

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

COUNTRY: GUATEMALA

SUBJECT TITLE: KILLING OF MYRNA ELIZABETH MACK CHANG, AGED 40

September 1990 AI INDEX: AMR 34/55/90
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Amnesty International is concerned that the killing of anthropologist and sociologist, Myrna Elizabeth Mack Chang on 11 September in Guatemala City be thoroughly and impartially investigated. Myrna Mack, was a co-founder of the Asociación para el Avance de las Ciencias Sociales en Guatemala (AVANCSO), Association for the Advancement of Social Sciences in Guatemala. She was also a member of the Junta Directiva (Board) of AVANCSO, as well as Coordinator of the Social Investigation Program.

Myrna Mack, was leaving the offices of AVANCSO, at 7.00pm on 11 September, when she was attacked, stabbed and killed. She reportedly received 11 stab wounds. She was reportedly also robbed. Because of the nature of the work that Myrna Mack was doing, sources close to her in Guatemala fear that her killing may have been an extrajudicial execution carried out by the security forces.

AVANCSO's work involves the widespread dissemination of information on socio-political analysis of Guatemala, including published works and seminars. Myrna Mack and her colleagues were developing work on themes such as foreign policy; development; those displaced by the violence; migration to the cities from the countryside and strategies for urban survival. Myrna Mack herself especially pioneered studies in rural areas of Guatemala, working with indigenous and displaced peoples. At the time of her death, she was preparing a study on the socio-ecological impact of agricultural diversification in the department of Chimaltenango. AVANCSO's work was widely recognized and supported by international organizations and universities, as indeed was the work of Myrna Mack.

Myrna Mack's assassination is seen by AVANCSO as a direct attack on those involved in activities in the field of social science and in their view calls into question the viability of social science research which they were carrying out in the interests of general development and the construction of a future democratic society in Guatemala.

Amnesty International has received reports in the past of people involved in social science research being targets of human rights

violations carried out by the security forces, particularly when their work was seen as critical of government social and economic policies. It is calling on the Guatemalan government to initiate immediate inquiries into the killing of Myrna Mack and to bring those responsible to justice whoever they may be.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

After nearly 20 years of military government, a civilian government publicly committed to the rule of law was elected in January 1986.

The accession of President Vinicio Cerezo Arévalo's government brought new hope for an end to human rights violations in Guatemala and a public explanation of past crimes committed by the security forces. However, President Cerezo's administration did little to investigate abuses committed under previous military governments or to bring those responsible to justice.

Even more worrying, after a brief, initial decrease in human rights violations, reports of abductions, "disappearances", and political killings escalated throughout his administration. Now, as the administration reaches its closing months (elections are currently scheduled for November), abuses have reached levels which some observers consider equal to those of any of President Cerezo's predecessors. Members of all branches of the Guatemalan police and military have been cited as responsible for violations reported. Sometimes they have carried them out while in uniform, sometimes in plain clothes in the guise of the so-called "death squads".

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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. In addition please undertake as many of the following recommended actions as possible.

1. This document is accompanied by an INTERNAL CASA Action No. 12/90, AI Index: AMR 34/55/90. Please consult your section for copies of the INTERNAL action.

DISTRIBUTION BY THE IS

This circular has been direct by the IS to CASA Coordinators, for distribution to CASA groups in their section. It has also been sent direct to CASA groups in sections where there is no CASA coordination group. In addition, it has been sent to relevant country coordination groups, and to Sections where there is a CASA group or country coordination group.