

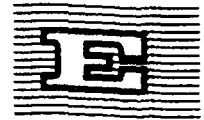
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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Sub-Commission on Prevention of
Discrimination and Protection
of Minorities

Thirty-eighth session
Agenda item 6

QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS
INCLUDING POLICIES OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AND SEGREGATION AND OF
APARTHEID, IN ALL COUNTRIES, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO COLONIAL
AND OTHER DEPENDENT COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES: REPORT OF THE
SUB-COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS RESOLUTION 8 (XXIII)

Written communication submitted by Pax Christi, a non-governmental
organization in consultative status (category II)

The Secretary-General has received the following communication, which is
circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[13 August 1985]

The question of disappeared persons in Guatemala

For more than a year now, dozens of parents of "disappeared persons" in
Guatemala, belonging to an organization set up for strictly humanitarian purposes,
the "Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo" (GAM - Mutual Aid Group) have been savagely repressed
by the Guatemalan authorities. After stating publicly and repeatedly that they
did not wish this organization to continue its activities, the authorities in
Guatemala have gone from words to deeds, and several members of GAM have been
abducted and assassinated in cold blood.

The case of several of the leaders of GAM described below illustrates the
untenable situation in which the members of this humanitarian organization find
themselves at present.

The facts about the Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo (GAM)

Several personalities who have played a role in the activities of the
organization have disappeared or been killed in 1984 and 1985. In May 1984
Carlos Ernesto, 25 years old, and Otto René, 26 years old, both board members of the
Association of University Students (AEU), were abducted. In April 1985 Rosario Godoy,
the wife of Carlos Ernesto Godoy, and Vice-President of GAM, was killed, the car
in which she was travelling being pushed into a deep hollow by a large vehicle which
then made off, according to the latter testimony of a passer-by. Furthermore,

Héctor Orlando Gómez Carlito, 32 years old, publicity officer for GAM, was found brutally murdered in March 1985, and Angel Arnulfo Reyes, another of the leaders of GAM, escaped after a kidnap attempt. In this connection, it must be borne in mind that GAM is a humanitarian body with some 600 members belonging to the families of disappeared persons. It began its activities early in 1984, and today it shares the grief and uncertainty of thousands of Guatemalans who each day search for their loved ones in the piles of dead bodies, more often than not in vain.

Its activities are based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other conventions signed and ratified by the Government of Guatemala.

It stresses that its activities are strictly humanitarian and that all it seeks is to find its family members still alive. It insists that it has no political leanings.

It claims the right of all persons anywhere in the world to seek their nearest and dearest. It maintains that the disappeared persons are workers, peasants, students, professionals and members of other sectors belonging to lawful associations who were carrying on their political activities openly.

The military Government nevertheless accuses them of being a tool of the insurgent movement, although the Catholic Church in Guatemala is in disagreement with the movement. The Metropolitan Archbishop, Monsignor Próspero Penados des Barrio, stated on 27 March last that the members of families of disappeared persons have every right to ask that they be told the truth about the fate of their family members and at the same time accused the Government of holding up the investigations.

The Chief of State, General Oscar Mejía Victores, stated on 11 March last that GAM was working in co-ordination with international communist organizations, and he cited the case of Amnesty International. General Mejía also described other organizations like Americas Watch as communist.

GAM has instigated a series of activities ranging from weekly gatherings in front of the Attorney-General's office to demonstrations, marches and peaceful sit-ins at work places.

Because of this, the Minister of the Interior, Gustavo Adolfo Sandoval, stated on 21 March last: "The Government has been very patient and has tolerated the action of GAM for humanitarian reasons; but this situation cannot go on any longer."

One old lady from the indigenous community and a member of the Group put in a nutshell one of the main objectives of the movement when she said: "All I want is to know whether my son is alive and to have him returned to me, or otherwise to be told, so that I need not go on looking for him."

In this connection, the Chief of State General Oscar Mejía Victores said on 19 November 1984 when for the first time he received the leaders of GAM: "I am not going to say that it is not the Government, nor am I going to say that it is the subversives or that it is the rule of violence; all factors have played their part in our country for many years now. We are trying to avoid such abuses. I am in weekly contact with all the security forces and I am fully aware of what is happening in Guatemala; and I shall do everything I can to solve the problems."

On that occasion, a fact finding commission was set up with the Vice-Ministers of the Interior and Defence and the Attorney-General of the nation. Four months later, on 29 March last, the commission delivered a judgement which stated in essence: "The conclusion reached by this commission is that there are no indications or traces leading to citizens who have disappeared in the last few years, and that there are no secret prisons in Guatemala."

Meanwhile, members and leaders of GAM are being harassed and their lives are being threatened in a variety of ways, while mysterious individuals keep an eye on all the movements of the Group so as to exert pressure to put an end to the reports on disappeared persons in Guatemala.