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Guatemala: Residents Of Santiago Atitlan Declare Political Neutrality

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Dec. 9, about 45,000 residents of Santiago Atitlan assembled in the local church courtyard for a town meeting led by widows, children and parents of the victims of the Dec. 3 massacre. (See CAU 12/05/90 and 12/07/90 for coverage of massacre.) Many participants in the meeting carried photographs of relatives who were disappeared, arrested or killed during the last 11 years. In a speech before the crowd, Mayor Salvador Ramirez said: "Today marks the end of the massacres and the presence of masked men on every corner...The tears we have shed do not mean that we are cowards. We are not afraid to die. We have suffered for 11 years, and now we are going to live in peace. "We want peace and freedom, we do not want democracy in word alone...There will be no more disappearances and arrests." Ramirez pointed out that prior to the most recent multiple killings by soldiers, the community had suffered two other massacres. These outrages, he said, were not publicly denounced because residents were "too afraid." The assembly produced a "Proclamation of Santiago Atitlan," asserting that Santiago Atitlan residents are henceforth neutral, opposing any ideology which affects the community's peace, security, and freedom. In the statement, residents request that the National Reconciliation Commission ask the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) to withdraw from the region. Within 12 hours, according to the statement, local residents will implement their own security measures. Participants at the town meeting spoke out against a list reportedly circulated by a death squad containing the names of 80 community residents. (Basic data from Notimex, 12/09/90)

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