

## DAY ONE

*On Monday, May 26, 2008, the proceedings began with the testimony of **Jacinta G.**, who spoke to the judge through an interpreter. Jacinta described the effects of army massacres that swept through the Quiché during 1981 and 1982, which forced thousands of the mostly Maya Quiché residents to flee their homes and hide in the hills and forests surrounding their communities. Jacinta, who married at age 14, had eight children when the conflict began; four of them died in the violence.*

I lived in the community El Carrizal of the municipality of Chiché, Quiché. Beginning in 1982, we heard rumors about the army killing people, but we didn't know anything about it. And then one night the soldiers arrived at my house. They came right into my room and grabbed me, saying they were looking for my husband and asking me where he was. Then they went into his room and my husband tried to escape through the roof of our house but they caught him. They took him off the roof and ordered him to get dressed, and then they killed him on the patio of our house. They beat him with their weapons, fracturing his skull, and then they shot him.

All our children were present. The soldiers forced us outside on the patio and told us to stay there while they searched the other houses in the village. They said if they didn't find the people in their houses they would come back to kill us. After they left, my children and I ran away. We fled to the forest and hid and came back the next day. We found my husband sprawled dead on the patio, black with the blood pooled in his body from the beating.

We returned to our house because our food was there. But the massacres continued in the villages around us so we decided we had to leave. First we went to the village of Laguna Seca. Then in Laguna Seca the soldiers killed everyone so we fled to Choyomché. I fled with all my children, the tiny ones to the bigger ones, but we left our food behind and had nothing. We went from village to village. Each time we arrived in one place, the soldiers would eventually arrive to kill everyone, so we would have to flee again.

[*How did you survive?*] When we arrived in a village, if there were still people there they would give us a cup of *atole*, but if there was no one left, we would starve. That's how a number of my children died. One was killed by soldiers who shot him with his pistol; three more died from starvation and fear. Finally I left the Quiché for the southern coast to try and make some money picking coffee at the plantations there. I needed to go there to feed my children. That's where I met my second husband. We returned two and half years later to live in Chupoj, where he was from. But the conflict was over by then.

When we moved to Chupoj, there were rumors going around that soldiers were kidnapping children to force them to join the army. I decided to join with other people who had already started working together in order to defend their children, and that is how I came to be part of CONAVIGUA.

[*Question: what base did the soldiers come from who killed your husband?*] They came from the base in Quiché. I know this because every time I went I would see the base, and the soldiers gathered there were dressed in the same way as those who came to my house. [*Were the*

*soldiers who came to your house accompanied by the PACs?]* No, there were only soldiers. When the conflict started and we fled our village, there still weren't any paramilitaries involved, it was only the army. *[When you fled, were there bombings in the mountain?]* There wasn't bombing. But the reason we continued to flee was that the soldiers were killing close to us – they were coming behind us and killing.

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***Feliciana M.***, a Quiché woman from Chupoj, lives now in Guatemala City with her three children. She told Judge Pedraz about the disintegration of her community in the face of army attacks that displaced her family permanently from their home and land.

At the end of 1981, when I was about 13 years old, I was living with my family. We lived in harmony and everything was fine. Then the military arrived in different communities around us. We began to hear rumors that in communities nearby there had been assassinations, the burning of houses and crops. But the violence hadn't arrived where we were.

Then on one occasion I was with my family in the market buying things. Suddenly some people in military uniforms came up to one of the vendors, and they killed him right in front of me. That was the first shock I received, because I had never seen that before. It impacted me greatly and left me very frightened. From that point on, I had trouble sleeping. When I wanted to sleep, I would begin thinking about how that man was left lying on the ground, how the blood came out of his head like a river, and it hit me hard. It took me a long time to recover from that.

Time passed. Our community was still very peaceful. Then one afternoon the military came to my house. I don't remember the date. They arrived and surrounded the house. My three brothers were there, my Papa, my Mama, and two nephews who were living with us. They took my father and brothers out of the house and tied their hands and feet, then threw them on the ground and began to accuse them of being guerrillas. My brothers had constructed a house of cement blocks; it was the first house of cement built in our village. So the soldiers said, how is it possible that in this community there would be a house of cement? It must be a guerrilla house, that's why it's made of this material! And they began to search the entire house. They took all our belongings and our clothes out of the house and destroyed them.

My mother and cousins and I were hiding in another little building made from corn stalks. I watched everything, feeling frightened, and I thought they were going to kill my brothers and my Papa. A little while later another group of soldiers arrived, bringing three men with them. The men were tied up in the same way, and they pulled them along as though they were animals, pulling them by the rope. And they said they were going to search for weapons in the houses and if they found any they would kill all of us.

Since there was nothing in our house except our things, which they had destroyed, they left, bringing with them one of my brothers. They kidnapped him. Later, he told us that they had forced him to look for food in the houses of our neighbors. They told him that if he found food, he would be all right, but if not they would kill him. They took him around to all the houses all

afternoon, and didn't finish until 10 at night. That's when he returned home, at that hour. He told us that after gathering all the food from the neighbors, they had brought him to our school, where there were many soldiers gathered. The food was for them.

At that point our fear began, even though that time they had not killed us. But the fear began there, there was no more tranquility, we were scared. My brothers couldn't work peacefully, they were always afraid. We were always looking around outside the house to see if the soldiers were coming again.

More time passed, and the soldiers were arriving constantly in our community – not only in ours, but in surrounding communities too. This time they weren't killing just one or two people at a time. They began the massacres. They attacked to Chupoj several times, but the fourth time they started shooting at everyone. There were so many shots they sounded like Christmas fireworks.

We never knew why they were killing us, whether there was a reason, or if the community had committed some crime. They never told us anything. The only thing we knew is that the soldiers would arrive, and they would begin to kill everyone they saw. This went on for a long time. They kept coming, and they would chase us, sometimes for weeks. I remember two different times in particular when they chased us for more than a week, from mountain to mountain, from village to village. We would walk at night time and we couldn't stop because they were still pursuing us. They would chase us until they got tired and gave up, and then we would go back into our village, dying of hunger and illness.

When we went to the mountains we didn't have food or blankets. We spent time under the hot sun, in the rain, during nights. Whatever we left behind in the houses, the soldiers would steal.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of August 1982, we went to Guatemala City to get away from the repression. It was difficult. In the first place, we didn't know the city. In the second place, we didn't have any money and we didn't know how to survive. We were obliged to take off our traditional dress there, which is part of our identity, for fear of being harassed. People would ask us questions: why are you here, why did you have to flee? Even though we didn't tell them what had happened, they would point at us and say, oh there are the fugitives! That was very hard for us.

[*Where do you work now?*] Now I am part of CONAVIGUA. It is an organization that was created as a consequence of the armed conflict, made up of widows and young people. The work is in defense of the right to life, the rights of children and human rights. We have between 13,000-15,000 members, most of them people who lost relatives during the conflict. We are trying to honor the memory of our families, especially by exhuming their bodies so we can bury them with dignity.

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