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## **PUBLIC STATEMENT**

### **Guatemala: 50 US cents a day - the price of justice?**

The verdicts in the Xamán case represent a milestone in bringing to justice for the first time members of the military responsible for committing serious human rights violations, Amnesty International said today.

However, Amnesty International is shocked by the leniency of the sentences handed down to those members of the Guatemalan army responsible for the killing of 11 returned indigenous refugees, including two children, at the Xamán estate in northern Guatemala in 1995.

Twelve soldiers, including one officer, were found guilty of aggravated homicide and 13 others of having acted as their accomplices, yet the maximum sentence they received was a five year suspended sentence. The most serious charge against them -- of extrajudicial execution -- was dropped, along with further charges of actual bodily harm and breaking and entering. The court is said to have already initiated proceedings for the soldiers' speedy release.

The human rights organization remains deeply disturbed by repeated reports that army personnel tampered with evidence, intimidated witnesses and bribed court officials during the course of the trial proceedings.

Reports also indicate that the soldiers have been given the option of buying off their prison time at a rate of 50 US cents a day.

Amnesty International understands that local human rights groups intend to appeal the decision at a higher level and take it before international legal bodies. It will continue to follow the proceedings closely.

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