

1-18-1989

Guatemala: Summary Of Human Rights Situation, Part 2

Deborah Tyroler

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen>

Recommended Citation

Tyroler, Deborah. "Guatemala: Summary Of Human Rights Situation, Part 2." (1989). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen/2660>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in NotiCen by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.

Guatemala: Summary Of Human Rights Situation, Part 2

by Deborah Tyroler

Category/Department: General

Published: Wednesday, January 18, 1989

* The annual report of the Inter-American Human Rights Commission (CIDH) released in Washington on Oct. 6 states that Guatemala continues to display an alarming disregard of the right to life. The report points out that although the Guatemalan constitution and recent legislation recognize and guarantee the right to personal liberties, it is clear that the security forces and the Army continue practicing illegal detentions, among other abuses. * According to a report by the Agence France Presse on Oct. 7, political violence in Guatemala in the previous three months had surpassed levels recorded in the previous two years. The government, said the report, appears to be incapable of controlling death squad activities. * Amnesty International's annual report on Guatemala released in late 1988 states that arbitrary arrests, torture, disappearances and extrajudicial execution of presumed government critics and opponents continue. Among the victims are labor union members, peasants, students, teachers, urban workers and clergypersons. Amnesty added that these abuses appear to be committed by members of the state security forces, who sometimes work in uniform but are usually clad in civilian dress in the "style of the death squads." * In mid-November, Anne Manuel, an observer in Guatemala for Americas Watch, said: "In spite of two and a half years of civilian government, Guatemala remains one of the worst human rights violators in the hemisphere. The improvement has reversed itself in the cities. And in the countryside, there's a de facto military dictatorship. Nothing has changed." * According to the independent monitoring group CIEPRODH, 75 people were assassinated in September, up from 71 in August and 57 in July. Spokespersons for the group said they compiled the list from public reports and that their figures include only a fraction of politically motivated killings in the country. In the first 10 months of Cerezo's term, political killings averaged 33 per month, according to an estimate by Central America Report. A few cases which drew international attention during the past year are summarized below: * Archbishop Prospero Penados del Barrio has been plagued by death threats, result of a call for land reform appearing in a pastoral letter issued by Guatemala's bishops. The death threats have been frequent, both in writing and by telephone. On a single day, July 30, the archbishop received five telephoned threats. Penados says he believes the threats come from wealthy right-wing groups. * In late July, Indian priest Fr. Ventura Lux Herrera, pastor of the Chichicastenango parish in El Quiche department, abandoned his post after having received numerous death threats from paramilitary groups. Lux's work was focused on indigenous communities and meeting the needs of widows and orphans. The priest subsequently attempted to return to his parish, but the bishop presiding in the El Quiche area refused Lux's request to protect the priest from his enemies. After his departure from the parish, Fr. Lux continued to receive death threats. Consequently, the Church arranged for the priest to leave Guatemala. At present, Fr. Lux's whereabouts are unknown. Military officers accused the priest of encouraging local residents to join the guerrillas instead of "preaching what the Bible says." The priest's "subversive" activities apparently included dedicating masses on several occasions to the souls of murder victims ("extrajudicial executions") in the El Quiche region. The masses were performed on request by the victims' relatives. * Leaders of Guatemala's electricity institute workers union, STINDE, have received death threats and were subjected to other forms of harassment for their activities in organizing workers and for refusing to participate in civil patrols during work hours. * In July,

University of San Carlos (USAC) agronomy student Adrian Guerra Roca was murdered after he and law student Oscar Monteroso were abducted. * In May, school teacher Amilcar Mendez Urizar and his family received death threats delivered to their home by the ESA, a death squad. Mendez resides and works in Santa Cruz del Quiche, El Quiche department, and is a member of the Guatemalan Education Workers Union (Sindicato de Trabajadores de Educacion de Guatemala-STEG). He had also been involved in human rights promotion activities. The threats also mentioned the Mano Blanca death squad. [ESA and Mano Blanca were responsible for murders and disappearances during previous military regimes. Guatemala's military rulers often characterized the two death squads as extremist groups beyond government control. According to Amnesty International, the available evidence indicated that both groups were comprised of military and security force personnel acting under orders from their superiors.] * On the evening of Oct. 14, Carlos Martinez Godoy, chief steward for Banco Internacional de Guatemala employees union, was shot to death while walking with his two young sons in Guatemala City, near 16th Avenue and A Street, Zone 1. The victim was beaten by assailants and then shot three times. Union members and relatives believe Martinez was killed for political reasons, since he was not robbed. After the murder, union members said Martinez Godoy and other union activists had received death threats, a development they had not previously disclosed. Some analysts believe the killing was part of a larger effort to halt unionization. The Banco Internacional employees union is relatively new, and is affiliated with the Federacion Bancaria (bank workers' federation). The Federacion was involved in a lengthy and difficult struggle to obtain legal recognition for a recently established union of Bank of the Army employees. * On Nov. 26, 22 bodies were found in three hastily dug graves on the outskirts of El Aguacate, a village in the municipality of San Andres Itzapa, Chimaltenango department. The victims, whose bodies showed signs of torture, included the local military commissioner, two assistant commissioners, an evangelical pastor, and other residents of the community. (Military commissioners are local, army-appointed officials, usually civilians, who handle recruiting and intelligence duties for the army.) Military sources blamed the killings on guerrillas pertaining to the Organization of the People in Arms (ORPA). An "urgent declaration" signed by guerrilla commandantes of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) denied any responsibility for the massacre. Instead, the killings were attributed to the Army in an attempt to create conditions for increased repression. The URNG called for an investigation of the murders by international organizations. Meanwhile, residents of El Aguacate have decided to leave their village and relocate to the department capital of Chimaltenango. [Sources: Back issues of Central America Update; and selected reports by the Centro Exterior de Reportes Informativos sobre Guatemala (CERIGUA), Apartado Postal 74206, C.P. 09080, Delegacion Iztapalapa, Mexico, DF, and from Guatemala, News in Brief, a publication of the Americas Watch Committee, 36 West 44th Street, New York, NY 10036; 739 Eighth Street SE, Washington DC 20003.]

-- End --