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REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Letter dated 2 December 1988 from the Permanent Representative of
Guatemala to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

On instructions from my Government, I have the honour to transmit to you the texts of an official communiqué (annex I) and a report issued by the Government of Guatemala (annex II) in connection with recent events that occurred at the village of El Aguacate in the municipality of San Andrés Itzapa, department of Chimaltenango.

I should be grateful if you would have the attached communiqué distributed as an official document of the forty-third session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 12.

(Signed) Francisco VILLAGRAN DE LEGN
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

Annex I

PRESS COMMUNIQUE ISSUED BY THE SECRETARIAT OF PUBLIC RELATIONS
OF THE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT OF GUATEMALA

The Government of the Republic wishes to report to the international bodies concerned with ensuring strict respect for human rights, to the nations of the world that have expressed their full support for the process of consolidating the democratic system to domestic and international public opinion and to the Office of the Procurator for Human Rights:

That, in a reprehensible act which totally disregards the most fundamental principles of humanity, forces which are enemies of our constitutional system, under cover of the self-styled Organización Revolucionaria del Pueblo en Armas (ORPA), abducted and subsequently murdered 21 humble peasants from the village of El Aguacate in the municipality of San Andrés Itzapa, department of Chimaltenango.

The events began on Tuesday, 22 November, when military commissioner Carlos Humberto Guerra Callejas disappeared from his village while on his way to work in the fields as usual.

When they realized that he had disappeared, relatives and neighbours organized search parties which, on Wednesday, 23 November, set out in different directions and also reported the incident to the national police for the department of Chimaltenango.

On Thursday, 24 November, one of the parties, which included Pastor Antonio Olivares as its spiritual guide, established contact with the terrorists. They were later joined by another search party, who were immediately held at gunpoint and overcome by the criminals, who operate outside the law.

Upon learning of the mass abduction, the Guatemalan army, through military base No. 302 in Chimaltenango, immediately dispatched military units to the village of El Aguacate, including a civilian affairs unit to assist the relatives of the abducted men, who were paralysed with fear.

It was not until 26 November that the gruesome massacre of the peasants was discovered; their bodies were found in three makeshift common graves near the village.

The names of the 21 unfortunate Guatemalan citizens, the innocent victims of unscrupulous criminals, are as follows:

Francisco Callejas Tobar
Rosalío Callejas Tobar
Pastor Callejas Tobar
Romualdo Callejas Tobar
Julio Callejas Tobar
Luis Callejas Tobar
Oscar Callejas Tobar
Juan Oswaldo Callejas
Aroldo Callejas Tobar
Horacio Tajtaj Callejas
Cristobal Chuy
Pedro Guerra
Isidoro Castellanos Guerra
José Leonel Callejas
Factor Callejas Guerra
Humberto Callejas Guerra
Leonel Callejas Aspuac
Isidoro Guerra
Esteban Arenales
Carlos Humberto Guerra Callejas
Antonio Olivares Banse (pastor).

The Government of the Republic absolutely will not allow the progress achieved in the past three years in consolidating the democratic process and promoting respect for the individual rights guaranteed in the Political Constitution of the Republic, to be reversed by armed groups which act on their own outside the law and under cover of anonymity and surprise attacks, against the population and the national interest.

The Government of the Republic calls for the most vigorous condemnation of this reprehensible act.

Guatemala, 27 November 1988.

Annex II

REPORT OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF GUATEMALA ON THE MASSACRE OF PEASANTS IN THE DEPARTMENT OF CHIMALTENANGO

Introduction

The Constitutional Government of the Republic of Guatemala submits the following report concerning the violent events which occurred at the village of El Aguacate in the municipality of San Andrés Itzapa, Department of Chimaltenango, when 22 peasants were murdered by members of the subversive faction calling itself the Organización Revolucionaria del Pueblo en Armas (ORPA), a group belonging to the Unidad Revolucionaria Guatemalteca (URNG).

The disappearance

On the morning of Tuesday, 22 November 1988, Mr. Carlos Humberto Guerra Callejas, military commissioner for the village of El Aguacate in the municipality of San Andrés Itzapa, Department of Chimaltenango, went to work in the fields as usual. Before leaving home, he said that he was going to take a look around the area for some of his livestock that had strayed.

That night, the family of Mr. Carlos Humberto Guerra Callejas informed the other villagers that he had disappeared. The villagers, led by Pastor Antonio Olivares, immediately organized two search parties of 15 men each, who set off at approximately 5 a.m. the next morning to find him.

The two search parties were organized because, according to his relatives, Mr. Guerra Callejas suffered from frequent epileptic fits.

The search

At dawn on Wednesday, 23 November, the two search parties, each consisting of 15 men from the village of El Aguacate, set out for the area surrounding the village. After hours of combing the area, some traces were found, but the searchers were unable to find the missing villager.

At 4.15 p.m. the same day, after a fruitless search, relatives of Mr. Guerra Callejas submitted a formal report to the national police station for the Department of Chimaltenango. The report was registered by the station secretary.

Encounter with armed men

The following day, Thursday, 24 November, the El Aguacate villagers organized three search parties of 10 men each, headed by the village pastor, Mr. Antonio Olivares.

A pick-up truck owned by the pastor was used during the first part of the search. In mid-morning, one of the parties looking for Carlos Humberto Guerra Callejas spotted a group of armed men just outside the village. It was assumed that they were holding the missing villager and a first contact was made with them. The two other search parties were not aware of this situation. The first party was busy talking to the armed men and did not notice the second party suddenly appear on the scene. The armed men immediately pointed their guns at the peasants, including the third party which happened to appear at the same time.

The abduction

As this was happening, 11 of the 30 villagers from El Aguacate managed to escape in the pick-up truck owned by Mr. Antonio Olivares, which was parked on the outskirts of the village.

As the villagers hastily fled in the direction of the capital of the Department of Chimaltenango to seek help from the military authorities, their vehicle ran off the road into a ditch, injuring five of them. The six peasants who were unharmed in the accident managed to get to military base No. 302 in Chimaltenango, where they reported the abduction and the accident which had just occurred.

The command of the military base immediately dispatched its units to the village of El Aguacate to begin an intensive search for the abducted villagers, while ordering the immediate transfer of the five injured villagers to the military hospital in the capital city.

On Thursday, 24 November, the command of the military base also dispatched a civilian affairs unit to El Aguacate to assist the wives and children of the 22 abducted peasants.

At 7.40 p.m. on the same day, Mr. Waldemar Figueroa and Mr. Carlos Arnoldo Guerra Hurtarte, who had managed to escape the abduction, appeared at the Chimaltenango military base, accompanied by Mr. Jacinto Zamora Callejas, military commissioner for the village of Xipalqui, to give an account of what had happened. This made it possible to verify the identity of the armed group which had abducted the 22 peasants from the village of El Aguacate and to establish that they were members of the self-styled Organización Revolucionaria del Pueblo en Armas (ORPA), belonging to the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG). The command of military base No. 302 immediately ordered the necessary military mobilization.

The abducted villagers

The information provided to the military authorities by two of the peasants who were able to escape the abduction included the names of the 21 peasants from the village of El Aguacate who were at that point in the hands of the subversive faction, namely:

Francisco Callejas Tobar
Rosalió Callejas Tobar
Pastor Callejas Tobar
Romualdo Callejas Tobar
Luis Callejas Tobar
Julio Callejas Tobar
Oscar Callejas Tobar
Juan Oswaldo Callejas
Aroldo Callejas Tobar
Horacio Taj Taj Callejas
Cristobal Chuy
Pedro Guerra
Isidoro Castellanos Guerra
José Leonel Callejas
Antonio Olivares Banse
Factor Callejas Guerra
Humberto Callejas Guerra
Lecnel Callejas Aspuac
Isidoro Guerra
Esteban Arenales
Carlos Humberto Guerra Callojas

The village of El Aguacate

The village of El Aguacate is situated in the south-west of the Department of Chimaltonango, four kilometres from the municipality of San Andrés Itzapa. The terrain is rugged and the one road is so tortuous and in such poor condition that only small, four-wheel drive vehicles can use it.

Thirty-four families live in the village. Everyone is related to everyone else by blood, by family name and by a sense of community. El Aguacate has 160 inhabitants: 36 men, 40 women and 90 children. The villagers' main occupation is farming.

All of the abducted men were heads of household. After the abduction, only three old men remained as heads of families. The houses in the village of El Aguacate are not close together but scattered over an area of one square kilometre.

That same day, Thursday, 24 November, the Head of the Department of Information and Dissemination of the Guatemalan army, Colonel Luis Arturo Isaacs Rodríguez, called in the press to cover the incident and keep the public informed.

The search

As soon as the abduction was reported, the command of military base No. 302 in the Department of Chimaltenango dispatched its units to look for the 22 peasants abducted by the Organización Revolucionaria del Pueblo en Armas (ORPA). On Friday, 25 November, military patrols came into contact with the subversive group at 9.30 a.m. At 12.30 p.m. that same day, there was a further encounter in which second lieutenant Manuel Adolfo Molina Gutiérrez was wounded; the wounded man was transferred immediately to the military hospital in the capital city.

At 10.30 a.m. that day, a unit patrolling two kilometres to the south of the village of El Aguacate, in the area known as "Falda del Cerro Las Minas", found the body of military commissioner Carlos Humberto Guerra Callejas, who had disappeared on Tuesday, 22 November, while on his way to work in the fields to look for livestock which had strayed from his property.

Discovery of the common graves

On Saturday, 26 November, military patrols from the Chimaltenango military base found three common graves containing the bodies of 21 people to the south of the village of El Aguacate. All the bodies showed signs of torture and strangulation. Because of the inaccessibility of the place and the ruggedness of the terrain, it was impossible to transfer the remains to military base No. 302.

On Sunday, 27 November, the Office of the Head of the Department of Information and Dissemination of the Guatemalan army brought local and foreign journalists to the Chimaltenango military base to cover the story and keep the public informed.

The 21 bodies found in the three common graves on the afternoon of Saturday, 26 November could not be recovered until Monday, 28 November, owing both to the inaccessibility of the place and the constant siege kept up by the subversive group during the operation. The constant attacks against the army troops and helicopters which came to move the bodies made it necessary to bring in Guatemalan Air Force fighter planes, which made a number of incursions in order to halt the guerrilla attack so that the recovery operation could proceed as planned.

During the operation, the necessary legal requirements were fulfilled through the presence of a judge, who launched preliminary inquiries and ordered the other procedures required by law.

On Monday, 28 November, at military base No. 302, the 21 bodies found in the three common graves were identified by their relatives as the peasants from the village of El Aguacate who had taken part in the search for Mr. Carlos Humberto Guerra Callejas, missing since 22 November.

Assistance to relatives

Following the identification of the victims and the necessary legal action, the national army extended to the relatives of the 22 peasants murdered by the Organización Revolucionaria del Pueblo en Armas (ORPA) facilities for their wake and their burial in Chimaltenango cemetery. It also provided for their safety and for continuation of the investigations and operations aimed at finding those responsible for this serious, violent act which violates human rights. The Constitutional Government of the Republic, through the Committee for National Reconstruction, also supplied food to the widows and orphans and set up a project for their transfer to the capital of the Department if they so requested.

Official report to the international community

On Sunday, 27 November, the Government of the Republic issued a press communiqué reporting the incident to the international bodies concerned with ensuring strict respect for human rights, the nations of the world that have expressed their full support for the process of consolidating the democratic system, domestic and international public opinion, and the Office of the Procurator for Human Rights, and calling for the most vigorous condemnation of this reprehensible act, perpetrated by subversives who are operating on their own illegally in some areas of the national territory.

Guatemala, 29 November 1988.
