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Guatemala: Threats and attacks against human rights defenders must be investigated

Amnesty International today urged the Guatemalan authorities to immediately and thoroughly investigate attacks against those involved in opening the country's police archives containing information on atrocities committed by the security forces during Guatemala's internal armed conflict.

"The ghosts of the past have no place in Guatemala today," said Kerrie Howard, Americas Deputy Director at Amnesty International. "The Guatemalan authorities must ensure that people responsible for the attacks and threats against those who work to bring to light the abuses committed during the armed conflict do not get away with it."

Members of the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office involved in the process that led to the opening of over 12 million archives containing evidence of human rights abuses committed during Guatemala's internal armed conflict, some of which amount to crimes against humanity, have been victims of attacks and threats.

The wife of the Director of the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office has been kidnapped and tortured. One official has been beaten up, whilst a number of threats have been made against other officials of the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office, including a bomb threat and a threat against the life of the Director of the Office.

Amnesty International believes these attacks and threats have been made to intimidate the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office and stop them from carrying out their work. Two former police officers have already been charged in a case of enforced disappearance as a result of information uncovered in the archives.

"The opening of the police archives is a huge step towards real justice in Guatemala," said Kerrie Howard. "The key now is to ensure that the information is used to deliver justice to thousands of victims of human rights violations in Guatemala."

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