

## GUATEMALA

From March 13-22, 1993, Patricia Bernardi, a member of EAAF went to Guatemala in order to share experiences with the new Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Team (EAFG). This organization was formed to carry out exhumations and analysis of the remains of disappeared persons at the request of Guatemalan non-governmental organizations. The team is supported by the American Association for the Advancement of Sciences (AAAS) who also sponsored this current trip. Drs. Clyde Snow and Karen Burns, both American forensic anthropologists, are providing scientific advice. During 1992, EAAF participated in a training seminar to the local team.

In Guatemala City, the EAAF members conducted interviews and discussions of the following kinds:

- a. information-gathering sessions
- b. consultation with members of EAFG
- c. recommendation to non-governmental organizations concerning future forensic projects.

1. EAAF shared the daily workings of EAFG, as part of its objective of providing practical support. EAAF representative was also present at the reburial ceremony for the remains discovered at Tunajá in 1992.

EAAF recommended EAFG to maintain a close relation with the National University of San Carlos, through talks and seminar. These meetings will help inform people about the use of forensic anthropology to resolve cases of human rights violations. At the same time, connections with the

university will gain recognition for the team from academic circles, and may in the future help the team recruit new members. It is also important to establish contacts with scientists in other fields (especially medicine and odontology) who could act as external consultants.

EAAF particularly stressed the importance of close working contact with other non-governmental organizations. A list of recommendations for the coordination of the forensic work with the local NGO's was prepared.

In addition, we focused with EGAF on methods for collecting and saving information. The EAAF computer programmer began a database for the Guatemalan team, using cases collected by the Group of Mutual Support (GAM) and shared with EAAF on the first mission to Guatemala in 1991. The database program was handed to the Guatemalan team and can be modified as needed.

2. While in Guatemala, EAAF made contact with the following organizations:

- Group of Mutual Support (GAM) Mrs. Nineth Montenegro de Garcia, President.
- Relatives of the Disappeared of Guatemala (FAMDEGUA). Part of the Board of Directors of this group is made of former members of GAM.
- National Coordinate of Guatemalan Widows (CONAVIGUA).
- Office of Human Rights/Archbishopric of Guatemala.

EAAF spoke with these organizations about issues relating to the exhumation projects. For example: how to prepare the preliminary information in cases

where EAFG's help has been requested, and the best methods for gathering information from relatives, journalistic accounts, testimonies, and so on. The team will focus on cases where the most information is available, concerning the exact location of the grave(s), the number of people buried, their possible identity, etc. This information will be extremely helpful in planning and scheduling the work.

In this way, the team will be able to look at the pre-mortem and historical data before beginning the exhumation.

In our discussions with non-governmental organizations, we also touched on security precautions for the work. For example, to give out the location of

the clandestine cemeteries only after the exhumations have already begun. The delay in publicizing the location of the bodies should protect them from vandalism and the removal of evidence.

We also discussed the importance of security for the investigators and the relatives, and of safe living quarters for any project that lasts more than one day. In order to gather the pre-mortem information, it will be necessary, to interview relatives several times, in a secure place where they feel comfortable speaking.

Finally, a further mission to Guatemala was discussed, in order that EAAF could continue to lend assistance.