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Guatemalans Testify Before U.N. Working Group On Indigenous Peoples

by Deborah Tyroler

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On July 31 in Geneva at its annual meeting, the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous People heard testimony from members of Guatemalan indigenous organizations. Francisco Cali, representing the Campesino Highlands Committee Highlands (CCDA), outlined diverse forms of violence used against indigenous Guatemalans. Systematic disappearances characterized the 1960s. In the 1970s indigenous people were the target of death squad activity. Under the regime of Gen. Efraim Rios Montt in the early 1980s, entire villages were massacred. At present, said Cali, the mutilated corpses of indigenous persons are found in the streets. Cali said that for Guatemalans the change to civilian government in 1986 merely signified "a change in the methods of repression." He asked, "Can democracy and pluralism exist when over 1 million indigenous Guatemalans are compelled to participate in civil defense patrols and to live in development poles and model villages?" According to Maria del Rosario Toj, representative of the Committee for Campesino Unity (CUC), Guatemala is no longer a civilian society. She noted that indigenous communities' traditional unity, cooperation and trust have been undermined by forced recruitment into civil patrols, and military surveillance of development poles. The CUC has testified before the Working Group for the past eight years. (Basic data from Cerigua Weekly Briefs, 07/30-08/05/90)

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