

Network of Concerned Historians				NCH
Campaigns				
Year original	Year follow-up	Circular	Country	Names
2003		31	Guatemala	Fredy Peccerelli, forensic anthropologist, a.o.
	2005			<i>follow-up 1</i>

Announcement

The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) reports once again about death threats against members of a Guatemalan forensic anthropology team. These teams literally excavate past atrocities and are therefore of great concern to historians. Please see NCH case summary and AAAS message below. We hope that you can send the recommended urgent appeals immediately. Please remember to write in your professional capacity.

P.S.: For other NCH actions on Guatemala, see: NCH #13, 24, 26. For other NCH actions on forensic anthropology, see NCH #29. For more news on forensic anthropology and exhumations in other parts of the world, see the news circulars at the NCH website.

NCH SUMMARY

In February, March and May 2002, anonymous threatening letters were sent and telephone calls made against current or former employees of the non-governmental Fundación de Antropología Forense de Guatemala (FAFG; Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation), the Oficina de Derechos Humanos del Arzobispado de Guatemala (ODHAG; Human Rights Office of the Archbishopric of Guatemala), the Centro de Antropología Forense y Ciencias Aplicadas (CAFCA; Center of Forensic Anthropology and Applied Sciences), and the Asociación para el Desarrollo Integral de las Víctimas de la Violencia en las Verapaces Maya Achi (ADIVIMA; Association for the Integral Development of Victims of Violence in the Verapaces Maya Achi), all involved in carrying out exhumations of individuals massacred during the counter-insurgency campaign by the Guatemalan military in the early 1980s. It is believed that the individuals behind the threats had ties to the military during Guatemala's civil war. At the time of the threats, there was a fire in a church in Nebaj, El Quiché, destroying most of the documents stored there, including information on 35 massacres recorded by the Catholic church between 1980 and 1983 in Nebaj alone. Since 1992 FAFG had carried out 191 exhumations of more than 2,000 victims of the armed conflict. Several of those threatened have given key forensic testimony in proceedings against former government officials for past human rights violations. Exhumations are also being carried out to provide further evidence in two genocide suits

filed in Guatemala, by the Asociación Justicia y Reconciliación (AJR; Association for Justice and Reconciliation) and the Centro de Acción Legal en Derechos Humanos (CALDH; Centre for Legal Action in Human Rights), against officials in the administrations of former Presidents Romeo Lucas García (1978–82) and Efraín Ríos Montt (1982–83). In 2002 anthropologist Victoria Stanford and journalists David González and Wesley Boxed received death threats for starting an investigation into mass graves exhumed in the Rabinal region of Baja Verapaz. They had published evidence of crimes against humanity committed during the *Guatemalan civil war in the New York Times*. In September 2002, Manuel García Cruz, who participated in the efforts of the National Coordination of Guatemalan Widows (CONAVIGUA) to have mass graves exhumed in Guatemalan indigenous areas and to protect indigenous rights, was seized, tortured and killed in El Quiché Department. In March, April and May 2003, and in September 2005, there were new incidents of threats and intimidation of FAFG members, including its director Fredy Peccerelli, and their families.

[Sources: American Association for the Advancement of Science Human Rights Action Network, *GU0207_for*, 21 March & 16 May 2002, 9 May 2003, 14 September 2005; Amnesty International, *Urgent Action Appeal 68/02* (5 & 13 March 2002), *127/03* (8 May 2003); Amnesty International, *Report* (London), 2002 (2002) 112–13; 2003 (2003) 114; *Index on Censorship*, 4/02: 116.]

**AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE
HUMAN RIGHTS ACTION NETWORK (AAASHRAN)**

(Visit the AAASHRAN website to read this alert online and compose letters of appeal:
<http://shr.aaas.org/aaashran>).

GUATEMALAN FORENSIC ANTHROPOLOGISTS FACING DEATH THREATS

14 September 2005--Case number: gu0207_for

ISSUE: Harassment or intimidation

Previous Alerts: 21 March 2002 ; 16 May 2002 ; 9 May 2003

FACTS OF THE CASE:

The Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation (FAFG), and in particularly anthropologist Fredy

Peccerelli, its Executive Director, and his family, are once again facing death threats from unknown assailants thought to be tied to the military during Guatemala's civil war.

On August 26, 2005, Jeannette Peccerelli, Fredy's wife and a US citizen, was accosted while stopped at a traffic light. Two men approached her car, one of whom held a gun to her head. The man with the gun told her that they were watching Fredy Peccerelli very closely, while pushing the gun into her head, and then they left.

On September 8, 2005, Omar Giron Bertoni, who works for FAFG and is Fredy's brother-in-law, found an anonymous letter addressed to Omar, threatening the entire FAFG team, as well as Bianka Peccerelli (Fredy's sister and Omar's wife), and Fredy. The letter mentioned previous threats to FAFG staff, saying "You didn't understand the first time, we already told you we don't want you working" and said if FAFG staff didn't want to do things the easy way, they had other means by which to stop these "sons of bitches that continue to do this work."

Both Fredy and the foundation received death threats in the past but since 2003, after the last presidential elections, they have been able to work without problems. FAFG has been working to exhume the clandestine mass graves of people massacred during Guatemala's 35-year civil conflict. Exhumations have played a critical role in providing forensic investigation teams with evidence to scientifically document massacres perpetrated by the Guatemalan military.

Bianka and Jeannette have reported the threats to the Public ministry and have asked authorities to investigate.

Since 1992, FAFG has carried out over 200 exhumations of mass grave sites, using forensic anthropology and archeology to search for the estimated 200,000 lives that were lost. FAFG is a non-governmental organization that functions in the absence of an official government exhumation program. The AAAS Science and Human Rights Program worked to train the members of the forensic team. In 2004, the Program honored FAFG at the Annual Science and Human Rights reception at the AAAS Annual Meeting.

(Sources of information for this case include: Personal correspondence with Fredy Peccerelli, depositions victims gave to Guatemalan police)

RELEVANT HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS:

American Convention on Human Rights

Article 04: Everyone has the right to life.

The Human Rights Defenders Declaration

Article 04: Everyone has the right to life.

Article 11: Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to the lawful exercise of his or her occupation or profession.

Article 12(2): The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights].

Article 6(a): Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others: To know, seek, obtain, receive and hold information about all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including having access to information as to how those rights and freedoms are given effect in domestic legislative, judicial or administrative systems.

Article 6(b): Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others: As provided for in human rights and other applicable international instruments, freely to publish, impart or disseminate to others views, information and knowledge on all human rights and fundamental freedoms;

Article 6(c): Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others: To study, discuss, form and hold opinions on the observance, both in law and in practice, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and, through these and other appropriate means, to draw public attention to those matters.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Please send faxes, letters, or emails:

Requesting that the government provide the scientists and other staff of the Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation with police protection;

Asking officials to investigate threats against the individuals concerned; and

Reminding government authorities of the Guatemala Historical Clarification Commission's recommendations that identified exhumations as an important step in achieving a full accounting of the past and national reconciliation. The Commission's report specifically states that the government should support the work of nongovernmental forensic scientists.

APPEAL AND INQUIRY MESSAGES SHOULD BE SENT TO:

Sr. Julio Godoy
Vice Secretary of State
Ministerio de Gobernacion
Email: magaly@mingob.gob.gt
Salutation: Dear Mr. Minister:

Sr Juan Luis Florido
Fiscal General (Attorney General)
Ministerio Publico
Email: fiscalgeneral@mp.lex.gob.gt, agudiel@mp.lex.gob.gt

Please send copies of your appeals, and any responses you may receive, or direct any questions you may have to Victoria Baxter, AAAS Science and Human Rights Program, 1200 New York Ave, NW, Washington, DC 20005; tel. 202-326-6797; email vbaxter@aaas.org; or fax 202-289-4950.

The keys to effective appeals are to be courteous and respectful, accurate and precise, impartial in approach, and as specific as possible regarding the alleged violation and the international human rights standards and instruments that apply to the situation. Reference to your scientific organization and professional affiliation is always helpful.

To ensure that appeals are current and credible, please do not continue to write appeals on this case after 90 days from the date of the posting unless an update has been issued.