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Family Of Human Rights Activist Flees Guatemala

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Sept. 23, the family of Maria Rumualda Camey fled Guatemala for Madrid under Spanish diplomatic protection. Rumualda Camey, 23, was abducted Aug. 15. Her husband, Jose Gonzalo Camey, their two babies, her brother and his family left the country after spending six weeks in a room at the Guatemalan Red Cross headquarters. They followed six other relatives granted political asylum by Spain last week. In an interview with the AP last week, Gonzalo Camey, a 23-year-old farmer, said his wife was kidnapped at about 5 a.m. on Aug. 15 from their home in Esquintla department. Rumualda Camey was the fourth person in her family to disappear in 10 months. The others eventually were discovered, shot dead and dumped on roadsides. Camey, a 23-year-old farmer, believes his wife is dead. Rumualda Camey was a member of the Mutual Support Group (GAM), an organization of relatives of the disappeared. After his wife was abducted, Camey's family and his brother-in-law's family sought refuge at the GAM office in Guatemala City, 30 miles from their homes. About 30 minutes after their arrival, a grenade was lobbed through the window. They were evacuated to the Red Cross, where they remained for nearly six weeks. In the past few weeks, at least 13 university student leaders have fled the country, and are now residing in Mexico, Panama and Costa Rica. According to GAM president Nineth de Garcia, a cadaver located in Escuintla department on Sept. 14 may be the body of Rumualda Camey. In an interview with Notimex on Sept. 22 in Guatemala City, Peter Kooijmans, special investigator on torture for the UN Human Rights Commission, said that because a significant proportion of the population in Guatemala lives in fear of their lives and physical safety, the country's human rights situation is "very serious and worrisome." Kooijman spent six days interviewing representatives of government and non-governmental human rights organizations. His visit was the result of an invitation by Guatemalan government to the UN Commission dated December last year. The special investigator will present a report to the Commission in February 1990, shortly before the UN organization's annual meeting in Geneva. Kooijman said that when his visit was scheduled he did not expect it to occur at such a grim "moment...in the already sad history of human rights in Guatemala." The UN investigator said that all governments have the responsibility of providing a "social climate" in which citizens can live without fear of being taken from their homes to suffer torture, and in some cases, to be assassinated.

(Basic data from AP, 09/23/89; Notimex, 09/22/89, 09/24/89, 09/25/89)

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