

# £GUATEMALA/MEXICO

## @Human Rights Violations by the Guatemalan Army in the Mexican Border Area

Amnesty International is concerned at reports of human rights violations, including torture and "disappearance" of Mexican citizens by members of the Guatemalan Army in the border area of the Mexican state of Tabasco in late May and early June 1991. The abuses reportedly occurred in the context of Guatemalan army operations, in which Guatemalan soldiers entered Mexican territory allegedly in search of armed opponents to the Guatemalan Government, and during operations against wood smuggling.

Towards the end of May 1991, the Guatemalan army is reported to have crossed the Usumacinta river and entered the Mexican state of Tabasco, allegedly in search of members of the Guatemalan armed opposition. They are said to have severely beaten Mexican citizen Crisóforo Alejo Hernández at his own home in the *ejido* (communal landholding) of El Bejucal, demanding to know the whereabouts of Francisco Danián Rúa, a leader of a communal lands organization, whom the Guatemalan army reportedly accused of having links with the armed insurgency in Guatemala. The whereabouts of Francisco Danián Rúa are apparently not known by residents of the region, and it is thought he may have gone into hiding.

The incident in which Crisóforo Hernández was tortured was reportedly investigated by officers of the 30th Military Zone in Tenosique and the findings were sent to the *Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional (SEDENA)*, National Defence Secretariat, in Mexico City, but the results are not known.

On 3 June 1991 members of the Guatemalan army élite "Kaibil" unit stationed in El Petén reportedly crossed into Mexican territory again and entered a small settlement mostly inhabited by Guatemalan widows near Nuevo Progreso, Tenosique municipality in Tabasco.

At about 11.00 am, 20-year-old Joaquín López López, a Mexican citizen, was abducted by members of the Guatemalan unit. According to eyewitnesses, he was beaten and forcibly taken away from the plot of land in the *ejido* Nuevo Progreso where he had been working. His bloodstained clothes were later said to have been found inside Guatemalan territory.

Joaquín López López' family believe that he was abducted to provide information to the Guatemalan army about the roads used to smuggle precious woods across the border

from Guatemala. Wood smugglers have reportedly been active in the area in recent months.

On 25 June, Joaquín López' family and local inhabitants of the area sent a letter to President Carlos Salinas de Gortari asking for his urgent intervention in the case. In the letter, they named the members of the Guatemalan army said to be responsible for his abduction and referred to claims by two people from El Petén department in Guatemala that Joaquín López had been seen in a prison in the town of El Naranjo and on board a Guatemalan military helicopter.

A few days earlier, human rights organizations in Mexico had denounced the incidents involving the Guatemalan army to the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Relations. In a letter dated 20 June, the organizations called on the Minister of Foreign Relations, Fernando Solana, to clarify the incidents and protect people living within its borders from any attacks by the Guatemalan army.

On 8 July, Fernando Solana sent a letter of protest to his counterpart in Guatemala requesting precise information regarding the whereabouts Joaquín López López. The Guatemalan authorities reportedly denied that Joaquín López had been abducted and, although the Guatemalan Ambassador in Mexico allegedly claimed that the government had ordered a full investigation into the incident, on 31 July it was reported that the governments of Guatemala and Mexico had closed the border incident. According to a statement from the Guatemalan government, the so-called incursion by Guatemalan soldiers had been nothing more than a "friendly meeting with Mexican colleagues." The same statement indicated that President Carlos Salinas de Gortari had accepted this explanation. This prompted further protests by Mexican human rights groups who called on President Carlos Salinas de Gortari to immediately intervene on behalf of Joaquín López.

The abduction has also been denounced to the Public Ministry Representative in Tenosique (*Agente del Ministerio Público del Fuero Común de Tenosique*), who initiated a preliminary investigation on 11 July. To date however, no further news of the fate or whereabouts of Joaquín López has emerged and he remains "disappeared".

Amnesty International is seriously concerned about the incidents that took place in May and June 1991 and calls on both the Guatemalan and the Mexican authorities to carry out thorough impartial investigations and to bring those responsible to justice.

## **Other cases of human rights violations by members of the Guatemalan Army in Mexico**

Other abuses committed in the context of incursions by members of the Guatemalan army into southern Mexican states have been reported to Amnesty International in recent years. In October 1990, for example, a Guatemalan primary health care worker, Armando Mazariegos Paz, living in the state of Chiapas, Mexico, was reportedly abducted by members of the Guatemalan army and remains "disappeared".

**Figure 1** Armando Mazariegos Paz

Armando Mazariegos, 35, married with two children, had lived in Tapachula for seven years. He worked in the community providing primary health care.

He was also a member of the board of the Asociación de Guatemaltecos Refugiados Unidos para mejorar la Salud (AGRUMS, Association of Guatemalan Refugees for Improved Health Care). According to reports, he was abducted at 12.00pm near the train station of the town of Tapachula. Witnesses alleged that he was forced into an unmarked vehicle by four individuals in civilian clothes who beat him as he tried to resist their assault.

His case was presented to Mexico's National Human Rights Commission (Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos) which was set up by President Salinas de Gortari in June 1990. The Commission opened an investigation but to date, no further news about his fate has been reported.

Armando Mazariegos's abduction followed reports in July and August 1990 about incursions by members of the Guatemalan army into Guatemalan refugee camps in Santa Elena Lagartero, Santiago el Vértice and Tziscaco inside Mexican territory.

There are said to be at least 41,000 Guatemalan refugees living in Mexico mostly in refugee camps in the border states of Chiapas, Campeche and Quintana Roo. Several incursions into Guatemalan refugee camps across the border by members of the Guatemalan army were reported in 1983 and 1984 during which a number of Guatemalan refugees were killed and others beaten. Mexican citizens too were reportedly ill-treated. These incursions were allegedly carried out in order to attack what the Guatemalan army believed were safe havens for the Guatemalan armed opposition as well as to frighten refugees into returning to Guatemala and discourage others from seeking security in Mexico.

Amnesty International is concerned that human rights violations by members of the

Guatemalan army crossing into Mexican territory have continued to be reported and that those responsible for these violations have not been brought to justice.

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**GUATEMALA/MEXICO**

**HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS BY THE GUATEMALAN ARMY  
IN THE MEXICAN BORDER AREA**

November 1991

**RECOMMENDED ACTIONS**

Please ensure that all relevant people in the section have received copies for their attention, and that the document is centrally filed for future reference.

**DISTRIBUTION**

This circular has been sent direct by the International Secretariat to CASA/Mexico coordinators/coordination groups for distribution to CASA groups in their section. Please note that a separate set of recommended actions, CASA No. 14/91, AI Index: AMR 02/02/91 has been sent to CASA/Mexico coordinators and relevant sections.