

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Fear of "Disappearance"

15 October 1990

GUATEMALA:

María TIU TOJÍN

Amnesty International is concerned at the apparent "disappearance" of María Tiu Tojín, a peasant, after she was reportedly detained by the Guatemalan army in mid-September 1990.

According to the information received by Amnesty International, in mid-September 1990, the Guatemalan army detained 86 peasants belonging to the Comunidades de Población en Resistencia (CPR), Communities of Peoples in Resistance, including women and children, in the Amacchel area, Nebaj District, in the Department of El Quiché. They were first reportedly taken to the Nebaj military base, from where they were transferred to the refugee reception centre of the Comisión Especial de Atención de Refugiados (CEAR), Special Commission for the Care of Refugees, a governmental refugee organization, in Nebaj.

However, according to some of those arrested, María Tiu Tojín and her one-month-old daughter Josefa, who were among those detained, were separated from the rest of the group, as the military authorities accused María of being a member of a guerrilla organization, and were not transferred to CEAR. Relatives who went to the Nebaj military base searching for her were told by the military authorities that she was not being held there; however, sources close to the military authorities have told her family that María Tiu Tojín and her baby are detained in the Nebaj base. A writ of habeas corpus was filed on María Tiu Tojín's behalf, but her whereabouts remain unknown and Amnesty International fears that she may be secretly detained, tortured and may "disappear".

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

CPR members live in the mountains, having fled army repression because of their refusal to do service in the ostensibly voluntary Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil (PAC), Civil Defence Patrols, and to live in army-sponsored "model villages", created as part of the army counter-insurgency campaigns in the early 1980s. People living in the CPRs have been accused of being guerrilla collaborators by the army and targeted for human rights abuses. The Guatemalan Constitution, which recognizes the right to freedom of association, states that no one may be forced to serve in self-defence groups. The authorities maintain the civil defence patrols are voluntary, but Amnesty International knows of scores of cases where peasants who have not wished to do patrol service or have tried to withdraw from them, have been labelled "subversives" by the army and subjected to harassment, death threats, "disappearance" and extrajudicial execution.

María Tiu Tojín's sister, Victoria Tiu Tojín, was repeatedly threatened to death in March and April 1990 because of her denunciation of human rights violations in Parraxtut, El Quiché Department, including the killing of their relative María Mejía (see UA 130/90, AI Index AMR 34/25/90 and its follow-up, AI Index AMR 34/30/90).

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters:

- expressing concern at the apparent "disappearance" of María Tiu Tojín and her baby daughter;
- urging the authorities to establish their whereabouts and legal situation;
- expressing concern that María Tiu Tojín may be tortured and asking for guarantees for her safety and the safety of her daughter.

APPEALS TO

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Lic. Mario Roberto Yllescas Aguirre
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COPIES TO:

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 Consejo de Comunidades Etnicas "Runujel Junam" (CERJ)
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 Guatemala

Diario Siglo XXI
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Lic. Ramiro de León Carpio
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and to diplomatic representatives of Guatemala in your country

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 30 November 1990.