

UA 141/01

Fear for

**GUATEMALACALDH (*Centro para Acción Legal en Derechos Humanos*)  
Others involved in lawsuit against officials of the Ríos Montt government**

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A Guatemalan human rights organisation has charged one of the country's former military rulers with genocide. They filed the lawsuit today, and announced the action at a public event in the capital. They and other NGOs working against impunity have recently come under attack, and Amnesty International is concerned that all those involved in the lawsuit, and the event where it was launched, will be in grave danger in the coming months.

Under the command of General Efraín Ríos Montt, who ruled Guatemala from March 1982 to August 1983, the army operated a "scorched earth" policy, massacring the inhabitants of some 600 indigenous villages. The *Centro para Acción Legal en Derechos Humanos* (CALDH), Legal Centre for Action on Human Rights, today filed charges of genocide against the General and other officials from his government. The lawsuit covers just 11 of these villages, where the army and its civilian adjuncts, the civil patrols, killed around 1000 people.

General Ríos Montt is a founding member of the ruling *Frente Republicano Guatemalteco* (FRG), Guatemalan Republican Front. He is now the head of Congress.

Because of its efforts to bring perpetrators of human rights abuses to justice, CALDH staff have suffered a series of threats and attacks. In May 2000, CALDH assisted an association of indigenous survivors of massacres, the *Asociación Reconciliación para la Justicia*, Reconciliation Association for Justice, to file a lawsuit against officials of the administration of General Ríos Montt's predecessor, Fernando Romeo Lucas García, charging them with responsibility for 10 massacres carried out while Lucas García was in power, from July 1978 to March 1982. Since they filed the charges, the Public Prosecutor's Office has questioned scores of witnesses.

In August 2000, a CALDH representative assisting villagers involved in this suit, Celso Balán Argueta, was abducted, robbed, drugged and left unconscious by two people thought to be linked to paramilitary organisations. Celso Balán and his family were warned not to report the attack (see UA 256/00, AMR 34/34/00, 25 August 2000).

In April 2001 a peaceful demonstration in Guatemala City was attacked by supporters of the ruling FRG, who had apparently been paid to come to the capital. It appears that CALDH staff were particularly targeted. The demonstrators were calling for General Ríos Montt and other FRG members of Congress to be arrested and prosecuted for illegally altering a law regarding alcohol taxation after it had been passed by Congress. (See NS 76, AMR 34/013/2001).

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

During Guatemala's civil conflict, which lasted more than 30 years, an estimated 200,000 people were killed or extrajudicially executed, the vast majority of them by the security forces. The conflict was formally ended by the UN-sponsored Peace Accords of 1996. Under the Peace Accords, the *Comisión de Esclarecimiento Histórico*, Historical Clarification Commission (CEH) was set up to investigate human rights abuses committed during the conflict. In its final report, delivered in 1999, the CEH concluded that the majority of those victims of massacres were the country's indigenous peoples. Under the 1996 Law of National Reconciliation there can be no immunity from prosecution for genocide.

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

- urging the authorities to ensure that all those involved in the CALDH lawsuit, and those attending the 6 June public event are protected from violence;
- expressing concern at recent attacks on CALDH and other NGOs, which are clearly intended to stop them from working to bring the people who committed human rights abuses during Guatemala's civil conflict to justice;
- reminding the government that it is bound by the UN *Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*, adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 1998, and the *Resolution on Human Rights Defenders in the Americas*, adopted by the Organization of American States at its meeting in Guatemala in June 1999, a resolution supported by Guatemala;
- urging the authorities to bring to justice all those who committed gross human rights abuses, including genocide, during the country's civil conflict.

**APPEALS TO: (Please note that it can be difficult getting through to some of these fax numbers. Please be patient and keep trying. If a voice answers say: "fax por favor" and wait for the signal)**

President of the Republic of Guatemala  
Lic. Alfonso Portillo Cabrera  
Presidente de la República de Guatemala  
6a. Avenida "A" 4-46  
Zona 1, Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA  
**Fax: + 502 238 3579**  
**Salutation: Dear President/Señor Presidente**

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

Minister of Defence  
Gral. Eduardo Arevalo Lacs  
Ministro de Defensa Nacional  
Ministerio de Defensa  
Antigua Escuela Politécnica  
Avenida Reforma 1-45, Zona 10  
Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA  
**Fax: + 502 360 9909/360 9919**  
**Salutation: Dear Minister/Señor Ministro**

Chief of Police  
Comisario Enio Rivera Cardona  
Director General de la Policía Nacional Civil  
6ª Avenida 13-71, Zona 1  
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**Salutation: Dear Chief of Police/ Señor Director**

**COPIES TO:**

NGO

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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 18 July 2001.