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Deborah Tyroler

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Alleged Existence Of Operation In Guatemala For Exporting Children As "organ Donors" Proven False

by Deborah Tyroler

Category/Department: General

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On Jan. 24, Guatemalan daily newspaper El Grafico published an article containing allegations on the existence of an operation in Guatemala City holding children to be exported for use as "organ donors" to the US and Israel. The alleged on-site organizers of this operation included two Israeli citizens. Two days later, El Grafico published an article containing quotes by John Treacy of the US Embassy in Guatemala denying the veracity of the allegations. On Jan. 27, the same newspaper published a note indicating that although the editors did not give much credence to the existence of the above operation, it ran the story based on statements by the Deputy Director of Customs, in his capacity as a government official. In response to queries by the Guatemala Health Rights Support Project (Washington, DC), and the Israeli Embassy in Washington, among others, Guatemalan Health Minister Dr. Carlos Soto replied only that the initial El Grafico article was not true. Details on investigations of the allegations or more recent El Grafico articles were not provided. Since then, the allegations published in the El Grafico article have been proven false. According to the Israeli Embassy in Washington, corrective action has been taken in Guatemala in the form of firing the Deputy Customs Director. Notes from El Grafico, 01/26/88: John Treacy, information and culture consul at the US Embassy, categorically denied the veracity of all allegations appearing in the Jan. 24 issue of the paper. He said that all statements were based on speculation. He added that such articles were part of disinformation campaigns promoted by communist countries. Treacy said that the Embassy had consulted with several US agencies, such as the FBI and the Immigration and Naturalization Service, to obtain reliable information about the alleged traffic in children as organ donors. These agencies, he added, indicated that the absence of any information on the alleged activities. Treacy pointed out that Guatemalan officials, including Interior Minister Juan Jose Rodil Peralta in a February 1987 statement, have indicated that information on child trafficking for organ transplants operations in Guatemala is pure fantasy, since names, dates and places are not mentioned. In a separate article, El Grafico indicated that upon consulting with Miguel Aguirre, director of the Intelligence and Narcotics Service (SIN), reporters learned that law enforcement authorities had no information or proof of the allegations published in the Jan. 24 edition. Aguirre pointed out, however, that similar allegations had surfaced previously, and that the SIN was presently engaged in an investigation to "once and for all" determine whether or not such operations exist or have ever existed in Guatemala. Note from El Grafico, 01/27/88: El Grafico editors pointed out that they were quite sure that both the US and Israeli governments consider human rights violations in general, much less trafficking in children as human organ donors, as outrages. Declarations published by the newspaper derived from an "irresponsible functionary" do not imply their veracity. El Grafico "wishes to clarify" that it received information from an authorized source, the deputy director of the Treasury Police (Customs), under the Intelligence and Narcotics Service (SIN). Until such time as the judicial authorities deliver a decision on the veracity of the allegations, the latter are understood to be only speculations of a government official. (From 04/22/88 bulletin by Guatemala Health Rights Support Project, Washington DC)

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