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Guatemala: Summary Of Recent Reports On Human Rights Abuses

by Deborah Tyroler

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January-March: The Center for the Investigation, Study and Promotion of Human Rights (Guatemala City) said 270 persons died in political violence, compared to about 100 in the first three months of President Vinicio Cerezo's five-year term. Center spokespersons emphasized that their statistics only demonstrate the trend, since the numbers are compiled from newspaper articles. The New York Times (06/28/90) pointed out that attacks on human rights monitors prevent the compilation of accurate statistics. June 1-4: Fifteen killings were reported by the Guatemala-based news weekly Central America Report. Seven other bodies were found in places near Guatemala City frequently used to dump slain people. June 13-17: According to reports received by the Guatemala Human Rights Commission (CDHG-Mexico) on 20 unidentified corpses found in several locations throughout Guatemala, the methods of killing included bullet wounds, amputation, torture, knife wounds, and strangling. The CDHG also reported on another the murders of another eight persons from June 13 through June 15, whose identities were established. One of the eight was Valdez, director of the Technical Vocational Institute. June 14: Members of the National Council of Guatemalan Widows (CONAVIGUA) told reporters that on June 14, a group of soldiers insisted on locating Council leaders in Pacoc, Zacualpa, Quiche department. When assistant mayors Ramiro Rodriguez and Francisco Riz refused, the soldiers threatened to "kidnap them along with the CONAVIGUA leaders." June 15: Julio Cesar Valdez, director of the Technical Vocational Institute, was shot in the head while driving to meet students who were to repair his pickup truck. Three of the persons awaiting his arrival were wounded. June 1-18: Guatemalan daily newspaper El Grafico reported on the cases of 41 bodies found in the capital city area were buried without first being identified. [The New York Times quoted Special Attorney for Human Rights, Ramiro de Leon, as saying that he regretted the increase in violence, but that it would probably escalate. He explained that the rising incidence in violence is to be expected in an electoral year.] June 18-24: Members of the National Finance Corporation Workers' Union reported an escalation in anonymous telephoned death threats. Ten union members have recently been suspended for an indefinite period without legal justification. Leaders of the Social Christian-oriented Guatemalan Workers Federation and the Guatemalan Workers Central (CGTG) also reported receiving death threats. CGTG general secretary Jesus Miranda requested government protection for the organization's executive committee members. The CGTG office has been burglarized twice thus far this year. June 26: The US State Department issued a travel advisory to US citizens to avoid visiting all locations in Guatemala due to increasing political violence as well as "common crime." About two months ago, a more limited travel advisory was issued. According to official statistics, tourism revenues increased in the last three years, making this source of foreign exchange Guatemala's second largest after coffee exports. [CERIGUA reported that in the second week of June, the US House Appropriations Committee approved a 70% reduction in military aid to Guatemala, from \$9 million in non-lethal assistance to \$2.887 million. The decision was justified in part by the State Department's negative assessment of Guatemala's human rights situation in its 1989 report. The congresspersons also stated that further military or economic aid will depend progress in the investigation of the

November 1989 kidnapping and torture of Ursuline nun Diana Ortiz by Guatemalan security forces. Other human rights violations mentioned in committee were the murders of Salvadoran Social Democrat leader Hector Oqueli and Guatemalan lawyer Gilda Flores, the kidnapping and murder of San Carlos University students, and an armed attack on Peace Brigades volunteers, one a US citizen. Meanwhile, Guatemalan Interior Minister Gen. Carlos Morales declared that official investigations indicate Oqueli was turned over to the killers by his own friends. Morales asserted that "foreigners" were responsible for the double murder, but that certain Guatemalans could have been involved. Several months ago, a similar explanation given by Morales regarding the kidnapping of Sister Ortiz was described by Guatemalan Archbishop Prospero Penados as an outrage. The minister claimed Ortiz had somehow kidnapped herself. President Vinicio Cerezo and then-defense minister Hector Gramajo later withdrew Morales' statement, but offered no apology or clarification.] [Basic data from CERIGUA Weekly Newsbriefs, 06/18-24/90; 06/25/90 report by Guatemala Human Rights Commission-USA (Washington, DC) based on information received by Comision de Derechos Humanos de Guatemala (CDHG, Mexico); Notimex, 06/27/90; New York Times, 06/28/90]

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