

Guatemala:

Ten Paradigmatic Cases and the New Coyuntura

April 8, 2010

Dear Friends,

I would like to bring everyone up to date on the new situation in Guatemala. I have spent most of my time there since January, and will return there soon to stay the entire month of April. I think that a truly historic opportunity to end the impunity is at hand, but it is very fragile and could be lost at any moment. For the first time that I can remember, war crimes trials are a real possibility. Needless to say, the army is displeased.

For those of you that missed my earlier letters, the chain of events began in February 2009, when the Inter-American Court on Human Rights of the OAS held a number of hearings on whether or not the Guatemalan government had complied with the Court's earlier sentencias. The judges wanted to know whether or not there was any progress in the required criminal prosecutions in the cases of Everardo, Carpio Nichol, and a number of others. Of course there was no progress at all, and in fact our entire evidentiary files had once again vanished. Although I thought this was rather comical, the Court was not at all amused, and issued a series of very emphatic orders. Upon my return to Guatemala, I found most of the government officials to be sincere in wanting to do the right thing. However, as we slowly retrieved the records, we learned that the accused military officers had secretly gone before a military court and had themselves declared innocent. They were hence claiming double jeopardy.

The military rulings violated a large number of international legal prohibitions, but not necessarily Guatemalan law. A group of very dedicated new fiscals and lawyers took the issue to the Guatemalan Supreme Court, which to everyone's amazement, ruled that the sobreseimientos were invalid, and that we were free to move forwards. The basis for this series of decisions was that Guatemalan courts must follow Inter-American law and CIDH rulings. This has set remarkable precedents for all of the human rights cases. However, I hear that the army is now in charge of the Supreme Court Justice's personal safety. I will try to verify this and get back to everyone.

These rulings coincided with a group of really committed fiscals at the Fiscalia de Derechos Humanos, and an MP willing to back them up. In turn the international community has strongly backed the movement towards prosecutions. The Dutch Embassy, for example, has given the government financial backing to press ten paradigmatic war crimes cases through the courts. So far these include the Dos Erres massacre case, the genocide case, the Bamaca case, the Carpio Nicol case, and the Fernando Garcia case. Many other cases involving massacres, killings of union leaders, and the femicide cases are being pressed as well.

The first army response came in the first case yielding arrests; namely the Dos Erres case brought by FAMDEGUA. A young attorney was shot point blank in the head and left dead, with nothing stolen. The matter is still being investigated. I will let everyone know when there are formal findings.

Not surprisingly, I was the next in line. I filed my petition for querrellante adhesiva status in Everardo's case, which gives me quasi-prosecutorial powers. Within two days, the Partida Patriota came out with a front page declaration that the current government had a written "Plan Victoria", which the Patriota members had been allowed to see but not to copy, and that this was a plan to destroy the presidential candidacy of poor General Otto Perez Molina.

Specifically, officials like Orlando Blanco of Sepaz were trying to bring false charges of corruption against Perez Molina, and had even paid my tickets and hotels in order to have me bring false charges as well. I, once again, was accused of just wanting money, although criminal prosecutions do not involve money in any way, just prison sentences. I thought this would blow over and did not answer. Instead it blew up completely, with Blanco and Congresswoman Baldetti duking it out daily in the press and suing each other as well. This has been a remarkable pre-emptive strike by General Perez Molina, and the intent is clearly to block the prosecutions that may involve him by casting him as an innocent political target.

All this placed a huge and dangerous spotlight on the Fiscalia, which had desperately been avoiding any publicity about the ten cases. I ended up doing two interviews, one on television and one in El Graphico, although based on past experience nothing I say is ever published or aired. I asked everyone to let the fiscals and the courts do their work without any political pressures or threats, and urged that the Bamaca case not be treated like a political football. To my amazement, the paper printed exactly what I said, and gave it front page coverage, and the TV station aired it twice as well. Once again, I am forced to recognize that things are changing, albeit slowly. The public response was good, especially on the streets, and from people in the judiciary. However, there was a storm of very military letters to the editor, some of which amounted to death threats, and the usual suspects began to slam my marriage and my motives once again. Everardo's old friends, at that point, reached the limits on their patience and sent me a former ORPA combatant as a body guard.

Despite the firestorm, the judge in Retalhuleu just granted my petition, citing the Inter-American Court ruling, and the Guatemalan Supreme Court's insistence that Inter-American law be followed. This was incredibly courageous on his part, as well as personally dangerous, so I will be monitoring his situation as well. Again, I am forced to recognize a new aperture in human rights efforts. This is why I am returning now. For the first time in 18 years I will give my formal testimony to a Guatemalan Judge, and I will be permitted to be present at all proceedings and demand files etc. etc.

The other cases are moving along swiftly and the Dos Erres case is already in court. These cases are hugely important in the history of Guatemala, and clearly the military

response has just begun. Collectively we are going to need a great deal of help in terms of calls, letters, fundraising, and emergency actions on behalf of all of these cases as well as the court and MP officials. If you can help us by sharing this letter with as large a network as possible, we would much appreciate it. Please coordinate with Amanda Martin at the Guatemala Human Rights Commission- USA, 202-529-6599.

Abrazos, Jennifer Harbury

May 5, 2010

Dear Friends,

Things continue to be a bit wild in Guatemala. Predictably, the army is not very happy about the ten paradigmatic cases making their way through the prosecutor's office these days. For the first time that I can remember, the government and judiciary appear willing to uphold the rule of law. However, the backlash has already begun.

When I last wrote, one lawyer had been murdered and the military had opened a blistering defamation campaign against me and Orlando Blanco, the head of the Sepaz office. When I returned to Guate the focus had shifted to government officials. Right now the goal is to run all of the pro- human rights people out of the Public Prosecutor's Office. Although our cases would still survive, that would make things much more difficult. The head Prosecutor changes every four years, and the time has come for President Colom to either re-appoint Mr. Zárate, or name someone new. A panel of jurists screens the field of applicants and presents the list of qualified applicants to the President.

Mr. Zárate and Gloria Porrás, his second in charge, are both real professionals. They have shown expertise in complex legal issues, and a strong commitment to the proper process of the law. There were a number of other good potential candidates as well. However, not a single one of them made the final list. The panel of jurists simply announced that they were "unqualified" without giving their reasons or explaining what the required qualifications were. Ninette Montenegro, a Congresswoman and the founder of GAM, promptly filed proceedings in court to void the list. She should win. Meanwhile, the MP is of course, in uproar.

After speaking with a number of other officials, I found out that there is a growing threat of smear campaigns against many of them. Again, the goal is to force them out of office and establish a revised Prosecutor's office willing to protect army impunity. This would be a serious blow to efforts to establish an independent civilian judiciary. I am working with friends to see how we could best deal with this growing problem. The IACHR in my own case recognized it as nothing less than obstruction of justice....and I think we need to start taking it far more seriously.

Of course if the smear campaigns do not work, there is always Plan B: bullets. Our friends in Guatemala continue their human rights work with a quiet courage that always amazes me. But they all understand exactly what prosecuting these cases is going to mean. They are going to need a great deal of support from us all.

Meanwhile, I went with a close friend from the GAM to visit La Verbena cemetery, which is being exhumed now by the FAFG team. La Verbena is the public cemetery where all of the death squad victims were taken during the brutal days of the 1980s. If not claimed by relatives within a day or so, the people were buried as unidentified persons, or

“XX” in endless walls of small, honeycombed tombs. Like everyone else, I still have nightmares of the condition of those bodies and the obvious signs of the torture they had endured. Apparently, after a certain period of time, the bones were removed from their spaces and tossed into several large pits, in order to make room for the newly dead. Those bone pits, or “hueseras” are what the FAFG team is excavating right now.

It is hard to describe what it is like to stand at the edge of that enormous pit and look at the skulls, leg bones and scraps of cloth lying in the clay so far below. Haunting is a better word than eerie. We placed flowers in a basket and lowered them to the bottom, then simply knelt in silence for more than an hour. My friend was one of the few survivors of the Frente Urbano in the early 1980s. Most of his closest friends were doubtless lying there below. He wept silently for the rest of the day, remembering.

Meanwhile, Everardo’s case presses onwards, much to my amazement. I am once again the querrellante adhesive....and Alpirez has tried to get us closed down again, but so far without success. We are trying to move the case to the capital for security reasons. I am due to give my testimony in Retalhuleu at the end of May, complete with cross examinations by all the army lawyers. That should be a blast, but hopefully not literally.

Muchos abrazos....Jennifer

June 4, 2010 EXTREMELY URGENT

Dear Friends,

OK everyone. Guatemala has just blown apart over the war crimes trials against the military leadership. All of the human rights oriented prosecutors were run out of office last week. Conrado Reyes, a right winger with frightening military connections has been appointed as the new Fiscal General (Attorney General) with the obvious goal of shutting down the trials, and Mr. Castresana, the head of CICIG (the UN backed anti –impunity commission) has just resigned in protest. Meanwhile, Major Soto is petitioning for both me and the prosecutor in my case, Manuel Vasquez, to be thrown in jail. The head-on collision between the campaign against impunity, and the military leadership responsible for the genocide in Guatemala has officially begun.

We need your emergency calls. The talking points and contact information are set out in the accompanying Urgent Action Memo. We also need your signatures on the attached petition. For those of you who are new to the Bamaca case, I am also attaching a chronology.

Meanwhile, here is the update on the last several weeks.

Last 3 Weeks in Guatemala:

When I last wrote, I was hoping to give my formal testimony in Retalhuleu for the first time since Everardo disappeared in 1992. Mother Nature seemed to be reflecting the general mood in the country. On the way out there we drove into a storm with warnings of a tropical cyclone off the Pacific coast. The next day as we drove back and the local volcano blew its stack, forcing emergency evacuations, shutting down the airport, and coating the capital in an inch of grainy black soot. I made the mistake of asking myself “What next?”....and the rains then turned into a near hurricane washing out roads and bridges, tumbling houses over cliffs and causing massive landslides. A giant sinkhole swallowed a three story building. There are reports of nearly 100 dead with many more unaccounted for, and thousands of homeless. The volcano is still erupting.

Meanwhile there was uproar over the appointment of a new national prosecutor. A panel of jurists was supposed to vet the applicants and give the President a list of the top six qualified persons. It was assumed that he would reappoint Amilcar Zarate and/ or Gloria Porras, who have been terrific on human rights issues. However, the panel skipped over both(somehow they were “not qualified” despite their great records). Everyone went to court, an interim fiscal was named and it looked like a new list would be presented...but the panel, rather brazenly, came back with the same six names. Lic. Zarate left, but for a while it looked like at least Gloria Porras would stay on and lead the ten cases....There was huge international support for her and the others. This went back and forth all week, but now she and Alejandro Rodriguez and the other really great people are all gone.

We had also been waiting for the court here to give us a hearing on transferring Everardo's case to the special courts in the capital (for human rights cases). This should be more or less automatic...the transfer is available to all serious human rights cases (We already won in the Inter American Court in Costa Rica) if we can show danger to witnesses, officials and other involved parties. (My list is several pages long.)

The hearing was postponed once because not all of the military lawyers were present. That was reasonable...but we had a hard time getting it rescheduled. My lawyer visited the court offices several times to remind them we would soon be in Retalhuleu to give my testimony. All the same, on Wednesday, as we prepared to take off, we learned that the hearing in the capital had been scheduled for Thursday, the same day as my testimony in Reu. The great problem with that, quite apart from the fact that I cannot be at both ends of the country at once, is that if half the lawyers showed up in one place and half at the other, both hearings would be cancelled... I actually had to smile at this strategy. In the end we got the hearing in the capital cancelled, everyone notified, and we arrived despite the storm in Retalhuleu on Wednesday night. I felt very ready, although it was no doubt going to be quite a day.

When we got to the court, we were told that the army defendants had filed a number of motions against the case, and that some had forced the judge to postpone the testimony. Only one military attorney even showed up, and not a single defendant. The Judge was good. However, someone later took me aside and told me that he was "hearing" things about my own safety as well as that of the Judge. This is all more or less typical. What is not typical is that Major Soto Bilbao has also filed a request that criminal charges be brought against both me and the prosecutor, Manuel Vasquez. (Mr. Soto has been named by both eye witnesses and CIA files as a participant in Everardo's torture). This does not mean we will actually be charged with anything....just that he is asking that we be charged. However, this becomes pretty scary given the new leadership in the Fiscalia. It is pretty much up to them.

I am still slogging through the many pages of furious prose....Basically Soto seems to be saying that since the case was shut down in Guatemala we have no right to re open it....on double jeopardy grounds. However, the dismissal back in 1995 (called a sobreseimiento) was completely illegal under international human rights legal standards, and the Supreme Court here last December correctly ruled that Guatemala must follow international law....so the case was ordered reopened. Likewise my marriage was first recognized here in Guatemala. When the CIA connection came out, the Minister of Defense told the CIA that they had paid a lot of money to a lawyer in Texas to get it annulled (1995). (Someone did show up in Texas but was promptly tossed out of court).

There ensued a huge battle in Guatemala which I won most of the way up the ladder (since all nations are required to recognize foreign marriages as valid if they are valid in the nation where they were celebrated)...but the Corte de Constitucionalidad finally ruled against me, after a year of threats and pressure. The reasons were a bit blurred. The Inter American court, not surprisingly, decided I AM the wife and that I have the right to fully participate in the proceedings. Since the Guatemalan Supreme court has ruled now that

the Inter -American court rulings must be followed, we filed once again to make me the querrelante adhesive (a status giving me near prosecutorial powers). The court granted the motion. Now Major Soto Bilbao is asking that both the prosecutor and I be charged with a long list of “crimes” for trying to get the Inter American court ruling enforced here....abuse of power etc etc for him...and against me everything from perjury and false pretenses for claiming that the Costa Rica Court ruling gives the right to proceed. I will meet with my lawyer soon to go over this line by line and try to understand the procedures here a bit better. (Why are they so freaked about my marriage? Because it allows me to be a co-prosecutor, which in turns permits me to subpoena military files, and question witnesses etc etc. Also, if they can cut out my marriage they plan to try to cut out all the evidence I amassed against them. That should not work, legally, but we are talking about Guatemala....)

The criminal complaint against us is bizarre, and most lawyers down here are just shaking their heads in amazement. No one thinks this can go anywhere....but based on prior experience I am not so sure. The prosecutor is all alone out there in Retalhuleu....and like Sylvia Jerez, who took 13 bullets when we started the trial in Costa Rica...he can certainly be reached. People out there are scared, with good reason. And the new chief fiscal, Conrado Reyes, is pro military. Ouch.

I note that Castresana, in his resignation speech, blasted the right wing for a growing smear campaign against him. This is happening everywhere....and is straight out of the CIA Psy-Ops manual. A number of officials are telling me that they are being threatened with the same thing.....it seems less malignant than bullets....but it is tearing apart the pro-democracy efforts.

Meanwhile the hearing for the transfer of the case to the capital was reset for Tuesday June 1. We went, and a huge group of supporters came from the many human rights offices here...as well as many of Everardo's compas. I was truly moved to see so many old friends there and so many new supporters. We won our motion...the case will proceed now in the capital...but the problem is that the motions to dismiss filed in Retalhuleu, as well as the criminal complaint filed against me there...must go up through the Retalhuleu courts on appeal....so we are litigating in two places at once.... This resulted in my doing a frantic trip back to Retalhuleu last week, once again through an approaching storm, in order to answer the amparos within the 48 hour deadline. WHEW!

PLEASE help us with some urgent letters and calls to the new prosecutor, Conrado Reyes, supporting the war crimes cases, and expressing outrage for the retaliatory criminal charges being sought, as well as all other acts of retaliation.... We also need a lot more signatures on the petition being circulated by GHRC. The urgent action instructions and information are attached with this update.. THANK YOU.

Abrazos, Jennifer

June 25, 2010

Dear Friends,

I just want to write these quick lines to thank everyone for the great telephone campaign.

Everyone down here has been commenting on it and saying how much they really appreciate the immediate show of support and solidarity. Please know that your efforts have made a difference. I think we can rest on the calls for now, although I have no doubt that we will soon enough face another crisis and be asking all of you for more help. Meanwhile, if you can help us pile up signatures on our petition, great.

As I wrote before, Conrado Reyes, the pro military Prosecutor, was forced to resign. The fiery resignation speech of Carlos Castresana of CICIG was amazing. He gave a lengthy press conference and outlined the official evidence that Reyes was not only a military sympathizer, but also was linked to military corruption and narcotrafficking. Castresana said he was resigning because the Reyes appointment would shut down any chance of ending the impunity in Guatemala, which of course, is the very reason that CICIG was established. Human heads immediately appeared in the streets of the Capital, one on the doorstep of the national Congress.

Despite the obvious message, the human rights leaders here flocked to the President's office demanding that Reyes be fired or forced to resign. The President remained disturbingly silent, making me think that he is under very serious threats of some kind. Reyes was nevertheless forced out of office, and the courts have required the selection process to start over. We now have an interim fiscal, Ms. Mejia.

The good news is that Gloria Porras and Alejandro Rodriguez are back in office. Meanwhile there is chaos. A number of the jurists on the selection panel have resigned, and I cannot say I blame them. They are trapped between the army and the human rights community. Other government officials are resigning also. A purge of corrupt police has also begun. Given a choice between a polygraph or resignation, there was a wave of official resignations there as well. All this, and the election year has not even begun!

So, despite the volcanoes, literal and military, the war crimes cases are still moving forward. I am worried sick about the safety of the lawyers, fiscals, and witnesses in all of the cases, but all of them are determined to continue.

I will write again soon.

Abrazos, Jennifer

July 16, 2010

Dear Friends,

The war crimes cases are still pressing forwards, but things remain extremely tense right now in Guatemala. There have been an unusually large number of attacks and killings throughout the country. A woman deeply involved in the anti-mining campaign was recently shot through the head. Another woman who was once involved in the Dos Erres massacre case as a court official has also been shot point blank in her home. Nothing was stolen in either killing. My lawyer, Edgar Perez, came home with his family two weeks ago to find that his house had been broken into. Some money was stolen from a special closet, but the house was also ransacked. Someone also tampered with his car. The fiscals have been getting threats as well, and I remain under threat of arrest. To summarize, Conrado Reyes is gone from the Prosecutor's Office, and the de facto coup was averted by Castresana's amazing resignation speech. But the situation remains very tense and very very violent in all regions.

The human rights community continues to amaze me. Aura Elena and the women at FAMDEGUA are pressing the Dos Erres massacre case, and have accepted the Panzos massacre case as well, despite the obvious risks. Nineth is doing great work as a Congresswoman and is also receiving very serious death threats. Several local rights defenders as well as some officials are facing rather preposterous criminal complaints. As in my own case, these were filed just as Conrado Reyes was appointed. With 20-20 hindsight it seems pretty clear to me that we were really going to get hauled off to jail as a warning to the others. The Fiscal's office is working to get these dismissed...we will see what happens. None of us plan to leave.

Meanwhile, in Everardo's case I keep finding more important materials and connections. Right now we are dealing with the half dozen amparos from the defense that are paralyzing the proceedings. These are all based on the claim that the case should not have been reopened, (despite the Inter-American Court ruling) and that I should not be allowed to participate or present my evidence because I am not the wife (despite the Inter-American court ruling). The only way they can win this is for the Corte de Constitucionalidad to rule that the Supreme Court had no right to apply international human rights law. Of course, no one is going to want to do that, so it will be interesting to see what happens. Two days ago the human rights community put together a really interesting forum in Zona 10. The subject was Psy-Ops and Defamation Campaigns as military strategies to maintain the official impunity.

Everyone is pretty much sick of the campaña negras down here. It has been happening since Arbenz right through to the recent case of Castresana of the CICIG. Some of the examples the panel discussed were the Gerardi case, the criminalization of the anti-mining leaders, the public smear campaigns of the young women being slaughtered in the femicide, the case of Dianna Ortiz, and of course, yours truly.

The strategy is obviously to discredit and punish the victim, and divert all public dialogue away from the real issues, such as genocide and torture. We have all decided to work together to recognize the issue and deal with it as a serious human rights violation in its own right. In fact the Inter-American Court said as much a few years ago in Everardo's case.

Thanks once again to everyone for the calls and letters of support. They made a real difference, and really raised the morale in a number of offices.

Abrazos, Jennifer

October 1, 2010

URGENT UPDATE ON WAR CRIMES CASES IN GUATEMALA

Dear Friends,

It looks like “Plan B” for shutting down the war crimes cases here in Guatemala has begun. The plan to take over the Ministerio Publico with a pro military Attorney General failed last spring. Apparently, enormous pressure is now being brought against the Judges, who are abruptly reversing their own rulings. Once again, we need your urgent assistance.

As you will remember, a few months ago President Colom was supposed to select a new Attorney General, but the panel of jurists responsible for screening the candidates somehow left out some of the most qualified applicants, and chose others with either weak qualifications or obvious military ties. Conrado Reyes was selected, and Castresana, the head of the UN Commission against Impunity in Guatemala, resigned in protest. Castresana is a Spanish attorney who worked on the Pinochet case. Before leaving office he gave a stunning expose of the Reyes’s links to corrupt structures and military powers. In the ensuing uproar, Reyes was forced to resign, and an interim Fiscal was named. Human heads appeared in the streets, one on front of Congress. Yet our cases managed to continue, albeit with more difficulties.

In August the Corte de Constitucionalidad, or “CC”, dismissed the six amparos (injunctions) that the army defendants had filed in Everardo’s case. These had blocked our formal testimonies for several months. The arguments raised were that the Supreme Court should not have permitted the case to be reopened, no matter what the Inter-American Court had ruled, and of course that I am “not really” married, no matter what the Texas courts or the Inter-American Court had ruled (and that therefore all my evidence should be excluded). We were all delighted when these were dismissed. Once again, it was clear that the courts were at last going to insist on complying with International law, a truly historic change.

A few days later the CC abruptly changed its own position. Col. Alpirez, back last February, had also filed an amparo urging that the case not be permitted to start up again. The preliminary amparo was promptly rejected as baseless. If there is no grounds for a preliminary amparo, there is obviously no grounds for a permanent one. Yet the CC suddenly dusted off this old petition and suspended the entire case, urging that the Supreme Court should “clarify” its decision within 15 days. This flatly contradicted the other rulings the CC had just issued.

The Supreme Court last year had simply ruled that the dismissal of the charges (giving double jeopardy protections) against the military defendants in 1999 was invalid, in light of the Inter- American Court decision of 2000, which in very harsh terms declared the entire investigation and legal process near farcical, and aimed at improperly protecting military impunity. The government had never told the Court that the charges

had been dismissed (a "sobreseimiento"), since this had happened at a near secret hearing with no notice to me, and without presenting any of the witnesses or evidence. All the same, under international law, a sobreseimiento based on such an invalid process is void, and gives no double jeopardy protection. There are many rulings on this subject, given that military defendants in several other countries have tried this in the past as well. We immediately received strong support from all the human rights groups down here, as well as internationally, in protesting the sudden change from the CC. Shortly after a joint press conference, I received a none too subtle threat, as did a court official and an attorney. We are still investigating those.

On Monday Sept. 20, a number of key human rights leaders met with the judges of the Supreme Court (Camara Penal), to express their full support for that Court's historic rulings of December 2009. These had declared void the sobreseimientos in several cases, including the Bamaca case, based on international law. The Judges were great, and showed us the resolution they had just signed, asking the Inter-American Court to back them up.

The next day the magistrates issued a second order, annulling their own request to the Inter American Court, cancelling their decision of 2009 and shutting down the Bamaca case. This week the CC issued an order in the Rio Negro case, again ordering "clarification" from the Supreme Court. If I understand correctly, they want the judges to reconsider the defenses of self defense and obedience to military commands. (The Rio Negro massacre involved the murders of nearly 300 unarmed Mayan villagers, mostly women and children). These defenses are completely inapplicable in such cases, but we expect the Supreme Court to fold nonetheless. Amparos are now being sought in the Dos Erres case and even in the Genocide case. Hopefully, these will come to nothing, but who knows. We are, of course, getting very close to election year, and General Perez Molina still intends to become the next President, despite his full participation in the genocide campaign during the war. A series of frightening war crimes cases reminding people of the past is not exactly convenient for him or to any former military official.

I am not sure of precisely what pressures are being brought to bear on the Magistrates, but the pressure is pretty obvious. I do know that military officials have been in charge of the judges' safety for some time now. (See for example <http://www.elperiodico.com.gt/es/20100106/pais/130861/> >[http://www.elperiodico.com.g](http://www.elperiodico.com.gt/es/20100106/pais/130861/)). In short, the army is doing a huge push to shut down all of the war crimes cases, and while they are at it, get the civilian judicial system back under military control. This is an enormous step backwards for the transition to democracy if it is permitted.

In so many other ways as well, the country seems to be sinking into madness and chaos. The first many pages of the papers are chock full of murders and beatings every day. There was a huge shoot out at a luxury shopping center. Most of my friends have been mugged and or had someone in their family mugged, usually at gun or knife point. (I recently bit someone, who fortunately turned out not to be armed). Much of this is random, but much of it is also coming from the huge mafia created by former and current

military officials who use gangs to carry out their various activities, such as narcotrafficking. Meanwhile the rains are relentless, roads and bridges are swept away, and people are dying in the floods and landslides. We need help.

Abrazos, Jennifer

PLEASE HELP WITH THE FOLLOWING URGENT ACTION REQUEST:

Please Call the Guatemalan Embassy in Washington DC and give the following message points. The telephone number is (202) 745-4952 -54. Be courteous, and simply state that you wish to give a message for the Ambassador, but speak with anyone who offers to take your message.

If you cannot get through at all, send an email to ambassador@guatemala-embassy.org. As always, organizing our effort is key. We would like the calls to continue for 2 weeks. Ideally, several groups will call on a given day, with different groups calling the next day. That was every day a number of calls get through. Afterwards, we ask that you send us feed back so that we can develop our strategies and evaluate how we are doing.

If you can get a group of at least 3 friends together to make the calls on a given day, please contact Andrea at GHRC 202 529 6599 or intern@ghrc-usa.org. Let her know so that we can keep the calls well distributed and organized. Also, email her your evaluation at the end of your day. If you call on your own, that is also great...and again, please let Kelsey know how it went.

We will write everyone after 2 weeks to let you know what the results are, and if we need to keep going. Meanwhile, have no fear, we are working with the Guatemalans to choose several more actions as well!

MESSAGE POINTS:

1. We are very concerned about the recent rulings in the Bamaca case, and certain developments in the other war crimes cases as well.
2. Ending the impunity and following international law is crucial to the transition to peace and democracy in Guatemala.
3. We are extremely concerned about the improper pressures that have evidently been brought to bear on the Judges, and ask for their protection.
4. We urge that Guatemala not weaken its status in the international community.

THANKS TO EVERYONE! Jennifer