

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety

19 February 1999

GUATEMALA

**Human rights activists, involved in exhumation of clandestine cemetery**

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Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of members of the *Asociación de Familiares de los Detenidos-Desaparecidos de Guatemala* (FAMDEGUA), Association of Families of the Detained-Disappeared of Guatemala, and the *Equipo de Antropología Forense de Guatemala* (EAFG), Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Team, who have been harassed by soldiers.

On 14 February 1999, three soldiers came to the site of a clandestine grave in Huehuetenango department, where members of FAMDEGUA, EAFG and local peasants, were exhuming the bodies of those killed in the 1982 massacre at San Francisco. One of them said he was a colonel from the Huehuetenango military base, and reportedly started taking photographs and filming all the people who were working at the site.

FAMDEGUA has made a public complaint about this, as they feel that the soldiers' action is intended to intimidate human rights activists who are trying to find out the truth about the thousands of people who were killed during the worst years of the civil war.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

This incident follows a series of death threats against relatives of victims of army massacres and members of human rights groups involved in exhumations.

Tens of thousands of non-combatant civilians, many of them indigenous peasants, were killed during army counter-insurgency campaigns in the Guatemalan countryside in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Current estimates put the number of clandestine cemeteries in Guatemala at more than 500.

On 17 July 1982, a few months after the coup led by General Ríos Montt, almost the entire population of the village of San Francisco, Nentón, in Huehuetenango department, were killed by a force of 600 soldiers. The massacre was among the best-documented incidents of large-scale killing of non-combatant civilians in rural Guatemala.

In recent years, human rights groups have been struggling to have the remains of the victims exhumed from mass clandestine graves, to return their bodies to their families for formal burial. These groups and those who support them have frequently been threatened and intimidated.

For further information please see Guatemala: The Human Rights Record, AMR 34,04,87; UA 173/96, AMR 34/21/96, 8 July 1996; UA 156/97, AMR 34/23/97, 29 May 1997; UA 252/97, AMR 34/30/97, 1 August 1997.

#### **RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/e-mails/express/airmail letters in Spanish or your own language:**

- expressing concern for the safety of those involved in the exhumation of the clandestine cemetery in San Francisco, Nentón, Huehuetenango department;
- calling for immediate and adequate measures to guarantee their safety;
- calling for an immediate and thorough investigation into the reported intimidation, and urging that those responsible be brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to adopt Amnesty International's recommendations regarding their duty to the victims of human rights violations and their families, calling on them to ensure that all reports of clandestine graves are fully investigated, and that exhumations are conducted promptly and according to the United Nations Manual for the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-Legal, Arbitrary or Summary Executions.

#### **APPEALS TO:**

President of the Republic

S.E. Alvaro Arzú Irigoyen  
 Presidente de la República de Guatemala  
 6ª Calle y 7ª Avenida, Zona 1  
 Palacio Nacional, Guatemala, GUATEMALA  
**Faxes: +502 221 4537/230 1508**  
**Telegrams: Presidente, Guatemala, GUATEMALA**  
**Salutation: Sr. Presidente/Dear President**  
**E-mail: AlvaroArzu@guate.net / alvaroarzu@guateconnect.com**

Minister of Interior

Lic. Rodolfo Mendoza Rosales  
 Ministro de Gobernación, Ministerio de Gobernación  
 Despacho Ministerial, Of. N° 8,  
 6ª Calle y 7ª Avenida, Zona 1, Palacio Nacional  
 Palacio Nacional, Guatemala, GUATEMALA  
**Faxes: +502 362 0269/232 1207**  
**Telegrams: Ministro de Gobernación, Guatemala, GUATEMALA**  
**Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister**

Minister of Defence

Gral. Héctor Mario Barrios Zelada  
 Ministro de Defensa, Ministerio de Defensa  
 Avenida Reforma 2-43, Zona 10, Guatemala, GUATEMALA  
**Telegrams: Ministro de Defensa, Guatemala, Guatemala**  
**Faxes: +502 360 9909**  
**Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister**

Commander of Huehuetenango Military Zone

Comandante de la Zona Militar de Huehuetenango  
 Aldea Las Lagunas, Zona 10  
 Huehuetenango, Huehuetenango, GUATEMALA  
**Fax: 502 764 1261**  
**Salutation: Sr. Comandante/ Dear Commander**

**COPIES TO:**FAMDEGUA

9a Calle "A" 3-56, Zona 1  
 Ciudad de Guatemala GUATEMALA  
**Fax: +502 232 9432**  
**E-mail: Famdegua@guate.net**

Attorney General

Lic. Carlos García Regás  
 Procurador General de la Nación  
 Procuraduría General de la Nación  
 15 Avenida 9-69, Zona 13, Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA  
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and to diplomatic representatives of Guatemala accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 2 April 1999.