Between March 18th and April 18th, 1997 EAAF member Silvana Turner conducted a mission to Guatemala at the invitation of the Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation. The mission had two main objectives: 1) to collaborate in the exhumation and analysis of human remains from cases of human rights violations under investigation by the Foundation; and 2) to establish the terms of a collaborative agreement between the Foundation and EAAF for 1998.

The mission was financed by the Guatemalan Foundation and EAAF.

BACKGROUND

Over the past four decades, more people have been forcibly disappeared in Guatemala than in any other Latin American nation. Since 1960, when civil war broke out in Guatemala, approximately 45,000 disappearances have been reported — an extremely high figure for a country with a current population of only ten million. In addition to the disappearances, approximately 100,000 people were killed in other ways during the conflict.


In 1990, the Guatemalan government and the URNG (Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca), a coalition of guerrilla groups, began peace negotiations under United Nations mediation. These talks had two important consequences for the human rights situation in the country. First, in 1994, the parties to the Guatemalan conflict agreed that a UN human rights overseers mission, MINUGUA, would be established in the country to monitor compliance.
with the existing and future peace accords. MINUGUA still has international civilian monitors working throughout the country.

Second, at the peace negotiations both parties agreed that a special commission of inquiry, the Guatemalan Historical Clarification Commission, would investigate human rights violations committed during the civil conflict. The Commission presented its report February 26th, 1999.

A peace accord was eventually signed on December 30th, 1996, ending 36 years of civil war. On December 16th 1996, however, with support from both sides of the former conflict, the Guatemalan National Assembly approved an amnesty law that has been interpreted by most human rights NGOs as exempting both government troops and guerrillas from prosecution for killings, kidnappings, and acts of torture committed during the civil war.

The peace process was further threatened in April 1998, when Guatemalan Bishop Juan Gerardi Conedera was bludgeoned to death. Two days earlier Bishop Gerardi had released a major study of human rights violations, which concluded that the Guatemalan military was responsible for approximately 80 per cent of the deaths and disappearances that occurred during the country's 36-year civil war. Evidence collected by church and human rights groups linked the Guatemalan Armed Forces to the killings, although the Guatemalan government has repeatedly denied the connection.

The human rights situation in Guatemala was also influenced in the mid-1990s by public disclosures about U.S. links to human rights violations. In March 1992 Efraín Bamaca Velázquez, a Guatemalan guerrilla leader married to U.S. lawyer Jennifer Harbury, was captured by the Guatemalan army and subsequently disappeared. In protest, Ms. Harbury undertook a number of actions, and eventually staged a hunger strike in front of the American embassy in Guatemala City, demanding that the U.S. government investigate her husband’s case. The Clinton administration eventually began an investigation, which revealed that Julio Roberto Alpírez, a colonel in the Guatemalan Army who worked as a paid CIA informant, was implicated in the killing of Mr. Bamaca and another U.S. citizen, Michael DeVine, in 1990. Subsequent disclosures revealed that the C.I.A. station chief in Guatemala at the time may have known more about these killings than he disclosed to his superiors. The station chief was subsequently removed from his post.

FORENSIC WORK IN GUATEMALA


At the same time in 1992, together with other professionals, EAAF participated in training the Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Team, which has since undertaken the important work of scientifically documenting human rights violations committed in the country.

Since 1992 this team, now called the Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation (Fundacion de Antropologia Forense de Guatemala), has been conducting forensic anthropological work in the human rights field in Guatemala and other countries. Since 1996, a second forensic anthropology team working for the Office of the Archbishop of Guatemala has also been doing similar work.

The two Guatemalan forensic anthropology teams and EAAF are currently the only organizations of...
Their kind working in Latin America. The three teams, all non-governmental organizations, formed in response to historical circumstances that made the application of forensic anthropology to investigations into human rights violations a vitally important project.

The results of the forensic investigations into human rights cases are being sent to the special commission of historical inquiry investigating human rights violations named above.

THE 1997 MISSION

The Collaborative Agreement

Because the Guatemalan Foundation has undertaken an extremely large workload, in early 1997 its members began to discuss the possibility of an institutional collaborative agreement with the Argentine team. During her stay in Guatemala, Turner discussed the technical details of this proposed accord with foundation members in more detail.

The outcome of these discussions was a project entitled “Project of Scientific Documentation of Human Rights Violations Committed in Guatemala: Exhumation of Clandestine Graves and Identification of the Remains of Disappeared Persons.” In the agreement, EAAF committed itself to undertaking three or four missions to Guatemala in 1998, each conducted by a single EAAF member. On each of these missions, the EAAF member will participate in excavations and analyses of human remains from cases of human rights violations under investigation by the Guatemalan Foundation. The project was subsequently approved by Misereor, a German agency.

Forensic Activities

Laboratory Work. Between March 21st and 25th, and again between March 29th and April 2nd, Turner participated in the analysis of disappeared persons’ remains in the laboratory located in the foundation’s offices. These remain had been exhumed in several different excavations conducted by the foundation.

Also, between April 5th and 9th, Turner participated in a seminar for the foundation’s members given by the U.S doctors Nizan Peerwani, a forensic pathologist, and Rodney Crown, a forensic odontologist.

Fieldwork. Between March 26th and 28th Turner participated with the foundation in an excavation of a mass gravesite and an investigation of another possible mass grave. Both were located in San Andrés Sajcabajá, a village in the department of Quiché. According to witnesses, near the end of 1980s, Guatemalan Army troops occupied the parish and kidnapped or murdered several hundred residents.

Between April 12th and 16th, Turner participated in the excavation of a site known as “El Tablon,” in the department of Chimaltenango. The excavation site was a well of approximately 30 meters in depth. According to several different witnesses, the Guatemalan Armed Forces had thrown the bodies of approximately 300 local villagers in this well during the 1980s. This excavation was interrupted by the beginning of the rainy season.

1998 Update

As specified in the agreement, during 1998 EAAF members conducted three missions to Guatemala. Each lasted for a month, and involved field and laboratory research. More information will be provided in EAAF’s 1998 report.
Guatemalan Rights Group Tracing Abuses in War

By LARRY POTTER
GUATEMALA — Assured by an amnesty law they regard as a whitewash, and skeptical of a new official commission that is supposed to look into more than decades of political repression, torture, extrajudicial killings and disappearances, human rights groups here have made it clear that they won’t hold their breaths for any tangible progress or any prosecutions of those responsible.

The project to Discover Historical Memory, pioneered by the Roman Catholic Church’s human rights office here, has since 1986 been interviewing victims and survivors of some of the worst violence in Guatemala’s 36-year civil war, which formally ended in 1996. The work was to culminate in a comprehensive report, and now that peace has finally come, these groups are more tenacious than ever that they did.

“We are not satisfied,” said Oliva de Ces, a Guatemalan rights educator and a member of the commission, “but a lot of these are in a certain category of those who are said to be dead, but who are still seen. This is a historical issue.”

For all their frustration others are still mourning the loss of relatives or close friends, that is not enough, her father-in-law, Jorge Carpio Nicolle, a prominent newspaper publisher, member of Congress and former presidential candidate, was shot to death in a highway ambush in 1993 by members of a paramilitary group that supported the Guatemalan armed forces.

It seems ridiculous to me that they are going to say that the army abuses were committed in the war,” he said.

At the same time, the commitment of 25 human rights groups in working together to submit some 10,000 cases of suspicion, forced disappearance and torture, covered over 20 years. It plans to publish the information after making it available to official commissions.

“The Government has reduced human rights violations to a minimum,” acknowledged Mario Ponce, coordinator of the Guatemalan Ministry of Human Rights, which was formed by the government as a way to clarify or prosecute even forced disappearances, even disappearances that continue to this day.

Even without naming names, the commission has been tough and reticent.

“If they had decided to name witnesses, I would have agreed to serve,” the commission’s executive director, Carmen Fuentes, said the commission is looking for names.

Even so, it’s not clear how much can be said. The commission has been fighting a battle for years.

“We have more than 10,000 names and information that is too sensitive,” she said. Scott Fife, a lawyer and son of the Alliance Against Tyranny, a coalition of human rights groups that regard the terms of the peace agreement as too lenient for the Guatemalan military, said that the commission is too weak to do much.

In addition, the commission, at least initially, has a budget of only $100,000, which is to come from the Government but private for high expenses.

But perhaps the biggest problem, as human rights groups have made clear, is that the commission will not address individual responsibility for crimes because its charter does not permit it to do so.

“We are not judges nor hangmen,” said Fife.

Thrus the project, which is financed by the United Nations, the Guatemalan government, and international donors, has discovered 3,600 killings. It has also received information about the locations of more than 360 clandestine cemeteries which is based on testimonies in several states.

In addition, Mr. Carpio said, the commission has approached 150 former soldiers or civilian members who took part in killings or torture and asked to clear their conscience. Human rights violations committed by Guatemalan forces have also been documented.

Disatisfaction with a Guatemalan amnesty law seen as a whitewash.

Killed Jorge Carpio Nicolle, [Mr. Carpio said], “All of Guatemala already knows that.”

But Ms. Fuentes said that the commission’s initial approach is the best way to bring about recognition and accountability among those who are still asking for the historical record “There are too many cases, and our resources are few,” she said.

What is the priority? She asked.

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Guatemalans Formally End Their 36-Year Civil War

BY LARRY ROITER
Guatemala, Dec. 29 — After 36 years of civil war that left more than 100,000 people dead and devastated this country's society, a grateful but weary Guatemala formally returned to a state of peace today with the signing of a final armistice between the Government and the leftist guerrillas who have been its traditional adversaries.

As thousands of people watched on giant television screens in the main square in front of the National Palace here, the principal leaders of the Guatemalan Revolutionary Unity, and members of the Government's Peace Commission signed a document that at fully carried out, will transform nearly every aspect of Guatemalan society.

With President Álvaro Arzú Irízar looking on, the signers then embraced each other, in the first public sign of the reconciliation that must take place here.

Today's “Accord for a Firm and Lasting Peace” brings to a formal end the longest and most destructive of Central America's civil wars. In addition to the 100,000 killed, most of them by the Guatemalan armed forces or paramilitary groups, an estimated 40,000 “disappeared,” and a million more were driven from their homes or into exile.

Perhaps because of the magnitude of the suffering, this country of 10.5 million people has endured, the tone of the events surrounding the peace ceremonies was more solemn than celebratory. This morning, groups sympathetic to the left marched to the General Cemetery here to honor the dead, while Maya religious leaders organized a ritual to placate those of their deities “to make peace between our peoples a reality.”

According to a poll published today by the newspaper Prensa Libre, many Guatemalans still have doubts that the peace will hold. The survey, conducted last week, indicated that 28% of those polled approved of the accord, only 38% believed that they “will be respected.”

The only openly dissenting note, however, was struck by a robed unit in the city of Quetzaltenango that refused to take part in local ceremonies to mark the end of the insurrection. According to news reports here, guerrillas from the Organization of the People in Arms sent a letter to the local Governor saying their absence would serve as a sign of rejection of some of the terms signed by the U.R.N.G. with the Government of Guatemala.

As established by the timetable negotiated by the warring sides, the first phase of the agreement calls for the demobilization of the guerrilla troops, estimated at fewer than 2,000, and their “reinsertion” into civil society. During the first 90 days, the armed forces are required to begin reducing their strength to a level that will eventually be one third below the current figure of 40,000 troops.

The agreement also foresees deployment of a small detachment of United Nations troops — about 150 soldiers — not as a peacekeeping force as in Haiti and other places, but to verify compliance with demobilization procedures. China, however, has threatened to veto that arrangement when it comes to the Security Council, in protest against Guatemala's diplomatic relations with Taiwan.

After 100,000 dead, the peace ceremony is more solemn than celebratory.

in an interview late Friday, Mr. Arzú described China's attitude as "worrisome" and said he hoped that "reason will prevail in the end." But he emphasized that his Government would not abandon its relationship with Taiwan, including support for its readmission to the United Nations, and said he has begun studying alternatives to a United Nations force if China vetoes it.

"That could be the Organization of American States, a South American group, whatever," Mr. Arzú said.

"There are always mechanisms." He also suggested that the international monitoring force could be done away with altogether if the process of organizing it proves too cumbersome.

"The thing is that both sides, the army and the U.R.N.G., have stated that there is not a pressing need for international verification," he said, citing the "mutual confidence" that has developed during six years of negotiations. "We are not going to define both sides as to our obligations, and we are willing to respect them." In recognition of the importance that the Spanish-speaking world attaches to the end of 36 years of conflict here, the Presidents of eight Latin American nations and the Prime Minister of Spain, José María Aznar, attended the ceremonies. Also present, in one of his last official acts, was Nestor Rios Otalora, the departing Secretary General of the United Nations, which played a decisive role in moderating the peace talks.

The United States, which organized the 1984 military coup that triggered the cycle of state-sponsored violence and repression, was represented by Thomas F. McLarty, President Clinton's special envoy for Latin America and the Caribbean. In remarks to American reporters today, Mr. McLarty pledged continued American support for Guatemalan efforts to “move toward peace and justice and democracy” under Mr. Arzú’s leadership.

Guatemalans seemed most impressed, though, by the arrival on Saturday afternoon of the guerrillas’ top military and political commanders, some of whom have been outside the country since the 1980’s. As a marimba band played, several hundred guerrillas and their sympathizers wanted outside the airport here, chanting revolutionary slogans and waving banners proclaiming that "we are here to continue our struggle.

"I find it hard to believe this is actually happening," said a young man whose face was covered with the blue bandana that identified him as a guerrilla fighter. "A year ago, the army would have killed all of us for trying to do something like this."
HAY 525 OSAMENTAS EN FOSA CLANDESTINA

Denuncia Amílcar Méndez:

El alcalde de San Juan Altotitán, Huehuetenango, Francisco García Mariño, ha recibido un informe de la Policía Nacional sobre el hallazgo de un fosa clandestina en el municipio. Los restos humanos se encontraron en lo que se presume que fue un vehículo abandonado en el lugar.

La denuncia fue presentada por el oficial guatemalteco, quien informó que la fosa fue localizada al sur de la ciudad de Huehuetenango. Según la Policía, la fosa contiene al menos 525 osamentas humanas. El alcalde García Mariño ha solicitado la intervención de las autoridades para investigar el caso.

Reinician búsqueda de osamentas en cementerio clandestino, en El Tablon

El departamento de Huehuetenango continúa con la búsqueda de osamentas en el cementerio clandestino de El Tablon. Las autoridades han encontrado restos humanos en el sitio, lo que ha llevado a la intervención de las fuerzas de seguridad.

Exhumarán osamentas en un cementerio clandestino

La Fiscalía de Huehuetenango ha iniciado las diligencias para exhumar osamentas en un cementerio clandestino descubierto en la ciudad de Huehuetenango. Según informes, el cementerio contiene al menos 500 osamentas humanas.

FONAPAZ: Hon regresó más de 30 mil refugiados

Una delegación de funcionarios de la Comisión Interno de Derechos Humanos (FONAPAZ) ha regresado de una misión de verificación en las zonas de conflicto, donde han recuperado más de 30 mil refugiados.

El delegado de FONAPAZ, el doctor Hernán García, ha informado sobre la situación de los refugiados, quienes han sido devueltos a sus hogares después de un proceso de verificación y asistencia.

Argentina Forensic 1996-97 BIANNUAL REPORT
Prelate Killed In Guatemala After Issuing Rights Report

GUATEMALA, April 27 (AP) — A Roman Catholic bishop was reported today to have been beaten to death two days after he presented a scathing report on human rights violations committed during the country's 38-year civil war.

The prelate, Auxiliary Bishop Juan Gerardi Conedera, 75, was hit in the head with a concrete block Sunday night at his home in Guatemala City, church officials said today.

The officials said he had apparently heard a noise in the garage and had gone to investigate. Bloody tracks suggested that his assailant had dragged him across the garage.

Prosecutors said they had not determined a motive.

Bishop Gerardi was director of the Guatemala City archdiocese's human rights office. He presented his report, "Never Again in Guatemala," at the city cathedral on Friday.

In it, nearly 80 percent of rights abuses in the war were attributed to the Guatemalan Army and to civilian paramilitary groups it created.

The United Nations mission chief in Guatemala, Jean Arnault, called the killing "a violent contrast, given that tierard was a man who played a role in the peace process."

The conflict, one of Latin America's longest, lasted from 1961 until the end of 1996. leftist rebels fought the often repressive Government, demanding land reform.

The killing is the first since the December 1996 peace accord to involve a Central American church figure of such high rank.

The report issued on Friday was based on 6,000 interviews with survivors. It cited the army and so-called civilian self-defense patrols for about 80 percent of the 150,000 deaths and 55,000 disappearances in the war. Leftist rebels were cited in the document in about 9 percent of the deaths.

In a report today on the tragedy, L'Osservatore Romano, the Vatican paper, called the bishop "one of the most strenuous defenders of human rights during the bloody civil war."

It said Pope John Paul II had met several times with the bishop during a 1996 papal visit to Guatemala.