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Guatemala: Human Rights Update

by Deborah Tyroler

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According to local press reports, serious human rights violations during the months of July and August totaled 177. Included were 56 murders, 13 abductions, 19 persons wounded in assassination attempts, 11 death threats, and three failed kidnapping attempts. The corpses of 47 of the murder victims were left in public places, and 23 of the total were killed in four separate massacres. Five of the abductees were later released. Sept. 8: The independent Center for Investigations, Research and Promotion of Human Rights (CIEPRODH) released a announced having recorded 852 abuses since Jan. 1, including 402 murders, 125 abductions, 44 disappearances, and 142 death threats. Sept. 12: Dr. Giovanni Franco, court forensics investigator, told reporters that exhumations would resume Sept. 16 in Chontala, El Quiche department. Recent exhumations in the area uncovered two grave sites containing the remains of 26 persons believed to have been killed in the mid-1980s. The exhumations were halted due to intimidation of forensic specialists and relatives of the victims by Civil Patrol (PAC) members. In Strasbourg (Germany), the European Parliament passed a resolution calling for improvements in Guatemala's human rights record, but did not sanction suspension of military and humanitarian aid. The resolution noted over 1,000 murders in Guatemala thus far in 1991, and made reference to the role of the army and death squads in human rights violations. Next, parliament members urged President Jorge Serrano to investigate violations and prosecute all guilty parties. Belgian Green Party member Paul Staes called for suspension of all aid to Guatemala. He said, "If we were willing to institute an economic embargo against Iraq, condemnation measures are one hundred times more necessary in the case of Guatemala." European Commissioner Peter Schmidhuber argued against a total aid cut-off. He said President Serrano was taking "concrete measures" to improve the human rights situation. Schmidhuber also noted that 70% of EC aid to Guatemala is humanitarian, while suspending aid would most negatively affect the Guatemalan poor. Sept. 15: In a statement, the Mutual Support Group (GAM) reported that exhumation of two grave sites in Chimaltenango department would commence Sept. 18. According to GAM, 19 sets of remains were found in a clandestine cemetery in Tunaja and 28 in another in Chuguexa. The report said the 47 persons were killed in 1981 by military personnel who accused village residents of collaborating with the guerrillas. According to GAM, "In Chuguexa more than eight families were killed. Family members, adults and children, were tortured and then shot. The bodies were burned and their remains buried in a 10-meter-deep grave." GAM said another 125 grave sites exist in Tunaja alone. (Basic data from Cerigua Weekly Briefs, 09/01-07/91; AFP, Inter Press Service, 09/12/91; ACAN-EFE, 09/08/91, 09/15/91)

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