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Guatemala: Summary Of Recent Reports Of Human Rights Abuses, Violence

by Deborah Tyroler

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* According to a report dated May 5 by the Guatemalan Human Rights Commission/USA (Washington, DC), leaders and members of several trade union and other popular organizations have become targets in a new wave of repression and persecution. Organizations receiving special "attention" are the Mutual Support Group (GAM), Council of Ethnic Communities "Runujel Junam" (CERJ), University Students Association (AEU), Guatemalan Workers Trade Union Unity (UNSITRAGUA), National Electricity Institute Workers Union (STINDE), and the Agricultural Workers Union (CTC). An unidentified coordinator of UNSITRAGUA quoted in daily newspaper *El Grafico* (03/28/89) said that since the May 1988 coup attempt, the independent trade union movement has been losing ground. "The attempts to neutralize the popular movement have increased through a campaign to prevent people from organizing," he said, which include increased repression and the strengthening of unions linked to the governing Christian Democrat Party. GAM offices are under continual surveillance by armed men. On March 25, GAM's main office in Guatemala City was raked by machine gun fire. On the morning of April 5, 21 heavily armed men broke into and searched the homes of the Cael Chacaj and Cac Cael families in El Quiche department. The intruders were seeking the "guerrilla" Tomas Cael, who reportedly escaped. The young man said he recognized the local civil patrol leader and a military commissioner among the intruders, both of whom were linked to the assassinations of his uncle and father. Both families have been members of GAM since 1983, when several family members were captured by the security forces. To the present, the families' queries for information on the whereabouts of missing relatives have been ignored. On April 7, GAM denounced the arbitrary detention and disappearance of Leopoldo Alfonso Socop Cuyuch, agricultural worker and father of five, by unidentified armed men in Mazatenango, Suchitepequez department. As of May 5, his whereabouts were unknown. According to GAM, five AEU members, students at the San Carlos Autonomous University, have decided to go into exile, result of threats from the Jaguar Justiciero death squad. As of early May, two of the five had already fled the country. On the evening of April 1, soldiers abducted CERJ members Luis Ruiz and Macario Puchi Balam from the Trinidad Miramar estate, located near Patulul, Suchitepequez. The two men were employed on the estate as seasonal laborers. Witnesses said uniformed men in black-face had been seen patrolling the estate a few days before the abductions. The same soldiers were seen after the April 1 incident posted at a road checkpoint. On April 7, soldiers abducted CERJ members Agapito Lopez and Nicolas Mateo from the same estate. Both are natives of El Quiche. To the present, the whereabouts of the four men are unknown. CERJ president Amilcar Mendez Urizar and family members have been subjected to an almost daily barrage of death threats and harassment. According to a report by Amnesty International, his 15-year-old niece, Iris Yomila Reyes Urizar, was abducted and raped by the military detachment chief of San Andres Sajcabaja, El Quiche. In a paid advertisement dated April 10 in daily newspaper *Prensa Libre*, STINDE denounced several incidents of physical and psychological abuse against members of the trade union movement. On April 21, the CTC denounced "constant threats... aimed at campesino leaders, workers, students and progressive political sectors..." CTC leader Nicolasa

Pimental Chavez was assassinated on a farm near Mazatenango, Suchitepequez. On April 15, Tomas Ramos, leader of the trade union for employees of the Empresa Pierre Bonin Sucesores y Cia. Ltd., was abducted and tortured by soldiers. He was falsely charged with carrying weapons. * On April 28, the Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA said human rights monitors had received reports that Juan Carlos Tejada Tortula, 33, an inmate at the Pavon prison farm, was being subjected to torture, denied food and water for long periods, and permitted only a ten-minute visit by relatives once a week. Tejada was a member of the University Student Association (AEU) between 1981 and 1983. On Nov. 27, 1984, Tejada and his girlfriend were detained by the Department of Technical Investigations (DIT, now defunct). He was an agronomy student at the time. The two were convicted of kidnapping, and sentenced to 35 years in prison. Both have consistently denied responsibility for the alleged kidnapping. The torture applied to Tejada and up to 100 other prisoners was reportedly in reprisal against prisoners who participated in the March 26-30 uprising at Pavon. Among other things, government officials had agreed not to exact reprisals against prisoners who led the revolt. * According to reports received by the GHRC/USA (04/10/89 report), the Guatemalan Army is preparing for a new counterinsurgency campaign in the Ixcán area of El Quiché department. The objective of the new campaign is the extermination or submission of the refugee civilian population in the Ixcán forest. Those who do not fight back and successfully escape are to be relocated to army-controlled resettlement camps or villages. The campaign includes destroying the crops of civilians remaining in the Ixcán forest and subjecting them to continual harassment. The army's "End of Year" and "Strength 88" offensives had similar objectives. The current campaign also seeks to prevent the return of Guatemalan refugees currently residing in Mexico. Conditions set by refugee groups to facilitate their return cannot be met in practice. In an effort to divide the peasant population, the army has mobilized civil patrols and repatriated refugees against members of peasant households who refuse to relocate and participate in the patrols. This campaign, called "Offensive of the People," recruits and trains patrol members from the communities of Xalbal, Mayalan, Monaco, Resurreccion, and other areas near the Communities in Resistance. Methods used by the army in this campaign clearly violate the norms of international humanitarian law contained in Common Article 3 of the Four Geneva Conventions of August 12, 1949, and the Additional Protocol II both signed and ratified by Guatemala. * According to a May 22 statement by Guatemalan Workers Trade Union Unity (UNSITRAGUA) broadcast by Notimex, a new death squad calling itself "Los Justicieros" has emerged in Guatemala. In death threats from Los Justicieros received by UNSITRAGUA members Natividad Peron de Fernandera and Luisa Carlota Perez, the two women were told to drop their union membership and leave Guatemala City. In January this year, a death squad known as "Jaguar Justiciero" made its first public appearance.

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