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Deborah Tyroler

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Guatemala: Report On Political Violence

by Deborah Tyroler

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Aug. 11-17: Mutual Support Group (GAM) president Nineth de Garcia told Cerigua that the resurgence of death squad killings "is reminiscent of the days of [former general presidents] Romeo Lucas and Rios Montt." She said death squads maintain constant surveillance of GAM offices and those of other civic action and labor groups. Aug. 24: Amilcar Mendez, president of the Rujunel Junam Ethnic Communities Council (CERJ), said he received a death threat from the Jaguar Justiciero (JJ). Aug. 26: Police spokespersons told reporters that five people were shot to death in different areas of the capital city over the weekend. All victims were killed execution-style. Metropolitan Judge Luis Mendez noted that the execution-style coup de grace was the mark of professional hitmen. He asserted, "There is a total disrespect for life and an environment of insecurity due to the recent increase in violence." Interior Minister Fernando Hurtado told radio broadcaster Patrullaje Informativo that individuals who do not recognize the government's efforts to bring an end to impunity are "bad" Guatemalans. Hurtado defended investigations by public security forces into the recent upsurge of political violence. Aug. 27: Manuel Conde, secretary general of the presidency, attributed recent acts of violence to turf wars between drug traffickers and auto thieves. Conde rejected the notion that the crimes were politically motivated. Human Rights Attorney General Ramiro de Leon Carpio said violence in Guatemala was the outcome of misery, poverty and hunger; drug trafficking; and, activities by right- and leftwing paramilitary organizations. According to de Leon Carpio, "Guatemala is famous not for our living but for the quantity and quality of our dead. The violence will end when there is an absolute respect among [diverse groups], and when those who break the law are punished." In a press statement, the Guatemalan Clergy Conference (CONFREGUA) condemned the resurgence of violence and called on the government to adopt measures to end impunity and institutionalized repression. CONFREGUA denounced army repression and forced military recruitment. The statement asserted, "[A]s long as the armed forces continue to be involved in assassinations, it will be difficult to bring the climate of fear, peril and death to an end." During a recent interview aired by TV news program Notisiete, Deputy Andres Giron said death squads and not common criminals are responsible for recent murders. "It is necessary to support President [Jorge] Serrano, but it is also necessary to confront him, to tell him that as the commander in chief of the army and the country, he should know where these murders and tragedies are coming from." The Center for the Promotion and Study of Human Rights (CIEPRODH) statistics for the first half of 1991 include 300 assassinations, and 244 cases of torture, abduction, disappearance, assault, and death threats. Human rights monitor organizations cited by ACAN-EFE report over 1,000 violent deaths since Jan. 1. Many of the victims were tortured and killed execution-style. (Basic data from Cerigua Weekly Briefs, 08/11-17/91; EFE, 08/25/91; AFP, ACAN-EFE, 08/26/91, 08/27/91)

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