

# amnesty international

## GUATEMALA

### HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS CARRIED OUT AGAINST MEMBERS OF THE CAMEY/CHITAY FAMILIES

OCTOBER 1990

SUMMARY

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At 05.00 am on 15 August 1989, heavily armed men in plain clothes, believed to be members of the security forces, burst into the home of María Rumalda Camey, aged 23, in Escuintla department and kidnapped her in front of her husband and two young children. She was forced into a waiting car and taken away. She has not been seen since, and despite a writ of habeas corpus, submitted on her behalf, she remains "disappeared". She is a member of the Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo por el Aparecimiento con Vida de Nuestros Familiares (GAM), Mutual Support Group for the Appearance of our Relatives Alive, formed in 1984 by families of "disappeared" people attempting to determine the fate of their missing relatives.

María Rumalda Camey, joined the GAM after the "disappearance" of her brother-in-law, José Carlos Chitay Nech, who was abducted in Guatemala City on 3 March 1985, by four heavily armed men in plain clothes, whom witnesses believed to be members of the security forces. His whereabouts remain unknown. María Camey's "disappearance" is the sixth in a succession of kidnappings and extrajudicial executions carried out since March 1985 against members of the extended Chitay/Camey families, originally from the predominantly Kachikel Indian community of Semetabaj, San Martín Jilotepeque municipality, Chimaltenango department. The families, many of whom were catechists (lay-preachers), were targeted by the armed forces, because of their involvement with religious groups considered "subversive" by the armed forces, and were forced to flee the region in 1982, during the height of the counter-insurgency campaigns there.

Since that time the family have continued to be singled out as targets by the security forces. On 16 November 1988, María Camey's brother, Eleodoro Ordón Camey was abducted in Guatemala City by armed men in plain clothes, wearing army boots. His body, bearing marks of torture, was found in Zone 18 of Guatemala City. His wife blames the

armed forces for his "disappearance" and subsequent extrajudicial execution.

During 1989, three further members of this extended family, were kidnapped and subsequently found dead in circumstances suggesting armed forces involvement. Other family members, many of them GAM members have also been followed and threatened by men in plain clothes, believed to be members of the armed forces. Twenty-five family members threatened have been forced to flee the country and now live in exile abroad. There is concern for the safety of those relatives remaining in Guatemala.

Amnesty International has repeatedly called on the government to initiate investigations into abuses carried out against this family, but has received no reply and to date, knows of no investigations begun into the fate of those "disappeared" and those extrajudicially executed.

This summarises a page document, GUATEMALA: HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS CARRIED OUT AGAINST MEMBERS OF THE CAMEY/CHITAY FAMILIES (AI Index: AMR 34/61/90), issued by Amnesty International in October 1990. Anyone wanting further details or to take action on this issue should consult the full document.

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Amnesty International  
International Secretariat  
1 Easton Street  
London WC1X 8DJ  
United Kingdom

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**GUATEMALA: HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS CARRIED OUT AGAINST  
MEMBERS OF THE CAMEY/CHITAY FAMILIES**

GENERAL BACKGROUND ON HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN GUATEMALA:

Tens of thousands of people have been victims of human rights violations in Guatemala over the past two decades. Trade unionists, academics and students, priests and catechists have been abducted, tortured and killed. Indian villagers have been seized, mutilated and shot dead. Thousands of men and women detained by the military and police have been "disappeared" -- their families and friends cannot find out what has happened to them.

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 brought new hope for an end to human rights violations in Guatemala and a public explanation of the 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 those of any of President Cerezo's military predecessors. Members of all branches of the Guatemalan police and military have been cited as responsible for the violations reported. Sometimes they have carried them out while in uniform, sometimes in plain clothes in the guise of the so-called "death squads."

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AGAINST MEMBERS OF THE CAMEY/CHITAY  
FAMILIES

At 05.00 am on 15 August 1989, three armed men in plain clothes burst into **María Rumalda Camey's, (23)** home in Escuintla and kidnapped her in front of her family, who were warned not to intervene. She was forced into a waiting car and taken away. She has not been seen since and is "disappeared". Her husband believes she was abducted by the

same men who had been watching her house for about two weeks prior to her abduction. María Camey, a member of the Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo por el Aparecimiento con Vida de Nuestros Familiares (GAM), Mutual Support Group for Reappearance Alive of our Relatives,<sup>1</sup> left behind two children, one aged 6 months (who was still breast feeding) and one 2 years old. Despite a writ of habeas corpus on her behalf, presented to the Supreme Court of Justice by the GAM, María Rumalda Camey's whereabouts remain unknown.

María Rumalda Camey's "disappearance" is the sixth in a succession of alleged "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions carried out since March 1985 against members of the Camey family, and the Chitay family (related through marriage to the Camey family), from the Kachikel Indian community of Semetabaj, San Martín Jilotepeque, Chimaltenango department. The families, were targeted and forced to flee the region in 1982, during the height of the army counter-insurgency campaigns there, because many were catechists (lay-preachers),<sup>2</sup> and occupied prominent positions within the community. Amnesty International has received numerous reports that security forces have singled out prominent families and catechist families for persecution, including extrajudicial execution, "disappearance" and torture, even after they had fled their community.

Large-scale abuses in the department of Chimaltenango were first reported to Amnesty International in the early 1980s, shortly after a military base was established in the area. During an Amnesty International visit to Guatemala in April 1985, the delegation was given eye-witness accounts of wholesale extrajudicial executions of civilians in Chimaltenango -- men, women, children and old people -- by army counter-insurgency forces. These accounts were consistent with information Amnesty International had received

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<sup>1</sup>GAM was formed in 1984 by relatives of "disappeared" people attempting to determine the fate of their missing relatives. Two of its founding members were killed in 1985 in circumstances strongly suggesting official involvement, and its leadership and members have continued to experience threats and harassment.

<sup>2</sup>Catechists or lay teachers, are elected leaders of Comunidades Eclesiales de Base (CEB), Christian Base Communities: grass roots Christian communities. As lay teachers, catechists would not only teach the doctrine of the church, but would also instruct the community on the basic principles of human rights, and were thereby perceived as "guerrilla sympathizers" by the armed forces. Clergy and lay activists of the Roman Catholic church in particular have been victimised, apparently thought by successive administrations to be stimulating opposition to the government. In just over one year, between April 1980 and July 1981 Amnesty International learned of nine Roman Catholic priests who either "disappeared" or were extrajudicially executed by the security forces. Many catechists were also extrajudicially executed by government forces during army counter-insurgency campaigns in the early 1980s. Roman Catholic priests kept lists of the names and locations of catechists working in their parish, and many of these lists fell into the hands of the armed forces.

at the time of these incidents. These included killings attributed to the army in the municipality of San Martín Jilotepeque, during the first week of February 1981, when some 85 men, women and children were killed when soldiers opened fire on villagers. Local residents also reported that 171 people from Chimaltenango had been extrajudicially executed by the army during two weeks in March 1981 and that 23 others including a five-year-old child, were killed in April. Similar reports from Chimaltenango continued to be received throughout 1982 and 1983. Between March and June 1982, Amnesty International received reports of the killing by security forces of approximately 350 non-combatant civilians in the department of Chimaltenango. (See Appendix I for a chronology of human rights violations directed against villagers in Semetabaj, during the army counter-insurgency campaign between 1981 and 1982, which was made available to Amnesty International by relatives). (See also Amnesty International Publication: Guatemala The Human Rights Record, AI Index: AMR 34/04/87 and Guatemala: Massive Extrajudicial Executions in Rural Areas under the Government of General Efraín Ríos Montt, AI Index: AMR 34/34/82 of July 1982.)

The first reported "disappearance" of a member of the Camey/Chitay families after they had fled their community, took place on 3 March 1985, after **José Carlos Chitay Nech**, a brother-in-law of María Camey, was abducted in Guatemala City, while on his way to a football match. A street vendor who witnessed the abduction stated that four heavily armed men in plain clothes forced him into a grey coloured car and drove off to an unknown destination. He was not seen again and remains "disappeared". The family believe he may have been abducted by members of the security forces, because of his previous activities as a catechist in his home village of Semetabaj, before he and his family were forced to flee the area in 1982. At the time of his "disappearance", he worked as a builder's assistant and lived in Guatemala City with his wife and four children. Following his "disappearance", his wife Modesta Cañas joined the GAM in an effort to locate her missing husband.

On 1 November 1988, (All Souls Day) **Eleodoro Ordón Camey, (36)**, brother of María Rumalda Camey, returned, along with his wife and children, to his native Semetabaj, from Guatemala City, to lay wreaths at the graves of dead family members. He first went to the military base in San Martín Jilotepeque to ask permission to visit Semetabaj. Permission was granted, but on arriving at Semetabaj, members of the Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil (PAC), Civil Defense Patrols, [civilian agents of the armed forces], refused him permission to stay in the village and instead tried to detain him and his family. He managed to convince them to take him alone to the local military base, where he was accused of being a "guerrilla", and questioned intensely about the whereabouts of others who had fled his village in 1982/1983. He was subsequently released and sent back to Guatemala City, from where he

contacted his family who were still in Semetabaj in order to arrange their return to Guatemala City.

After he returned to Guatemala City in early November, the military detachment in Chimaltenango reportedly telephoned Eleodoro Camey's place of work in the capital on 7 November 1988 to confirm that he was employed there. On 16 November 1988, Eleodoro Camey was kidnapped in Guatemala City, in front of his 13-year-old son, by three heavily armed men in civilian clothes, wearing army boots, and driving a grey car with black bumpers. The abduction took place within 50 metres of the headquarters of the sixth division of the National Police, who made no effort to intervene. On 22 November, Eleodoro Camey's body, reportedly bearing marks of torture, was found in Zone 18 on the road to the Atlantic. His wife blames members of the military base in Chimaltenango for his kidnapping and subsequent killing.

On 3 April 1989, **Eusebio Camey**, brother-in-law of María Rumalda Camey, was killed in unknown circumstances.

Then on 22 July 1989, **Aurelio Lorenzo Chitay, (30)**, another member of the Chitay family, was abducted at about 7.00 am by four men in plainclothes, driving a white car with polarized windows in the Colonia Maya district in Zone 18 of Guatemala City. Witnesses to the abduction stated that Aurelio Chitay tried to resist and was beaten on the head with the butt of a gun and forced into the car. Cars with polarized windows are customarily used by the Guatemalan security forces when operating in plain clothes in the guise of the so-called "death squads". His body bearing marks of torture was found on 25 July in San Pedro Ayampuc, in the department of Guatemala. Days before his kidnapping, he reportedly received death threats from military commissioners from Semetabaj, San Martín Jilotepeque, the same military commissioners who had detained Eleodoro Ordon Camey in November 1988. Aurelio Chitay was married with five children, the youngest being 2 months old, and Aurelio Chitay was an active member of the GAM. On 8 August, just over two weeks after his body had been found, a plainclothes policeman visited his widow, and asked questions about her and her dead husband's activities with the GAM.

Since that time, **Modesta Canas de Chitay (widow of Juan Carlos Chitay)**, **María Chitay Nech (widow of Eleodoro Ordon Camey)**, and **Hermenegilda de Lorenzo (widow of Aurelio Lorenzo Chitay)**, all members of GAM, have been watched and followed by men driving a grey Subaru car, the licence plates of which were noted by witnesses, but no effort has been made to officially identify the owners of the vehicle. A member of the GAM leadership, Blanca Hernández Quiroa, who is in very close contact with the widows of the three killed men, also reported being followed on 30 July by men in a white car, believed to be the same car which was used in the abduction of Aurelio Lorenzo Chitay.

On 23 July 1989, José Martin Chitay Nech, aged 60, brother of José Carlos Chitay Nech, who "disappeared" in 1985 (see case details above), himself went missing in Antigua Guatemala, Guatemala department in unknown circumstances. His body was found on 25 July close to Guatemala City. On that same day four heavily armed men entered the house of the brother of Aurelio Chitay (case details above). He was not at home, but the men threatened his wife and family.

The above-mentioned killings and "disappearances" have caused widespread fear for the the safety of the remaining members of the Camey and Chitay families. On 15 August, the same day as the abduction of María Rumalda Camay, her husband, children and other family members sought refuge at GAM headquarters in Guatemala City. Later that day, GAM's headquarters were severely damaged after an explosive device was thrown inside the ground floor. Fortunately, noone was injured in the blast. María Camey's husband and children, along with other relatives have now left the country to seek political asylum abroad. Those remaining in Guatemala are continually being watched and followed by men driving cars with polarized windows. There is concern for their safety.

#### ATTEMPTS TO LOCATE MARIA RUMALDA CAMEY

Since the "disappearance" of María Rumalda Camey, GAM has campaigned vigorously for her reappearance alive. On 29 May 1990, members of the organization peacefully occupied the offices of the International Red Cross, to call attention to the plight of the 40,000 "disappeared" in Guatemala, highlighting particularly three recent "disappearances", among them María Rumalda Camey, and asking that they reappear alive.

However, according to a later statement from GAM, following a meeting held on 5 June with Vice-President Roberto Carpio Nicolle, the Vice-President informed GAM that the government could not do anything on the case of María Camey.

Repeated appeals from Amnesty International to relevant government authorities in Guatemala and official human rights bodies hav been similarly unproductive.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>A series of bodies established under the present administration, ostensibly to inquire into human rights violations, have failed in this, as in the many hundreds of other cases denounced to them, to carry out geuine investigations into the fate of the "disappeared" person; other human rights bodies announced by the government of President Cerezo have failed even to begin to function. (See Chapter 4.5 - Efforts at investigation of reported human rights violations - of AI Publication Guatemala: Human Rights Violations under the Civilian Government, - AI Index: AMR 34/07/89 of June 1989).

APPENDIX I**CHRONOLOGY OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS DIRECTED AT VILLAGERS IN SEMETABAJ, DEPARTMENT OF CHIMALTENANGO BETWEEN 1981 AND 1982 DURING THE ARMY COUNTER-INSURGENCY. \***

According to information made available to Amnesty International, between September 1981 and October 1982, the following villagers from Semetabaj, San Martin Jilotepeque, Chimaltenango department, including church workers, and non-combatant civilians, were subjected to human rights violations, including torture, "disappearance" and extrajudicial execution, carried out by members of the armed forces.

**1 September 1981:** Nine men, including Venacio Pirir and his son, were extrajudicially executed in Semetabaj by armed men believed to be members of the armed forces. They suffered knife wounds to the chest.

**22 December 1981:** Four villagers from Semetabaj: Sabino Ramos, father of seven children, Lauriano Hernández, father of four children, José Alberto Ramos, father of three children and Victoriano Camey, father of four children (including José Gonzalo Camey - husband of María Rumalda Camey -see case details above), were captured by members of the armed forces. They were taken to the school house in Semetabaj and tortured. They have not been seen since.

**Beginning of 1982:** 21 members of the Velásquez family were extrajudicially executed by members of the armed forces. They included:

Francisco Velásquez (father of 12 children)  
 Catarina Sinon de Velásquez  
 Delfina Velásquez  
 María Velásquez  
 Eulalia Velásquez (mother of four children), along with two of her children, hanged with her.  
 Arnoldo López Velásquez  
 Cristobal López Velásquez  
 Gabriel Velásquez and his wife Rosalilla Guerra  
 Modesta Velásquez  
 Vicente Velásquez, and a child of 2 years.  
 Domingo Velásquez, his wife, child and a brother-in-law.  
 Juan Velásquez and his wife.  
 Eladio Tacen.

All were captured by members of the armed forces. They were found hanged with a cord, with burns to their bodies - the women had been raped. Some of the bodies, including that of Catarina Sinon de Velásquez, a midwife who looked after the pregnant women in the village, were left for four days in a nearby field for the dogs to eat.



**Beginning of 1982:** Nine people, including, Guillermo Guerra, Eleodoro López, Francisco Set, Lucas Cun and Geronimo Popol were abducted and "disappeared".

One month later, the armed forces, extrajudicially executed the Balán and Cun families, including:

Austin Belán and his mother-in-law  
Isabel Cun and her husband  
Cruz Siguín Alberto Balán, and his wife  
Rocenta Lorenzo and her three children  
Rosa Chitay, and her three month old son  
Juan Guerra and the Cun family  
Luisa Cun and her five children

That same month, four members of the Pirir family were killed.

**Mid-1982:** The following people were killed by armed men believed to be members of the armed forces:

Ismael Xicay  
Marcos Guerra, father of three children  
Larazo Cun  
Aurelio Aguin  
Victoriano Xicay  
Cipriano Guerra  
María Tacen, mother of two children  
Eladio Aguin, father of four children

A few days later, two members of the Xicay family were extrajudicially executed by men believed to be members of the armed forces, bringing the total of family members killed to 15, including men, women and children.

**October 1982:** Eight young people were killed. including:

Adrain Aguin  
Máximo García  
Factor García  
Fernando Guerra  
Bernadino Arnira  
Tereso Cun  
Carmen López  
Ricardo Ramos

It was in this context that the Camey/Chitay families fled Semetabaj in 1982.

\* This chronology was prepared by former residents of Semetabaj. Although Amnesty International is not in a position to corroborate all the incidents listed in the chronology, they are consistent with the pattern of abuses observed by the organization in recent years in Guatemala.