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Guatemala: Notes On Recent Human Rights Abuses

by Deborah Tyroler

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[Appearing below are summaries of recent reports on human rights abuses by the Comision de Derechos Humanos de Guatemala (CDHG-Mexico City), distributed by the Guatemalan Human Rights Commission-USA (Washington, DC). The reports are compiled from the CDHG's direct sources and the following publications: El Grafico, Prensa Libre, La Hora, Excelsior, La Jornada and Salpress.] Assassination, abduction/disappearance, assault, kidnapping (Feb. 15-28). The corpses of eight men were found in Guatemala department, and those of seven men and one woman in San Marcos department. The victims had been drowned, shot, strangled, and/or tortured. Three abductions/disappearances were reported, including a 22-year-old man in Villa Canales, Guatemala; University of San Carlos medical student in Guatemala City; and, another man in Guatemala City. Gisela Reyes de Coy, wife of union leader Juan Luis Coy, was abducted in Guatemala City, and held for several hours by three armed men. She was driven to several places in a pickup and interrogated about her husband's activities. University student Carlos Luna was shot and injured in Guatemala City by a group of armed men driving an official Agriculture Ministry vehicle. Civil patrols, army harassment. The Army continues to threaten and harass residents of Sacpuluc village, Chichicastenango, El Quiche, who refuse to participate in civil patrols. In February, three farms were set on fire, and that merchandise was stolen from a local communal grain storage project run by widows in the community. Members of the Mutual Support Group (GAM) sent a delegation to investigate complaints of harassment and the property damage. Days later, a contingent of soldiers returned to the community, and began using the local school as a military dispatch center. In late February, after a clash with guerrillas near the village, the Army accused residents who refuse to participate in patrols of having fought alongside the rebels. Meanwhile, soldiers continue "informing" residents that GAM and other human rights organizations are subversive. On March 2, approximately 200 GAM members and supporters were attacked by a crowd of about 350 civil patrol members from 17 communities outside the town of Chupol, Chichicastenango, El Quiche. The GAM group had intended to walk several kilometers to Sacpuluc as part of a gesture to show support for village residents who refuse to participate in the patrols. Twenty persons were injured in the patrol members' fusillade of stones, including GAM leader Ninth Montenegro de Garcia. One of GAM's vehicles, a pickup truck, was partially destroyed. An unidentified US journalist informed the Legal Office of the Archbishop of Guatemala that members of the Sacpuluc civil patrol admitted involvement in the incident. They said that on March 1, soldiers from the Chupol army post arrived in Sacpuluc and ordered civil patrol members to attend a meeting in Chupol the following morning. Patrol members from 17 surrounding villages attended the meeting in Chupol on the morning of March 2, and were instructed by soldiers to attack the GAM demonstrators when they arrived later that day. Local media sources reported that following the March 2 incident, 140 residents of Sacpuluc returned to Guatemala City with the GAM and supporter contingent. They returned to Sacpuluc on March 3, accompanied by Ramiro de Leon Carpio, Guatemala's Attorney General for Human Rights. On March 4, daily newspaper El Grafico reported that Sacpuluc's auxiliary mayor, Lucas Mendez Tecun, has received death threats from members of the Sacpuluc civil patrol because he refuses to participate in the patrols. The Council of Ethnic Communities "Runujel Junam" (CERJ) reported in February that 50 families in Sacpuluc are afraid they will be killed because of their

refusal to join the civil patrols. Army attacks against civilian communities in resistance. Many Guatemalan civilians who were displaced from their places of origin by previous army offensives fled to the mountains, and established "communities in resistance." Recent documented army attacks against such communities are described below. On Nov. 4, 1989, army soldiers abducted three men and four women from the Sajituj community, Antigua Amajchel. On Nov. 27, after most of the men residing in the San Antonio community had left for work, the village was surrounded by the Army. Soldiers captured 57 people, mainly women and children. Since mid-1989, the Army has changed tactics against the El Xeputul community, from one of abductions and penetration of the area to a "scorched earth" policy. In the area of Los Cimientos, soldiers carried out over 50 incursions in a 90-day period, leveling 141 houses and destroying crops. The air force bombed villages, and civilians were attacked with mortars, shells and machinegun fire. On Nov. 23, in an attack on Santa Rosa, three women and two girls were killed. On Feb. 9 the second infantry battalion of the Mariscal Zavala Brigade in Los Cimientos attacked Xaxboc, Chajul, El Quiche, with machine guns, rifle fire, 60mm mortars and grenade launchers. Two teenagers were killed, and another was injured. On the following day in the capital of Chajul, soldiers shot and seriously injured a child.

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