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GUATEMALA: FOR OVER SIX MONTHS THE GOVERNMENT HAS TURNED A DEAF EAR TO AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL' S CALLS FOR AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE POSSIBLE "DISAPPEARANCE" OF "MINCHO"

For over six months the Guatemalan government has made no answer to Amnesty International's repeated calls for an investigation into the circumstances surrounding the arrest and possible "disappearance" of presumed guerrilla fighter Juan José Cabrera, alias Mincho.

"Today we reiterate our call to the authorities, particularly in light of the findings of the investigations carried out by the United Nations Mission for Guatemala (MINUGUA)", underlined the organisation.

MINUGUA stated yesterday that its investigations into the case, the importance of the latter and its knowledge of methods used in similar operations had led it to the conclusion that Juan José Cabrera was seized by members of the security forces. The organisation also indicated that the government had rejected its request to interview the members of the security forces who took part in this operation.

Amnesty International requests the Guatemalan government to fulfil its international obligations to ensure that all reports on possible extrajudicial executions and "disappearances" be investigated without delay, thereby clearly signalling that it will respect its international commitments on human rights.

"Despite the fact that the Guatemalan government has publicly denied that Juan José Cabrera was captured and killed by members of the army on 19 October, to date we have no information to show that these statements are backed up by official investigations by the Guatemalan authorities and, of course, if such investigations did take place, the methods utilised and conclusions have not been made public", says the organisation.

On 31 October 1996, Amnesty International publicly condemned the kidnapping of Mrs Olga de Novella by members of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unit (URNG), the former armed opposition group. The organisation called for an investigation into the circumstances of the arrest and exchange of Rafael Augusto Valdizón Núñez ("Isaías"), who was apparently detained with Juan José Cabrera ("Mincho"), and for the Guatemalan government to clarify whether the guerrilla fighter had appeared before judicial authorities during the six hours of his arrest, and whether the latter had taken part in questioning him, as laid down by the Guatemalan constitution. It did not reply.

On 24 April this year, following a fact-finding mission into this case by an Amnesty International delegation, the Deputy Secretary General of the organisation requested in a letter to the President of the Republic that a swift and immediate investigation be carried out into the "disappearance" of Juan José Cabrera ("Mincho"). It did not reply.

At the same time, at a meeting with representatives of the URNG on 23rd April, Amnesty International called on this organisation to furnish the state authorities with all information it had concerning the disappearance of Juan José Cabrera.

“There is now only one way in which the Guatemalan government can show a political willingness to combat impunity, and that is by rapidly and efficiently investigating the presumed disappearance on 19 October 1996 of Juan José Cabrera (“Mincho”) by the security forces, said Amnesty International. “It is now up to the government to signal its desire for change with specific measures”.

Background information

Juan José Cabrera, alias Mincho, a presumed member of ORPA (Revolutionary Organisation of the People in Arms, one branch of the former armed opposition group the URNG), “disappeared”, supposedly at the hands of the security forces, on 19 October 1996. That same day another member of ORPA, Rafael Augusto Valdizón Núñez, alias Isaías, was exchanged for Olga de Novella. Novella had been kidnapped by a URNG commando on 25 August 1996.

For years Amnesty International has been documenting cases of torture, “disappearances”, and extra-judicial executions of members of armed opposition groups following their capture by the army and, in some cases, after transfer to secret detention centres.

One case investigated by the organisation is that of Emiliana Patrocinia Mazariego Hernández (“Cristina”), a member of the URNG, who is presumed to have been summarily executed by the army on 13 August 1995, following a shoot-out at El Bramadero, a farm in the municipality of Sayaxché in Petén department. Several wounds were found on her body and a coup de grace had been fired at short range.

Throughout the world Amnesty International condemns the torture and execution of prisoners, deliberate and arbitrary killings and kidnappings by armed opposition groups.

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