



POLICE INVOLVEMENT IN KILLINGS IN GUATEMALA

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**‘GUATEMALANS ARE NOT IGNORANT OF THE PROBLEMS
CONFRONTING THEIR COUNTRY AND ARE AWARE OF THE POLICIES
THAT COULD BE PURSUED TO AMELIORATE THOSE PROBLEMS... THE
QUESTION TODAY IS LESS WHAT SHOULD BE DONE THAN WHETHER
GUATEMALA HAS THE WILL TO DO SO.’**

UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, February 2007

Killings by members of the police, or by clandestine groups in which former or serving members of the police are believed to be involved, continue to be reported in Guatemala. Data collected by other human rights organizations in recent years – including the Centre for Legal Action on Human Rights (Centro de Acción Legal en Derechos Humanos, CALDH), the Archbishop’s Office of Human Rights in Guatemala (Oficina de Derechos Humanos del Arzobispado de Guatemala, ODHA) and Security in Democracy (Seguridad en Democracia) – suggest that the number of such killings in any one year may be in the hundreds.

The cases described here are drawn from the many killings reported to Amnesty International involving police officers, former officers or, in one case, soldiers carrying out law enforcement operations.

The circumstances surrounding some of these deaths suggest that they may have been unlawful and deliberate killings carried out on the orders of, or with the complicity or acquiescence of, the authorities – that is, extrajudicial executions.

Many of the victims share common characteristics. They are predominantly

young and many have come into contact with the criminal justice system and either have a criminal record or are suspected of involvement in crime by the local security forces. Some appear to have been targeted because they are in some way associated with people suspected of involvement in crime. One thing most victims have in common is that they come from some of the most marginalized and deprived neighbourhoods in Guatemala.

The killings themselves also often follow a marked pattern. The victims’ bodies are often discovered in isolated places, such as rubbish tips, ravines or vacant lots. Many are found with their hands tied behind their backs and the bodies show injuries consistent with torture. In most cases, the victims were either strangled or shot in the head at close range.

Some of the language used in the media, and at times by the authorities, to describe these killings indicates an attitude of tolerance, and even of support for, these crimes, which are often referred to as “social cleansing”. The failure to investigate the killings promptly and effectively – or indeed in some cases to undertake any meaningful investigation whatsoever –



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indicates a level of acquiescence among some officials. It also shows a failure on the part of the Guatemalan authorities to fulfil their obligations under international human rights law to protect the right to life and to bring to justice those responsible for violating this right.

Lengthy delays in investigations, a failure to gather evidence or testimony and reluctance on the part of officials to provide prosecutors with the information they request are common and have resulted in widespread impunity for those responsible for killings. Even with strong eyewitness testimony of alleged police involvement in killings, cases are rarely prosecuted. The absence of effective protection for witnesses is another major barrier to effective investigation and prosecution.

The bodies of seven alleged gang members found in Guatemala City, 9 February 2006.

Aspects of the execution-style murders were reminiscent of crimes committed by death squads in the 1980s.

Front cover: A forensic officer examines one of two teenage boys whose mutilated bodies were found by the side of the road in Guatemala City, 13 August 2005. © AP/PA Photo/Rodrigo Abd

CASE STUDY 1

Fifteen-year-old Carlos López was reportedly seen being forced into a police patrol car in February 2007 in a neighbourhood in the south-west of Guatemala City. He was reportedly walking down a street close to the local police station on his way to see his girlfriend, when, according to three witnesses living in the street, police officers abducted him. The family immediately raised the alarm. On the day Carlos López went missing, the family went to a local human rights organization, the Archbishop's Human Rights Office, who helped them lodge complaints with the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Police Internal Affairs Unit. However, witnesses refused to attend a line-up to identify the suspected police officers, arguing that they feared for their lives. The Public Prosecutor's Office did not pursue the case. Carlos López' family never saw him again. His fate and whereabouts have never been clarified.

Throughout this briefing the real names of the victims and details of the circumstances of the killings have been withheld in order to ensure that the security of families and witnesses is not compromised.



AN INADEQUATE RESPONSE TO THE PUBLIC SECURITY SITUATION

Guatemala continues to experience high levels of violent crime, including homicides. The Guatemalan government has acknowledged the gravity of the public security situation many times in the press. Reporting in 2008 on its activities the previous year, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Guatemala acknowledged that the country faced a critical public security situation.

In his 2007 report following his visit to Guatemala, the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions highlighted not only the level of violence, but also evidence of police involvement in such crimes:

"[A] number of violent phenomena afflict Guatemala, including social cleansing, the rapidly rising killing of women, lynching, the killing of persons for their sexual identity or orientation, the killing of human rights defenders, and prison violence. In some cases, the State bears direct responsibility. There is strong evidence that some acts of social cleansing – executions of gang members, criminal suspects, and other 'undesirables' – are committed by police personnel." The UN Special Rapporteur's 2007 report concluded with a number of recommendations including:

- Calling on every level of government to absolutely and categorically reject the resort to executions of suspects and others considered socially undesirable as a strategy for ensuring order and reducing crime;
- Calling on the authorities to reform and expand the criminal justice system – especially the police and the Public Prosecutor's Office – to investigate and prosecute murders effectively;

Police and forensic teams examine the body of a young man discovered in a deserted area on the outskirts of Guatemala City, June 2008.

- Calling on Guatemala to fully accept the scope of state responsibility under international law and take the necessary measures – including costly measures – to bring crime under control in a manner that is effective and just;
- Calling on Congress to enact the legislation required to establish the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala and the package of security-related legislation needed to realize the Peace Accords;
- Calling on Congress to greatly increase the funds allocated to the institutions of the criminal justice system;
- Calling for the introduction of an adequate witness-protection programme to address the needs and fears of witnesses to human rights violations, including the victims of such violations, in which agents of the state or other powerful actors are implicated. This could be established under the supervision of the Ombudsman's Office (Procurador de los Derechos Humanos).



© AP/PA Photo/Moises Castillo

A police officer stands over five suspected gang members, Guatemala City, 14 March 2006.

ensuring that agents of the state respect the right to life and do not carry out unlawful and deliberate killings. In addition, the authorities must conduct effective and prompt investigations into killings when they do occur – whether the suspects are agents of the state or private individuals – and bring those responsible before a competent court to be tried according to internationally recognized standards. However, as Amnesty International's research shows, the Guatemalan authorities are systematically failing to meet these obligations.

In 2009 the Special Rapporteur issued a follow-up report examining implementation of the 2007 recommendations. He noted that legislation had been passed to establish the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (Comisión Internacional Contra la Impunidad en Guatemala, CICIG), which is a UN mission set up to assist in investigations and prosecutions of organized crime. However, he also stated that: "The State continues to inadequately investigate and respond to unlawful killings. Much-needed improvements to the criminal justice institutions, witness protection, budget allocation, and fiscal policy have not been implemented."

According to the Guatemalan Code of Criminal Procedure, the Public Prosecutor's Office (the *Ministerio Público* or Public Ministry) is responsible for the investigation and prosecution of crimes; the police play a subordinate role, taking their lead from the Public Prosecutor's Office (Article 107). Even though all investigations come under the control of the Public Prosecutor's Office, the police can initiate investigations on their own initiative (Article 112). In addition, in cases of criminal acts subject to mandatory prosecution (that is, those for

which a complaint by a private citizen is not necessary for the Public Prosecutor's Office to initiate an investigation, for example cases of homicide), the police are required to act with urgency to gather evidence and prevent suspects fleeing (Article 304). The judicial system then adjudicates on cases presented to it by the Public Prosecutor's Office. The Human Rights Ombudsman's Office is an independent agency funded by the state with a monitoring and oversight role with regard to the respect of human rights.

However, the institutions charged with ensuring justice are not effective. A 2005 report by the Public Prosecutor's Office noted that the conviction rate was approximately 1.98 per cent for homicides. In 2007 the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions put the conviction rate at 1.4 per cent. In effect, approximately 98 per cent of homicides go unresolved in Guatemala. In a 2007 report, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime has stated that "in such a climate of impunity, the deterrent effect of the law is minimal."

Under international human rights law, Guatemala has an obligation to respect and ensure the right to life. This includes

CASE STUDY 2

In May 2006 Lidia Osorio and Manuel Aguirre, a couple in their twenties, were travelling by car in Guatemala City. It was a trip they took every day. Manuel Aguirre would stop by his girlfriend's house in the morning and take her to the bank where she worked. He did not have a regular job and police suspected that he was dealing in stolen cars. Around 40 minutes after leaving Lidia Osorio's house, the car was stopped, allegedly by police officers. The couple were asked for car registration documents and when they could not produce their papers, one of the men swore at them and threatened them. The couple were taken away by the alleged police officers and never seen alive again.

When Lidia Osorio did not arrive at work, a colleague rang her parents to ask where she was. According to witnesses, the couple was seen being stopped and detained and then being taken away by the alleged police officers. The families of Lidia Osorio and Manuel Aguirre immediately began looking for them. They visited the Police Internal Affairs Unit, the Police Criminal Investigation Unit, the Police Office for Attention to Victims, and various local police stations. They also spoke to three senior police officers in other units and went to the police Anti-Kidnapping Unit to lodge their complaint. However, the police officers on duty refused to register the complaint because less than 24 hours had passed since the incident. The families returned the following day to lodge their complaint.

Despite the disturbing reports of their abduction and the frantic efforts of the victims' families, the investigating police officer did not interview relatives until 28 hours after the couple were reported missing. He conducted three interviews in five days and concluded the preliminary report by stating that the car was registered to another person and that Manuel Aguirre had a criminal record.

Some 10 days after the couple was last seen, the public prosecutor leading the investigation wrote to the National Director of Police – who received the letter three days later – asking if there had been a police roadblock at the location where Lidia Osorio and Manuel Aguirre had been stopped. Twenty days later the prosecutor received a reply stating that at least 10 police officers had been manning the roadblock at that location and listing their names. Over the next months the prosecutor sent letters to different government agencies to try to establish whether the couple had left the country and requesting information about any activity involving their bank accounts. However, it was not until three and a half months after the couple were last seen that the prosecutor interviewed three of the police officers who had been at the roadblock. In response to questions, one officer said he could not remember if he was there or not because so much time had elapsed. The two other officers admitted being at the roadblock, but said that they were having breakfast in a nearby café at the specific time Lidia Osorio and Manuel Aguirre were alleged to have been stopped and taken away.

The majority of the investigative effort by the Public Prosecutor's Office focused on establishing the details surrounding the ownership and registration of the car in which Lidia Osorio and Manuel Aguirre were travelling; inquiries revealed this to have been a stolen car. The diligent and vigorous pursuit of that element of the investigation stands in stark contrast with the delayed and minimal questioning of police officers alleged to have been at the roadblock.

Six months after they were last seen at the roadblock, the bodies of Lidia Osorio and Manuel Aguirre were discovered by farm workers on a motorway in a rural area some distance from Guatemala City. The cause of death could not be determined because the bodies were in an advanced state of decomposition. Both were wearing the same clothes as on the day they were abducted. Forensic reports estimate that both died a short time after they were last seen at the roadblock.

CASE STUDY 3

In January 2008 the bodies of 17-year-old Edward González and 23-year-old Freddy Colindres were found by the roadside in woodland a short drive from their home town and some 30 minutes' drive from Guatemala City. Photographs of their bodies show that the two men had heavy bruising and that they had been strangled. Their attackers had wrapped a rope around each man's neck and then inserted a piece of wood that, with every turn, tightened the rope. Both men had then been shot in the head at close range.

Their families told Amnesty International that both Edward González and Freddy Colindres had been involved in criminal activity and were believed to be members of a gang involved in stealing phones, motorbikes and, sometimes, cars. The families told Amnesty International that the night before their bodies were found, the two young friends had been out drinking in their home town. They apparently got into a fight with another young man who ran off. Edward González and Freddy Colindres chased him into his home. Neighbours came out onto the street to see what the noise was about. The families said that a group of local residents beat and tried to lynch the two young men. Someone in the crowd phoned the police who arrived a short time afterwards. Witnesses said that the police claimed they were taking Edward González and Freddy Colindres to hospital. The two young men were put in the police car, semi-conscious. They were never seen alive again.

Their bodies were found the following morning. According to forensic estimates they had been killed some eight hours earlier. In an interview with Amnesty International some five months after the deaths, the prosecutor leading the

investigation stated that investigators had worked on the hypothesis that Edward González and Freddy Colindres were part of a gang engaged in extortion and were probably killed by bus or truck drivers in retaliation. The prosecutor had archived the case and no further investigation was envisaged. The case file contained no records of interviews with witnesses or suspects, or indeed any attempts to question them. There was no indication in the file notes that evidence had been collected or, indeed, of any active investigation of any kind.

The complete failure by the Public Prosecutor's Office to initiate a meaningful investigation into the killings means that evidence to support or refute the claims is lacking. However, the reports are consistent with other allegations of similar actions by groups involved in killing criminal suspects.

Two other boys from among the same group of friends, 16-year-old Juan and 13-year-old Francisco, were abducted by police in the same town in early 2007. Their bodies were discovered a few days later in a Guatemala City neighbourhood.

A few weeks after Edward González and Freddy Colindres were killed, the press reported the death of another alleged member of the group, 17-year-old Tomás Pérez. A note was left by his body warning others to stay away from crime. The local prosecutor investigating the case told Amnesty International that he had received information that police may have been involved in these killings, but he had not pursued this allegation. He claimed that the family had not provided any information or made any complaints.

A few weeks after the death of Tomás Pérez, another member of the gang, 17-year-old Erick Quinto, was killed. The cause of death was multiple gunshot wounds.

None of the six killings has been investigated and the perpetrators remain at large. People in the town where the killings took place told Amnesty International that a clandestine group, whose members include private individuals and retired and serving police officers, was operating in the town and killing people suspected of criminal activity. Local human rights activists who have investigated killings in the area confirmed this. Despite widespread allegations that such a group was involved in killings in the town, the authorities have taken no visible or significant steps to prevent or investigate killings, or to prosecute and punish those responsible.

There is an urgent need for a rigorous and independent investigation to establish the circumstances of the deaths of all six victims – Edward González, Freddy Colindres, Juan, Francisco, Tomás Pérez and Erick Quinto – and to bring those responsible to justice. It is also vital that the authorities investigate reports that a clandestine group – operating with the knowledge, and possibly even the involvement, of current or former members of the security forces – is responsible for the killing of many young people in the town. They also have an obligation to ensure that such killings stop and that the perpetrators are brought to justice.

CASE STUDY 4

Ricardo Valdez, a young man in his twenties who wanted to go to law school, was allegedly detained by a military patrol near his home in Guatemala City in August 2007. A military detachment had been stationed near his home to help police the local area. He had been drinking with a group of friends in his local neighbourhood and at some point went to buy some more alcohol for the group. Eyewitnesses recall that as he walked towards a local store, he stopped to talk to a woman and there was some kind of argument between Ricardo Valdez and the woman's family. Somebody called the military patrol which was nearby. The soldiers entered the woman's house and a fight broke out. Ricardo Valdez was seen being loaded into a pick-up truck being used by the soldiers and driven away.

Some witnesses told Amnesty International that the pick-up truck simply left the scene; others said they saw Ricardo Valdez being dumped in the street a short distance away and that he was picked up shortly afterwards by men driving an unmarked car. What is not disputed is that he was never seen alive again.

The following day his body was discovered in a field by farm workers. His hands and feet were bound and he had been shot six times. The local forensic examiner recorded bullet wounds to the head, right eye, neck, thorax, left knee and right knee, plus scrapes on his face, shoulder and thigh and bruising in many other parts of the body. Two bullet wounds had gunpowder residue around the point of entry, indicating he was shot at point-blank range.

The investigation into the killing of Ricardo Valdez has progressed slowly. Two and a half months after his death, police investigators interviewed an officer from the unit to which the pick-up truck seen by witnesses was alleged to belong. The officer, who was not alleged to have been part of the patrol that night, stated that he had no recollection of the event and that the individuals in the unit alleged to have been on patrol that day had all been transferred to different parts of the country. He also stated that he had no knowledge of the whereabouts of the vehicle alleged to have been used.

Ten months after Ricardo Valdez' death, Amnesty International was told that the investigating prosecutor had not received information about the identity of those soldiers allegedly on patrol in the area that night or details about the patrol car, despite several requests to the relevant officials. In March 2009, a full 18 months after the killing, a judicial order was sought to compel the Ministry of Defence to provide the information requested. As of September 2009 the information had still not been handed over by the Ministry of Defence.

The judicial order and the continuing investigation mean that progress may yet be made in identifying suspects. However, given the conflicting testimony of the various witnesses, physical evidence is particularly crucial. This may prove difficult to obtain from the pick-up truck, if and when it is identified, because of the extended period of time that has passed since the killing. Nevertheless, the family of Ricardo Valdez remain hopeful and optimistic that they will one day see justice done and that their son's killers will be brought to justice.



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The bodies of two alleged gang members, Guatemala City, 1 June 2006.



A LEGACY OF VIOLENCE

Levels of violent crime in Guatemala are very high and the number of recorded homicides has increased during the past five years. According to the Ministry of the Interior, there were 6,292 homicides in 2008, approximately equivalent to 49 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants.

In the past 15 years or so, street gangs known as *maras* have sprung up all over Central America and the USA. Widely involved in crime, the *maras* are composed mostly of teenagers and young men and women. Studies suggest that they emerged from the ranks of those who had gone to the USA to escape the armed conflicts in Central America in the 1980s and who were subsequently deported back to Central America in the 1990s. Some of the young people returning from the USA found themselves facing a largely alien culture and sought the company of fellow deportees. These groups formed the basis of the *maras*. By 2005, some 14,000 people were estimated to belong to gangs in Guatemala; gang membership is believed to have increased since then.

Another major element contributing to the critical public security situation in Guatemala is the widespread prevalence of so-called clandestine groups. Termed as such by civil society, these groups are best described as criminal networks involving serving and former members of the army and the police, the business sector, private security companies, common criminals and gang members. They form the bedrock of organized crime and have embedded themselves within the state structure where they are able to use their positions and contacts to control lucrative illegal activities and ensure their continued immunity from prosecution. Clandestine groups have their roots in and sprang from paramilitary and vigilante groups set up during Guatemala's internal armed conflict (1960-1996) to participate in and support intelligence units and other special military units that operated with impunity and outside the law. These "death squads", normally off-duty soldiers, were tasked by their superiors with executing selected individuals considered "the enemy", such as trade union leaders or opposition activists. Enjoying continuing impunity and considerable power, these groups did not disband when the internal

armed conflict came to an end. To date there has been no serious initiative by the state to hold those responsible for these serious human rights violations to account.

An estimated 200,000 people were extrajudicially executed or forcibly disappeared during Guatemala's internal armed conflict. Two landmark inquiries – the 1998 Human Rights Office of the Catholic Church inquiry (known as the Recuperation of Historical Memory Report) and the 1999 UN-sponsored Historical Clarification Commission (known as the Memory of Silence Report) – into the gross human rights violations of the conflict years found that the Guatemalan military and their allies had been responsible for the vast majority of abuses, including enforced disappearances, extrajudicial executions and torture. Among many other human rights violations, the Historical Clarification Commission collected detailed testimony and documentation regarding 23,671 cases of victims of arbitrary execution and 6,159 cases of enforced disappearance. The Historical Clarification Commission estimated that government forces and associated paramilitary groups were

Impoverished neighbourhood in Guatemala City, 2009. Guatemala City has around 3 million inhabitants, many of whom live in shantytowns or slums.



responsible for 92 per cent of arbitrary executions and 91 per cent of enforced disappearances. To date, fewer than five of these cases of serious human rights violations have resulted in convictions in a Guatemalan court, and even then, only low-ranking officers have been prosecuted. No high-ranking officer or official has ever been brought to justice for their role in ordering, planning or carrying out the widespread and systematic human rights violations over which they presided.

During the internal armed conflict, the majority of the victims of killings and disappearances were those who were suspected of sympathizing with armed opposition groups. However, there have also been allegations that people were killed because of their social background or perceived association with crime.

In 1999, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights ruled in the case of five street children who had been killed by police officers. The Court found that Guatemala had violated the right to life and personal integrity, judicial guarantees and rights of the child. The judgement stated:

“In Guatemala, at the time the events occurred [1990], there was a common pattern of illegal acts perpetrated by State security agents against ‘street children’; this practice included threats, arrests, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and homicides as a measure to counter juvenile delinquency and vagrancy.”

Amnesty International has conducted research in the past into extrajudicial executions in which victims are believed to have been killed because of their social background or their perceived association with crime. In 1990 Amnesty International published *Guatemala: extra-judicial executions and human rights violations against street children* (AMR 34/37/90). This documented extrajudicial executions by police officers, torture, cruel inhuman and degrading treatment of street children, the failure to provide medical assistance and widespread intimidation and threats against local human rights defenders working on these issues.

STATE RESPONSIBILITY

In 1992 Guatemala ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, thereby voluntarily accepting a legally binding treaty obligation to respect and ensure the right to life. This includes an obligation to undertake prompt and effective investigations into all killings. Guatemala also ratified the American Convention on Human Rights in 1978. This also includes a binding obligation to respect the right to life.

The UN Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions set out measures which governments should take to prevent extrajudicial executions, as well as measures for undertaking thorough, prompt and impartial investigations of killings where there are grounds for thinking they may have been carried out by public officials or others acting in an official capacity, or at their instigation or with their consent or acquiescence. The UN Principles also state that governments should ensure that those identified by the investigation as having participated in such killings are brought to justice.



CASE STUDY 5

Two brothers, José and Mario Orozco, and Luis Méndez, one of the men who worked in their garage in the north of Guatemala City, were abducted in early January 2007. According to witnesses, a police car pulled up outside the garage and several officers – some uniformed and others in plainclothes – got out, went into the garage and started beating the men. The officers then dragged the three young men into a police car and drove away. None of the three was ever seen alive again.

Witnesses alerted the men's relatives and gave them details of the licence plate number of the police vehicle they had seen outside the garage. The family went to the local police station and spoke to the officer in charge. He radioed the officers assigned to the police car which had been identified by witnesses. Twenty minutes later, the officers returned and claimed that they had not been in the area at the time the three young men were assaulted and detained. The officer in charge told relatives that nothing more could be done and no efforts were made to investigate the reported abduction or to verify the officers' claims.

The brothers' relatives visited hospitals and police stations in a desperate effort to locate them. They obtained a court order demanding that the police present the three young men before a judge and give legitimate reasons for their arrest or detention.

The following day, the families learned from news reports that the bodies of two young men had been found on a motorway an hour from Guatemala City. The bodies were identified as those of Mario Orozco and Luis Méndez and bore signs of beatings. The autopsy report gave the cause of death as "asphyxia by strangulation". After identifying the bodies at the morgue, relatives and friends returned to the area to search for José Orozco; his body has never been found.

The investigation into the abductions and killings has so far produced no results. Amnesty International was informed that no forensic tests were carried out on the police car to establish whether there was evidence that the three men had been in the vehicle and no efforts were made to verify the stories of the police officers allegedly involved. As a result of this failure to carry out an effective investigation at the crucial preliminary stages, the case has now stalled and bringing those responsible to justice will be that much more difficult.

Despite Guatemala's obligations under international human rights law, and the specific measures recommended in the UN Principles, successive governments have shown a lack of political will to investigate alleged extrajudicial executions carried out either during or after the internal armed conflict. Guatemala, according to its own Constitution, is bound by international human rights law and its Criminal Code prohibits extrajudicial executions. However, a national legal framework is not in itself sufficient; it must be accompanied by a clear political will to prevent and punish deliberate and unlawful killings.

Amnesty International believes these killings and allegations of the involvement, complicity or acquiescence of members of the security forces, in particular the police, must be taken seriously. The authorities have an obligation to ensure that there are effective, prompt, impartial and exhaustive investigations into these killings and that those responsible are brought to justice. So far they have patently failed to fulfil these obligations.



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Young human rights activists in Guatemala City demand justice for the victims of police killings, June 2009.

TAKE ACTION NOW

Please write to President Álvaro Colom:

- Expressing concern at the number of killings of young people, mostly boys and men, in circumstances which suggest they may have been extrajudicially executed and where eyewitnesses claim police officers were involved;
- Expressing concern that despite the input and efforts of various donor countries, international and national human rights experts as well as UN offices, virtually no progress is being made in curbing these abuses;
- Stating that as Head of State he is responsible for guaranteeing that members of the police or other security forces involved in law enforcement operations do not take the law into their own hands and do not perpetrate, encourage, condone or acquiesce in human rights violations such as killings;

- Stating that as Head of State he is also responsible for guaranteeing that those who abuse their power and commit human rights violations, or who fail to ensure those under their command do not commit human rights violations, are subject to the full weight of the law and are brought before the courts and held to account for their crimes;
- Asking to be informed of the efforts his government is making to stop the killing of young people in Guatemala and to end the involvement of members of the security forces, in particular police officers, in these killings.

President of the Republic
Lic. Álvaro Colom
Presidente de la República
Casa Presidencial, 6ª Avenida, 4-18, Zona 1
Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala
Fax +502 2221 4423 or +502 2238 3579
Salutation: Dear President/Estimado
Sr. Presidente

Please write to the Attorney General, calling on him to:

- Ensure that prompt, impartial and effective investigations are carried out into all of the killings and alleged cases of torture described in this publication as well as other cases reported by national human rights organizations;
- Ensure that these investigations conform to the standards set out in the UN Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions.

Attorney General and Head of the Public Prosecutor's Office
Lic. José Amílcar Velásquez Zárate
Fiscal General de la República y Jefe del Ministerio Público
8ª Avenida 10-67, Zona 1, Antiguo Edificio del Banco de los Trabajadores,
Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala
Fax: +502 2411 9124 or +502 2411 9326
Salutation: Dear Attorney General/Estimado
Sr. Fiscal General

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Amnesty International is a global movement of 2.2 million people in more than 150 countries and territories who campaign to end grave abuses of human rights.

Our vision is for every person to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion – funded mainly by our membership and public donations.

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