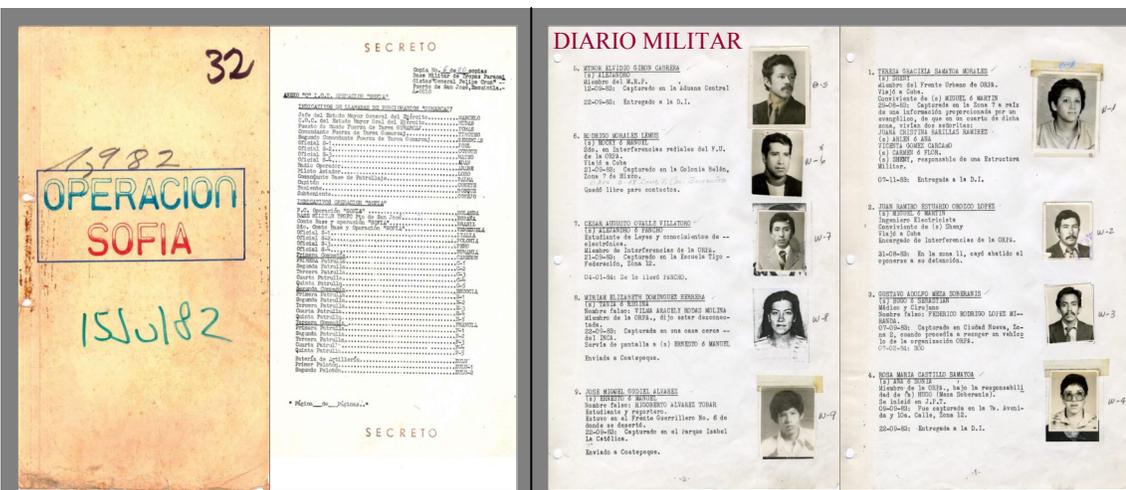
and disappeared their victims. The log book is the first official government archive accessible to the public that proves state responsibility for crimes of the past.

For many family members seeking information on the disappeared, the document has provided the impetus to push the case through the court system.



Stacks of documents at the Police Archive wait to be sorted and analyzed. 80 million documents were discovered in 2005 (Photo: Kelsey Alford-Jones)

The Military Diary case is now before the Inter-American Human Rights Commission, and is expected to be recommended to the Court this spring (2010). A decision on this case will set a strong precedent in Latin America and beyond, emphasizing the importance of access to information in human rights investigations, and establishing the right to truth as a fundamental human right.



Left: The cover and first page of military plan "Operation Sofia," a collection of army records that contains important information about the government's scorched earth campaign. Right: Pages from the military log book "el Diario Militar" show how the military documented the activities of their suspects, recorded their capture, and left clues to their fate. (Images: NSA)

The discovery of the National Police Archives in 2005 led to a treasure trove of evidence on Guatemalan disappearances. Ten million—of approximately 80 million—documents have now been cleaned, scanned, and analyzed, and provide information that corroborates evidence provided in other sources.

Visit the National Security Archive website for more information: nsarchive.org.

American University Delegates Become Advocates for Guatemalan Human Rights Defenders

On March 13, 1982, 177 women and children were brutally massacred in the remote village of Río Negro, Baja Verapaz, Guatemala. In a dispute over building a dam on Maya Achi land, the Guatemalan military ordered the Civil Defense Patrol (PAC) in a neighboring village to commit the horrific destruction of the Achi community. The women and children were marched up a steep mountain, forced to entertain their captors, then systematically raped, beaten, shot, and thrown into a pit. Eighteen children were selected from the group to serve in the homes of their mothers' murderers.

As part of the Human Rights Defenders campaign, GHRC is coordinating an international effort to seek justice in this unresolved case. In January, a GHRC delegation of 13 students and their professor from American University traveled to Guatemala during winter break to visit Río Negro. The 10-day trip focused on the testimony of human rights defenders in Guatemala, and preparing the students to advocate for defenders' rights upon returning to the US.

Upon arrival in Guatemala City, the students met with courageous Guatemalan defenders who risk their lives to pursue the advancement of human rights. Claudia Hernández Cruz, daughter of Norma Cruz, told the students of her mother's internationally recognized courage in fighting for women's right to live free of violence, as founder and director of the Survivor's Foundation. "My mother has been receiving death threats constantly for the past year," Hernandez said. "She worked with investigators who located the source of the telephone threats, and told those making the threats to get ready for life behind bars."

Also sharing his work with the students was Jorge Lopez, director of OASIS, defender of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) rights and prevention of HIV-AIDS. Lopez said: "I work for the

rights of the LGBT community because I was forced to live a life that I did not choose, under societal pressure to marry and have children." In 2008, Lopez was accused of murder and placed under house arrest for eight months, with no evidence against him. Lopez sees the accusation as part of the constant persecution and intimidation faced by OASIS workers meant to halt their work in support of LGBT rights.

Jerónimo Guarcas, his wife, and three daughters also spent an afternoon with the delegation. Jerónimo is a recipient of GHRC's Defender Relocation Program. Guarcas shared his testimony of searching for his father's remains and being whipped and almost burned alive by his father's murderers. (See p. 7 for an update on Jerónimo's case.)

The students also met with women's rights activist and organizer Sandra Moran, director of the Women's Sector. Moran fought for the inclusion of women in the Peace Accords process, ending the 36-year war in 1996. Today the Sector is a political coalition of diverse women's organizations, representing the rights of women domestic workers, factory workers, female prisoners, LBT women, indigenous women, HIV positive women, and many others who are denied their rights in Guatemala. Moran spent many years in exile in Nicaragua and Canada, where she expressed her political opinions through music and art.

The delegation then traveled to Río Negro, six hours north of Guatemala City, by highway and dirt road, to Pueblo Viejo. Because the National Institute for



American University students, at the request of local community members, paint one of the five large monuments in the Pacux cemetery that commemorates the massacres of Río Negro in 1982.

Electricity refused to grant the GHRC delegation permission to enter the area of the controversial Chixoy hydroelectric dam, the group hiked in with gear, water, and food. They loaded motorboats for the 30-minute ride across a lake to Río Negro. The lake was formed by the construction of the \$350 million dam in 1978, a project funded by the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank. The 300-foot high dam flooded 3,460 acres of fertile land, affecting 3,400 people in 33 Mayan communities. Villagers were forced to sell their land for the project or be labeled counterinsurgents and risk being massacred by state forces.

Nevertheless, many resisted. From 1980-82, military and paramilitary officials committed five massacres, including the March 1982 Río Negro massacre, killing more than 440 people, mostly Achi Mayans, in this region.

Continued on next page

American University Delegation

Continued from previous page

Today, the Río Negro population consists of 14 families who returned to their land to rebuild. Living conditions are extreme. The remote village still has no access to electricity, nor any roads; families live in one room houses with beds made of logs and rope. Every three weeks, the villagers walk four hours to the market in Rabinal to purchase basic food and housing supplies. The community has a one-room elementary school. Children who aspire to attend sixth grade must move to Rabinal, where they are eligible to attend the New Hope middle school, founded by Río Negro survivor Jesus Tecú Osorio.

In January, the GHRC delegation was received by Sebastian Iboy Osorio, a Río Negro survivor. He is president of the Historic and Cultural Center in Río Negro. Sebastian was 14 years old when his pregnant sister, Paulina, his young nephew, and other family members were killed in the 1982 massacre. He escaped into the mountains where he spent several years running from army attacks.

Iboy Osorio led the student delegation up a steep trail to the top of a mountain to Pak'oxom, the site of the massacre. He shared his testimony as the group stared down into the pit where 177 bodies had been thrown.

Over the years, steps have been taken to uncover the historic memory of the region. In 1993, the Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation (FAFG) exhumed the Río Negro mass grave. Each year, on the anniversary of the massacre,



Río Negro community member and survivor of the 1982 massacre Sebastian Iboy Osorio at Pak'oxom.

people come from far and wide to honor the dead.

Community members who survived the massacres were relocated to Pacux, a cluster of small, cement houses built and patrolled by the military just outside of Rabinal. At the request of the survivors' organization, ADIVIMA, the students painted the five large monu-

ments in the Rabinal cemetery, each commemorating one of the massacres.

The delegation also met with the Río Negro community members to clearly define the role of international solidarity in seeking reparations for the damages caused by the Chixoy dam. ADIVIMA is currently negotiating the reparations package with Guatemalan president Alvaro Colom and the final agreement is scheduled to be signed at the end of April 2010.

At the end of their trip, GHRC delegates met with US Ambassador Stephen McFarland in Guatemala City to discuss Guatemalan human rights defenders, Río Negro, and the need for improved support of those defenders. The ambassador followed up by meeting with ADIVIMA leaders to discuss the reparations process.

Upon return to Washington, DC, GHRC delegates wrote and delivered a letter in support of comprehensive reparations to President Colom during his visit to the Organization of American States in February 2010. The delegates also met with the Inter-American Commission (IACHR) to deliver their letter in support of moving the Río Negro case to the Inter American Court in Costa Rica.



Students make the steep climb up from the community of Río Negro to the site of the massacre of 177 women and children.

Other activities by the returned delegates continue, including educational presentations, local radio interviews, the formation of an official American University student organization in solidarity with Guatemala, and support in the coordination and accompaniment of the ADIVIMA director during his visit to Washington, DC for IACHR sessions in March 2010.

The GHRC trip to Guatemala will have a lasting effect on the students. As one of the students commented: "I knew nothing about Guatemala before this trip. Now I feel so connected to the rural community of Río Negro and their 28-year fight for justice. Through our student organization for Guatemalan solidarity, we will continue doing this important work."

Apply now to participate in GHRC's August 7-15 delegation to Guatemala focused on violence against women. Apply online at www.ghrc-usa.org.

Cost: \$900 plus airfare

Historic Immigration Rally Sends Message: It's Time to Walk the Talk

On Sunday, March 21, an estimated 200,000 people rallied on the National Mall to demand comprehensive reform for a broken immigration system, sending a strong message that this is a priority issue.

Participants arrived from all over the United States, including tens of thousands from Virginia and Maryland. While the Latino community comprised the overwhelming majority, other immigrant groups were represented including Korean, Irish, and Caribbean Islander. Some solidarity marchers wore t-shirts recognizing their own family's immigrant past. Unions and student groups carried flags and banners. The crowd chanted "Sí se puede – yes we can" between scheduled speakers.

"Immigration reform is extremely important for the Guatemalan community, since most of the Guatemalans in the United States are undocumented," explained Guatemalan community activist Cynthia Mazariegos. Cynthia, a first-generation American, arrived by bus from Chicago. "At the march, Guatemalans joined in chants from other groups. You could feel the solidarity between all of us."

The energy of the crowd remained positive and focused on the urgent need for a system that reflects changes in today's society. Specifically, advocates are pushing for a clear path to legalization for immigrants, the end of detentions and deportations, and an end of criminalization of workers.

President Obama continues to list immigration reform among his priorities. His recorded comments, broadcast at the rally, expressed solidarity with the movement: "I have always pledged to be your partner as we work to correct our broken immigration system, and this is a promise I reaffirm today."

Unfortunately, the President's empty

promise, and the continuing deterioration of the immigration system evidences his lack of action.

While new legislation takes time to draft and pass through Congress, the executive has the power to change some important policies without debate on Capitol Hill. Since Obama took office, immigrants and advocates have clearly and strongly called for an end to raids, criminal-like detention conditions, and deportation.

The Obama administration's continuation of Bush-era policies has been a huge disappointment to immigration rights activists. Obama has barely addressed the dismal and dehumanizing condition of immigrant detention centers. His administration has allowed Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to continue

The energy of the crowd remained positive and focused on the urgent need for a system that reflects changes in today's society. Advocates are pushing for a path to legalization, the end of detentions and deportations, and an end of criminalization of workers.

their persecution of undocumented workers. ICE workplace raids continue, and the number of deported immigrants is higher than under Bush. During Obama's first year in office, an average of 33,000 immigrants were detained daily and 387,790 were deported, as compared to 369,221 in 2008, a 5% increase.

Major concerns over current deportation measures include the incarceration of documented workers and the separation



Thousands fill the National Mall to support a comprehensive immigration reform

of families. It is estimated that the government deported the lawful immigrant parents of nearly 88,000 citizen children between 1997 and 2007, most for relatively minor crimes. The deportations often resulted in psychological harm, behavioral changes and problems in school for the children left behind.¹

This trend will continue. As ICE bragged in a recent press release: "criminal deportations increased by 19% and this priority continues in FY10 with 40% more criminal aliens removed to date as compared to the same period last year."²

"The recent increase in deportations has even grabbed the attention of the Guatemalan government," Cynthia noted. "Before the big march in Washington, DC, Guatemalans from all over the country with Guatemalan officials (Vice - Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador, Consul, and a video speech from the Minister of Foreign Relations) to discuss the importance of involvement in this movement." One to two plane loads of Guatemalans are deported each day, and thousands suffer in detention centers, separated from their families and with little access to legal services.

Increased collaboration between immigration officials and local police, a

Continued on next page

Accused Refuse to Attend Court Hearing in Pocohil Case

In May 2009, in their rural village of Pocohil, in the department of El K'iche', Jerónimo Guarcas, and two of his fellow villagers attempted to exhume the remains of their fathers who had been murdered during the internal armed conflict of the 1980s.

Jerónimo, a twenty-four year-old father of three, and the two men were attacked by villagers at the urging of former PAC members, doused in gasoline, whipped, and barely escaped with their lives. (See the September 2009 edition of *El Quetzal*.) GHRC is currently supporting them through the Human Rights Defenders Relocation Program.

The case is advancing slowly through the Guatemalan judicial system. On February

4, 2010, the 12 people accused were summoned to court but did not comply. The Public Prosecutor's Office of Crimes Against Human Rights Defenders claimed the judge in Chichicastenango did not properly notify the accused of the hearing.

Jerónimo, a joint plaintiff in his case against the men and women who attacked him, lamented that the judges' errors affect the outcome of his case. He still believes that justice is possible, that the criminals will be sentenced, despite the multiple death threats that he has received. The accused are charged with aggravated assault, illegal detention, discrimination, public disorder, and coercion.

The accused include the mayor of Pocohil

and members of both the Community Council of Development and the local Security Council of Pocohil.

Jerónimo explained that he and the other men attacked in March were forced to leave the community, abandoning the exhumation process with the knowledge that the mass grave was broken into and the remains of their fathers stolen.

Jerónimo's family members who continue to reside in Pocohil are subjected to discrimination, forced to pay a fee for reinstallation of water and electricity, were excluded from community projects, and the children suspended from public school. The Pocohil defenders continue to receive threats for taking the case to court.

Immigration Reform

Continued from previous page

program known as 287(g), has been long criticized by civil society organizations, who state that the program does not properly train police, diverts already scarce resources, and adds to illegal racial profiling and civil rights abuses. On April 2, 2010 the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of Inspector General (OIG) published a report with similar criticisms.³

Obama has expanded the employment verification system, or E-Verify, an internet-based system that allows employers to determine whether or not an employee is eligible for work in the US. This system is considered to be unreliable and inaccurate, and frequently results in employees being erroneously labeled as unauthorized workers. An estimated ten percent of the records for newly naturalized citizens are inaccurate, and nearly 13 million records of US-born citizens are affected as well.⁴

There is still hope for reform, however, and the overwhelming grassroots support for a new immigration policy has reached the halls of congress. Two bills have been drafted, one sponsored by Rep. Luis

“Immigration reform is extremely important for the Guatemalan community, since most of the Guatemalans in the United States are undocumented.”

- Cynthia Mazariegos, Guatemalan participant at the immigration rally

Gutierrez (D-IL) and the other by Senators Charles Schumer (D-NY) and Lindsey Graham (R-SC). The house bill seeks to improve detention conditions, by ensuring certain requirements such as adequate medical attention, humane treatment and access to a telephone for

detainees; it would also provide a path to citizenship. The senate bill, more conservative in its approach, includes a heavy emphasis on strengthening US borders, increased ICE patrols at workplaces, and favors highly-skilled workers for residency.

While the US immigration system is in dire need of reform, only a *just* reform - that stops separating families and criminalizing migration, and that recognizes the rights of immigrants - will improve the situation of the approximately 1.3 million Guatemalans in the US.

Now is the time to push for policy change in congress. GHRC continues to advocate for a comprehensive reform, recognizing the enormous contributions of Guatemalans and other immigrants to our communities.

¹ “In the Child's Best Interest?” University of California, Berkeley and Davis Schools of Law. March 2010; p. 6. (http://www.law.berkeley.edu/files/IHRLC/In_the_Childs_Best_Interest.pdf)

² <http://www.ice.gov/pi/nr/1003/100327washingtondc.htm>

³ <http://www.aclu.org/immigrants-rights/dhs-report-confirms-serious-civil-rights-problems-local-immigration-enforcement-pr>

⁴ Mexican American Legal Defense & Educational Fund http://www.maldef.org/immigration/public_policy/e-verify/

US Policy Addresses Violence Against Women: IVAWA Introduced in Both House and Senate

With the introduction of the International Violence Against Women Act, or IVAWA (H.R. 4594, S. 2982) on February 4, 2010, the US has come one step further in its support for women around the world. In a joint event on Capitol Hill, Congressman Poe (R-TX), a survivor and former Texan judge, gave a heartfelt speech in support of women's right to non-violence. Senate co-sponsors Senators Kerry (D-MA) and Boxer (D-CA) also spoke, reiterating the important role women play in creating peaceful societies. About 200 people, mostly women, were present.

The bill would create two new offices charged with coordinating US efforts to address VAW through both the State Department and USAID. It would fund two key positions, an Ambassador-at-Large of Global Women's Issues and a

in its response to VAW, as well as in training of foreign military, police and judges in responding to instances of VAW.

Though the introduction of the bill is only the first step, IVAWA has the potential to set an important standard for addressing violence against women as a focal point of US foreign policy.

IVAWA, if passed, would provide pilot programs in 5-20 countries. GHRC and participants from the August VAW delegations have raised awareness among legislators on violence against Guatemalan women, with the hopes that the country will become a top candidate for new programs to address the crisis.

The bill requires that countries chosen are regionally diverse and have the political will to work with the US to carry out the programs. As one of the most dangerous countries for women in Latin America, and with a strong women's movement and

member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee staff, participants stressed the dire situation of women in Guatemala, and recommended that a larger percent-

As one of the most dangerous countries for women in Latin America, and with a strong women's movement and a legislative framework in place to protect women, Guatemala "fits the bill".

age of funds go directly to local organizations with the knowledge and experience to carry out needed programs.

In January, the group received a warm welcome by Melanne Verveer, Ambassador-at-Large on Global Women's Issues, a new position created by President Obama that is set to receive funding under IVAWA. Ambassador Verveer has been a long-time advocate for women around the world and has visited Guatemala.

The spring speaking tour with Norma Cruz provided another opportunity to raise the issue of violence against women and femicide with the US government. Verveer's office coordinated a meeting for Norma Cruz during the first week of March.

Delegates from the August 2009 delegation have spearheaded many of these efforts to meet with key government players, and coordinated events for Norma Cruz's week-long tour.



Delegates from GHRC's August delegation and GHRC staff meet with Ambassador Verveer (fourth from left) and Irene Marr (second from left) at the State Department.

Director of the Office for Women's Global Development. IVAWA also supports health programs, increased legal and judicial protections, improved educational and economic opportunities, and seek to ensuring US accountability both

a legislative framework in place to protect women, Guatemala "fits the bill".

GHRC and delegates brought this message to Congress and the State Department. In a meeting with Robin Lerner, a

Dear Readers:

This publication is provided free of charge for our supporters, but it takes time and resources to produce. Please consider supporting the publication financially with a tax-deductible donation. You can donate by check, or online at www.ghrc-usa.org.



Voiceless Speak Recipient Addresses Femicide in Guatemala

By Lucia Muñoz

I was born in Guatemala in 1963. I moved to the United States when I was five years old. During my teen years, I returned to Guatemala, where a war was being waged. The experience impacted my life forever. I heard constant gunfire and witnessed military personnel stopping people on the streets and on buses, leading them away, never to be seen again. My neighbor and friend disappeared in the middle of the night. When I started asking questions about his disappearance, I was told to ignore it and stop asking questions.

I moved back to the US to attend high school in 1980. I got married in 1982 at age 19, and my husband and I started an import-export business. As part of this business, I traveled to Guatemala frequently. During these trips I asked questions I was told to not ask as a child. I began to learn and understand what was happening in the internal conflict, in particular, that girls and women were being tortured, raped and killed. I learned that brutality towards women was employed as a means of population control to keep mothers from raising leftist children. Violence against women was also a tool for control used by the government to instill fear and thus prevent rebellion.

As a US taxpayer, I was horrified to learn that the abuse of women was being taught by the School of the Americas as a counter-insurgency tactic, and that my tax dollars were being spent to promote the evil and injustice in my homeland, Guatemala. The war in Guatemala ended in 1996, but torture and killings of girls and women continue.

In response to the lack of implementation of the Peace Accords, in 2001 Raul Molina—a professor at NYU—and I co-founded the Guatemala Peace and Development Network.

Because I came from a Guatemalan mili-

tary family, I was ashamed to know that my family could have been part of this gender violence. By 2004, I needed to become more directly involved with ending femicide. In 2005 I founded MIA, Mujeres Iniciando en Las Americas (Women Initiating in the Americas) to help end this injustice. As founder and Executive Director, I work with students and others here in the US raising consciousness about the sad reality that our



MIA's White Ribbon Campaign against femicide. Image: www.miamericas.info

sisters face, and also work with the Survivor's Foundation in Guatemala working to end femicide. The Foundation, under the direction of Norma Cruz, runs a center in Guatemala City which helps survivors of crimes of femicide and family members of women who have been killed, as well as victims of domestic violence.

Guatemalan women have organized to end the injustice, but need the support of men—especially young men. After reading *The Macho Paradox* and learning how men can help end femicide, I realized that the seed to stopping femicide lies within men. By changing gender attitudes in men, gender violence will cease to exist. The origins of femicide must be addressed to effect change.

Gender equality workshops in Guatemala are MIA's greatest success; designed and implemented by MIA, they were inspired by the Canadian-based White Ribbon campaign. We continue to see vast improvements in young men's attitudes towards women.

MIA's White Ribbon Campaign has been implemented in grade schools, high schools, and universities in Guatemala, as well as the National Police Academy. After the overwhelming positive response from the students at the Police Academy, we are excited to be working toward establishing an ongoing program.

The 1996 Peace Accords include a clause addressing gender equity in school curriculum. The Women's Studies Department at San Carlos University (USAC) is working to achieve this goal. MIA is coordinating programs for class credit at USAC.

Along with MIA's White Ribbon Campaign, our work focuses on removing gender biases within the Guatemalan government, promoting educational programs to reduce domestic violence and femicide, and promoting equality for women. MIA takes two or three delegations to Guatemala each year, including US and European academics and activists, and follows up with commitments to support Guatemalan women's rights.

MIA members also testify as expert witnesses to help Guatemalan women struggle against the increase of deportations and breaking of families.

Since 1987 GHRC has encouraged Guatemalans in the US speak truth to power through the Voiceless Speak program. GHRC provides direct assistance to Guatemalans in the US who have suffered human rights abuses in Guatemala, are in financial need and who are engaged in Guatemala human rights work.

GHRC is now accepting applications for 2010-2011.

Cause for Celebration! The Ixhil Women's Network Inaugurates a Shelter for Victims of Violence

In 2009, Juana Bacá Velasco, the mother of four daughters, was repeatedly attacked and threatened in her town of Nebaj, department of Q'uchiché. Juana, profiled in the September 2009 edition of *El Quetzal*, is a director of the Ixhil Women's Network (Red de Mujeres Ixhiles, or RMI), which provides support for more than 350 women in nine rural Mayan communities in Nebaj.

The RMI, founded in 2003, is dedicated to rural development and the participation and empowerment of Mayan women, and provides support and accompaniment for women who are victims of violence. The mayor of Nebaj, Virgilio Geronimo Bernal Guzman, is the accused perpetrator of the attacks and robbery of over US\$16,000 from the RMI. According to Juana, Bernal Guzman wants total economic and political control of the region.

As Guatemala grows increasingly more dangerous for human rights defenders

such as Juana, there is little opportunity for celebration. However, on February 6, 2010, Juana and the Ixhil Women's Network proudly opened a women's shelter

"We celebrate our achievements, despite all of the limitations and persecution that we have suffered as an organization. We decided to continue fighting to defend the rights of women."

- Juana Bacá

in Nebaj, K'iche'. "We celebrate our achievements, despite all of the limitations and persecution that we have suffered as an organization. We decided to continue fighting to defend the rights of women. We are building a women's shelter to house victims of violence, to provide legal assistance, psycho-social ser-

vices, and refuge for emergency disasters in the region," Juana said.

The inauguration of the shelter, "Defenders of the Ixhil Women," is financed by the Emergency Program of Italian Cooperation as part of the "Urgent Actions to Reduce Vulnerability in the Municipality of Nebaj" and run by the non-governmental organization CISV (Italian Community Service Volunteers) in collaboration with the RMI.

Juana was four months pregnant when she was attacked by women hired by the mayor on the steps of the Nebaj town hall in March 2009. Her husband intervened to rescue her, and is now accused of assaulting the assailants. The case has been transferred to the departmental capital, to a new judge. "I hope the judges can be objective and see that we are suffering persecution for the work we are doing to defend women's rights," Juana said.

US Seeks Extradition of Former Guatemalan President Portillo

Alfonso Antonio Portillo Cabrera served as president of Guatemala from 2000-2004. He belonged to the Guatemalan Republican Front political party (FRG, created by former president and dictator Efraín Ríos Montt). Portillo campaigned on a platform of ending corruption and helping the poor. Today he is in prison in Guatemala City, awaiting possible extradition to the US for embezzlement and money laundering.

At the end of his presidential term in 2004, Portillo's political immunity from prosecution was revoked. Portillo fled to Mexico, with 52 cases of corruption filed against him. He is accused of embezzling \$70 million during his presidency.

In 2006, Mexico's Foreign Ministry approved his extradition to Guatemala, which finally transpired in October 2008.

On January 25, 2010, federal prosecutors in New York issued an indictment charging Portillo with laundering money through US banks, including \$2.5 million from the Taiwanese government destined for children's school books and almost \$4 million embezzled from the Department of Defense. Guatemalan authorities, with support from the CICIG, arrested Portillo on January 26, 2010 on the eastern shore of Guatemala, thwarting his attempt to escape to Belize on a boat.

Portillo has appealed his case, and his lawyers state that Mexico must agree before the proceedings can take place, since Mexico initially turned Portillo over to Guatemala to face charges there. Mexico has not confirmed this statement.

Under the extradition treaty, signed and ratified by Guatemala and the US in 1903,

the US can extradite Portillo. According to Guatemalan law, however, he would need to be tried first in Guatemala and serve his time there before standing trial in the US. The evidence presented suggests he would spend at least six years in prison in Guatemala and could face up to 20 years in US prisons.

Guatemalan citizens have mixed reactions to the likely extradition of Portillo to the US. Some feel that extradition to the US is a threat to Guatemalan sovereignty and another example of US intervention in the Guatemalan judicial procedures. Others feel that the judicial system in Guatemala is corrupt and inefficient, and that Portillo's case would result in impunity, as do 98% of the cases in Guatemala. Thus, they support the extradition, as justice would more likely be served in the US than in Guatemala.

SITRAPETEN Unionists Attacked in Guatemala City's Central Plaza

December 10, 2009: International Human Rights Day

At noon on December 10, 2009, 27 members of the SITRAPETEN labor union were violently and illegally evicted by the Guatemalan National Police and Municipal Transit Police from a makeshift camp in the Central Park, in front of the National Palace of Culture.

Since May 2008, members of SITRAPETEN have occupied the plaza in peaceful protest of labor rights violations including the firing of 47 workers for organizing a

During the eviction, Guatemalan National Police doused four union members with a liquid that caused severe itching, nausea and coughing. The union tent was destroyed and all personal belongings were seized.

union. Workers were subjected to threats, bribery and violence from the Agua Salvavidas company including security guards attacking workers and killing one leader. Union members are demanding the re-hiring of fired workers.

During the eviction, Guatemalan National Police doused four union members with a liquid that caused severe itching, nausea and coughing. The union tent was destroyed and all personal belongings were seized. Unionists remained in the park, accompanied by representatives from various civil society groups, who came out to offer protection from subsequent attacks. There was a second police attack at 11:30 pm with tear gas, batons to beat unionists, and caustic liquid. Nery Rodeñas, director of ODHAG¹, and Idivina Hernández, director of SEDEM² were observing the incident when doused with the liquid.

Attacks on labor unions are commonplace in Guatemala; in 2009, at least two per month were recorded. It is the first instance of the use of abrasive liquid for attacks, though the tactic is commonly employed in Honduras.

GHRC met with SITRAPETEN members at their camp in the Central Park of Guatemala City in January 2010. The GHRC delegation of 13 students from American University (Washington, DC) and GHRC director Amanda Martin heard the testimony of several union members, in front of the National Palace.

¹Archbishop's Human Rights Office



SITRAPETEN workers protest in Guatemala City's Central Plaza. They were violently evicted on International Human Rights Day.

Two undercover intelligence officers approached the group, listening to the exchange of information. Martin asked them to state their purpose. "Isn't this a free country, a democracy? Can't we listen to a conversation in a public place?" one of the men huffed.

Martin replied that it was a personal exchange between the union and the student group, and requested they leave. After a moment of awkward silence, they departed. "The government and military intelligence are everywhere, gathering information on unionists, organizers, and activists, in order to repress, detain, and abort their efforts for change," said one of the unionists.

² Security in Democracy

Guatemalan Victim of Domestic Violence Granted Asylum

After 11 years in a brutally abusive relationship in Guatemala, and 14 years working to gain asylum status in the US, Rodi Alvarado has not only won her case, but has helped set an important precedent for other victims of domestic abuse.

Originally granted asylum in 1996 by a San Francisco judge, the case was appealed and in 1999 was overturned by the Board of Immigration Attorneys (BIA); Rodi was ordered to be deported back to Guatemala. Represented by Karen Musalo, now director of the Center for Gender and Refugee Studies (CGRS), and

backed by a nationwide grassroots campaign, Rodi did not give up.

Meanwhile, the case also prompted a revision of Department of Justice (DOJ) regulations that would address the grey areas, or "novel issues" in asylum and refugee claims, including "the extent to which victims of domestic violence may be considered to have been persecuted under the asylum laws."¹

Citing the 1999 decision in Rodi's case as emblematic of the problematic task of

defining individual cases of domestic violence in home countries with unique social contexts, the INS advised against a "universal model for persecution claims based on domestic violence." Instead, it recommended principles that allow for a "case-by-case" analysis with the general understanding that "gender can form the basis of a particular social group."²

In January 2001, Rodi's deportation ruling was overturned by then-Attorney General Janet Reno. She ordered the case to be reassessed after the issuance of the new DOJ

¹ & ² Federal Register/Vol. 65, No. 236, p. 76588-76589

Three FRENA Leaders Killed

Continued from Page 1

plaints filed with the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office.² As a solution to the problem, FRENA proposes the installation of a municipal electricity company to provide quality electricity at fair prices to all residents, as a public service. FRENA's goals include the nationalization of electricity.

Entrenched interests reacted violently. In response to public protest, the FRENA organizers received death threats and three of the leaders were assassinated.

On October 25, Victor Gálvez, FRENA

Asylum Granted

Continued from Page 11

regulations on the subject of gender asylum. In June 2004, eighteen senators urged the Attorney General John Ashcroft to follow DHS's recommendation and grant asylum to Rodi. Ashcroft sent the case back to the BIA. However, despite these measures, the new regulations were never finalized during the Bush Administration and the case made little progress between 2005 and 2008.

Then, in 2009, the CGRS notes, change came with the Obama Administration. "DHS attorneys under the Obama Administration had unexpectedly filed an amended brief in [another] case, asserting that women who have suffered domestic violence may qualify for asylum based on membership in a particular social group if they meet certain, clearly defined criteria."³

This paved the way for CGRS, who won the case arguing that Ms. Alvarado was part of a specific social group: "married women in Guatemala who are unable to leave the relationship."

GHRC continues to support Guatemalans seeking political asylum through affidavits and expert testimony.

³ <http://cgrs.uchastings.edu/campaigns/alvarado.php>

leader, was gunned down in Guatemala City, shot 18 times as he left his office. After arriving at the scene, police conducted an insufficient forensic investigation and authorities have made no further inquiries. According to sources, Gálvez had attended a meeting of the Parochial Assembly of Malacatán, in the Parliamentary Hall of Democracy, the day before his murder. In September 2009, one month before his assassination, he was threatened in his home for blocking plans for the construction of a hydroelectric plant in Textapala (San Marcos). In June 2009, he and three other protestors were beaten and threatened while demonstrating in front of the National Electricity Institute (INDE). Gálvez was the sixth labor leader to be killed in 2009 in Guatemala.

Four months after Gálvez's assassination, his brother-in-law Octavio Roblero, another FRENA leader, was killed. Roblero received threats prior to his assassination on February 17, 2009. Roblero was shot 17 times in front of the bus station in Malacatán, San Marcos. Roblero had recently given authorities the names of those responsible for the murder of Gálvez. He leaves behind a wife and three children. Roblero was the second FRENA leader killed in San Marcos in 2010.

The first was Evelinda Ramírez Reyes, who was attacked and killed while driving home to San Marcos from Guatemala City on the evening of January 13, 2010. Evelinda was a community leader and member of FRENA as well as the CUC/Farmer's Union. She had just attended a series of meetings with government officials on public access to electricity; she and other FRENA members had filed complaints about the excessive rates charged by service provider DEOCSA-Unión FENOSA, and also advocated for the public management of electrical energy distribution. On the drive back to San Marcos that evening, a car blocked the road and fired into her vehicle.

Ramírez was killed. Another passenger, Freddy Rodas, was shot and two others, Leonel de León and Jorge Lorenzo, were wounded. Ramírez was a 26 year-old single mother and leaves behind a five year old son.

Under the pretense of preventing further violence, Guatemalan President Álvaro Colom declared martial law in San Marcos on December 22, 2009. All meetings and



On its website, Union Fenosa advertises its commitment to social responsibility and the investment it makes in communities. The company, however, has not taken steps to resolve the conflict in San Marcos.

protests were prohibited in the department. The lockdown was set to expire on January 4, 2010 but was extended for multiple 15-day periods and remains in effect.

GHRC has written a letter to the Guatemalan Attorney General's office with hundreds of signatures, demanding a full investigation and prosecution of those responsible for these murders, as well as protection for the families of victims. GHRC also signed on to a letter to President Colom, along with 59 other organizations, demanding a full investigation of the FRENA murders, and the possible complicity of the Union FENOSA company. The letter was also sent to FENOSA, its Guatemalan subsidiaries, and to Repsol YPF and La Caixa, major shareholders in FENOSA.

Neither the company nor the President's office has responded to these demands.

¹National Institute of Statistics: XI Censo de Población y VI de Habitación, 2008. Guatemala

²Comision Nacional de Energia Electrica (CNEE)

Human Rights *UPDATE*

RECENT HEADLINES

Nov. 24, 2009: President Colom receives 54% approval rating.

Nov. 20: Guatemalan officials announce the resumption of international adoptions after a nearly two-year suspension due to human trafficking. According to the National Adoption Council, legal reforms established during the suspension will prevent problems in the future. Prior to the shutdown, Guatemala was #2 in adoptions to the US (China was #1).

Nov. 21: President Colom inaugurates the megaproject “Franja Transversal del Norte” to construct a highway across the northern highlands of Guatemala. Environmental and community groups protest due to damage of protected areas.



Nov. 29: Pedro Ramírez de la Cruz, director of the Indigenous Defenders of the Verapazes and member of the National Council of Indigenous and Campesino People (CNAICP) is shot and killed in Baja Verapaz.

Nov. 30: President Colom urges return of Honduran president Zelaya as requirement for recognizing elections on Nov. 29.

Dec. 10: A United Nations report declares Guatemala to be one of ten countries at highest risk from climate change. The report was presented before the international summit in Copenhagen, Denmark.

Dec. 16: Rodi Alvarado is granted asylum, ending her fourteen year legal battle after fleeing her home country of Guatemala, where she suffered a decade of brutal domestic violence.

Jan. 15: Colom names Helen Mack, founder of the Myrna Mack Foundation, as Police Reform Commissioner. Mack is in charge of coordinating the Commission, created as part of the National Security Agreement, and will include inspection, analysis of police, academic information, as well as criminal investigations.



Feb 25, 2010: Interior Minister Raul Velásquez is dismissed on charges of money laundering after the discovery that at least Q20 million (approximately US\$2,450,600) paid to energy company Maskana, S.A. to provide fuel for the police ended up in the bank accounts of companies in the US, Brazil and Panama and in personal accounts of individuals related to Maskana. He was replaced by Carlos Menocal, a journalist by training, named by Colom in March as the Anti-Impunity Commissioner.

IN BRIEF

MILITARIZATION

The military may increase its number of active duty soldiers to 20,000, a 29% increase in relation to the 15,500 who currently serve. This was established at the end of November by Government Accord 301-2009 of the Defense Ministry after Congress approved an increase of Q150 million (US \$18,716,111) for the modernization and professionalization of the military.

The government is reactivating multiple bases. The military has sent approximately one thousand soldiers to date to Ixcán, Q'iché as of December 8. Between 1979 and 1988, the Ixcán was the site of 102 massacres resulting in 2,500 deaths and forcing 96 percent of the population to flee to avoid becoming victim to further atrocities.

In January 2010, Defense Minister Abraham Valenzuela asked for an additional \$12 million to reopen a military base in San Marcos, claiming it is necessary to improve security in the department. As in the Ixcán, the base played an important role the armed conflict.

On January 21, President Colom inaugurated a new Pacific Anti-narcotics Military Base military base. At the event, the president also announced the creation of a special unit to fight the contra-band related to drug trafficking.

One month later (February 22), President Colom announced that he had asked the US to lift the military embargo, imposed on Guatemala since the 1980's, in order to buy “mobilization equipment” like speedboats to combat drug trafficking.

ADVANCEMENTS IN CASES

El Jute: On Dec. 3, 2009, Marco Antonio Sánchez became the first army officer to be convicted for the crime of forced disappearance in the Guatemalan armed conflict. He was sentenced to 53 years in prison for ordering the forced disappearance of 8 peasants in El Jute, Chiquimula in October 1981, and he was convicted along with three paramilitaries. US Ambassador Steven McFarland attended the last day of the hearing and visited the families of victims in El Jute.

Rosenberg: On Jan. 6, 2010, the Public Prosecutor's Office formally accused eight suspects implicated in the assassination of lawyer Rodrigo Rosenberg. Three more suspects have been arrested but will be judged separately because they named those who contracted them.

Continued on Page 14

Human Rights *UPDATE*

Continued from page 13

Portillo: Ex-president Alfonso Portillo was captured in Izabal on Jan. 26 by the National Civilian Police, CICIG, and the Public Prosecutors office. The arrest took place after the United States requested his capture and extradition. He is accused of conspiracy to launder money, in the amount of \$70 million, \$15 million of which he laundered while President. If the request is carried out, Portillo will become the first ex-president of Guatemala to be extradited to the US.

Dos Erres: On Feb. 12, Kaibil member Manuel Pop Sun was captured and is being investigated by the First Municipal Criminal Court of San Benito, Peten, for his part in the murder of 251 people in the community Dos Erres in 1982. This is the first arrest in relation to the massacre since the Interamerican Court of Human Rights tried prosecuted 17 soldiers whose lawyers hindered the amparo appeals.

Then, on March 1, Carlos Antonio Carías, the Lieutenant in charge of the Santa Elena military base in Peten, and named as having directed the massacre, turned himself in voluntarily. The next day, the charges against him – of assassination and crimes against humanity – were dropped, and he was let go after paying Q10 thousand (\$1,250) in bail and put under house arrest. He is still charged with “robbery”.



The massacre in Dos Erres took place between the December 6th and 8th of 1982, during the Ríos Montt administration.

LYNCHINGS

According to the Guatemalan Supreme Court of Justice, there were 41 deadly lynchings in 2009 as of December 8, along with 68 other acts of vigilante justice, and a total of 211 related injuries. The departments of Guatemala, Petén, Quiché, and Huehuetenango have the most cases.

On November 28, 2009, three people were lynched in Sololá for extortion of bus drivers. Angry citizens set the police headquarters and squad cars on fire, forcing the release of the accused, who were then burned alive.

Then, in a ten day period at the beginning of December 2009, eight presumed criminals were lynched in the northern part of the country.

People of Chicol, a rural area in Santa Barbara, Huehuetenango, captured at least 13 suspected gang members on Dec. 3, and lynched three the following day. The rest remained in captivity. The gang is suspected of various crimes in the area, including the decapitation of a local woman. The locals also burned at least two

buses and a pickup truck. There was no presence of local authority or police. There hasn't been a police station or courthouse in the area since 2002.

On December 7, the people of Panajachel, Sololá killed a suspected thief and almost lynched three women who were suspected of stealing from the local market. Four patrol cars were burned, and various vehicles were damaged. Four policemen were wounded.

The following day, December 8, an accused kidnapper was lynched by people in Santiago Chimaltenango, Huehuetenango today. He was tortured before being lynched, so that he would give the names of his accomplices. He gave five names. He is accused of kidnapping Augusto Pablo, who escaped and returned to Huehuetenango to denounce the crimes against him. There haven't been police in the area since 2005, when the population expelled them because they refused to turn over gang members accused of crimes in the region.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Sexual abuse continues to be a silenced crime. Each day, hundreds of children suffer at the hands of relatives, teachers and neighbors. The statistics are alarming. At least 11,000 cases per year are reported, and this number reflects only those with the resources or resolve to seek help. Seven of ten cases are committed by family members.

The Law Against Femicide (2008) has not been widely used in these cases, but on December 4, 72 year-old Nicolás Coti Gonón was sentenced to 25 years in prison for femicide in Quetzaltenango. It is the first case to see sentencing under the law in the department. Coti Gonón is charged with the murder of his wife with a metal tube on August 14, 2008. The day of the murder, he was found drunk and covered in his wife's blood. He claims no memory of the incident and has been kept in a mental health facility since he was first apprehended.

US POLICY & AID

As of November 20, 295 communities have received food aid from US government funds. Over a one year period, 7,600 metric tons of vegetable oil, beans, rice, wheat, and soy will be distributed. Pregnant and lactating mothers and children under 5 years old are prioritized.

On December 15, 2009, *Comprehensive Immigration Reform for America's Security Act and Prosperity* (CIR A.S.A.P.) was introduced in the House by Congressman Luis Gutiérrez and representatives from the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, Congressional Asian and

Continued on next page

Human Rights *UPDATE*

Continued from previous page

Pacific Caucus, Congressional Black Caucus, and Congressional Progressive Caucus.

STATISTICS

On January 7, the US Congress approved a new appropriations law which includes unprecedented funding to protect human rights activists.

The 2009 UN Human Rights Report highlighted the increasing number of homicides, which, according to police reports, rose to 6,498 in 2009, a 4% increase from 2008. 83% of the crimes were committed with a firearm.

The departments with the most assassinations are Guatemala, Escuintla and Petén. A rebuttal from the PNC claims that the numbers have gone down overall.

At least 9,434 cases of domestic violence were registered last year by the police's Victim Services Division. The majority of cases occurred in the department of Guatemala. 708 women were murdered in 2009, making it one of the most violent years for women on record.

133 bus drivers were killed as of November 26, 2009, with only eight assailants convicted.

The National Civilian Police reported 140 kidnappings in 11 months.

2009 was the most violent year for activists in a decade. Unionists were the most targeted group with 120 attacks, a 225% increase from 2008. Similarly, attacks against the defenders of truth and justice jumped from 42 cases to 96 cases while attacks against human rights defenders increased by 40%.

As of December 17, authorities had seized 6,936.09 kilos of cocaine in 2009. The number has increased drastically since 2008, during which 2,214 kilos were seized. Although the number of seizures is higher, conviction for drug crimes have decreased. Three hundred and three people have been sent to jail for drug related crimes in 2009, down from 437 in 2008. There were 146 sentences in 2009 and 200 in 2008.



The US Department of Defense sees the transfer of narco-trafficking networks to Central America as a result of political pressure in Colombia, Mexico and the Caribbean. The US plans to send some 100 million dollars to Central America through the Merida Initiative to address the issue.

Income from remittances fell by 9.7% from January to November of this year compared to the same period in 2008, from 3,975,400,000 to 3,588,000,000.

EVENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

CALENDAR

April 14, 7pm EST: American University students and GHRC interview on Latino Media Collective radio program. Listen locally (DC-metro area) on 89.3, or [stream online](#).

April 26: 12th anniversary of assassination of Bishop Juan Gerardi

May 6, 6:30-8:30pm: Jennifer Harbury Speaks on her Struggle for Justice in Husband's Case. (*Busboys and Poets / 1025 5th St, NW / Washington, DC 20001*)

May 16, 1pm EST: Party to honor Sr. Alice Zachmann, founder of GHRC (*St. Jerome Parish Hall / 5205 43rd Avenue / Hyattsville, MD 20781*)

August 7-15: GHRC delegation to Guatemala, focused on violence against women and femicide. Apply now! (Application available on our website.)

GHRC is now
on
[Facebook!](#)

Log in to your
facebook page
and **become a fan**
of GHRC to get
news updates and
event invitations.



Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA

3321 12th Street NE
Washington, DC 20017
Tel: (202) 529-6599
Fax: (202)526-4611
www.ghrc-usa.org

NONPROFIT ORG
US POSTAGE PAID
WASHINGTON, DC
Permit NO. 469

Return Service Requested



El Quetzal

A Quarterly Publication



Trade Unionists and Activists under Attack



GHRC Leads AU Student Delegation to Guatemala



**US Legislation: Immigration reform and IVAWA
in the spotlight**