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GUATEMALA

Arrest Warrants Issued for Four Ex-Military and Police Officers

On 6 Nov, Guatemala's Fifth Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for four former military and police officers who were accused of crimes against humanity by the Spanish National Court on 7 July '06 (Vol. 25, Nos. 7, 11). The Guatemalan arrest warrants were issued to prevent the accused from fleeing the country prior to and during the formal extradition hearings to be held soon in response to the international arrest and extradition orders issued by the Spanish court.

The accusations of State terrorism, kidnapping, torture and murder relate to the respective officers' roles in the kidnapping and murder of five Spanish Roman Catholic priests during '80-'81 and the armed assault and firebombing the Spanish Embassy in Guatemala City on 31 Jan '80, where a group of Mayan *campesino* activists and student sympathizers were peacefully protesting human rights violations by the government and military. A total of 35 people were killed in the Spanish Embassy assault and fire, including three Spanish citizens and Vicente Menchú Pérez, the father of '92 Nobel Peace Prize laureate Rigoberta Menchú Tum.

Guatemalan arrest warrants were issued for Gen. Ángel Aníbal Guevara Rodríguez, former Minister of Defense ('78-'82); former military dictator Gen. Óscar Humberto Mejía Víctores ('83-'86); Col. Germán Chupina Barahona, former General Director of the National Police; and Pedro García Arrendondo, former head of a National Police commando unit. All of these officials are accused of complicity in the crimes previously cited, which occurred under their command responsibility during the military dictatorship of Gen. Fernando Romeo Lucas García ('78-'82), who died at age 81 on 27 May '06 in exile in Puerto la Cruz, Venezuela.

By 14 Nov, Guevarra had turned himself in to Guatemalan authorities, Chupina had been placed under house arrest in a private clinic, Pedro García was nowhere to be found, and the arrest warrant issued against Mejía had been suspended by the Fifth Criminal Court after a hearing.

In '99, the Spanish National Court began criminal proceedings against former Gen. Lucas García for accusations of torture and genocide against the Maya population after a formal petition was introduced

by Rigoberta Menchú. However, the Venezuelan Supreme Court denied the Spanish extradition request on 22 June '05, arguing that the required evidence was not presented and lifted its house arrest order against Lucas García.

Also included in the July '06 international arrest warrant issued by the Spanish National Court was Gen. José Efraín Ríos-Montt, who came to power in Guatemala by means of a *coup d'État* in '82 that ended the corrupt and brutal regime of Gen. Lucas García. However, the Fifth Criminal Court excluded Ríos-Montt from the arrest warrants issued because he held no public position of responsibility within the Guatemalan government between Jan '80 and Sep '81 when the events described in the Spanish arrest and extradition order occurred.

Ríos-Montt also led a brutal military regime ('82–'83) that was responsible for some of the worst atrocities of Guatemala's 36-year civil war, which ended with a peace treaty in '96. The civil war between a coalition of left-wing guerrilla groups and the Guatemalan Army placed huge numbers of Mayans and *campesinos* in the crossfire. At least 200,000 Guatemalans (83% Mayan and 17% Ladino) were killed or disappeared during the conflict, making it one of Latin America's most violent wars in modern history.

In '99, the Historical Clarification Commission established that State security forces and allied paramilitary groups were responsible for 93% of the documented human rights violations, that the insurgent forces were responsible for 3%, and that the remaining 4% of the cases include other authors (Vol. 18, No. 3).

MAIZ Manifesto to the Nation: Another Guatemala is Possible

On 19 Nov, a group of 400 progressive leaders, assembled under the banner of the Social-Political Front of Leftists (FPSI), achieved the formal and legal creation a new political movement known as the Ample Leftist Movement (MAIZ) and presented their Manifesto to the Nation, entitled “Another Guatemala is Possible.”

According to this document, their intention as of 10 Sep '06 has been to form a new political movement of leftist organizations that is popular, progressive and democratic to challenge the nation's traditional economic and political powers, in the same way that other leftist political parties have done in other Latin American countries during the past decade, such as in Venezuela, Bolivia, Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina and Chile, and more recently in Nicaragua and Ecuador.

Leaders of FPSI, MAIZ and Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) agreed, on 19 Nov, to join forces and select a list of candidates for the '07 general elections who will support a common agenda of implementing profound and radical social and economic changes and of establishing a new multi-cultural vision of Guatemalan society with clearly-defined rights for Indigenous peoples, young people, women and handicapped persons.

In addition, their political agenda calls for the full implementation of the '96 Peace Accords, respect for everyone's human rights, social justice for all (especially for the poor), agrarian and tax reforms, better education, improved environmental protection (including opposition to open-pit mining), strengthening cooperatives and labor unions and the right of collective bargaining, establishing a policy of democratic

public security (rather than the current policy of national security that equals State terrorism), opposition to neoliberal economic policies such as Plan Puebla-Panama and CAFTA, and stopping government corruption, among others.

New Water Treatment Requirements and Monitoring Established

The Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources (MARN) will initiate a program to monitor municipalities and industries throughout the country to ensure that they comply with the installation of sewage treatment plants and conduct periodic technical studies on their water quality, beginning in May '07. This monitoring program seeks to improve water quality nationally, because recent studies by MARN have shown that 90% of the nation's water supply is contaminated.

So far only the municipalities of Guatemala, Mixco, Villa Nueva, Villa Canales and San Miguel Petapa have signed written agreements with MARN, as well as the industries affiliated with the Coordinating Committee of Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial and Financial Associations (CACIF), regarding the new program.

Impact of Bancafé Closure Uncertain

The 20 Oct liquidation of Bancafé, which was the country's fourth-largest commercial bank, has generated different opinions among economists regarding the impact this has had on the nation's banking system (Vol. 25, No. 11).

Alfredo Skinner-Klée, director of the Central American Economic Integration Bank affirmed that Bancafé's liquidation by State banking authorities did not affect the solvency of other Guatemalan banks or the financial system, whose condition he said was "reasonably good." He indicated that the larger banks had the capacity to absorb Bancafé's former clients.

However, César García, former director of Banco Continental (now G&T Continental), believes that Bancafé's foreclosure calls into question the supervisory capacity of the State regulatory agency, the Monetary Board. "Now the financial system is more vulnerable," he said, because Bancafé was one of the country's major banks, with assets of over \$1 billion.

Lizardo Sosa, former president of Banco de Guatemala, underlined that what occurred demonstrated political and civic will to confront Bancafé's financial problems, but he admitted that it would have been better if the Monetary Board had intervened earlier. Sosa indicated that the liquidation of Bancafé would not have a major impact on the nation's economy.

However, five other large Guatemalan banks also have been liquidated by the Monetary Board due to insolvency, fraud and mismanagement since '01, which has caused great concern among many banking clients and investors.

—Clifton L. Holland