

## THE MENDIZABAL CASE

### Introduction:

On June 18, 1992, two EAAF members - Alejandro Inchaurregui and Silvana Turner- traveled to Panama city, under the request of the Popular Committee for Human Rights in Panama (COPODEHUPA) to investigate the case of the disappearance of Marlene Mendizabal and Enrique Falconnet. This case is being investigated together with others, by a Panamanian Special Attorney's Office. EAAF members stayed in Panama until June 22, 1992.

### Background of the case:

Betsy Marlene Mendizabal (19) and Jorge Enrique Falconnet (23) disappeared on January 30, 1976, in the locality of Atalaya, province of Veraguas, Panama. They disappeared from an estate owned by Roberto Pinzon Diaz, member of a wealthy Panamanian family. The estate border the Pacific Ocean and the estuary of a river.

Both Mendizabal and Falconnet where politically active students at Panama University.

On February 1976, a female body appeared, in a nearby beach. The body was identified as belonging to Mendizabal. The identification was done by Falconnet's father although he had never met Marlene. He also said that he saw a gun shot wound in the abdominal area. However, the official cause of death was "asphyxitia by inmersion" though no autopsy was done. By the time Mendizabal parent knew about the finding, Marlene was already buried. The body of Falconnet was never found.

In May 1976, two months later, the supposed body of Mendizabal was exhumed by governmental forensic specialists, to examine the cause of

death. This time, the result was "undetermined"

Due to political circumstances and delays at the Judiciary System, the investigation did not advance since then.

In 1991, COPODEHUCA started working in the investigation of the case and requested the technical assistance of EAAF in order to carry out a new exhumation.

### The Role of EAAF:

The two EAAF member exhumed the remains and transported the remains to the Santo Tomas de Panama Hospital.

The remains correspond to a woman, with an average age of 20 years old, and an approximated stature of 162,32 cm. All of this information is consistent with Mendizabal. But there were some dental inconsistencies.

On the exhumation and at the laboratory, no evidence was found concerning a possible cause of death. No signs of gunshot wound were found in the bones.

The results of this visit pointed put the necessity of further investigation on the case. The lawyers from COPODEHUCA will continue the investigation.

COPODEHUCA requested the assistance of EAAF for 1993, to participate in other cases under investigation at the Special Attorney's Office.