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Guatemala: Killings of women continue unchallenged

On 12 August 2005, Claudina Isabel Velázquez Paíz, a 19-year-old law student left her home in Guatemala City to go to university. It was the last time her family saw her alive.

Claudina's body was found on 13 August 2005. She had been raped and shot in the head.

"Claudina is yet another victim in a country that fails to protect women from violence," said Amnesty International on the eve of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, which is being marked in Guatemala with activities organized by victims' relatives and NGOs .

As with the hundreds of other cases of women killed in Guatemala, preliminary investigations around the case of Claudina were unsatisfactory.

Whilst forensic doctors carried out basic tests on Claudina's body, the authorities failed to pursue important leads. No forensic tests were carried out on her clothes. Instead, they were returned to her family, potentially losing important evidence. No tests were carried out on the main suspects to determine whether they had fired a gun. Potential witnesses and valuable leads were also reportedly not pursued.

Since the publication in June 2005 of Amnesty International's report on killings of women, Guatemalan civil society has continued to press the authorities to deal effectively with the killings. As of July 2005, there has been a draft law in Congress to create a National Forensic Institute. However, Amnesty International is disappointed that the draft law does not appear to have government backing.

Amnesty International welcomes the increase of resources assigned to the investigation of murders of women within the Special Prosecutor's Office for Crimes Against Life. "However, as long as the vast majority of killings remain uninvestigated and unpunished, these steps remain inadequate," said Amnesty International.

According to information received by Amnesty International, the transfer of cases of murdered women to the Special Prosecutor's Office for Crimes Against Life since January 2005 has not secured convictions or sentences on any cases.

According to press reports, 531 women were killed between January and October 2005, surpassing the total figure of 527 in 2004. The police have also reported that sexual violence against women has increased.

“Claudina’s parents would have been celebrating her 20th birthday on 21 November. Instead, they are fighting for justice for the killing of their daughter.”

Background Information

Amnesty International members across the Americas will mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women by visiting Guatemalan embassies in their countries calling for justice for the hundreds of cases of murdered women in Guatemala.

For a copy of Amnesty International’s report on killings of women in Guatemala, please see:

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGAMR340172005>

Public Document

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