

Network of Concerned Historians				NCH
Campaigns				
Year original	Year follow-up	Circular	Country	Names
2002		26	Guatemala	Forensic anthropology foundations

Announcement

Amnesty International reports that two weeks ago death threats were made in a letter against employees of several forensic anthropology teams. These teams literally excavate the past by carrying out exhumations of individuals massacred during the counter-insurgency campaign carried out by the Guatemalan military in the early 1980s. This forensic evidence has been crucial in the few cases where convictions of those involved in the massacres have been secured. Exhumations are also being carried out to provide further evidence in the two suits for genocide filed in Guatemala against officials of the administrations of former President Lucas García (1978–82) and former President Ríos Montt (1982–83). For other NCH actions on Guatemala, similar to the present one, see NCH #13 (bishop Juan Gerardi) and NCH #24 (historian Matilde Leonor González Izas). See also our news circulars on the website. We hope that you can send the recommended urgent appeals immediately. Please remember to write in your professional capacity.

URGENT ACTION APPEAL

5 March 2002—UA 68/02—Threats/Fear of safety—GUATEMALA

Death threats have been made against the employees of the Fundación de Antropología Forense de Guatemala (FAFG; Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation), the Centro de Antropología Forense y Ciencias Aplicadas (CAFCA; Centre of Forensic Anthropology and Applied Sciences) and others involved in carrying out exhumations of individuals massacred during the counter-insurgency campaign carried out by the Guatemalan military during the early 1980s.

On 21 February, ten copies of a typed letter arrived at the home of one of the forensic scientists involved in exhumations. The letter explicitly named eleven people; five of whom have carried out exhumations in the past, four present employees of FAFG and two who work for CAFCA.

The letter also made reference to any institution working on exhumations. It demanded that the exhumations stop and warned that if forensic scientists continued carrying out their work, their families would “soon be burying their bones and those of their children”.

At the same time as the letter was issued, a fire was started at a church in Nebaj, El Quiché Department which stored equipment used for exhumations. Part of the church was destroyed. During the last few months, organizations and individuals involved in the exhumation process have also reported incidents of threats and intimidation.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

In the absence of any official government exhumation program, FAFG works to exhume the remains of individuals massacred in the counter-insurgency campaign carried out by the Guatemalan military during the early 1980s. Since 1992, the Foundation has carried out 191 exhumations of more than two thousand victims of the armed conflict. FAFG is currently carrying out an exhumation of the secret mass graves in Xiquin Senahi, Comalapa, Chimaltenango Department where between 80 and 130 victims are believed to be buried.

The exhumation of secret mass graves have enabled forensic investigations into the massacres to take place. This evidence has been crucial in the few cases where convictions of those involved in the massacres, have been secured. Exhumations are also being carried out to provide further evidence in the two suits for genocide filed in Guatemala, by the Centro de Acción Legal en Derechos Humanos (CALDH; Centre for Legal Action in Human Rights) against officials of the administrations of former President Lucas García (1978–82) and former President Ríos Montt (1982–83).

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible:

calling on the authorities to guarantee the safety of the employees of FAFG, CAFCA and others involved in carrying out exhumations;

urging the authorities to immediately investigate the reported threats against organizations carrying out exhumations;

reminding the authorities of their obligation to fulfill the recommendations made by the Historical Clarification Commission which identified exhumations as an important step towards justice and national reconciliation, and called for a government exhumation program;

urging the authorities to initiate a government exhumation program.

APPEALS TO:

(If your emails are returned please send your appeals as faxes or through the mail.)

President of the Republic of Guatemala:

Lic. Alfonso Portillo Cabrera

Presidente de la República de Guatemala

6a. Avenida 'A' 4-41, Zona 1,

Ciudad de Guatemala , GUATEMALA

Telegrams: Presidente de la Republica de Guatemala, Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala

Fax: 011 502 239 0090 (please keep trying this number)

Email: mensajes@presidenteportillo.gob.gt

Salutation: Dear President/Señor Presidente

Minister of the Interior:

Eduardo Arevalo Lacs

Ministro de Gobernación

Ministerio de Gobernación

6a Avenida 4-64, Zona 4

Ciudad de Guatemala , GUATEMALA

Telegrams: Ministro de Gobernación, Ciudad de Guatemala ,

Guatemala

Fax: 011 502 362 0239/ 362 0237

Email: monica24@inteln.net.gt

Salutation: Dear Minister/Señor Ministro

Peace Secretary:

Sr. Gabriel Aguilera

Secretario de la Paz

5a Calle 4-33, Zona 1

Edificio Rabi, 4 Nivel

Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Fax: 011 502 230 1731

Salutation: Dear Secretary/Señor Secretario

COPIES TO:

Fundación de Antropología Forense de Guatemala (FAFG)

Avenida Simon Canas 10-64, Zona 2,

01002 Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Fax: 011 502 254 0882/288 7297/ 288 7302 (if a voice answers, say “por favor, tono de fax”)

Newspaper:

Diario Prensa Libre

13 Calle 9-31, Zona 1

Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Fax: 011 502 251 8768

Ambassador Ariel Rivera Irias

Embassy of Guatemala

2220 R St. NW

Washington DC 20008

Fax: 1 202 745 1908

Please send appeals immediately. Check with the Network of Concerned Historians if sending appeals after April 16, 2002.

Amnesty International is a worldwide grassroots movement that promotes and defends human rights.