

UA 300/97

Fear for safety

16 September 1997

GUATEMALA Marlon García, photographer, *Equipo de Antropología Forense de Guatemala, EAFG, Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Team*
Other human rights defenders

Human rights defenders and relatives involved in trying to establish the fate of victims of past human rights violations continue to be victimized by intimidatory acts and death threats.

The latest incident occurred on 10 September 1997 at the "Lakeview Hotel" in El Estor, Izabal Department where members of the *Equipo de Antropología Forense de Guatemala, EAFG*, the Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Team, and *Asociación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos de Guatemala, FAMDEGUA*, the Association of Relatives of the Detained-Disappeared of Guatemala, were staying. A group of unknown individuals reportedly arrived at the hotel insisting that photographer Marlon García go to talk to them. When he refused they persisted in their demand until members of EAFG, FAMDEGUA and Peace Brigades International intervened.

This comes soon after exhumations began of a mass grave containing what are believed to be the victims of the Panzós massacre which took place on 29 May 1978 in the town of Panzós, Alta Verapaz, where at least 100 Kekchi indigenous people were killed by the army.

In June 1996, Carlos Federico Reyes López, another forensic anthropologist and member of EAFG was threatened on a bus in Guatemala City when an unidentified individual pushed a pistol between his ribs and told him to "stop hanging around with those friends because it is dangerous". He was threatened again a week later. A few months before Carlos had taken part in the exhumation of a mass grave in which the remains of 19 people, including six children, were found.

During the excavation of mass graves at Las Dos Erres in the northern department of El Petén during 1994 and 1995, members of FAMDEGUA and EAFG were given police protection after stones were thrown at the roofs of their temporary accommodation and machine-gun shots fired into the air. Las Dos Erres was the site of a massacre in 1982 during which 350 people were reported to have been killed. In another incident, members of FAMDEGUA visiting the communities of Palestina and La Libertad, El Petén in July 1997, were subjected to intimidation by former members of *Comités Voluntarios de Defensa Civil, CVDC*, the Voluntary Civil Defence Committees.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Following hundreds of massacres of civilians by the Guatemalan army during counter-insurgency operations at the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s, thousands of corpses, the majority those of Mayan peasant farmers, were thrown unidentified into unmarked clandestine graves. For many years it was virtually impossible to carry out exhumations in Guatemala for fear of reprisals against relatives of the victims. The first exhumations, carried out in remote mountain areas in the late 1980s and early 1990s, were characterised by inadequate procedures, allegations that evidence was being removed from secret graves and by attempted abductions and threats against those calling for the exhumations to be carried out. Judges who attempted to carry out exhumations were also threatened and many were forced to abandon their investigations.

Between 1988 and 1991, human rights organizations petitioned the courts to allow for the exhumation of 17 mass graves. In this period, however, only eight were carried out. Military authorities dismissed the clandestine cemeteries as burial grounds of guerrillas killed in combat by the army or civil patrols. Civilian authorities, including the present government, have lacked the political will to undertake serious investigations into "disappearances" or extrajudicial executions.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/e-mail/faxes/express/airmail letters in Spanish or your own language:

- expressing concern at the intimidation of Marlon García;
- calling for immediate measures to guarantee his safety and that of other members of the EAFG and FAMDEGUA;
- asking that the incident which took place on 10 September 1997 be immediately and thoroughly investigated and that those responsible be brought to justice.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic
 S.E. Álvaro Arzú Irigoyen
 Presidente de la República de Guatemala
 Palacio Nacional
 6ª Calle y 7ª Avenida, Zona 1
 Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Telegrams: Presidente, Guatemala, Guatemala

E-mail: alvaroarzu@guateconnect.com

Faxes: +502 221 4537

Salutation: Sr Presidente / Dear President

Attorney General
 Lic. Héctor Hugo Pérez Aguilera
 Fiscal General de la Nación
 Ministerio Público
 6ª Avenida 3-11, Zona 4
 Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Telegrams: Fiscal General, Guatemala, Guatemala

Salutation: Señor Fiscal / Dear Attorney General

COPIES TO:

Human Rights Procurator
 Lic. Jorge Mario García Laguardia
 Procurador de los Derechos Humanos
 Procuraduría de los Derechos Humanos
 12 Avenida 12-72, Zona 1
 Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Faxes: +502 238 1734/251 7769

Head of the Presidential Coordinating Committee of the Policies of the Executive relating to Human Rights

Licda. Marta Altolaquirre
 Comisión Presidencial Coordinadora de la Política del Ejecutivo en Materia de Derechos Humanos (COPREDEH)
 13 calle 15-33, Zona 13
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FAMDEGUA

Sres.

9a. Calle "A" 3-56

Zona 1

Guatemala, GUATEMALA

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 28 October 1997.