

PUBLIC

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Extrajudicial execution/fear for safety

6 July 2001

GUATEMALA

**Carlos Morales, peasant leader
Other villagers from Repollal Suquinay de Purulhá, Los
Cimientos and Santa María Tzeja**

Killed: Domingo Us Quixán, community leader

Gunmen have attacked three rural communities, killing one community leader and attempting to kill another. In all three cases, the assailants were described as former members of the so-called civil patrols. These paramilitary groups operated alongside the army, and committed gross human rights abuses, during Guatemala's long civil conflict. They were declared illegal, and were supposedly disbanded, under the Peace Accords which ended the conflict in 1996. However, local peasant groups and human rights organisations report that they are now becoming active again.

Domingo Us Quixán, a well-known community leader, was shot and killed on 28 June as he worked his plot of land in Santa María Tzeja, Quiché. Us had recently received an anonymous death threat. He had worked for the local community for many years with the Catholic church, refugee and other organisations. Most recently he had led efforts to secure low interest loans for people in the community to build houses. Any of these activities could have been the reason for his murder.

Santa María Tzeja is one of nine communities that filed a law suit against former president General Romeo Lucas García and several members of his government in May 2000, charging them with genocide and other crimes against humanity while they were in power (1978-1982). This could also have been the reason for the attack on Us. Since the suit was filed, community members have faced repeated threats and intimidation. Several students and teachers from Santa María who are studying in Guatemala City have also been threatened. Villagers say that the police have done little, and fear there could be further attacks on the community.

This was the third attack in a week by former civil patrol members.

Peasant leader Carlos Morales was attacked on 22 June, by men identified as former civil patrol members and ex-military commissioners (civilian agents of the army) in the community of Repollaso Juquinay in Baja Verapaz. They beat him and reportedly tried to lynch him. Five others, two social scientists from a research institute in Guatemala City and three other directors of Morales's local peasant organisation, were violently taken hostage, but later released after the intervention of local human rights groups. The police reportedly stood by and did nothing.

The assailants were allegedly acting under the orders of local landowners who wanted to gain control of the community's lands. The ownership of the land has been in dispute for some years. During Guatemala's long civil conflict, successive governments often rewarded their supporters by giving them the lands of those they believed to sympathise with the armed opposition.

Early in the morning of 25 June, some 30 heavily armed former civil patrollers raided the community of Los Cimientos, Quiché, another community which has suffered a long-term dispute over lands of villagers forced to flee after army attacks on their villages. Their lands were then awarded to civil patrollers who supported the government during the civil conflict. The assailants reportedly raped three women, and destroyed 86 houses, forcing 90 families to flee. The patrollers also kidnapped seven children, but released them the next day. Three journalists who tried to reach the village to report on events there were threatened, as were their guides. The journalists and one of the guides managed to flee, but the other was seized and beaten. The former head of the region's civil patrol told one of the journalists that no one was permitted

to enter Los Cimientos, threatening, "Anyone who goes into the village is in danger, because we don't recognise any authority and certainly not MINUGUA." MINUGUA is the United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala, which had been asked by local groups to protect the threatened villagers. The police response to events at Cimientos was again slow and inadequate.

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

- calling on the Guatemalan authorities to investigate these attacks and bring those responsible to justice;
- reminding them that the civil patrols were to have been disbanded under the Peace Accords, and urging them to state publicly that illegal acts by former patrol members will not be tolerated, and any who commit crimes will be prosecuted;
- urging the authorities to take action immediately to protect the communities of Repollal Suquinay de Purulhá, Los Cimientos and Santa María Tzeja from any further attacks by former patrollers;
- asking them to ensure that all the villagers who were attacked receive medical attention, including the women who were allegedly raped;
- urging the authorities to take action to resolve the land disputes in these and other communities, to prevent further human rights violations.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic of Guatemala
 Lic. Alfonso Portillo Cabrera
 Presidente de la República de Guatemala
 6a. Avenida "A" 4-41, Zona 1, Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Tel: + 502 239 0000

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Salutation: Dear President/Señor Presidente

Minister of the Interior
 Sr. Byron Barrientos
 Ministro de Gobernación
 Ministerio de Gobernación, 6ª Avenida 4-64, Zona 4
 Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Fax: + 502 362 0239

Salutation: Dear Minister/Señor Ministro

Director of the National Lands Council
 Pedro Palma Lau
 Director, Consejo Nacional de Tierras
 Avenida Hincapié 5-71, Zona 13, Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Tel: +502 3321525/3321 523

[He is testifying to the Guatemalan Congress on what he will do to address the land conflicts which have given rise to these abuses.]

Salutation: Dear Director/Señor Director

COPIES TO:

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 9ª Av. 2-59, Zona 1, 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 17 August 2001.