

Summary

AMR 34/42/00

PUBLIC

On 4 September heavily armed men raided the offices of *Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio*, **HIJOS**, Children for Identity and Justice against Forgetting and Silence and the *Asociación de Familiares de Detenidos y Desaparecidos de Guatemala* **FAMDEGUA**, Association of Relatives of the Detained and "Disappeared" of Guatemala, and assaulted members of their staff.

The attackers asked for members of HIJOS who share the office with FAMDEGUA. On being told that no one from HIJOS was there, they forced their way in. Staff members were thrown to the floor and had pistols put to their heads. The assailants stayed for an hour, repeatedly threatening to kill them if they spoke or cried out. The men were forced to strip. When the raiders left, they took most of the organizations' computers containing records of important human rights cases they are investigating, particularly the Dos Erres massacre, other office equipment, money and one of the group's vehicles (for more information see Urgent Action UA 265, AMR 34/35/00 and News Service No. 171, AMR 34/36/00).

Background

HIJOS is a new human rights group, made up of young people, many of them students, who were children when their parents were "disappeared", killed or massacred and have joined together recently, some of them returning from exile, to try and establish what happened to their parents and who was responsible for it. They also want to help educate the new generation in Guatemala about what happened during the years of repression. Amnesty International shares their view, that understanding what happened, who was responsible and who allowed it to happen are vital in efforts to make sure that no such future violations will be either repeated or tolerated.

HIJOS work to discover the fate of their family members who were victims of the civil conflict which raged in Guatemala over a period of more than 30 years. Before the conflict was formally ended with the signing of the final Peace Accords in 1996, it is estimated that some 200,000 people were extrajudicially executed or "disappeared" at the hands of the Guatemalan security services or the civil patrols and so-called "death squads" acting under their command. The number of cases where the perpetrators have been identified and brought to justice can be counted on the fingers of one hand.

Testimony of Raúl and Vladimir Nájera, members of HIJOS.

"... It was at the beginning of November of 1982. I, Raúl, was only three years old and my brother Vladimir one year old. We were too young to understand what would happen that night; as were my sisters who were between 10 and 15 years old age. My father was not at home and everything was as usual until forces of darkness took advantage of the night to pull out the heart and life of my family.

With extreme violence they took my mother, my 68-year-old grandmother, an uncle and his wife, leaving us, innocent children, unjustly crushed with grief and uncertainty. There were only seven children left, who could not understand why the people we loved had been taken away from us.

Seven days later they appeared one by one, but tortured, lifeless. The monsters not only snatched away the family, but with it, a village, a school, a friend... an entire life.

Now I am 20 and I know what happened. I can see the importance of fighting to punish the military-monsters who cut short the life of thousands and thousands of people and till have never been tried for their crimes.

As young people, we see the importance of breaking the silence, stopping these criminal acts, supporting each other, finding our disappeared relatives and demanding justice and punishment for those responsible for genocide.

We joined HIJOS for ever Guatemalan and for all those who died hoping for a better country, with democracy, social equality, equality of rights, hoping for life, peace, freedom..."

The raid on the HIJOS and FAMDEGUA offices has come in the context of a recent and very disturbing wave of abuses directed at human rights organizations and others seeking justice for past violations through the courts, and other critics of the current government (for more information see Urgent Actions: UA Also in October 1999, HIJOS being denounced that some of their members were followed and threatened by unidentified men, who reportedly belonged to military intelligence. This events followed an active presence of HIJOS during the exhumations on the site of the former headquarters of the *Policía Militar Ambulante*, PMA, Mobile Military Police in Guatemala City. The excavations, however, failed to find any sign of the up to 5,000 bodies which human rights organizations thought might be buried at the site, where the military and police reportedly tortured suspected opposition members during the years of the conflict. Some of these remains could be relatives of the members of HIJOS.

93/00, AMR 34/13/00 and update AMR 34/14/00; UA 128/00, AMR 34/15/00; UA 137/00, AMR 34/17/00; UA 142/00, AMR 34/18/00; UA 1999, AMR 34/28/00; UA 212/00, AMR 34/30/00; UA 223/00, AMR 34/32/00; UA 256/00, AMR 34/34/00)

Some of th

- To keep a
- To partic
- To educa
- primary
- non-officia
- To join to
- To suppo
- To speak
- convert th
- To seek a
- for genoci
- their crime



TAKE ACTION!!

Purpose of the action:

1. To show concern about the HIJOS' attack and to prevent any further actions against them;
2. To support the objectives of their work.

Activities that you can carry out:

I. *Write telegrams/faxes/express/airmails letters to the Guatemalan Government in Spanish, English or your own language.*

Copy your letters to HIJOS, the Guatemalan press and Guatemalan representatives in your country (see authorities list-Annexe I):

- making clear that you are young people who feel an especial empathy with the members of HIJOS who lost their parents when they were young children;
- indicating your support for the efforts of HIJOS to find out the truth about what happened to their parents and to clarify past human rights violations;
- expressing concern at this recent attack on their offices, an apparent attempt to intimidate them from pursuing their aims;
- calling on the authorities to carry out a full and prompt investigation into this attack and ensure that those responsible are brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to take effective measures to assure the security and physical integrity of all those, like HIJOS who are attempting to clarify past human rights violations;
- urging the Guatemalan Government to implement the specific recommendations of the Historical Clarification Commission on forced "disappearances" and exhumations (1). These recommendations constitute a vital part of the peace process and their implementation is

essential to establish the truth about the fate of the relatives of HIJOS.

II. Outreach

- ☺ Try and involve other student groups in your city by asking them to write letters to the Guatemalan Government, protesting about the raid on HIJOS, expressing support for their efforts to obtain justice for what happened to their parents and to educate young people in Guatemala about the country's tragic past;
- ☺ Ask them to consider other forms of action which they may be able to take through their own channels, independently of AI;
- ☺ Organize a joint petition along the lines suggested above. Send it to Guatemalan diplomatic representatives in your country or consider presenting it directly to them.
- ☺ Send joint letters of solidarity to HIJOS, expressing your support for their work and your interest in maintaining an exchange of information about your own activities;
- ☺ There are groups of HIJOS in different countries. Some of them are in yours (see annexe II). They are formed by children of people who suffered "disappearances" and killings in different parts of Latin America, not only Guatemala. Try to get in contact with them and organise a public discussion on Latin American countries which suffered gross human rights violations.

(1) The Historical Clarification Commission was agreed under the Peace Accords, signed in 1996. It was mandated to clarify the human rights violations and acts of violence that caused suffering to the Guatemalan people in the context of the armed conflict; prepare a report analysing the factors which contributed to the conflict; and formulate recommendations aimed at supporting peace and national harmony in Guatemala (for more information

see News Services: AMR 34/05/99 and AMR
III. Publicity

* Try and obtain publicity in student and other youth magazines regarding the recent attack on HIJOS and for the campaign initiated by them to find out the truth about their parents. You can write articles with the information provided in this action (summary and background, testimony of Raúl and Vladimir Nájera, the poems of members of HIJOS-annexes III and IV-). End any such articles asking readers to add their protests regarding this attack on the HIJOS offices, and provide them with an appropriate address or addresses, chosen from the authorities list. You can also use the photos used in this action. To get them contact the audiovisual team at the International Secretariat: audiovis@amnesty.org;

* Issue material on any public activities that you carry out. For example, if you decide to present a petition in person to the Guatemalan diplomatic representatives in your country, invite the local press or your own student newspaper, to cover the event. If you hold a public discussion or conference together with other organizations like HIJOS, again invite the local press or your own student newspaper.

* Use the web. If your Section or network has a website, try to post up the case of HIJOS with recommended letter-writing actions;

* If your Section or network has a magazine, try to publish the articles you wrote on HIJOS.

34/05/00).

IV. Speakers tour

Some of the members of HIJOS may be prepared to speak at public events in your country about their own experience. Such a tour will be very useful for all types of campaigning on the action, specially outreach and publicity. The tour should be well prepared, meetings and public events will need to be arranged several weeks beforehand.

Any HIJOS speakers will need to have all their travel and accommodation costs covered by the group or Section that invites them. It may also be possible to co-fund the tour with another organization that has an interest in this issue. You can also try and organize a tour to a few countries and the Sections in those countries could share the costs.

Please contact the Guatemalan Research Team at the International Secretariat if you are interested in organizing a speakers tour for HIJOS: guatteam@amnesty.org

V. Classroom Project

This is an exercise that you can propose to your group. It is also for teachers who may be the coordinators of youth or student groups.

These are a series of techniques which have been used in the past by teachers with children and young people of various ages and been proved very effective, in getting children and young people to understand what “disappearance” is, and getting them to think about the impact of “disappearance” on children.

Of course, it is many years later, and the sad fact must be faced that few if any of the “disappeared” parents of the HIJOS members are still alive. However, it has been well established by scholars and human rights experts that the suffering of those left behind continues, and is worse, if the State has never admitted what happened, nor taken responsibility. Many studies show that the grieving process can not be completed, and in some cases, even started, until the fate of the missing person is established, and ideally, their remains are recovered and properly laid to rest.

_ You can illustrate the exercise with a description of one of more specific cases of disappearances, as for example, the case of Luz Haydée Méndez, mother of Wendy Méndez (see annexe V), one of the founder members of HIJOS;

_ Students can then be asked to imagine how they would feel if a parent or other close relative “disappeared”. They can be asked to write a letter to the authorities, explaining how they feel and why the authorities must make every effort to locate or establish the fate of the “disappeared” person and bring those responsible to justice;

_ *Students could be also asked just to write a letter describing how they think they would feel if their parent or other close relative had*

“disappeared” and send this as a gesture of solidarity to HIJOS;

_ Another possibility would be for students to be asked to write a letter as if to the imagined “disappeared” parent, again, in an attempt to imagine how it would feel if their own parent had “disappeared”. These letters could then be sent both to the authorities and to HIJOS, to suggest to the authorities the effect that “disappearances” can be expected to have had on the children in Guatemala who really did experience this phenomenon, as an incentive to them to try and establish the fate of the “disappeared,” and to HIJOS, again as a gesture of support and solidarity.

_ Under international standards, the children and other relatives of the “disappeared” are entitled to compensation from the State for the loss of their parent(s) if State agents were involved. All of these points can be explained to students and included in their letters.

Teachers, student groups and children’s groups will have many more ideas about how to make this issue come alive in the classroom so that young people and children will understand what the members of HIJOS have experienced and what they are trying to do, and be motivated to protest this recent attack on them and express support for their efforts to find out what happened to their parents. Use your imaginations -- and please share your ideas with us!

ANNEXE I

President

Lic. Alfonso Portillo Cabrera
Presidente de la República de Guatemala
6a. Avenida "A" 4-18, Zona 1
Ciudad de Guatemala , GUATEMALA
Fax: 502 221 4423/ 221 4537
Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/ Dear President

Minister of the Interior

Sr. Byron Barrientos
Ministro de Gobernación
Ministerio de Gobernación
6ª Avenida 4-64, Zona 4
Guatemala , GUATEMALA
Fax: 502 362 0239/ 362 0237
Salutation: Señor Ministro / Dear Minister

Strategic Affairs Secretariat

Lic. Edgar A. Gutiérrez
Secretario de Asuntos Estratégicos
Secretaría de Asuntos Estratégicos
6a Avenida "A" 3-53, Zona 1
Guatemala, GUATEMALA
Fax: 502 2322886
Salutation: Señor Secretario / Dear Secretary

COPIES TO:

HJOS

2 Calle A 7-13, Zona 2
Guatemala, GUATEMALA
Fax: 502 220 3785/ 232 9432
E-mail: Hijos8guate@yahoo.com

CERIGUA newspaper

2a calle 1-42, Zona 1
Guatemala, Guatemala
Tel/Fax: 502 238 1456/ 221 2521
E-mail:cerigua@guate.net

"Prensa Libre" newspaper

13 Calle 9-31, Zona 1,
Guatemala, GUATEMALA
Tel/Fax: 502 230 1384
Fax: 502 251 8768/ 230 2193/ 230 2257
E-mail: medioselectronicos@prensalibre.com.gt
nacional@prensalibre.com.gt

ANNEXE II

Address of HIJOS in the world:

- HIJOS Cordoba (Argentina): martoran@latinmail.com
- HIJOS La Plata (Argentina): hijoslaplata@hotmail.com
- HIJOS Neuquen (Argentina): hijosneuquen@hotmail.com
- HIJOS Rosario (Argentina): hijosrio4@mail.com
- HIJOS Tucumán (Argentina): salvatierra40@noanet.com.ar
- HIJOS Vancouver (Canada): hijosvancouver@hotmail.com
- HIJOS Barcelona (Spain): hijosbcn@post.com
- HIJOS Madrid (Spain): hijos.madrid@nodo50.org
- HIJOS Paris (France): hijosparis@hotmail.com
- HIJOS Mexico: hijosmexico@hotmail.com
- HIJOS Malmoe (Sweden): hijos.malmoe@zdnnetmail.com
- HIJOS Venezuela: hijos@derechos.net

There are also groups of HIJOS in Chile, Cuba, Holland, Italy, Uruguay... but we do not have their addresses available as yet.

ANNEXE III

NAMELESS

There are days when I understand nothing
and I am living in artificial nights
between walls of impunity and cowardice
when she died
I wished it was contagious
will it be exile?
will it be truth or silence?
or will it be the worst?
the simple fact of breathing becomes a challenge
mummy did not stop playing hide and seek
and I keep on looking and looking for
the love that got intertwined in the branches of the trees that no longer
exist
memory overcomes me with its hand of milk and honey
darkness is not the opposite of light but a lack of it
and today I need you
today distance has a new meaning for me
and I do not want to believe that it separates us
I want us to get drunk on laughter and pain
shout the names of our love ones into the wind
of those
the ones that are far away
I want to ease the pain
and to play in their eyes filling them with sunlight.

Wendy Mendez

Member of HIJOS

Daughter of Luz Haydée Mendez

Detained-Disappeared on 8 March, 1984

(Translated by A.I.)

SIN NOMBRE

Hay días que no entiendo nada
y vivo dentro de noches artificiales
entre paredes de impunidad y cobardía
cuando murió
deseé que fuera contagioso
será el exilio?
será la verdad o el silencio?
o será lo siniestro?
el simple respirar se convierte en un desafío
mamá no dejó de jugar a escondidas
y busco y busco
el amor que quedó enredado en los árboles que se fueron
memoria me alcanza con su mano de leche y miel
la oscuridad no es lo contrario de la luz, sino la falta de
y hoy voz me haces falta
hoy la distancia tiene nuevo sentido para mi
y no quiero entender que nos separa
quiero emborracharnos de risas y dolor
gritar con el viento el nombre de los nuestros
de los de aquellos
de los de lejos
quiero hacer calmar el dolor
y en sus ojos jugar llenándolos de sol.

Wendy Méndez

Miembra de HIJOS

Hija de Luz Haydee Méndez

Detenida-Desaparecida el 8 de Marzo de 1984.

(Original poem in Spanish)



ANNEXE IV

COLLECTIVE SUBSTRATUM

You don't know how wounded my memory is,
on waking in the penumbras of reality,
from anxiously drawing the face of your name/
since they put out the light and told me that
on leaving university you never
arrived home, that you were wearing
a Jhon Lenon t-shirt,
that after the demonstration they couldn't find you,
that they saw you for the last time
wearing your favourite skirt.

**But believe me I caress you without touching you,
I see you without looking at you,
I speak to you without raising my voice,
I still love you, I looking for you./**

Because time has stood still since 78 or 80
or perhaps 82 to 84
and the months have blurred, January is May and
December is a red October,
and dates play tricks that the 15th is not the 15th
but the 6th and the 6th have gone by March
and March with 80...

Because since then my name is
wendy, raul, claudia, paco, jessica, carlos,
rebeca, mario, leslie, vladimir, rosa, miguel.

Because my parents are luz haydée, oliverio, rogelia,
edwin, mirta, rosario, irma, felipe.

**Because we are children of living ghosts,
of people who became invisible,
of those in the limbo of memory's common grave,
of those who went nowhere.**

Nobody knew we existed,
only the police truncheons which knocked at the door,
and thus we learned to move constantly from rented room
to rented room, to take another name,
we learned to pronounce a strange language,
in a strange country,
to recognize the anonymous calls,
to share the infantile dances with the spectre of a white panel,
to spell the alphabet of exile and not to be recognized
by a whorish and conservative homeland.

**We swallow our tears in the music box
which harbours the grey moments of rage,
of pain, of this helplessness and those endless nightmares
hidden by machine guns and galils.**

HIJOS

(Translated by A.I.)

SUBSTRATO COLECTIVO

No sabes como tengo llagada la memoria,
al despertarme en las penumbras de la realidad,
de dibujar con ansiedad el rostro de tu nombre./
desde que apagaron la luz y me dijeron que
al salir de la universidad nunca
volviste a casa, que llevabas
una playera de Jhon Lenon,
que al terminar la manifestación ya no te encontraron,
que te vieron por última vez
con la falda azul esa la que más te gustaba.

**Pero créeme te acaricio sin tocarte,
te veo sin mirarte,
te hablo sin alzar mi voz,
te sigo amando, te estoy buscando./**

Porque el tiempo se cristalizó desde el 78 o el 80
o quizás el 82 al 84
y que los meses se fusionaron que enero es mayo y
que diciembre es un octubre rojo,
y que las fechas juegan en las regresiones
que el 15 no es 15
sino 6 y el 6 se fue con marzo
y marzo con 80...

Porque desde entonces me llamo
wendy, raul, claudia, paco, jessica, carlos,
rebeca, mario, leslie, vladimir, rosa, miguel.

Si porque mis padres son luz haydée, oliverio, rogelia,
edwin, mirta, rosario, irma, felipe.

**Porque somos hijos de fantasmas vivos,
de personas que se volvieron invisibles,
de los que se encuentran en el limbo
de la fosa común de los recuerdos,
de los que se fueron a ningún lugar.**

Nadie sabía que existíamos,
solo los garrotes policiales que tocaban a la puerta,
y así aprendimos a cambiarnos constantemente de pieza
en alquiler en pieza en alquiler, de ponernos otro nombre,
aprendimos a pronunciar un idioma extraño,
en un país extraño,
de reconocer las llamadas anónimas,
de convivir las rondas infantiles con el espectro de una panel blanca, de deletrear el
alfabeto del exilio
y de no ser reconocidos
por una patria puta y conservadora.

Nos tragamos las lágrimas en la caja de música
que alberga los grises momentos del arrebató,
del dolor, de este desamparo y que no terminan
esas pesadillas

ANNEXE V

camufladas de metralletas y galil.

HIJOS

(Original poem in Spanish)

Luz Haydée Méndez de Santizo, the mother of one of the founder members of HIJOS. Luz Haydée “disappeared” in 1984. The army raided her house, looking for her husband, a university professor. They held her and her two children aged 9 and 11 under guard in the house for 8 hours, waiting for him to come home, but when he didn’t appear, they abducted her instead. She has never been seen since. She was 36 years old, a mother and housewife at the time of her “disappearance”.

