



THE NETWORK IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE PEOPLE OF GUATEMALA
SOLIDARITY UPDATE

April 2003

What's Happening in Guatemala?

As the attacks against human rights workers continue, the recent creation of the Commission to Investigate Illegal Groups and Clandestine Security Apparatuses (CICIACS) is most welcomed. While CICIACS is a step forward in investigating the perpetrators of human rights abuses and uncovering the formal and informal connections between state and non-state security forces, funding is still necessary to ensure its independence. While the rise in politically motivated attacks creates fear in civil society, the lack of democratization and non-fulfillment of the Peace Accords worries, or should worry, the international community. In this article, we examine a number of pressing issues facing Guatemala today in the hopes of clarifying current challenges and strategizing for the future.

National Elections Approach
 Guatemalans will elect new leaders in November 2003. So far, the Presidential elections are shaping up to be a contest between different right wing groups. Of the nearly 20 officially registered political parties, the two strongest contenders are the PAN and the FRG.

The National Advancement Party

(PAN) represents big-business interests, including industry, banking, and large-scale agricultural plantations, and stands for neo-liberal economic policies such as the privatization of public services

The ruling Guatemalan Republican Front (FRG), meanwhile, is dominated by the military – including wartime human rights violators in leading posts – and the so-called “new rich.” Party head General Efraín Ríos Montt, mastermind of the scorched earth policy during the civil war, aspires to run on the FRG presidential ticket. The Guatemalan Constitution, however, prohibits his candidacy since he took power in 1982 by means of a coup. A court will rule in May whether or not he can legally run for President.

The Leftist party, New Nation Alliance (ANN) suffers from a lack of funds and unity. The presidency is almost surely beyond its means and it is more likely to focus on Congressional seats and municipal-level posts.

Election years in Guatemala are notoriously accompanied by increased violence. Politicians and civil society representatives will likely experience an increase in intimidation and attacks.

Military/EMP budget transfers
 According to Congresswoman Nineth Montenegro’s summary of the Guatemalan national budget for fiscal year 2002, the Defense Ministry and Presidential General Staff (Estado Mayor Presidencial- EMP) were some of the largest beneficiaries of the special budget transfers carried out last year. The Defense Ministry’s budget was increased by Q238.7 million above the initially approved Q1,000 million and the EMP’s budget was increased by an additional Q79.5 million above the Q58.7 million initially approved by Congress. These additional fund transfers to the armed forces are a continuation of the current administration’s attempts to further strengthen sectors of the Army to the detriment of civil society institutions and important social needs.

The government also continues to assign tasks to the Army that do not fall under its mandate such as internal security duties, distribution of government subsidized fertilizers, and anti-narcotics operations. Additionally there is a proposal before Congress to put the Defense Ministry in charge of the National Maritime Authority, giving the Army control over many fiscal and immigration activities.

Despite the links between high level military officials and drug trafficking, and the widely documented abuses of authority and power by the Army, the civilian government appears quite willing to cede even more influence. The extension of military authority to civilian matters and the continued existence of the EMP undermines key elements of the Peace Accords.

Furthermore Enrique Rios Sosa, son of the FRG’s Secretary General and President of Congress Efraim Rios Montt, is currently head of the General Staff of National Defense and may be named the Minister of Defense. As the military further consolidates its control

over civilian institutions, civil society will have to work even harder to establish a full democratic order in Guatemala.

Teachers’ Strike
 From January to the beginning of March, more than 62,000 of Guatemala’s 82,000 public school teachers were on strike. The teachers delivered a list of 33 points to the Guatemala Ministry of Education, demanding increased spending for school meal programs, text books, desks, chairs, building repairs, a 100% salary increase, long-term contracted positions, and monthly paychecks rather than quarterly ones. Since there are 23 recognized languages in Guatemala, the teachers also petitioned for increased bilingual education that respects native languages.

The teachers coordinated with students and their families, women’s groups, indigenous groups, labor sectors, and retired police officers to successfully and peacefully occupy government buildings, block the Pan-American highway, halt service at the Santa Elena airport and the International Aurora airport, and stall traffic at the border crossings to Mexico, Honduras and El Salvador. In Chimaltenango, teachers blocked the Pan-American Highway for three hours, allowing traffic to pass every five minutes, boarding buses to educate riders on the situation. The teachers took to the streets shouting creative chants to the rhythm of plastic whistles and formed conga lines to keep the energy of their strike alive.

The Guatemalan military was deployed to protect public buildings during the protests, a move that many demonstrators felt was intimidating and in violation of their constitutional right of assembly. During a protest at the Salvadoran border, two teachers were arrested and one wounded.

continued on page 7

INSIDE

G.A.P. Update	2
A Friend Passes Away	2
Urgent Action: IMET	3
Urgent Action: Agrarian Reform	3
Urgent Action: GAM	4
What War Means	5
Gerardi Case Update	6
Mack Case Update	6
CAFTA Update	6

G.A.P. Update

BECOME A HUMAN RIGHTS OBSERVER IN GUATEMALA!

Next G.A.P. Training June 23-30, 2003

Application Deadline: May 1, 2003

The Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala (NISGUA) seeks qualified volunteers to act as human rights observers as part of the Guatemala Accompaniment Project (G.A.P.). Volunteers serve for six months to one year in communities at risk for human rights abuses.

What is human rights accompaniment?

Accompaniment creates a non-violent response to the threats, harassment, and violence suffered by Guatemalan communities and grassroots organizations. To this end, NISGUA's Guatemala Accompaniment Project (G.A.P.) places U.S. volunteers to live side-by-side with at-risk communities and organizations in an effort to deter human rights violations. These volunteers, known as accompaniers, monitor the situation and alert the international community to abuses. The accompaniers' presence provides a measure of security and creates space for Guatemalan communities and organizations to organize to defend their rights.

Who does NISGUA/G.A.P. accompany?

Returned Refugee and Displaced Communities: Since 1995, G.A.P. has placed accompaniers in villages of returned refugees and displaced people. Currently G.A.P. maintains some level of presence in 13 villages in the areas that were hardest hit by the 36-year civil war. G.A.P. accompaniers and their U.S. sponsoring communities have provided a vital international link for these communities as they seek to rebuild their lives.

Association for Justice and Reconciliation: In 2000, a courageous group of war survivors brought legal cases to a Guatemalan court against former military dictators on charges of genocide against the indigenous population. The witnesses in this case have formed the Association for Justice and Reconciliation and have requested international accompaniment. G.A.P. has responded to this request with four accompaniers in the Ixcán and Ixil regions.

Grassroots Organizations: Since the beginning of 2000, threats, harassment, and direct attacks have increased against Guatemalan labor unions, peasant and indigenous groups, and other organizations working for justice and human rights. To respond to this situation, G.A.P. initiated its Organization Accompaniment Program. Two G.A.P. accompaniers based in Guatemala City respond to short-term requests for accompaniment for organizations and individuals.

What are the Qualifications for Becoming a Human Rights Accompanier?

Prospective candidates should be at least 21 years old, live in the U.S. or Canada, and have: Spanish proficiency or demonstrated ability to develop proficiency within six weeks; the ability to live and work in rudimentary conditions and in situations that may involve some risk; cultural sensitivity and good judgment; ability to write reports and undertake human rights monitoring; availability for a minimum of six months (in addition to training and language study); previous experience in Guatemala or Latin America (preferred).

How Do I Become a Human Rights Accompanier with G.A.P.?

G.A.P. holds three trainings a year. These weeklong sessions in the U.S. cover Guatemalan history, politics and culture, non-violence, human rights monitoring, and development work. Upon successful completion of the training, the accompanier is matched with a Guatemalan community and a U.S. sponsoring community, which covers most of the accompanier's costs. For more information, contact NISGUA/G.A.P., 1830 Connecticut Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20009; (202) 265 8713; nisguagap@igc.org.

Next G.A.P. Training June 23-30, 2003

Application Deadline: May 1, 2003

A Friend Passes Away: Amy Boseman Remembered

By Caitlin Hasser

My journal entry from the first day that I met Amy Bosman said "I met the nicest, brightest, spunkiest person today." We met during language school in Xela, Guatemala, beginning a friendship that would take us through trying times in Guatemala and into hopes of new beginnings back home in the States. Amy died on Saturday, March 22, 2003 at the age of 25. It is hard to imagine that a person who was exploding with so much life is no longer able to share her large smile and uplifting laughter.

Amy was born in Kenosha, Wisconsin on Sept. 4, 1977. After graduating from Northwestern University with a degree in History and Political Science, she taught elementary school for two years in an inner city school in Houston through Teach for America. Continuing her commitment to social justice and equality, she joined the Guatemala Accompaniment Project as an accompanier in Xaman from January to June, 2002. She worked both in the community itself and with witnesses from Xaman who were involved in the trial that spring. Amy hoped eventually to work in international human rights law. At the time of her death, she was pursuing her Master's degree with the University of Chicago School of Public Policy and was scheduled to enter the University of Chicago Law School in the fall.



The night that Amy died, she had gone out with friends in Chicago. The last time anyone saw her she was pushing the elevator button in her building. She had been happy and in a good mood—having just finished her exams a week before and planning a trip to San Francisco the next week. She fell off of her fire escape on the 9th floor and died at 12:30 in the morning. The medical examiners think that her heel got caught in the grating causing her to twist her ankle and fall over the railing in an accident.

Many people knew Amy for her commitment to social justice, her intellectual rigor, and her social butterfly personality. We knew her as a generous and loyal friend. We remember the "book club" she started to discuss books we would read out in the communities, her contagious laughter, her thoughtful solidarity with people, and the aching fear she had when she almost drowned in the ocean off the coast of Guatemala.

What was she thinking when she went to the fire escape that night? Was she furrowing her brow thinking about the new war in Iraq? Was she feeling the warm breeze in Chicago to celebrate the first day of spring? We will never know the answers to these questions. But we do know that the world has lost a wonderful woman who had much to give to her friends, to her causes, and to the world. She is sorely missed.

Cultural Survival Quarterly

Cultural Survival Quarterly explores the interconnected issues of the environment, land rights, sustainable development, and cultural preservation programs as they affect Indigenous Peoples and ethnic minorities. Each issue includes news, resources, reviews, photo essays, and general interest pieces. Membership includes a full year (4 issues) and supports our special projects and research efforts.

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Act Now to Continue IMET Ban

Once again, we are building our campaign to continue the ban on military training in Guatemala. The IMET ban historically has been tied to fulfillment of the peace accords, and specifically with the dismantling of the Presidential General Staff (EMP) and the reduction of military deployments to defensive roles. Neither of these specific conditions has been met.

With the recent creation of the Commission to Investigate Illegal Groups and Clandestine Security Apparatuses (CICIACS), a new wave of violence has targeted civil society organizations and government human rights workers. As most believe these recent attacks are tied to the state, we must demand thorough and independent investigations. The CICIACS commission will be mandated to investigate these and other cases but must be supported, protected and financed.

Background

Guatemala has not yet made the substantive reforms necessary to justify a removal of the ban on US military aid in the form of international military training (IMET) and foreign military financing (FMF). This ban has been in place since 1990 following the assassination of US innkeeper Michael Devine. It was modified after the 1996 signing of the Guatemalan Peace Accords to permit the Guatemalan military to attend expanded-IMET courses, which cover subjects such as civil-military relations, military justice, defense resource management, and democracy. The ban remains a useful source of leverage to advance military reforms agreed upon by the Guatemalan state in the Peace Accords.

While Guatemalan President Portillo initially made promising statements regarding military reform and human rights, little concrete action has been taken. The creation of the CICIACS commission is a step in the right direction but will require adequate funding and independence. The best way to urge the administration to follow through with earlier promises is to show that Guatemala matters to the international community.

Who to Call:

Your member of Congress, especially if they are on the Foreign Operations Subcommittee! You can visit <http://thomas.loc.gov> or call 202-224-3121 to find your Representative's contact information.

Foreign Operations Sub-Committee: Jim Kolbe (AZ), Sonny Callahan (AL), Joe Knollenberg (MI), Jack Kingston (GA), Jerry Lewis (CA), Roger Wicker (MS), Henry Bonilla (TX), John Sununu (NH), Nita Lowey (NY), Nancy Pelosi (CA), Jesse Jackson, Jr. (IL), Carolyn Kilpatrick (MI), Steven Rothman (NJ).

Talking Points:

With a startling increase in attacks, threats, intimidations and murders, the human rights situation in Guatemala has deteriorated drastically. The CICIACS commission is mandated to investigate human rights attacks but will need international funding and support. The U.S. cannot justify lifting the ban on military aid, in the form of international military training (IMET) and foreign military financing (FMF), until the Guatemalan government ensures the safety of its human rights defenders and implements the following key components of the Peace Accords and civil society demands:

- A change in deployments of the armed forces to reflect a role limited to external defense
- Disbanding the Presidential General Staff (EMP)
- Cooperation with judicial investigations
- Compliance with the Clarification Commission's recommendations
- Development and implementation of a new military doctrine
- Civilian minister of defense

Act Now to Support Agrarian Reform

The Agrarian Platform calls on the Guatemalan Government to follow through with its commitment to implement emergency plan

Background

In the past few years, coffee prices in Guatemala and throughout Central America have plummeted, which has had a devastating impact on the tens of thousands of plantation workers who depend on the harvest. Recently, a crisis in overproduction in developing countries has led to a sharp decline in prices. This shift has led to a marked increase in rural unemployment.

The vast majority of the Guatemalan population lives in either poverty or extreme poverty. A report in the Spring of 2000 by the Commission for the Verification of Corporate Codes of Conduct revealed that half of all Guatemalan coffee pickers in its survey were paid less than half the legal minimum wage of \$2.48 per day. In addition, most do not have access to running water or electricity.

In response to the disastrous coffee crisis and the longer term, but no less destabilizing, land distribution conflicts, a coalition of groups in Guatemala, the Agrarian Platform, has developed a plan for lasting and sustainable development. Their alternative, the *Plan to Attend Socially the Coffee Crisis and Agrarian Conflictivity*, has garnered strong support from civil society and plantation workers but has reached a standstill with the government.

This emergency plan was passed by President Portillo on February 24, 2003, but still awaits implementation. Early resistance by members of the FRG administration was challenged by the Agrarian Platform coalition. Supported by a broad base of grassroots partners, the coalition insisted that the government properly fund this emergency proposal to help mitigate the every-increasing hunger in the countryside.

In keeping with Government Accord 475-2002, in force since December 11, 2002, which declared the coffee crisis a social emergency of national interest, the Guatemalan government should assign the resources necessary for the execution of the Plan and coordinate the actions of different State institutions.

What You Can Do:

Write or fax a letter to the Guatemalan government and Agriculture Department to let them know that you are concerned about the impact that the country's coffee crisis has on workers and their families. Urge them to approve and subsidize the emergency plan because it will:

- Attend to the communities that were hurt by the fall in coffee prices and by the ongoing inequality in land distribution
- Provide for food security
- Alleviate land conflicts
- Resolve labor issues
- Provide for sustainable development projects
- Generate jobs

Who to Contact:

President of the Republic of Guatemala

Lic. Alfonso Portillo Cabrera
Presidente de la República de Guatemala
6a. Avenida "A" 4-41, Zona 1
Guatemala, Guatemala
Fax: 011 502 253 0801
Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente

Ambassador Antonio Arenales Forno

Embassy of Guatemala
2220 R St. NW
Washington DC 20008
Fax: 1 202 745 1908

Minister of Agriculture, Livestock & Nutrition

Lic. Edin Barrientos, Ministro
de Agricultura Ganadería y
Alimentación
Edificio Monja Blanca, 70
Avenida 12-90 Zona 13, Ciudad
de Guatemala, Guatemala
Fax: 011 502 332 8302
Salutation: Señor Ministro

CC Appeals to:

Center for Human Rights
Legal Action (CALDH)
9.a Ave. 2-59 Zona 1
Ciudad de Guatemala,
Guatemala
Fax: 011 502 251 8163

Act Now to Support GAM Leaders

On April 7, 2003, the home of GAM director Mario Polanco and Congresswoman and GAM founder Nineth Montenegro, was broken into. The assailants entered the home at 12:30 pm and asked directly for Mario Polanco. Upon hearing that Mr. Polanco was not at home, the perpetrators stole personal files, computers and home electronics, while leaving behind valuable objects that are often the target of common burglary. This act occurred only four days after the kidnapping and murder of another GAM member, Diego Xon Salazar, in the town of Camanchaj, Chichicastenango, Quiché.

Background

GAM is one of Guatemala's oldest human rights groups, formed in the 1980s by people trying to uncover what had happened to their relatives, and thousands of others who 'disappeared' during Guatemala's civil war. Since President Portillo came to power at the beginning of 2000, human rights activists have faced increasing threats and intimidation. President Portillo appointed a number of hard-line military officials to senior positions in his administration, some of whom had held office in the military governments during the civil conflict. A number of highly placed officials have attacked Guatemala's human rights NGOs, accusing them of trying to destabilize the country.

To combat wide-scale, systemic human rights violations, on March 13, 2003 chancellor Edgar Gutiérrez, representing the Guatemalan government, and Human Rights Ombudsman Sergio Morales signed an agreement that created CICIACS. The Commission is set to begin operations on Sept. 13, 2003. According to the agreement, the decisions made by CICIACS will be binding and carried out by the Public Prosecutors Office. The Commission will also investigate the Interior Ministry, the Presidential High Guard, and the Public Prosecutors Office (MP) as government entities that are possibly involved with clandestine groups. The government has also proposed that the Commission investigate private security groups to discover any connections with criminal activity that may exist. GAM continues to be a strong proponent of CICIACS. Another key player in installing CICIACS, Guatemalan Attorney General Carlos de León Argueta, received death threats on April 4, 2003, and survived an assassination attempt on December 6, 2002.

Recommended Actions:

Please send letters to President Portillo, the Attorney General, or the Interior Minister urging them to:

1. Investigate, identify and prosecute those responsible for this crime and related crimes.
2. Immediately dismantle all clandestine security forces that enjoy the protection of impunity and who threaten the lives of human rights proponents throughout the country.
3. Facilitate the process to install the Commission to Investigate Illegal Bodies and Clandestine Security Apparatuses (CICIACS), to insure its international backing and guarantee its independence.
4. Demand that the justice system (Judicial Body, the MP, the National Civil Police) comply with their obligation to pursue and punish criminals who threaten the human rights movement in Guatemala.

Appeals to:

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
 Fax: 011 502 238 3579
 Salutation: Dear Mr. President /
 Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente

Minister of the Interior:

Lic. Adolfo Reyes Calderón
 Ministro de Gobernación
 6ª Avenida 4-64, Zona 4
 Ciudad de Guatemala
 Guatemala Fax: 011 502 362
 0239 / 362 0237
 Salutation: Dear Minister/
 Señor Ministro

Attorney General:

Lic. Carlos David de León
 Argueta
 Fiscal General de la República
 Fiscalía General del Ministerio
 Público
 8a. Avenida 10-57, Tercer nivel
 Zona 1, Ciudad de Guatemala
 Guatemala
 Fax: 011 502 221 2718
 Salutation: Dear Attorney
 General/Señor Fiscal General

CC Appeals to: GAM

8a Calle 3-11 Zona 1
 Ciudad de Guatemala
 Guatemala
 Fax: 011 (502) 220-0606
 Email: gam@intelnet.net.gt

Hello to the NISGUA Community!

After more than 2 years of amazing work as National Organizer, Carrie Ferrence has decided to leave NISGUA. Her commitment and breadth of knowledge is remarkable. In the coming weeks and months, I hope to be in contact as we continue to support the people of Guatemala.

Over the past few years, I have been organizing around issues of militarization, free trade, and war, working with speakers, sending vans to the School of the Americas, and mobilizing for anti-war protests. I was lucky enough to work as a human rights companion in Guatemala for six months, four months of which as a genocide case companion and two months with other organizations that were under threat.

With the ongoing situation in Iraq, it is sometimes hard to focus on other issues, especially those that are outside of the media spotlight. While large mobilizations are important to our movements for peace and justice, we need to continue to make the connections between between military and economic intervention in the Middle East and in Guatemala and the rest of Latin America.

I look forward to working with many of you during the year, and please continue to write, email, or call: 202-518-7638, nisgua@igc.org.

In Peace,

**Matthew Kennis
National Organizer**

Guatemala Staff



From Left to Right (Ali Durban, Jessica Yarrow, Yuri Casasola)

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On Aurelio Pérez's 24th birthday he lies in a hammock stretched across his kitchen, feet grazing the dirt floor. One foot is pink and swollen where Aurelio was bitten by a scorpion yesterday while harvesting sweet corn. His baby son, Angel, toddles up to the hammock, rests his head on Aurelio's chest. Angel is the spitting image of his father: dimpled cheeks, mullet haircut, eyes wide with curiosity about the world.

"If a scorpion bites you," Aurelio instructs, "you must eat a spoonful of sugar to ease the pain." And he changes the subject as quick as the tropical rainstorms that burst the sky open on sunny days here in the Ixcán: "Do you have any news of the war in Iraq?"

He is not the first to ask. For months, Guatemala has had its eyes trained on another small country on the other side of the world. Here in Cuarto Pueblo, a village of just over 2000 people in an isolated corner of El Quiché, the majority of adults never finished primary school. They are not well-studied on world affairs. Most could not find Iraq on a map, nor do they have access to books about history or world cultures, apart from a few dusty volumes on a shelf in the middle school. But when they watch news reports on Iraq or page through the "Prensa Libre" and see images of buildings on fire, soldiers wielding machine guns, brown-skinned men and women and children fleeing for refuge, their eyes flicker with recognition. When news of Iraq comes on the radio, they shush their children and women hold babies closer to their chests. To many Guatemalans, seeing the images of carnage and destruction in Iraq is much like looking in a mirror angled twenty years back in time. From their own experiences of war, the residents of Cuarto Pueblo have constructed an analysis sharper and of greater depth than that of "The New York Times".

"It's just like what happened here in Guatemala," Aurelio says. "The repression here was supported by the United States, so that they could continue to exploit our resources." Any Guatemalan campesino could tell you the story of Jacobo Arbenz, the left-leaning president who was overthrown by a CIA-sponsored coup in 1954. Arbenz had offended the United States by taking steps to purchase the U.S.-owned United Fruit Company's unused land and redistribute it among landless farmers. Arbenz's forced removal set up 36 years of civil war and repression. "The United States continued to support the war in the 80's. They moralize about peace, but meanwhile they're killing people. It seems the United States wants to be king of the world. Right now, they have their eyes on petroleum—and this petroleum is costing many lives."

Guatemalans in the Ixcán know about the cost of lives. During the early 80's, the Ixcán was one of the areas most devastated by the army's genocidal "scorched earth" policy. Dozens of villages here were burned to the ground, including Cuarto Pueblo. Doroteo, a raspy-voiced man of around sixty, fled to the jungle when the army destroyed Cuarto Pueblo. He spent three years in the CPR's (Communities of Population in Resistance) before leaving his country for refuge in Mexico. "I wish the government in the U.S. would think about the fact that war is difficult," he says. He is sitting on a bench outside his home on a windy morning. His son, Doroteo Junior, leans into his shoulder, hanging on to every word of the conversation. Another son, Roderico, still too young to understand, entertains himself by running around the yard, trying to scoop up baby chickens. Some of

What War Means For Guatemalans

By Neela Ghoshal

the newborn chicks teeter towards refuge under their mother's wing.

"When I think of the war in Iraq, I wonder, do people in your country know what happened in Guatemala? The U.S. government helped Lucas García kill us." Doroteo wonders whether people in the U.S. understand what war is. "When there is war, one lives in fear. You can't sleep because you don't know if you'll wake up dead or alive." He shakes his head. "When I hear about them killing civilians, a pain strikes me, because this has already happened to us. In the jungle, I saw the army drop bombs. I saw a woman go down in a rain of bullets fired from a helicopter. As for me, I no longer hear well ever since the time a bomb was dropped near where I was hiding. These are the effects that war leaves behind."

The effects of war manifest themselves in many forms among Guatemala's survivors: lasting injuries, physical illness, inexplicable pains, depression, anger. Andrea Velasquez is a wiry 58-year-old woman with two braids down her back and a gentle voice that spits out fierce commentary on the world. When I ask her for her opinion on the war in Iraq, her eyes glitter with anger. "In the first place, I want peace," she declares. "In any war, those who suffer most are the children." She points down at her three-year-old grandson. "And what fault do they have? And what are the interests here? The U.S. isn't interested in helping the poor. Their interest is petroleum." Like Doroteo, she quickly shifts back in time. "It's like what happened to us. We were just living our lives when the helicopters came, and BAM!" She acts out a bombardment with animated gestures, then bends forward to draw a detailed map in the dirt with her bony index finger. "This is where the army came from. This is where we fled... and here's where I was standing when I saw the army kill an old man. They killed him and then divided up the tortillas he carried in his bag, one per soldier, and they drank his coffee... They killed 350 people here in Cuarto Pueblo, do you know?" She dissolves into an uncontrollable cough, spits into the dirt and clears her throat. Her eyes jump back to the present. Her voice is scratchy but firm. "This is why I say, let there be peace."

Cuarto Pueblo is one of twenty-two indigenous villages seeking justice in a criminal case against the High Command of the governments of Romeo Lucas García and Efraín Ríos Montt, former military dictators responsible for hundreds of massacres throughout Guatemala between 1981 and 1983. Lucas García and Ríos Montt stand accused of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. Although the indictments are in Guatemalan courts, the case has brought a new awareness of international law and international human rights standards to Guatemalan villagers, and community members apply this knowledge to their analysis of the situation in Iraq. Artemio López Vasquez sits on his patio on a moonless night. He complains, "This Bush doesn't respect any organizations at the international level. He just applies his own law wherever he wants. I heard it on the radio last night, the UN inspectors found no weapons of mass destruction. There's no need for war. But Bush is stubborn, he won't accept

this, and he's a very bad example for the world. This is not a government that loves peace... they are bypassing all international law. This is a dirty war." He adds, "The U.S. government wants to destroy, but they don't construct anything. In Iraq, they say they will reconstruct the country after the war. I don't believe it."

Artemio knows about broken promises. We are sitting on land that he recently cleared with a pick and a shovel. He planned to build a new cinderblock house with materials that the Guatemalan government promised to returned refugees as part of the 1996 Peace Accords. Recently, President Portillo stated that the funds will not be available at any time in the foreseeable future. Meanwhile, money flows into the military budget. Artemio is tired of the prioritization of war over community development, at the national and international level. "Instead of investing all these resources in war, why don't they invest more in students, in poor people?" He is seconded by Prudencio Pablo, a 19-year-old student pursuing a degree in elementary education. Prudencio argues, "It would be better for the world if they stopped this war and invested those billions of dollars in education. What comes of war? Nothing but death and sacrifice. Why not invest that money in health and education? With what they are spending on war, the U.S. could probably fund every primary school in Guatemala."

Above all, Guatemalans are concerned about the growing civilian death toll in Iraq, the senseless deaths of "people like us," as many put it. "There are international laws about this," says Sabino Pérez. "If they have to fight, why not just do it on land? Why drop bombs and kill civilians? They are treating the people of Iraq like garbage, just throwing them to the side." In 1982, Sabino watched from a hillside as his village went up in flames. Since Sabino and the other refugees returned from Mexico in 1994, Cuarto Pueblo has been rebuilt, but some things cannot be replaced. "You can give money to reconstruct a country after a war," Sabino points out, "but you can't reconstruct the lost humanity. You can build buildings—but nothing can bring the dead back to life." In a nearby village, a young man stands on the site where his mother, grandmother, siblings and cousins were killed by the army when he was just 10. His father stands to the side, tears rolling down cheeks followed with years of hard work and suffering. After recounting the story of the massacre, the young man concludes, "This is why we say no to war. It doesn't matter whether it's here in Guatemala or in another country. We have to realize," he says, arms crossed over his chest, "that war is not a game."

"When you live through war," Doroteo explains, "you never forget it to the day you die." Doroteo Junior is still listening intently. Roderico has run off in search of new adventures, leaving the newborn chicks in peace. Five of them pile onto their mother's back, perch there expectantly as if hoping to gain a better view of the brand new world around them. They haven't yet realized that there are some things you never want to see. Echoing the young man who lost his family in an army ambush, Doroteo speaks softly, his voice almost lost in the wind. "This is why we don't want war. After everything that I saw... the pain is with me, forever."

"When you go back to your country," Doroteo instructs me, his voice gaining strength, "when you

continued on page 7

Gerardi Case Update

April 26 is the fifth anniversary of the murder of Bishop Gerardi, whose case is still pending in the court system. A June 2001 conviction sentenced three military men and a priest to 30 and 20 years of prison respectively. In February, 2003 the Chamber of Injunctions of the Guatemalan Supreme Court temporarily upheld the appeals court decision that annulled the original conviction and called for a retrial. The judges ordered that the case be sent back to the Fourth Circuit Appeals Court to re-examine the basis for appeals. This is the same appeals court that heard the appeal arguments last fall, but three different magistrates will preside and review the case. Meanwhile, two of the defense lawyers have taken separate grievances to the Constitutional Court. There will most likely be another series of legal actions to request that a different appeals court look at the case in order to eliminate the possibility of existing biases. In addition to these delays, Obdulio Villanueva, a former sergeant in the Presidential guard who was convicted in the Gerardi murder, was killed in a prison riot. Since the prison riot, the two other military men implicated in this case and those implicated in the Mack case have been moved to a new maximum security facility, to ostensibly protect their safety. Over the course of the last five years many witnesses, prosecutors, judges and others related to these cases have suffered threats and intimidations -- some have even been killed -- making it more difficult and dangerous for others to proceed.

CAFTA Update

The third round of negotiations for the US/Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) was held in San Salvador from March 31 through April 4, during the height of the war in Iraq. The scene was typical of trade summits in recent years. In a luxury hotel, behind three concentric rings of razor-wire fences and protected by more than 1,000 police and military personnel, negotiators were busy auctioning off public goods and services to US corporate interests. On the streets outside, tens of thousands of protesters from across Central America put into practice the globalization of resistance as they marched against CAFTA and the US war in Iraq. The morning started with music and continued with protesters attempting to deliver a declaration against CAFTA. As the group tried to reach the giant fence, they were pushed back by heavily armed riot police with crowd-control shields. The march ended with a rally in front of the police

Mack Case Update

The Myrna Mack case being tried in Guatemala is still in the appeals process, but the case was heard before the Inter-American Human Rights Court (CIDH) of the Organization of American States (OAS) in February. Several days after Guatemalan representatives walked out of the court proceedings that took place in San Jose, Costa Rica, the Foreign Minister sent a letter to the CIDH stating that the Guatemalan government accepts institutional responsibility for the murder of Myrna Mack, a Guatemalan anthropologist. According to Helen Mack, sister of the victim, the Guatemalan government had previously accepted responsibility for not providing due process in the case. The court will reach a decision on the case in the coming months.

CAFTA Continued

barricades, and a pledge of total resistance against US economic and military imperialism, be it in the form of CAFTA or the war in Iraq.

Detailed information about CAFTA negotiations has been blocked by a secrecy clause that the United States forced Central America to sign in the second negotiating round in Cincinnati. Newspaper reports, however, indicate that the US seeks to force Central America into opening its markets to US agricultural products and eliminating all protections for its already-fragile agricultural sector, even while the U.S. itself refuses to give up its new "bio-terrorism regulations" that effectively block most Central American agricultural products from entering the U.S. The U.S. also seeks to "ensure preferential investment access in services": in plain English, the total privatization of all public services, from water and electricity to health care and housing. U.S. telecommunications corporations hope to use CAFTA to gain a leg up on their European competitors, who cornered the market in El Salvador, but it is the Salvadoran people who have paid the price with 400% rate increases in the past four years. Responding to the pressures of a strong social movement against privatization, the Costa Rican government has stated that it will not sign an agreement that mandates the privatization of electricity or telecommunications, but it is feared that U.S. trade negotiators will simply agree to exempt Costa Rica and push forward with privatization in the rest of Central America. On the positive side, delays in negotiations make it less likely that CAFTA will be finished before the end of the year, giving more time to organize, educate, and mobilize. The next round of CAFTA negotiations will take place in Guatemala in mid-May.

-This update was largely taken from CISPES, 4/2/03

The Report on Guatemala



Photo by Jonathon Moller

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continued from page 1

Although the strike was intended to pressure the government into action, dialog between union leaders and government officials was sporadic. The administration broke off negotiations several times during the strike as the Portillo Administration was not very attentive to the demands of the teachers. On February 20, the Guatemala Supreme Court declared the strike illegal and ruled that if after five days time, the teachers did not return to their classroom, they would be dismissed "without [government] responsibility." The court decision allowed the government to withhold the teachers' wages for February. The teachers unions appealed the ruling but the decision was upheld and forced the teachers back to their classrooms. The strike ended on March 11 when the Guatemalan government agreed to provide a nearly Q150 wage increase for teachers and promised to increase the education budget by about Q8 million.

Decertification

On January 31, 2003, Paul E. Simon, Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, announced the Bush administration's decision to "decertify" Guatemala due to its lack of cooperation in the drug war. Although the decertification process permits the U.S. to sanction those countries it deems are not doing enough to repress the illicit drug trade, Washington decided to waive economic sanctions in the case of Guatemala, citing reasons of national security.

According to U.S. officials, in the three years since President Portillo assumed office, Guatemala has emerged as one of the principal corridors in the hemisphere for U.S.-destined drugs, with about 40 percent of all drugs entering the United States through Guatemala. The State Department's recently released International Narcotics Control Strategy Report confirms that drug seizures have dropped dramatically under the Portillo administration, with only half the amount of drugs seized in 2002 as compared to 2001.

Formal decertification has come after a long period of sharp criticism from the Bush administration. In March 2002, after ongoing drug-related scandals, U.S. pressure forced the Guatemalan administration to lay off nearly three-quarters of all its anti-narcotics agents. In July, the United States announced it would provide no further support to the Guatemalan Anti-Narcotics Operations Department (DOAN) due to ongoing corruption,

and in October, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Otto Reich denounced alleged ties between top Guatemalan government officials and drug traffickers during a Congressional briefing. In response to Reich's testimony, Guatemalan Minister of the Interior Adolfo Reyes Calderón immediately announced the complete dissolution of the DOAN, replacing it with a new narcotics agency called the Service for Analysis and Anti-Narcotics Information. Agents of the new 400-plus (SAIA) force are trained at the U.S.-funded Regional Counter-Narcotics Training Center in Barbarena.

The Guatemalan response to its decertification has been sharp, and relations have become strained between the two countries. Following the State Department's announcement, the Guatemalan government temporarily withdrew its ambassador to the United States, and President Portillo publicly challenged the U.S. to take over security at Guatemalan ports. In turn, U.S. officials have recently intimated that if Guatemala does not step up its drug war efforts by September 2003, its inclusion as a participating member of the Central America Free Trade Agreement may be threatened.

Victims Reparations

Survivors of human rights violations and relatives of the victims of the Guatemalan civil war are demanding that the Guatemalan congress approve a reparation law, to comply with the recommendations of the United Nations Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH). The report, issued in 1999, concluded that more than 200,000 civilians were killed during the 36-year-long internal armed conflict, and named the Guatemalan military responsible for the vast majority of human rights violations.

Late last year a coalition of organizations presented a reparations bill to the government. The bill that is currently being reviewed by congress includes: (1) material reparations such as land and housing; (2) economic reparations; (3) psychological reparations; and (4) measures to dignify victims including building museums and monuments, and exhuming clandestine cemeteries.

While the reparations proposal addressed many substantive points, several indigenous organizations presented another plan to highlight the fact that most of the violence during the civil war targeted and affected the Maya population.

Ex-Patrollers Demand Reparations
Guatemala's Civil Defense Patrols (PACs), which were officially disbanded by the 1996 Peace Accords, have recently reorganized themselves publicly to demand reparations for their services. The Guatemalan army created these paramilitary groups during the height of the civil war to gather intelligence and control the rural population as part of its counterinsurgency campaign. In many communities, membership in the patrols was mandatory. The CEH attributed 18% of wartime human rights violations to the PACs.

In June 2002, the former Civil Patrolers blocked highways, an airport, an oil refinery, and an archeological site to demand Q20,000 each. President Alfonso Portillo responded with a series of contradictory promises. On March 20, 2003, the government announced that it would pay a total of Q5,000 to each of the 250,000 registered patrollers in three separate installments: one under the Portillo administration, and two under the next government. Unsatisfied with these terms, ex-PACs have re-ignited protests throughout the country.

A number of civil society organizations are opposed to the compensation plan, questioning how groups involved in human rights violations can be rewarded while survivors who lost family members or were displaced during the war have yet to receive reparations. Many observers believe that the decision to compensate the ex-PACs is a political strategy by the ruling FRG party to win the upcoming Presidential elections.

Land

Small farmers in Guatemala continue to struggle for their right to own and work a plot of land. Over the past year or so, farmers have put increasing pressure on individual plantation owners, the Guatemalan government, and international corporations to provide them access to land. In some cases, the government promised parcels of land to communities but never delivered; in other instances, farmers requested uncultivated but arable land that could be used to sustain themselves and their families. Guatemala has the most unequal land distribution in the region, with less than 2% of landowners controlling 65% of the arable land, while 27% remain landless.

In response to the ever-increasing inequality, farmers have occupied at least sixty plantations from Izabal to San Marcos. Some landowners have reacted violently, hiring private security forces and paramilitaries to intimidate

and attack. Several land activists have been murdered, and many others threatened or detained. In early April, the 16 year old son of a peasant leader was kidnapped after the family had received death threats. The National Coordination of Peasant Organizations (CNOC) and the National Indigenous and Peasant Coordination (CONIC) have strongly denounced these acts.

Along with land occupations, groups of small farmers are blocking major highways to draw attention to their demands. As part of the Agrarian Platform they proposed an \$85 million plan for land purchase and rent, grain donations, and technical training. The Portillo government agreed to the plan but has stalled its implementation by not providing the necessary funding. Currently the farmers are negotiating with individual communities and organizations, but there is little institutional or governmental support for true land reform.

Guatemala Moving Forward?

The government's limited ability and lack of political will in fulfilling the Peace Accords lead many to wonder whether the Guatemalan military is once again consolidating power. The interaction between the Portillo Administration and former civil patrollers has been tense but mutually beneficial, while there has been scant attention focused on the victims of past human rights abuses and the remaining survivors of the civil war. Profound inequalities, historical land conflicts, and the dramatic fall in coffee prices have all contributed to a dire situation in the countryside, with the proposed implementation of CAFTA (decertification aside) only expected to exacerbate the current situation. Amidst the threats, human rights organizations continue to demand an end to impunity, economic justice advocates propose alternatives that put a human face on corporate-led globalization, and the Agrarian Platform's emergency land and coffee plan offers a concrete and viable answer to the current economic crisis. We hope these democratic initiatives garner institutional and international support.

what war means continued from page 6

go back to your country which is starting wars, tell them about the war we experienced in Guatemala." He shakes my hand gently, and Doroteo Junior follows suit. I promise him that I will share his story, and pray that his voice will be heard.

The Solidarity Update is an organizing and information tool provided free of charge to you as a person who cares about the struggle of Guatemalans to build a peaceful and just society, and the struggle in the U.S. to pressure our government to implement policies that support the efforts of our Guatemalan partners

While NISGUA strongly believes in providing the Solidarity Update free of charge to our supporters, it is becoming a strain to do so, without detracting from our other program work. Donations from our many supporters make it possible for us to write, produce, print, and mail this newsletter. If you are not already a regular NISGUA donor, please consider making a contribution at this time. Your financial gift, no matter what size, is critical to ensuring that NISGUA can continue its work to inform, educate, and mobilize support for Guatemala solidarity work.

As many of you probably already know, the "War on Terrorism" has adversely affected the finances of many progressive groups-and NISGUA is no exception. Solidarity organizing has always been done on a shoestring budget and in some ways September 11 broke that string. We need your help right now to help retie the knot.

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THE NETWORK IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE PEOPLE OF GUATEMALA

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