

UA 265/00

Fea.

**GUATEMALA Members of FAMDEGUA including Aura Elena Farfán (f), Otto Villanueva (m) and Victoria Tuvin (f);  
Members of HIJOS.**

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Heavily armed men raided the offices of the *Familiares de Detenidos y Desaparecidos de Guatemala* (FAMDEGUA), the Association of Families of the Detained and "Disappeared" of Guatemala, on Monday 4 September, and assaulted members of their staff. Amnesty International is concerned for their safety.

A well-dressed young man reportedly came to the offices shortly before noon, and asked for members of a new human rights group *Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio* (HIJOS), Children for Identity and Justice against Forgetting and Silence, who also work from the FAMDEGUA offices. On being told that no one from HIJOS was there, the young man with three other heavily armed men forced their way in. Aura Elena Farfán, the Director of FAMDEGUA, and two FAMDEGUA staff, Otto Villanueva and Victoria Tuvin, were thrown to the floor and had pistols put to their heads. The assailants, who repeatedly threatened to kill them if they spoke or cried out, stayed for a hour subjecting other FAMDEGUA staff who arrived to the same treatment and forcing the men to strip. When they left they took most of the organization's computers containing records of important human rights cases they are investigating, other office equipment, money and one of the group's vehicles.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

FAMDEGUA is one of Guatemala's oldest and most respected human rights organizations. It has been key in promoting exhumations and initiating proceedings to bring to justice those responsible for the large-scale massacres carried out by the Guatemalan army during its counter-insurgency campaign of the late 1970s and early 1980s. FAMDEGUA is particularly associated with the case of the Dos Erres massacre in El Petén in 1982 when 350 men, women and children were massacred, with the women subjected to mass rape before being killed. As a result of exhumations promoted by FAMDEGUA, some 187 bodies have so far been identified; at least 67 of which were of children under the age of 12. Based on these findings, proceedings against those responsible have slowly wound their way through the Guatemalan Courts and claims for compensation lodged. Those involved in efforts to bring the perpetrators to justice have suffered a series of threats and other abuses, and a number have been forced into exile in fear of their lives. In March 2000, 18 years after the event, arrest orders were issued for nine soldiers, but the Constitutional Court recently provisionally stayed implementation of the orders.

HIJOS is a new organization, formed by people who were children at the time of their parents' "disappearance", but have recently joined together to try and find out what happened to their parents and to educate the new generation in Guatemala about the years of repression.

This latest attack on the FAMDEGUA offices comes among a new and highly disturbing wave of threats and abuses against members of human rights organizations, journalists and others involved in important human rights cases in Guatemala. (See for example Urgent Actions UA 199/00, UA 212/00, UA 223/00 and UA 256/00). MINUGUA, the United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala, last week condemned these recent events, and said that the involvement of military intelligence agencies could not be discounted.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in Spanish or your own language:**

- Calling on the authorities to immediately investigate this latest outrage directed at Guatemala's human rights community and to bring those responsible to justice;
- Insisting that the authorities take all required steps to ensure the security of all of those involved in legitimate efforts to return Guatemala to a state of law and bring those responsible for past abuses to justice;
- Reminding Guatemalan officials that continued international support for the country's peace process is dependent on seeing progress in human rights areas and that attacks on human rights defenders such as occurred on 4 September at the FAMDEGUA offices cannot be tolerated.

**APPEALS TO:**

**President**

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Presidente de la República de Guatemala  
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**Salutation:** Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente

**Minister of the Interior**

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**Salutation:** Señor Ministro

**Peace Secretary**

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**COPIES TO:**

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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 October 2000.