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Guatemala's Human Rights Attorney General: On Poverty, Violence & Elections

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Nov. 8, Human Rights Attorney General Ramiro de Leon Carpio told reporters that increased violence in recent months is directed correlated with deteriorating economic conditions. According to the World Bank, inflation is running at about 40% on an annualized basis, and at least 50% of all workers are un- or underemployed. Of Guatemala's 9 million people, 67% are illiterate, and 87% receive below poverty-level incomes. Leon Carpio said no one of the leading presidential candidates has offered significant alternatives for confronting the economic crisis. He added that efforts to preserve democracy will deteriorate following the elections, and that many military officers continue to participate in death squads. The official stated that extreme poverty and violence serve as a backdrop to the elections: since the electoral campaign began in June, 11 politicians and three journalists have been assassinated, and five of the 12 presidential candidates have received death threats. He added during the first 10 months of the year, 281 persons have been murdered by death squads, and 188 have been "disappeared." The Center for Investigation, Research and Promotion of Human Rights (CIEPRODH), an independent human rights agency, estimates that in the January-August period, 585 persons have been assassinated, presumably by members of the armed forces, police and paramilitary groups. (Basic data from EFE, 11/08/90; AFP, 11/06/90)

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