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INDIAN LAW RESOURCE CENTER

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First Session of the
Working Group On Indigenous Populations
August 11, 1982

Statement of the Indian Law Resource Center,
a non-governmental organization in consultative
status, Roster, on the need for priority attention
to the rights of indigenous peoples of Central and
South America.

WGIP 82 / AME / 3

During the first two days of this meeting we have heard a number of helpful presentations about the problems which are being faced by the indigenous peoples of the Americas. All of these problems are important matters for this Working Group to consider. However, there are problems facing the Indians of Central and South America which are especially severe. In those regions, the rights of Indian peoples are being denied by various governments and regimes which have continued unchanged the most gross discriminatory Indian policies of the colonial era.

Although the problems facing Indian peoples of North America are very serious, as shown for example by recent efforts of the United States government to unilaterally extinguish Indian land rights and Indian legal claims to land, the problems facing Indian peoples of Central and South America require the most urgent attention of the Working Group because even the most fundamental human right, the right to life, is at stake.

The Working Group has already heard from others that Indians of Central and South America are denied their rights to land and self determination. The political, economic and cultural rights of Indian peoples are neither recognized nor respected in this region of the world. For example, the government of Chile continues to force the break-up of communal Indian land holdings and to destroy the communal way of life of the Mapuche people. (Much documentation on this particular situation has earlier been presented and is readily available to the Working Group for its study.) The prevailing legal and political situation throughout the Central and South American region is that Indian peoples are officially considered to be culturally backward and unqualified to enjoy the rights which other peoples take for granted. As a race, Indians are considered

All of these denials of rights need the attention of the United Nations. But since there are only very limited resources at this time, we are obligated to focus attention where the need is greatest, where the violations of fundamental human rights are most severe.

Accordingly, we call special attention to the situation in those countries where Indian peoples are presently being subjected to forced relocation, imprisonment, torture and killing by the nation states which assert dominion over them. Because of these developments, tens of thousands of Indians have become refugees and entire Indian communities have been systematically massacred.

Guatemala and El Salvador provide the clearest examples of these genocidal practices. In the past few years much documentation has been provided to the United Nations about the denial of the most basic human rights of Indian peoples by those countries. Reports which we have recently received from various sources convince us beyond any doubt that genocidal practices continue at this time and have even been intensified in the Indian territories. The administration now in power in Guatemala has publically expressed racial hostility towards Indian peoples and has undertaken a military campaign which includes wholesale killing of Indians. Entire Indian communities have been massacred by the armed forces. Documentation of these recent developments is fast becoming available through the press and other sources. Some of the most reliable and shocking documentation is found in the report of Amnesty International which accompanies this intervention. That Amnesty International report was presented as testimony to a United States congressional committee on August 5, 1982. In a remarkably detailed appendix to that report there is a chronology of the killing of some 2200 persons since March of this year. Virtually all of the dead are Indian victims of Guatemalan government forces.

Obviously the Working Group must not avoid any of the problems which are presented by indigenous peoples. However, we believe that all concerned with the rights of indigenous peoples would agree that the Working Group should give priority attention to the most grave situation which many Indian peoples face today in Central and South America.

Statement of the Indian Law Resource Center
August 11, 1982
Page 3

We urge the Working Group to give careful consideration to these thoughts and to the proposed Principles For Guiding The Deliberations Of The Working Group On Indigenous Populations in all deliberations on the issue of standards for the protection of the rights of indigenous peoples.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

TESTIMONY ON GUATEMALA

SUBMITTED BY

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL U.S.A.

INTRODUCTION

The United States Section of Amnesty International, in consultation with the International Secretariat of Amnesty International in London, welcomes this opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee on International Development Institutions and Finance to highlight its concerns with respect to the human rights situation in Guatemala.

Amnesty International is a worldwide human rights movement which, since its inception twenty years ago, has worked for the release of prisoners of conscience, men and women detained anywhere for their beliefs, color, sex, ethnic origin, religion or language, provided they have not used or advocated violence. Amnesty International opposes torture and the death penalty in all cases without reservation, and advocates fair and prompt trials for all political prisoners. Amnesty International is independent of all governments, political factions, ideologies, economic interests and religious creeds. It has consultative status with ECOSOC of the United Nations, UNESCO and the Council on Europe, has cooperative relations with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States, and has observer status with the Organization of African Unity. Amnesty International was the recipient of the 1977 Nobel Prize for Peace.

LONG-TERM CONCERNS IN GUATEMALA

For many years Amnesty International has been concerned at the widespread and massive occurrence of human rights violations in Guatemala. Victims have included people from all sectors of Guatemalan society,

among them peasants and Indians, trade unionists, religious personnel, political leaders, journalists and members of the legal profession. Successive governments over a period of nearly two decades have consistently blamed the killings on extremist groups of the left and right which were beyond official control. During periods of insurgency (such as the late 1960s and the present), the authorities have claimed that some of the victims died in confrontations between the official security forces and guerrilla groups.

However, after closely monitoring the human rights situation in Guatemala for many years, Amnesty International has concluded that the vast majority of these abuses attributed by the Government of Guatemala to independent "death squads" are in fact perpetrated by the regular forces of the civil and military security services operating under government control or with government complicity. No evidence has been found to support government claims that "death squads" exist that are independent of the regular security services.

This conclusion was further documented by Amnesty International in the publication of its February 1981 report, "Guatemala: A Government Program of Political Murder" in which Amnesty International confirmed its findings that during the presidency of Lucas Garcia there had been official involvement at the highest level in an orchestrated government program of illegal actions, including wide-scale "disappearances" and extra-judicial executions, directed at opponents or presumed opponents of the government.

The report recorded the arbitrary seizure and subsequent murder of some 5,000 Guatemalans since the ascendancy of Lucas Garcia to the presidency in July 1978. At least 615 other people reported to have been seized by

the security forces remain unaccounted for.

In spite of these murders and "disappearances" the Government of Guatemala has denied making a single political arrest or holding a single political prisoner.

MARCH 1982 ELECTIONS

During 1982 Amnesty International saw no let-up in the occurrence of "disappearances" and extra-judicial executions in Guatemala. In the lead-up to the elections, Amnesty continued to receive persistent reports of repression directed against all sectors of Guatemala society.

In the March 1982 elections, as had become customary in Guatemala, President Lucas Garcia's chosen successor was his Minister of Defense, General Anibal Guevara. Following past patterns in Guatemala, Guevara was declared victorious in the elections, which were almost unanimously denounced as fraudulent.

THE COUP AND ITS AFTERMATH

On March 23, 1982, a coup was staged in Guatemala, which annulled the results of Guatemala's recent elections. Upon assuming power, the three-man military junta, under the leadership of General Efraim Rios Montt, General Horacio Maldonado and Colonel Francisco Luis Gordillo declared that it intended to ensure a return to the respect for human rights in Guatemala. In addition, it announced that a new body had been formed to receive denunciations from relatives concerning "disappearances". A number of civilian officials who had been involved in repression during the previous regime were placed under arrest. The Cuerpo de Detectives (Detective Corps) of the national police, popularly known as the policia judicial (judicial police), who had been repeatedly cited over the years

as responsible for large-scale human rights violations including "disappearances" and extra-judicial executions, were declared disbanded.¹ The government called for all guns not in the hands of the official security forces to be turned in and declared it intended to ensure an end to the killings.

In the immediate aftermath of the coup, death squads killings did appear to decrease in the urban areas. However, in analyzing the coup more closely, it is important to bear in mind a number of factors which gave observers cause for serious concern. Reports indicated for example, that by the time General Efraim Rios Montt assumed power as the strongman of the three-man military junta, the younger officers who initially staged the coup were no longer in control. It was also pointed out that to date none of the military figures of the previous regime who had been connected with the legalized violence have been detained. Though there were disputed reports that former President Lucas Garcia and his brother Benedicto who had served as Head of the General Chiefs of Staff were under house arrest, analysts doubted whether the new authorities could remain in power if they actually took any strong steps against any sector of the military. Local commentators suggested too that the detentions carried out against civilian members of the former regime appeared to have stemmed more from anger at what had apparently been considered unacceptably high levels of graft and corruption, than from genuine desire to force the former officials to account for their human rights records. While it is true that the judicial police were officially declared disbanded and their unmarked jeeps were, according to local accounts, no longer seen on the capital's streets, some felt this merely indicated a shift in power between various factions in the Guatemalan military and security apparatus. Local sources also stressed that the stability and longevity of the Rios Montt regime

were in constant question and that it was not clear to what extent he could neutralize powerful factions in the country such as the hard-line military, the MLN² and former president Arana's supporters. The reported links between the new regime and figures who had played a role in the repressive apparatus of pre-Lucas Garcia regime also gave cause for concern, as did some of the appointments made by the Rios Montt-led junta. Past involvement of the junta members themselves in specific acts of repression were also noted.

With respect to the issue of government accountability for the killings which occurred under previous governments, or as to whether there will be any genuine investigation regarding the locus of responsibility for even those violations which occurred immediately before the coup, the new administration has already declared that while it is open to visits from human rights organizations like Amnesty International, it cannot be held accountable for abuses which occurred under previous administrations.

On June 9th, General Efraim Rios Montt, leader of the new junta, announced that he had dissolved the junta and intended to assume the country's presidency and command of the armed forces. The other two junta members, General Horacio Maldonado Schaad and Colonel Francisco Luis Gordillo, were stripped of their posts, including their cabinet portfolios as Minister of the Interior and Minister of Communications, respectively, and it was announced that they had resigned from the junta.

Only one week later, General Rios Montt replaced the country's 324 elected mayors with his own appointees. On June 29th he ordered that official communiques could be issued only by the President's public relations office.

During the month of June, the authorities also offered a thirty-day amnesty to opposition groups, calling on them to lay down their arms and abstain from violence. The amnesty offer was to terminate on 30 June; from that date, General Rios Montt announced that he intended to declare a "state of war" in the departments of El Quiche, Huehuetanango, San Marcos and Quezaltenango. At the same time he had also given some indication that he would be willing to negotiate with his opponents. In a recent statement Rios Montt has also announced that the elections which the initial junta had originally promised would take place within a matter of months have now been postponed until 1985; saying that this had become necessary for reasons of national security, as he had learned that "elements linked to the overthrown regime had been plotting against him".

On July 1st, when the announced amnesty expired, General Rios Montt declared a state of siege, the first in Guatemala since 1978, and announced the following measures:

- under the state of siege provisions, the armed forces are empowered to arrest and hold suspects without charge and without the right of habeas corpus;
- the military can also temporarily take over private homes and vehicles;
- government troops and police will be able to legally break into homes and offices at night;
- all Guatemala's former soldiers under the age of thirty are to start registering at military bases for possible call-up.

In a further decree issued on the same day, General Rios Montt was empowered to select special court judges empowered to sentence to death guerrillas found guilty of murder, sabotage, terrorism and treason. Any insurgent sentenced to death will have no right of appeal and will not be eligible for presidential pardon. (The Guatemalan Constitution of

1965 provides in Article 54 that "The death penalty shall be considered extraordinary and may not be applied to persons guilty of political crimes".) Amnesty International knows of only a few cases in recent years where people have been subjected to the legal death penalty, allegedly on common law charges but actually for politically motivated reasons. The last known execution of this type occurred in 1975.

Finally, in another communique issued by Rios Montt, which under the state of siege carries the force of an official order, the media were banned from broadcasting any reports about leftist guerrilla activity not issued by the President's public relations office, and all political party activity was banned. Thus, despite its public pronouncements regarding human rights issues, and some initial positive steps, the human rights performance of the new government must be subjected to close and continuing scrutiny.

In this regard, Amnesty International has written to the new government welcoming its stated commitment to restore respect for human rights, but pressing the authorities for details as to what steps have been taken in this direction. To date, no reply has been received. In this regard, it has already been noted that while reports of killings in the cities initially fell after the coup, recent reports from the countryside indicate, however, that the counter-insurgency operation there is being pursued with renewed vigor.

In the aftermath of the coup, Amnesty International has continued to receive persistent reports of an intensification of large scale massacres of indigenous populations in the countryside. Following a pattern not significantly different from that implemented under previous governments, Guatemalan security forces continue to attempt to control

opposition forces, both violent and non-violent, through widespread killings including the extra-judicial execution of large numbers of rural non-combatants, including entire families, as well as persons suspect of sympathy with violent or non-violent opposition groups. As under previous governments, the majority of extra-judicial executions have been reported to be carried out in isolated rural areas, particularly those in which guerrilla groups have been active. Information available to Amnesty International from a variety of sources, including press reports, testimonies of witnesses and official government pronouncements, reportedly identifies the regular and civilian army forces organized as "civil defense" units under the government of Rios Montt as responsible for the majority of the reported massacres.

In May, 1982, for example, a group of Indians entered the Brazilian Embassy in Guatemala City to call world attention to continued massive killings of non-combatants in rural areas under the new government, massacres which they claim involved the deaths of hundreds of civilians at the hands of the military as well as massive destruction of crops, livestock and property, since the new government had taken power in March.³ In the aftermath of the coup, between April and late June 1982, Amnesty International reported the deaths of some 2,186 individuals in large scale extra-judicial executions.⁴

Among the massacres reported to Amnesty International are the following illustrative examples:

On April 7th, soldiers killed at least three women after attacking the hamlet of Chirrenquiche, Coban, Alta Verapaz. The following day soldiers returned to the hamlet and machined-gunned an entire family including a one-year-old baby.

The testimony which follows is that of a 17-year old Kechi Indian woman from Alta Verapaz who survived the April 7th army attack on her village. She was hacked with machetes during the army incursion and sustained wounds in the neck, foot, a deep slash in the head, and one hand was almost amputated. Her 13-year old brother, Ramos, was also seized and wounded in the army attack. Of their entire family, only the two remain alive.

"The soldiers came; we went to the mountains; there we found tree trunks and stones where we hid. A group of soldiers came from behind, they came in behind us. They seized three of us; they took them to the mountains; they tied them up in the mountains and killed them with machetes and knives. There they died. Then they asked me which ones were the guerrillas, and I didn't tell them, so they slashed me with the machete; they raped me; they threw me on the ground and slashed my head with the machete, my breasts, my entire hand. When dawn came, I tried to get home. By then I could hardly walk. I came across a girl from our village, and she was carrying some water. She gave me some and took me to her house.

"The army also seized my 13-year-old brother Ramos and dragged him away, and shot him in the foot and left him thrown on the ground. My brother and my parents and my other brothers and sisters had been in the house. The soldiers said 'They are guerrillas, and they must be killed'. My brother saw how they killed my parents, my mother, my brothers and sisters and my little one-year-old brother; the soldiers machine-gunned them to death when they arrived in the village. Only my brother, Ramos, and I are alive. Our friends are giving us injections and medicines. We can't go to the hospital at Cobán. I think they would kill us there."

According to campesino groups, on April 15th, the army attacked the village of Semeja in Chichicastenango; they report that twenty villagers were tied to the poles of their houses and burned alive. On the same day, in the village of Chocorrales, Santa Cruz, Quiche, an army patrol beheaded nine peasants, among them a 9-year old girl, as the family was praying.

On or about May 7th, a family of four were machine-gunned and hacked to death with machetes in San Pedro Jocopilas, Quiche. Unidentified armed

men kicked down the door while the family slept, dragged them from their beds and subsequently killed them.

On June 8th, nine people, including three children and two elderly persons were burned to death on a road leading to San Pedro Carcha, Alta Verapaz department. Some thirty armed men in small cargo vehicles forced the victims out of their homes, threw gasoline over them and set them on fire, according to an eye-witness report.

During the last week in June, 300 soldiers entered the village of Pampacche, Alta Verapaz department, and dragged all of the village men out of their homes. Several days later, more than seventy tortured corpses were found near the village of Tactic.

Despite reports that there was a substantial decrease in killings in urban areas in the immediate aftermath of the coup, Amnesty International has received several reports of human rights violations in the cities which are cause for serious concern. For example, Amnesty International has recently learned that on May 22, 1982, Professor Guillermo Toralla, a lecturer at the Humanities Faculty of San Carlos University, was arrested, while accompanied by his wife and children in Monserrat Supermarket in the capital. His captors were reportedly members of the security forces; no reason was given for his arrest and his present whereabouts are unknown.

Amnesty International has also received reports that eight secondary school students "disappeared" in Guatemala City during the last week of May and the first week of June. Thirteen year old Marvin Ivan Perez, a student at the Instituto Central para Varones, a secondary boys' school was missing on May 29, 1982. Two days later, his two sisters, Alba Natiemi and Lesbia Liseth Perez, ages 18 and 16 respectively, and students in Belen, also "disappeared". The same day, the children's father Jose Domingo Perez was reportedly discussing their "disappearance" with some visitors in his home when heavily armed men burst in and took away Sandra Lorena Solorzano,

a friend of the family and a student at the Instituto Pedro Arriaza Mata.

Four business students are also reported to have "disappeared" in Guatemala City at about the same time: Milton W. Teni Mendez, Edwin Reynaldo Guzman, Edwin Francisco Catalan and Elias Virgilio Lopez Corzo. To date, Amnesty International has received no further information on their whereabouts.

On the morning of June 24, Dr. Juan Jose Hurtado, a 56-year old pediatrician, was detained without warrant by men in civilian clothes outside the clinic where he worked in Zona 9 of Guatemala City. Dr. Hurtado was subsequently identified by government authorities to be held in the National Police Hospital after being held earlier by the Second Division of the National Police. Dr. Hurtado was reported to have been charged under the Law of Defense of Democratic Institutions, because he is considered to be a communist. On July 30, Dr. Hurtado was released on lack of sufficient evidence.

ATTRIBUTING RESPONSIBILITY FOR MASSIVE EXTRA-JUDICIAL EXECUTIONS OF NON-COMBATANT CIVILIANS SINCE THE COUP

Amnesty International is unable to verify in each instance who has actually been responsible for particular large-scale extra-judicial executions. However, it is relevant to note various public statements made by non-governmental sources on the violence as well as by current Guatemalan officials concerning the military strategies the government is implementing.

In response to the continuing reports of massacres in the countryside, the government has repeatedly maintained that those killed were guerrillas who died in clashes with official government forces or that it is the guerrilla groups who were responsible. On some occasions, according to the official explanation, members of armed opposition groups have donned stolen army uniforms and carried out killings, in order to convince local and international public opinion that the military is still responsible

When asked during an interview with foreign journalists, for example, about the 1981 Amnesty International report which implicated the former president, General Romeo Lucas Garcia, and the official security forces in civilian massacres, General Rios Montt denied that any Guatemalan general could order the death of an innocent person. However, when pressed further about reported massacres of civilians, including women and children, since the coup which brought him to power, Guatemala's new military leader replied: "The problem of war is not just a question of who is shooting. For each one who is shooting there are ten working behind him". The President's Press Secretary Francisco Bianchi continued: "The guerrillas won over many Indian collaborators. Therefore, the Indians were subversives. And how do you fight subversion? Clearly you had to kill Indians because they were collaborating with subversion. And then it would be said that you were killing innocent people. But they weren't innocent, they had sold out to subversion."

Such attitudes are also reportedly instilled in the troops, many of them illiterate conscripts. One young soldier on patrol in a remote mountain village told a foreign correspondent concerning the guerrillas that "there are so many of them. Very few are armed. But we have to kill them".

Following a disputed group of killings which occurred in the middle of May, a former soldier acknowledged to another foreign newsman that the army had burned the village in question and killed many of the inhabitants because "they were subversives".

Amnesty International's 1981 report on Guatemala, already referred to, included the testimony of a former Indian transcript soldier, who told of the ideological training all transcripts were given with respect to the identification of "subversives" and the military's right to kill them.

More recently, post-coup thinking as to how to defeat the opposition was revealed more formally in a confidential four-page document circulated in April by the Guatemalan military called "National Plan of Security and Development", a copy of which has been made available to Amnesty International. This plan stated that "The manpower, armaments and equipment of the Guatemalan army is not adequate to cover the different fronts presented by armed subversion". It declared that "changes in the basic structure of the State" would therefore be necessary, and called for a public campaign of "psychological action at all levels" to win popular support which the junta privately "increased the legal and functional capacity of anti-subversive organisms" and created "at the highest political level, an organism for the direction of anti-subversive functions".

In the succeeding months following the formulation of the plan, the pace of rural massacres increased. The killings seemed to be concentrated in very specific areas where the guerrillas were strongest. Thus, while the level of killings in some provinces, such as those in the far east and far west, actually fell after the coup, in the departments where the opposition had most strength--El Quiche, Chimaltenango, Solola, Sacatepequez and Alta and Baja Verapaz--continued reports were received of the raiding and burning of villages and the murder of Indian campesinos, in large numbers. In each of these areas, members of the junta had visited strategic local counter-insurgency bases by helicopter within one week of the coup.

With respect to evaluating the likelihood of responsibility for specific massacres, it is also relevant to note that on a number of occasions testimonies received by Amnesty International from surviving relatives of murdered Guatemalans indicated that the military had been

responsible for particular killings; press reports, however, gave the government version--that guerrilla groups had been responsible.

On other occasions, editorials in Guatemala's leading newspapers have indicated belief that the authorities lay behind the continued killings; according to the New York Times of June 3, 1982, even General Rios Montt acknowledged that one such editorial carried in El Grafico on May 17, 1982 laid the responsibility for the post-coup wave of massacres at the door of the government.

Former high officials in the Guatemalan government have likewise testified of government responsibility. Two such officials who served under previous administrations are General Lucas Garcia's Vice-Presidential running mate, Francisco Villagran Kramer, who eventually left the country and went into exile in protest at the continuing violence, and the dismissed former head of the National Police Detective Corps, Jesus Valiente Tellez, also in exile after an internecine police feud during which several members of his family were killed. Both men have unequivocally stated that killings in the past were carried out on orders from the highest levels of the Guatemalan government and then officially blamed "on extremist groups of the left and the right".

In a recent taped telephone conversation from his place of exile, a transcript of which has been made available to Amnesty International, Valiente Tellez said he wanted to return to "denounce those assassins who subjected our country to a bloodbath, and tried to make governments around the world believe that the guerrillas were responsible".

After the March coup, Valiente Tellez offered to return to Guatemala to give evidence concerning attacks in which he had participated or of

which he had been victim, but a public announcement was made by the authorities that he would be arrested if he tried to enter Guatemala.

Amnesty International's 1981 report itself included other such testimony given by Elias Barahona y Barahona, press representative of the Ministry of the Interior until his defection in September 1980. Barahona confirmed that the so-called "death squads" on whom the government blamed much of the killing were actually part of a program of pacification carried out by the Guatemalan security forces.

Non-governmental sources including opposition groups as well as campesino organizations, Indian groups and Christian groups such as the Justice and Peace Committee, on the other hand, accuse the government of responsibility for a series of incidents in recent months during which men, women and children have been killed. According to the campesino, church and opposition groups, such killings of obvious non-combatants form part of a stepped-up government counter-insurgency program intended to clear areas in active contention of their civilian population in order to eliminate any possible base of logistical support for the opposition.

Certain areas have already been cleared of their populations, their former inhabitants having either been killed or having fled either across the borders to Mexico or Honduras, to larger cities in the area or into the mountains or jungles surrounding threatened villages.

Detailed reports prepared by these non-government sources indicate that it is the regular military forces or newly-formed government-sponsored civil defense groups who have been responsible for the massacres and massive destruction of crops and property which has led to this exodus.

The Comite de Unidad Campesina (CUC), Committee for Peasant Unity, the Movimiento Indigena, Indian Movement, as well as the Justice and Peace Committee report that the civil defense patrols are nothing more than a new form of paramilitary band, led by soldiers and local military commissioners and spies. They charge that peasants have been told that if they do not join the patrols, they will be killed and all of their property burned. They also allege that the Army has also offered those joining the patrols the lands, harvest, belongings and women of the peasants massacred. Many of the massacres which the government has blamed on the guerrillas have actually been carried out by these new civilian groups, according to the reports received by Amnesty International. During an interview carried out in April by a foreign journalist, a transcript of which is in Amnesty International's possession, civil defense patrol members from Baja Verapaz admitted that they had been involved in such atrocities. They stated that they acted under the orders of military commanders who instructed them to consider as "involved" anyone they found over the age of twelve in areas or houses considered suspicious by the commanders. They were told to seize such people and kill them. Even younger children, if they too were felt to be "involved", were to be summarily executed. The testimony stated that until recently, the women had been left alone in the houses when the men were taken off, but that now women were being routinely raped, even those who were pregnant. One member of the squad told his interviewer that in one case a woman was raped five days after giving birth, when she had left her home to bathe the baby. He also reported having seen people drowned and mutilated and said he had seen several people's ears being cut off. His brother-in-law had told him of witnessing stranglings by

garotte. The soldiers who directed these civilian squads were, according to the informant, also young Indians, obliged by their commanders to order the civilian defense squads to commit such atrocities.

Another member of the patrol told of seeing a man who tried to escape being recaptured. All his muscles were cut and gunpowder placed in his navel and set on fire. The victim's eye was put out, and his skin was then peeled off. The soldiers joked that they were going to have a barbecue.

The testimony also told of civilian defense patrol members being told that they should denounce their fathers, brothers, children or other relatives that they suspected might be mixed up in opposition activities.

The men giving the testimony also spoke of the same soldiers who had carried out atrocities in villages returning to hand out toys to the local children as part of a "civil action" program intended to win support for the government. After giving out the toys, the soldiers then took all the men of the village who had appeared for the gathering to the village clinic. Later, only six bloody ears were found there.

Those who do not want to patrol, they said, were killed. On other occasions, it is reported that the military, acting alone, have carried out such killings while in plain clothes to make their attribution difficult. It is also charged that government representatives have been buying up large amounts of the distinctive indigenous clothing which are usually sold to tourists and have dressed the troops in this clothing prior to ordering such massacres, in order to discredit the opposition groups.

Opposition groups have alleged that the government troops or paramilitary units under their command had carried out atrocities while in plain clothes, or while wearing indigenous clothing, in order to support their allegations that guerrilla groups were responsible for specific

atrocities. This corresponds to previous testimony received by Amnesty international. Prior to the March coup, survivors of attacks on villages who have reached Mexico told of having been taken into custody and tortured while others were killed by men in plain clothes who later changed into uniform. The former Indian conscript whose testimony was included in Amnesty International's 1981 report also told of occasions when he had been sent out on patrol in plain clothes to attack villages and then later told to change into uniform in order to return to the same villages and "investigate" such attacks. Both in 1980 and 1982, Amnesty International also recorded the testimony of relatives who spoke of a variant of this tactic, whereby young men who had been kidnapped were later found dead dressed in combat fatigue-type clothing which was not their own, in order to support government statements that the dead men were guerrillas who died in combat with regular security forces.

In no case known to Amnesty International has a campesino who has succeeded in reaching comparative safety abroad in either Honduras or Mexico supported claims that opposition forces have been responsible for massive extra-judicial executions of non-combatant civilians. On the contrary, many who have spoken to foreign journalists outside of Guatemalan territory have indicated their knowledge or belief that the atrocities which they have witnessed or survived had been perpetrated by government or government-supported groups.

FOOTNOTES

¹ On 21 April, the junta officially announced that the Cuerpo de Detectives had officially been disbanded; simultaneously, the Policia Nacional (National Police) announced that a new group, the Comando de Operaciones Especiales (COE), had been formed and would serve as a support force in counter insurgency actions. Another new group, to be called the Departamento de Investigaciones Tecnicas (Department of Technical Investigations) has also been formed by the National Police. It is believed that it will carry out many of the functions formerly performed by the Cuerpo de Dectives. In succeeding weeks, however, the "judiciales" were reportedly once again back in operation.

² Movimiento de Liberacion Nacional (National Liberation Movement) (MLN), a far-right political party, heirs of the group which led the US-backed overthrow of President Jacobo Arhems, bringing to an end ten years of reformist government in Guatemala.

³ See Central America Special Action (CASA) 27/82, which is appended.

⁴ For a complete list of massacres reported to Amnesty International since the March 1982 coup, see the attached appendix.