

Network of Concerned Historians				NCH
Campaigns				
Year original	Year follow-up	Circular	Country	Name
2018		92	Guatemala	Archivo Histórico de la Policía Nacional (AHPN)

Announcement

The renowned Archivo Histórico de la Policía Nacional (AHPN; Historical Archive of the National Police) in Guatemala is in danger.

Since its discovery in 2005, it has crucially contributed to document human rights violations in the country in high-profile prosecutions. Powerful military intelligence and operational officers have sought to shut down the human rights and justice organizations contributing to these prosecutions, including AHPN. This probably caused the government of President Jimmy Morales to seek to control AHPN and dismiss its director, Gustavo Meoño Brenner, on 3 August 2018.

Please urgently sign the petition of protest. To sign, send your name (individual or institutional) to Kate Doyle of the National Security Archive in Washington.

Email address: kadoyle@gwu.edu

Subject line: AHPN signature.

Please find below:

1. The text of the petition in English and a link to the petition in Spanish.
2. A background article written by Kate Doyle.

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Sign the Petition

The National Security Archive is collecting institutional and individual signatures to be forwarded to Archives without Borders, which will coordinate the international response. To sign, send your name (individual or institutional) to kadoyle@gwu.edu with the subject line "AHPN signature."

IN LIGHT OF THE CURRENT SITUATION OF THE HISTORICAL ARCHIVE OF THE NATIONAL POLICE (AHPN), THE UNDERSIGNED ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS DO DECLARE TO THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM (UNDP), THE AUTHORITIES OF THE MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND SPORTS, AND THE CITIZENS OF GUATEMALA THE FOLLOWING:

- Our profound recognition of the professional work of the staff of the aforementioned Archive, which over the course of thirteen years rescued and made accessible an important document collection that was found in a state of total neglect and abandonment, transforming it into a national and international benchmark for best practices in archival science and public consultation. We thus express our solidarity with the Archive's staff and its leadership.
- Our concern about the attitude assumed by the UNDP in concert with the Ministry of Culture and Sports, which, in haste and without taking the necessary time to establish basic policies and technical guidelines, intervened in the normal functions of the Archive without guaranteeing the continuity or efficiency of its operations.
- Along those lines, for example, no explanation has been given for why the AHPN Coordinator was not rehired except the simple argument that his contract had come to an end; there was no performance review, no evaluation of results achieved, and no accounting audit. This at the same time that the sectors most implicated in human rights violations in the country have publicly demanded the departure of the Coordinator and that the Archive be prohibited from continuing to fulfill its role in the fight against impunity and the defense of the right to truth and justice.

Given these circumstances, the Ministry of Culture and Sports and the UNDP must provide citizens with answers to the following questions:

- In the case of a document collection of the State of Guatemala, which therefore belongs to the people, is it legal for the Ministry of Culture and Sports to delegate the direction and management of the AHPN to an international entity?

- Faced with the appointment of a new Coordinator of the AHPN, what guarantees that she possesses the experience, capacity and vision needed for the continuity and strengthening of the Archive?
- Given that the UNDP has publicly attested to the existence of funding from the international community guaranteeing the Archive's operations until June of 2019, what is the justification for splitting the contracts of the AHPN consultants into periods of one and two months, an action that violates legally recognized labor rights?
- The UNDP is an entity of the United Nations, which is founded on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Do these actions not constitute a violation of those guarantees?
- In that context, is UNDP headquarters aware of these decisions and does it endorse them?

Due to our concern regarding the instability created within the AHPN by the measures taken by the Ministry of Culture and Sports and the UNDP beginning on August 3, 2018,

WE DEMAND:

1. A guarantee of the inviolability of the information contained in the AHPN and the strict preservation of its document collection, while ensuring the continuation of all work processes in the Archive.
2. The continued openness, efficiency and cooperation with the institutions, organizations and individual users of the AHPN and of the Archive's various investigations, as well as its contribution to the right to truth and search for justice, at a minimum with the same level of commitment demonstrated to date.
3. The reactivation of the Advisory Board, comprised of prominent personalities in academia, culture, and the defense of human rights, to accompany and professionally advise the work of the AHPN.

Guatemala, 7 August 2018

Petition from organizations and individuals supporting the Historical Archive of the National Police

[English version](#)

The National Security Archive is collecting institutional and individual signatures and will help coordinate the international response. To sign, send your name (individual or institutional) to kadoyle@gwu.edu with the subject line "AHPN signature."

[Versión en español](#)

El Archivo de Seguridad Nacional está recopilando firmas institucionales e individuales y ayudará a coordinar la respuesta internacional. Para firmar, envíe su nombre (individual o institucional) a kadoyle@gwu.edu con el subject line “Firma AHPN.”

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<https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/news/guatemala/2018-08-13/guatemala-police-archive-under-threat>

Guatemala Police Archive under Threat

Repository of historic human rights evidence faces government crackdown

Published: Aug 13, 2018

Edited by Kate Doyle

For more information, contact: 202-994-7000 or nsarchiv@gwu.edu

Related links

[Guatemalan Police Archive](#)

[Mildewed Police Files May Hold Clues to Atrocities in Guatemala](#)

The New York Times

November 21, 2015

[The Atrocity Files](#)

Harper's Magazine

December, 2017

Washington, D.C., August 13, 2018—Guatemala’s renowned Historical Archive of the National Police (AHPN) is in crisis after its director Gustavo Meoño Brenner was abruptly removed in one of a series of recent actions orchestrated by the Guatemalan government and a United Nations office. The actions also placed the AHPN’s remaining staff of more than fifty people on temporary contract, and transferred oversight for the repository from the country’s national archives, where it had functioned since 2009, to the Ministry of Culture and Sports.

Meoño learned of his removal on Friday, August 3, when a convoy of government vehicles pulled up in front of the Police Archive, and officials from the Culture Ministry and the Guatemalan office of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) entered, demanding that he leave. “The operation was executed with all the characteristics of a commando strike,” [one press account reported](#).

The unexpected move threatens to jeopardize the stability of the AHPN's enormous collection of fragile National Police documents. Since their discovery in an abandoned and deteriorating state on a Guatemala City police base in 2005, hundreds of volunteers and paid employees have cycled through the AHPN under Meoño's leadership to clean, organize, scan, and make public over twenty million pages of the estimated 8 linear kilometers of paper records. A UNDP employee with no experience in archival management has been named to replace Meoño as director.

Historically, the UNDP played an important role in the creation of the Police Archive. Its Guatemala office administered millions of dollars in donations granted to the AHPN by foreign governments and the United Nations. The office provided technical assistance, political advice, and administrative support. It was also a frequent ally to the AHPN during several difficult periods in the course of the archive's growth and development.

Yet in [a press release issued on the Sunday after Meoño's ouster](#), the UNDP failed to explain its decision to push the long-time director out, beyond stating that his contract had ended and would not be renewed. The release is written in bland, bureaucratic language that provides no detailed plans for the future management of the Police Archive beyond ensuring that it is "strengthened in its institutionality and sustainability."

For the National Security Archive, Meoño's abrupt removal, the decision to shift oversight of the AHPN out from under the careful stewardship of Ana Carla Ericastillo – director of the national archives of Guatemala – to the untested Ministry of Culture and Sports, and the UNDP's refusal to provide dozens of long-time staff members with reasonable working contracts are deeply troubling developments. The National Security Archive has an association with the Historical Archive of the National Police that goes back to the AHPN's beginning. The [Archive's Kate Doyle and Carlos Osorio had the privilege of visiting the site of the massive Police Archive](#) just weeks after it was discovered in July 2005. They witnessed firsthand the awesome task that faced Meoño and his colleagues to rescue a treasure trove of historic documentation that was rotting with mold after years of neglect. Doyle went on to advise the AHPN project, bringing professional archivist Dr. Trudy Peterson conduct an initial assessment of the collection, and then worked with the AHPN to develop investigative skills to identify evidence of human rights abuses. Today, Doyle serves on the AHPN's International Advisory Board.

[In 2010, Doyle participated as an expert witness](#) in the first criminal human rights proceeding in Guatemala to draw on Police Archive records as legal evidence for the prosecution. The trial of two former police agents for the forced disappearance of labor leader Edgar Fernando García, and [a second trial in 2013 of their superiors](#) – including the former chief of the Guatemalan National Police, Col. Héctor Bol de la Cruz – represented a breakthrough in human rights justice in Guatemala. Led by Meoño, the

[extraordinary work of the Historical Archive of the National Police](#) made those prosecutions – and the many others that followed – possible.

Indeed, it may be the Police Archive's crucial contributions to human rights trials that caused the government of President Jimmy Morales to seek to control the repository and fire its director. Besides the Fernando García case, AHPN records played a central role in trials of former army and police officers for the 1980 deadly burning of the Spanish Embassy, and the 1981 abduction, torture and rape of Emma [Molina Theissen](#) and forced disappearance of her 14-year-old brother Marco Antonio, among others. AHPN documents also form the heart of evidence in the as-yet-untried [“Death Squad Dossier” investigation](#), concerning the mass forced disappearance of almost 200 citizens over the course of 18 months at the height of the country's internal conflict.

Those cases, along with the 2013 genocide trial of ex-dictator Efraín Ríos Montt, enraged powerful military intelligence and operational officers who were behind the scorched earth counterinsurgency campaigns of the 1980s. They have sought to harass, intimidate, and shut down the human rights and justice organizations contributing to the prosecutions ever since. President Morales himself has also attacked the international investigative body that helped strengthen human rights prosecutions and fight corruption, known as CICIG. Since taking power, Morales' government and the Congress his party controls have [tried to shut down CICIG and kick out its commissioner](#), Iván Velásquez, without success. So it is possible that the government crackdown on the Historical Archive of the National Police is another effort to halt the process of human rights justice in Guatemala and punish its defenders. What is still utterly unclear is why an agency of the United Nations is joining in that effort.

Since Gustavo Meoño's dismissal, friends of the Police Archive – among them, civil society groups, human rights defenders, academics, lawyers, religious organizations, and international supporters – have come together to demand an explanation for the hasty and still unjustified actions taken by the UNDP and the Guatemalan government. Last week, they issued a statement calling for answers from those two entities and demanding that the AHPN's documents be safeguarded, its investigative work continue, and its Advisory Boards be reactivated to help guide the Police Archive in the coming period.

The National Security Archive joins our colleagues in Guatemala and internationally in calling for clarification of these latest developments on the part of the government and the UNDP. The precious holdings of the Historical Archive of the National Police must be protected and continue to serve the causes of human rights, accountability and justice in Guatemala.