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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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TO: HA - Mr. Levitsky
FROM: INR/IAA - Willian Knepper
SUBJECT: Human Rights in Guatemala

A clear understanding of the violence in Guatemala is difficult to obtain due to intimidation of witnesses, guerrilla disinformation, and government control over the media. Nonetheless, two trends in the human rights situation are clear. First, violations by government security forces have decreased substantially over the past four months, particularly in the cities. Second, killings of civilians by the insurgent forces have reached unprecedented levels. (U)

The improvement in the human rights situation can be credited to President Jose Efrain Rios Montt, who was asked to lead the military junta set up by the junior officers who carried out the coup of March 23. At the time of the coup, Rios was serving as director of the school run by the Church of the Complete Word, an offshoot of the Gospel Outreach Church of Eureka, California. (U)

Rios gained his reputation for honesty in 1971 when his attacks on corruption in the Armed Forces caused him to be relieved of his position as Army Chief of Staff. He consolidated this reputation in 1974 when he ran for president and apparently won, although the office was denied him by ballot fraud. Rios, always a very religious man, converted to the Church of the Complete Word in the late 1970s. (U)

Upon assuming power with the other two junta members, Rios made clear his intention to end indiscriminate killings by government forces. (U) He immediately disbanded the notorious detective squad, which apparently signalled to other right wing death squads that their activities would no longer be tolerated. The number of deaths attributed by the Embassy to government elements was nearly halved in the first month after Rios' accession to power. (See Appendix "A") This number dropped even lower in June when the government offered the insurgents a thirty-day amnesty. Last week, Rios disbanded the judicial police in another move to curb official violence. (C)

The progress made by the government in curbing abuses

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is clouded by several factors, however. Rios ousted the other two junta members in early June and has since ruled by unilateral decree, with only vague references to return to constitutional rule. Some of these references have been repeated enough for it to be relatively safe to ascribe some validity to them. For example, it appears that Rios does plan to convene a constituent assembly some time next year. (U)

A far more ominous note, however, has been struck by his consolidating in his own hands (in the presidential guard) all future illegal actions, such as kidnappings, etc., directed against suspected subversives. While his order should cause an overall reduction in such activity due to the stricter controls, it calls into question Rios' repeated claims of a new morality in government. (S/NF/NC/ORCON)

One of the most difficult tasks faced by the Guatemalan government is that of bringing its forces under control. (U) The recent kidnapping of Dr. Hurtado, who was suspected of supplying medicine to the guerrillas, apparently was carried out forces subordinate to the Minister of Interior, Mendez Ruiz, in an attempt to obtain a bargaining chip for use in gaining the release of the Minister's son, who is being held by guerrilla forces. (S/NF/NC/ORCON) Nonetheless, it appears that Hurtado's release can be credited to Rios' intervention. (U)

In the northwestern highland (altiplano) provinces of Huehuetenango and El Quiche the government of Guatemala faces its greatest challenge. There the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP) has spent ten years preaching that the government intends to exterminate the resident Indian people (indigenas), descendants of the Mayas. The guerrillas believe that the Indian is the key to their program for eventual control of the government. (U)

The Indians account for half of Guatemala's population of seven million. They include twenty cultural groupings which speak twenty different dialects. Few speak Spanish. The Indians have traditionally been ignored by the government when not needed as impressed labor on road building projects, etc. Treatment of the Indians by the non-Indian population of Spanish descent, the ladinos, has been similar, which is not surprising, considering the fact that it is the ladinos who dominate the government. The ladinos have seldom considered the Indians as more than a pool of cheap labor to be exploited at harvest time on the south coast (Pacific) coffee, cotton, and sugar plantations. (U)

Efforts by church workers and peace corps volunteers to establish cooperative commercial ventures were aimed at establishing new terms of trade between the Indians and the ladino sector. The insurgents, too, seized upon the traditional abuses connected with the labor contracting system in their proselytizing efforts. Guerrilla violence directed against the ladino elite, however,

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caused all rural development projects to be viewed by the right as communist inspired or controlled. Under the government of Romeo Lucas Garcia, a tremendous wave of violence was unleashed upon the altiplano, and large numbers of priests, lay workers, teachers, and cooperative leaders were killed. (U)

Rios Montt has decided that it is time to improve the status of the Indian in Guatemalan society, and has taken on the insurgent challenge head to head. Rios has apotheosized the virtues of the Indian man in his recent speeches. He has called upon all Guatemalans to emulate him and define a new Guatemalan identity which is not merely a poor copy of western consumerism or eastern communism. Equally important, he has begun a series of actions which illustrate that he is not all talk. (U)

The most important action taken by the Rios government toward the Indian is the decision to arm them, an action that would have been unthinkable only a year ago. Civil Defense Forces (CDFs) have been organized in remote villages and arms are slowly being provided. Whereas a central tenet of guerrilla theology is that the armed Indians would turn their weapons upon the government, this has not been the case. The lightly armed CDFs have prevented guerrillas the easy access to villages to which they had become accustomed, and have inflicted a number of casualties upon the guerrillas. In order to intimidate the Indians into refusing to support local CDFs, the insurgents have launched ferocious attacks upon CDF members and their families. In the village of Chacalte, on June 15, the guerrillas massacred over 100 defenseless campesinos. In many other attacks the guerrillas have killed fewer Indians but left the same message of the cost of sympathy for the government. (U).

Despite these recent insurgent attacks upon the campesinos, reports differ about the identity of the attackers. (U) A clandestine source with good contacts with the EGP stated that guerrilla forces acting on instruction from a Mexican leftist wore Army camouflage uniforms when they massacred 150 campesinos in Alta Verapaz Department. (S/NF/NC/ORCON) Similarly, reports abound that the army sometimes wears olive green uniforms during massacres to cause the victims to believe that the guerrillas are the perpetrators (U)

In conclusion, before the March 23 coup, right-wing death squads, detective squads, judicial police, and the military were responsible for most murders. (U) In contrast, our embassy now estimates that the number of civilians killed by the left jumped from 33 in the first quarter of 1982 to 358 in the second quarter, a 1000% increase. (C)

The massacres carried out by the left in the past two months are indicative of increasing anxiety among the still powerful guerrilla forces. Prior to the coup, the left was gaining impressive momentum as the Indians slowly began to join its ranks. This growth

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however, was arrested when Rios came to power and curtailed government abuses. His announcement of amnesty for all insurgents and supporters also aided this. The reformist attitude of the new government and decreasing popular support for the guerrillas seriously challenge the legitimacy of the guerrilla movement. The insurgents are clearly trying to provoke the military into its traditional tactics of repression to recover popular support. (U)

The question, then, is whether Rios can persuade the military to respect human rights while mounting an aggressive offensive against the insurgents. This will be a difficult task given the traditional behavior of the military, particularly in combat zones. If Rios can succeed and introduce necessary socio-economic reforms, the guerrilla movement should lose popular support and wane. If, on the other hand, the military succumbs to the temptation of repression, the insurgents will fight back with ever stronger force, and with it, another chapter of human rights abuses will be written in Guatemalan history.

Drafted: INR/IAA:CHerrington
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POLITICAL AND MILITARY-ASSOCIATED
DEATHS IN GUATEMALA
1982

	JAN.	FEB.	MARCH	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG.	SEP.	OCT.	NOV.	DEC.
PROBABLY POLITICAL	477	342	389	278	348	330						
RIGHT EXTREME	1	7	0	2	0	11						
LEFT EXTREME	82	55	55	104*	138*	180*						
-Civilians ² (min.)	9	9	15	71	97	170						
-Army & Police "	56	36	19	15	12	10						
GOVERNMENT ELEMENTS	145*	16	91*	54	90	28						
-Civilians (min.)	1	0	0	0	1	0						
-Guerrillas "	141	16	91	54	80	28						
CIVIL DEFENSE GROUPS	-	-	-	30	5	0						
NON-ATTRIBUTION	249	264	243	88	115	111						
POSSIBLY POLITICAL	43	62	21	13	2	7						
DEATH SQUAD	18	2	2	3	5	0						
TOTAL	538	406	412	294	355	337						
%Change over previous month	+38%	-24%	+1%	-29%	+21%	-8%						
ABDUCTIONS	44	29	37	4	23	49						
MILITARY/GUERRILLA CLASHES ³	20	4	9	6	11	5						
CIVIL DEFENSE/GUERRILLA CLASHES	-	-	-	7	2	1						
TERRORIST ACTS BY GUERRILLAS ⁴	45	94	47	72	59	49						

¹Compiled from press reports and other sources available to the Guatemalan Embassy

²Includes Civil Defense Members, campesinos, and other innocent individuals

³Includes only encounters of a military nature between guerrillas and Army troops (i.e. ambushes are not included)

⁴Does not include clashes with the Army or Civil Defense

*The highest attributable death figure

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APPENDIX A: OUTLINE OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

- April 23-28 Guerrilla activities increase, especially in Huehuetenango. Insurgents start to counter the positive image of new government with propaganda machine.
- May 12 Guerrillas kill 20 people in Northern Alta Verapaz region.
- May 19 Guerrillas raid village and kill 14 people of Patzul, a village 130 miles NW of capital.
- May 20 STAFFDEL visit Guatemala, meet with priests, and receive a mixed, confused view of violence. Level of violence is generally down in the cities, while it continues to be high in the rural areas.
- Late May A Mexican leftist, closely associated with the EGP, states that a group of 150 peasants were killed by guerrillas in Alta Verapaz for cooperating with GOG.
- June About a dozen students are abducted by the GOG. Most are released one week later.
- June Rios Montt apparently gives orders to use extra-legal operations against members of guerrilla organizations.
- June 15 Between 112 and 120 campesinos are massacred in the town of CHACALTE by the insurgents.
- June 24 Dr. Hurtado, a suspected leftist, is arrested by GOG and accused of being a communist. He provides info on EGP under interrogation and is released one month later.
- July Commanders are ordered to protect civilians and win the support of the people by RIOS.
- July 15 The Attorney General's office asks the courts to open a trial against former president Lucas GARCIA on charges of graft, extortion, and fraud. A high-ranking Lucas government official is tried and convicted for extortion.
- July 17 Insurgents attack village of Pajumay, Chimaltenango, and kill 42 civilians. Other terrorist acts are reported.
- July 21 ORPA threatens a former poll-worker, killed his brother.
- August 1 Sixty-one guerrillas are killed in clashes with Guatemalan security forces in various parts of the country. No government casualties were reported.

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