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Guatemala: Killings of women on the rise in 2006

In a new report published today, Amnesty International revealed that killings of women in Guatemala have risen for the fourth consecutive year since 2001 as the government fails to effectively investigate and punish those responsible.

Over 2,200 women and girls have been brutally murdered in Guatemala since 2001. Up to 665 cases were registered in 2005; 527 in 2004; 383 in 2003 and 163 in 2002. 299 killings of women have been reported between January and May 2006 alone.

“Women’s murder rate in Guatemala is on the rise because there is no reason for the murderers to stop: they know that they will get away with it,” said Sebastian Elgueta, Amnesty International researcher on Guatemala.

According to Guatemala’s Human Rights Ombudsman, up to 70% of murders of women are not investigated and no arrests were made in 97% of cases.

In the few cases that are investigated, the process is usually flawed – forensic evidence is not properly gathered and preserved, few resources are allocated to each case and witnesses are denied protection.

On 4 July 2005, 26-year-old Clara Fabiola García was shot at in the town of Chimaltenango, south Guatemala and died in hospital short after.

Two years before, on 7 August 2003, Clara Fabiola witnessed the murders of 15-year-old Ana Berta and 18-year-old Elsa Mariela Loarca Hernández in Guatemala City. Her testimony was key to securing the 100 year prison sentence against gang member Oscar Gabriel Morales Ortiz, alias “Small”, in February 2005.

According to media reports, on receiving his sentence “Small” threatened Clara Fabiola García that she would pay for testifying against him.

Noone has been prosecuted for Clara Fabiola's murder.

Amnesty International's report also highlighted that in hundreds of cases, victims are blamed for their deaths.

5 May 2006, Guatemala's Chief of Police stated publicly that in order to prevent the murders of women it is necessary to "ask them not to get involved in street gangs and to avoid violence within the family, which we as police cannot do."

"Past governmental initiatives, such as the development of new legislation, have yet to have any real impact on the numbers of women killed, or the ability of police and prosecutors to effectively investigate and bring to justice those responsible. Meanwhile the killings of women continue to rise," said Sebastian Elgueta.

"The best prevention campaign the authorities can develop is to improve the quality of investigations: Showing that the lives of Guatemalan women have real value."

Amnesty International calls on President Berger to take urgent steps to:

- Improve coordination and cooperation between state agencies;
- Strengthen the Public Ministry's Witness Protection Programme;
- Guarantee the availability of human and financial resources for the National Forensic Institute.

Background Information

Amnesty International's report reviews the development of cases of killings of women across Guatemala since the publication of "No protection, no justice: killings of women in Guatemala" in June 2005 and included 14 recommendations to President Oscar Berger and other state institutions.

For a copy of "Guatemala: No protection, no justice – killings of women (an update)", please see:<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGAMR340192006>

For a copy of "Guatemala: No protection, no justice – killings of women", published in June 2005, please see:
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/ENGAMR340172005>

For media materials please see: <http://news.amnesty.org/>

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