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Proponent of peace speaks

By Ben Embry

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Maria Teresa Sic De Mendoza, a survivor of the atrocities that wracked Guatemala during its 36-year civil war, spoke to a group of Kansas Citizens last night at Peace Chapel, recounting her harrowing story of rape, murder and loss.

Mendoza, 50, a Maya Achi farmer from Chichupac, lost her parents, husband and other family members after a succession of brutal raids from paramilitary groups under the control of then-President Gen. Efraim Rios Montt in late 1982 and early 1983.

Montt, the strongman widely believed to be responsible for the Chichupac massacre in which 31 community leaders were tortured and murdered and hundreds of other war atrocities, is now running for president.

More than 200,000 people, most of them indigenous, died or disappeared during the 1960-96 civil war in Guatemala. The truth commission concluded that the worst carnage occurred during Rios Montt's brief rule, especially in the Rabinal area where Chichupac is located.

Across the world, human rights groups and governments, including the United States, fear a Rios Montt victory could unravel what little democracy exists in Guatemala, a country wracked by poverty, violence and official corruption.

Two years ago, Chichupac joined 23 Guatemalan communities in a lawsuit charging Rios Montt with genocide. A special prosecutor is investigating whether to bring the case to trial.

To increase public awareness of the human rights crisis in Guatemala, Mendoza, along with four other women, are touring the United States on a nationwide speaking tour titled "Women Speak Out." Mendoza's appearance in Kansas City was co-sponsored by Kansas City Interfaith Peace Alliance and Network in Solidarity with Guatemala.

"Justice for us would be to capture these people and put them in jail," she said forcefully. "We who survived this know who is responsible. They killed our people. For this, we want justice."

In addition to her talk at Peace Chapel, 600 Broadway in Kansas City, Mendoza was also speaking in Independence at the Community of Christ Stone Church, 1012 W. Lexington, today at 11 a.m.

To reach Ben Embry, e-mail ben.embry@examiner.net or call (816) 350-6323.