

# Prioritize War Victims over Former Paramilitaries

On August 19 2004, the Guatemalan Congress approved payment of some Q420,000,000 (approximately \$52.5 million) to former members of the Civil Defense Patrols (Ex-PAC's) for "civic activity" that they carried out during the internal armed conflict. The Civil Defense Patrols were created by the Guatemalan Army during the dictatorships of Lucas Garcia and Rios Montt of the early 1980's, to act as an extension of the military and army intelligence units in rural communities. Ex-PAC's were armed by the military and often ordered to carry out massacres or torture in neighboring communities.

According to the United Nations Historical Clarification Commission (CEH, Guatemala's Truth Commission), the Ex-PAC's were wholly responsible for 18% of the human rights violations and other acts of violence committed during the civil war. It is estimated that during the internal armed conflict, 200,000 people were killed or disappeared, and at least one million displaced.

The approval to compensate the Ex-PAC's comes during a budget crisis in the country, where it is expected that paying the Ex-PAC's will increase the public debt, reduce funds for social services, and counteract other domestic plans for reactivating the national economy. On average, each of the former 700,000 Ex-PAC's is scheduled to receive a total of about \$600 over the course of the next 2 years.

While the Ex-PAC's demands have been constantly supported by both the Executive and Congress, the National Reparations program for victims of the internal armed conflict has been only tepidly acknowledged as an important institution by the Guatemalan Government. In comparison with the allocated budget and rapid timetable to pay the Ex-PAC's, the National Reparations Program will only be able to make reparations payments of about \$100 over the course of 13 years to the hundreds of thousands of orphans, widows, and other victims of the war.

To the Honorable President Berger,

I am deeply concerned that your administration has placed the compensation of former members of the Civil Defense Patrols (Ex-PAC's) above the need to make reparations to the victims of the internal armed conflict. While Ex-PAC members in many ways benefited from their position, many victims of the war, and especially widows and orphans, were left without homes, families, or means for survival.

It is my understanding that Ex-PAC's, on average, will receive about \$600 per person over the course of the next two years, while victims of the war will receive about \$100 over the course of the next thirteen years. As evidence of your commitment to re-launching the Peace Accords, I ask that you prioritize the National Reparation Program for the victims of the war over the incendiary position that considers Ex-PAC's national heroes. In my opinion, groups that commit widespread human rights violations are not entitled to receive compensation for their services, and should NOT be hailed as national heroes.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_