

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 34/057/2002

UA 282/02 Possible Extrajudicial execution/

13 September 2002

fear for

GUATEMALA Manuel García de la Cruz (m) - killed
Isabela García (f)
and other members of CONAVIGUA

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Isabela García and other members of the Guatemalan indigenous human rights organization, *Coordinadora Nacional de Viudas de Guatemala* (CONAVIGUA), National Coordination of Guatemala widows, in the area of Chuchuca, Zacualpa, El Quiché department, after the torture and murder of Isabela García's husband, Manuel García de la Cruz, on 6 September near the community.

Manuel García de la Cruz left his home in the community of Chuchuca in the northwestern highlands of Guatemala on the night of 6 September, and travelled in the direction of the town of Joyabaj to buy corn. However, he never returned and members of his community later found his tortured body. He had been decapitated and his ears, nose and eyes cut out.

The victim was an active supporter of CONAVIGUA, participating in training courses and other activities aimed at promoting the development of his community. He had been involved in all the exhumations and re-burials carried out by CONAVIGUA in the area (see background information), accompanying the widows to court for the necessary legal procedures. CONAVIGUA considers that his brutal torture and murder are intended as a clear warning to its members and their families in the community because of their work for reconciliation, peace and justice in Guatemala. The organization fears that local civil patrollers, who served as civilian auxiliaries to the military during Guatemala's long-term civil conflict which shook the country for a period of over thirty years, wish to cover up the atrocities in which they were involved and may have been involved in his torture and extrajudicial execution.

Television reporters who came to cover the CONAVIGUA press conference on 11 September denouncing Manuel García's murder were attacked by unknown individuals and their camera equipment stolen.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

CONAVIGUA was formed in 1988 to struggle for respect for human rights, particularly the rights of Guatemala's indigenous peoples, and the rights of indigenous women victims of the genocide, including those who had lost their husbands or had themselves suffered rape in the context of the conflict. Initially formed by indigenous women widowed in the course of the conflict, membership now includes single and abandoned mothers, young women, as well as men. Its mandate now also includes "opposition to militarization and all forms of racism and discrimination against the identity, culture and harmony of indigenous communities".

CONAVIGUA has also become very active in pressing for exhumations of the many mass graves where indigenous victims of the massacres carried out by the Guatemalan army and the civil patrols during their counter-insurgency campaign in the countryside were anonymously buried. According to the organization's latest figures, it has succeeded in having the remains of 365 people exhumed from secret grave sites located in 35 communities in the largely indigenous departments of Baja Verapaz, El Quiché, Chimaltenango and Sololá e Izabal.

Over the years, many CONAVIGUA members have suffered threats and intimidation because of their work (see UA 261/90, AMR 34/36/90UA, and UA 246/91, AMR 34/34/91). CONAVIGUA's central offices in Guatemala City have also been raided on a number of occasions. Recently, in the context of an escalation of threats and intimidation directed at human rights defenders in Guatemala, and the public resurgence of the civil patrols, forensic experts involved in exhumations of mass graves were targeted (see UA 68/02, AMR 34/014/2002, and further information AMR 34/25/2002). These cases suggest that those who perpetrated the massacres are becoming increasingly concerned at the exhumations supported by various Guatemalan non-governmental organizations including CONAVIGUA and the evidence they are unearthing about the massacres and their likely perpetrators.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Spanish, English or your own language:

- expressing grave concern at the torture and murder of Manuel García de la Cruz, noting that it is one of the most serious human rights violations reported from Guatemala in recent years;
- insisting that this outrageous crime must be investigated and the perpetrators brought to justice if the international community including the Consultative Group of major donor countries is to have any faith that the Guatemalan Peace Accords are to be truly implemented and the country returned to rule of law;
- calling on the authorities to assure the protection of all members of CONAVIGUA as they carry out their lawful human rights work, including those in the Zacualpa and Joyabaj areas of El Quiché department;
- urging the government to establish its own program of exhumations as called for by the Historical Clarification Commission (CEH) established under the Peace Accords, so that all victims of the conflict years can be identified and returned to their families for proper burials

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic of Guatemala

Lic. Alfonso Portillo Cabrera

Presidente de la República de Guatemala

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Fax: (502) 239 0090

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente

Vice-President of the Republic of Guatemala

Lic. Juan Francisco Reyes López

Vicepresidente de la República de Guatemala

6a. Avenida "A" 4-18, Zona 1, Guatemala, GUATEMALA

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Minister of Defence

General Robin Maclon Morán Muñoz

Ministro de Defensa Nacional

Ministerio de Defensa

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COPIES TO:

Human Rights Organization

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Newspapers

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Fax: +502 332 9761

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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 25 October 2002.