

UNCLASSIFIED

RELEASED IN PART

E400

DRAFT B1, A5

SECRET

GUATEMALA'S DISAPPEARED
1977-86

PHUM
Forward to
a1, 92, 93

Summary

Guatemala is a violent society. The conscious acceptance and use of violence as an instrument of politics contribute to the extraordinary levels of murder, kidnapping and disappearances. Statistics on homicides reveal that Guatemala has a murder rate almost equivalent to that of the rest of Latin America combined. Young males are the most likely to be victims.

Guatemala's kidnap victims are more often killed and their bodies seldom found. While criminal activity accounts for a small percentage of the cases, and from time to time individuals "disappear" to go elsewhere, the security forces and rightist paramilitary groups are responsible for most kidnappings. Insurgent groups do not now normally use kidnapping as a political tactic, although they did resort to kidnapping for ransom in their formative years.

First used systematically by the security forces against the Communist Party and members of the moderate left beginning in 1966, the practice of kidnappings became institutionalized over time. Some 6500 persons have been kidnapped or disappeared since 1977, far short of the 38,000 claimed by critics of the previous Guatemalan governments. The average number of monthly kidnappings peaked in 1984 under the regime of General Mejia. At first security forces utilized kidnappings to intimidate the left and to convince potential guerrilla supporters to remain neutral. Kidnappings of rural social workers, medical personnel, and campesinos became common between 1979-83. Often innocent victims were accused of being insurgents by military commissioners, other village leaders or an individual's personal enemies or business competitors. Many of these accused would soon join the ranks of the disappeared. In the cities, out of frustration from the judiciary's unwillingness to convict and sentence insurgents, and convinced that the kidnapping of suspected insurgents and their relatives would lead to a quick destruction of the guerrilla urban networks, the security forces began to systematically kidnap anyone suspected of insurgent connections. This tactic was successful. Most of the insurgent infrastructure in Guatemala City was eliminated by 1984.

United States Department of State
Office of FOI, Privacy, & Classification Review
Review Authority: MOSKOWITZ, SAM
Date: 06/29/96
Case ID: 9512221

SECRET
(DECL: OADR)

94 F 88, 4
FILE: PHUM DISAPPEARANCES

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

SECRET

- 2 -

Although the number of incidences dropped during the last year of the government of General Mejia Victores and continued to decline under incumbent President Minicio Cerezo, disappearances continue. Ex-detectives and other security forces personnel, rural landowners, and individual military officials continue to kidnap for financial gain, or to eliminate personal and ideological opponents. The continuing economic recession will make kidnapping for ransom attractive. Efforts by labor and campesino groups to exercise their Constitutionally-guaranteed rights may stimulate additional kidnappings by those who feel threatened by these efforts.

Economic development and judicial reform, hopefully, will eventually lead to a reduction in the rate of disappearances. We can also help the police to build public confidence in their discredited institution through provision of training assistance. If this can be achieved, the public may begin to cooperate with the police authorities. Through existing programs we can also help Cerezo reorganize the judiciary and help protect the judges who must prosecute kidnappers. We can also support the work of the Human Rights Ombudsman (a Constitutionally mandated office) by inviting him to the United States,

[REDACTED]

// B1

While this study reveals that our monitoring of human rights is good, we have failed in the past to adequately grasp the magnitude of the problem. Better collection of data will be necessary to ensure that our policy in the future is based on accurate information. We should take steps to ensure that verified information collected by non-governmental organizations on human rights abuses is factored into our analysis.

End Summary

A Violent Society

Guatemala is one of the world's most violent societies. There is no country in this hemisphere that surpasses Guatemala's homicide and disappearance rates. In 1981 (the latest year for which Pan American Health Organization homicide

SECRET

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

SECRET

- 3 -

statistics are available) Guatemala's murder rate of ~~100 per 100,000~~ population was equivalent to the combined rates of all Latin America, Canada and Puerto Rico combined, and was ten times the U.S. national rate (and triple the rate for black American males). Violence affecting young Guatemalan males is much worse than even the statistics indicate. In 1981, for instance, ~~100,000~~, a rate seventeen times the U.S. murder rate for young males, and almost four times El Salvador's. In 1981, 36% of the deaths recorded in this age group were the result of murders. Worse, the incidence of murder has steadily increased (Appendix A). Homicides as a percentage of all recorded Guatemala deaths soared from 0.3% in 1963 to 11.3% in 1981. The rise in violent deaths has occurred at a time when overall death rates have declined dramatically due to improved health and nutrition, and when comparable violence rates in neighboring Latin countries have slowed appreciably, or declined dramatically.

Roots of Guatemalan Violence

Guatemala's high violence levels cannot be accounted for by economic or political variables. Equally poor nations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America have lower violence levels. The explanation for Guatemala's high levels of violence probably is rooted in cultural and sociological factors unique to Guatemala. Guatemala is distinguished from other Central American nations by the duality of its culture where a wealthy ladino minority lives side by side with an impoverished Indian majority largely marginalized from national political and economic life. Nowhere else in Central America does this ethnic diversity exist. The use of violence to settle disputes of almost any nature is accepted in Guatemala's indigenous culture.

Guatemala is also distinguished from the rest of Central America by less interaction between the urban elite and the Indians. The ladino elite in Guatemala has been estranged from the many Indian groups for centuries by language, culture and geography. Poor communication with the Indians, lacking common bonds and shared experiences, the elites have tended to treat Indians as a population to be exploited as well as feared. The plantation system which historically generated Guatemala's exports and wealth has relied on Indian labor to function.

SECRET

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

SECRET

- 4 -

Indeed, until 1944, Guatemalan law allowed landowners to obtain free labor from Indians. Attempts by Indians or other workers to bargain collectively, create unions or otherwise improve their lives have usually been countered with violence.

Fear of revolution stems from the Arbenz period when the first political efforts to involve peasants and Indians in national life began in earnest. Many in Guatemala believed that the Arbenz government was close to being dominated by communists. Following Arbenz' ouster in 1954 saving the country from communism and personal self interest thus blended to form a psychology conducive to supporting physical repression of workers and peasants in the name of anti-communism.

Politics and commerce have been the monopoly of the small, privileged urban and landowning elites. Guatemala's geography and limited infrastructure and communications in many rural areas have led to the existence of many quasi-autonomous rural fiefdoms. Until recently the central government's authority and presence did not reach far into the rural areas. The definition and execution of "justice" was local and personal. By and large, the poor have not had access to the material benefits of society, or the protection of formal legal structures. Landowners, politicians and businesses have traditionally tolerated violence -- often hiring persons to kill enemies. They have also not hesitated to direct the violence at one another. In addition, the poor themselves have never had faith in a judicial system where wealth influences the judicial process, or where judges can be intimidated. The result has been the widespread use of violence and other extra-legal methods to achieve goals and satisfy a primitive sense of justice within and between classes.

Disappearances

In addition to the high murder rates, Guatemala also registers the highest number of disappearances, abductions and missing in the Western Hemisphere. Only pre-Alfonso Argentina approximates Guatemala's levels of kidnappings. Abductions in

SECRET

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

SECRET

- 5 -

Guatemala are carried out for numerous reasons; including intimidation of political opponents, criminal or political ransom, and as part of counterinsurgency operations. To a certain extent, kidnappings are also staged to cover incorporation into the insurgents or defection to the security forces; to mask trips abroad for insurgency training; or mistaken for migration abroad for economic reasons.

Unfortunately, ~~very little reliable information is available on political violence in Guatemala.~~ No human rights groups operate within Guatemala to collect accurate data. The Catholic Church does not keep count of even catechists or priests killed or kidnapped. As far as we know, no defectors from the GOG have come forth to speak of their involvement in government-sponsored disappearances. In late 1985 the army moved the "Archivos" (a secret group in the President's office that collected information on insurgents and operated against them) to the D-2 section of the military and to dismiss personnel who had worked with these records of government security activities. Therefore, information verification by the new civilian government will be difficult. The Guatemalan press adequately covers urban violence, but no attempt is made to distinguish criminal from political violence. Rural violence is under-reported. Few human rights groups keep individual case files, and there is occasional duplication of data and exaggeration by human rights groups who, at times, accept any account as true. ~~Data collected by Embassy Guatemala is justifiably or not, dismissed by most human rights groups as incomplete, biased or distorted.~~

True

Unable to properly quantify the violence and unwilling to accept USG data, many outside human rights and "lobbying" groups have simply invented figures to fit their needs. For example, Lord Avebury of the British Parliament, after a short visit to Guatemala for the British Inter-Parliamentary Group in early 1985, claimed the Guatemalan Bishops in September 1984 had catalogued 38,000 disappeared since 1950. Enfoprensa, the Guatemalan Human Rights Commission, and other groups linked to the insurgents quickly adopted this figure. A spokesman for the Guatemalan Catholic Church, contacted by our Embassy in March 1986 stated that the Bishops had actually referred to 38,000 displaced Guatemalans in Mexican refugee camps, not disappeared.

SECRET

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

SECRET
- 6 -

With a new civilian government in Guatemala now dedicated to human rights improvements, it is important to be able to determine human rights trends. Insurgent groups and organizations linked to them and critics of U.S. policy can be expected to argue, for different reasons, that the Cerezo government has not improved the human rights situation. Our ability to provide military aid and higher levels of economic assistance to democratic Guatemala will depend in large part on our ability to persuade skeptics in Congress and the media that improvements are in fact taking place. This will require a credible data base on which all interested parties can agree. To that end we need to marshal all the available data on violence in Guatemala. A data bank is also necessary to test the accuracy and degree of completeness of our monthly human rights reports, and to serve as an analytical tool for those looking for patterns and information on specific cases of disappearances.

With these goals and purposes in mind, we have produced for the first time a comprehensive list of disappeared, kidnapped and missing persons from 1977 thru 1985, using all known sources of published data (Appendix B). These sources include the Embassy's human rights summaries and reports from Amnesty International, the OAS, the Guatemalan Human Rights Commission and affiliated groups, WOLA, COHA, Enfoprensa, the Mutual Support Group, and others. Our methodology and assumptions are explained in Appendix C.

~~Our estimate is that 6600 persons were reported kidnapped or missing during the period 1977-1985. These numbers understate the actual number of persons in Guatemala.~~

This conclusion is based on the high percentage of cases in which only one reporting agency had the data, which suggests that many cases go unreported. Secondly, a review of recent depositions accompanying political asylum requests reveals that almost none of the kidnappings of relatives reported by the applicants were ever counted by outside monitors. Families of the missing and abducted commonly prefer not to go to the press, although on occasion people pay a newspaper to run a story in hopes of getting their relative back. But the majority of rural residents are illiterate or too poor to do this or anything else. Likewise, most relatives see no purpose in informing the police or military of a kidnapping since they usually believe the government is responsible. They also fear

SECRET

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

SECRET

- 7 -

becoming a victim themselves. In rural areas, the campesinos have learned not to complain, and lacking recourse, they say little or leave the area, or, as in the past, join the guerrillas for self-protection.

Who Are the Victims?

Guatemala is agricultural, rural and about 50% Indian. Thus it could be expected that the majority of the kidnap victims would be ladino campesinos and Indian farmers. Based on an analysis of the abduction cases reported by our Embassy during the past 50 months (Appendix D) members of these groups were the principal kidnap victims in cases the victim's occupation and a political motivation was determined. However, given the failure of relatives to report incidents and identifying data to the press, in 43% of the cases we were not able to ascertain the victim's occupation.

Students and teachers together comprised the next most frequent target. Without intending to downplay the seriousness of the incidents, we believe human rights groups have exaggerated the frequency of kidnappings of labor leaders, students and teachers. Lord Averbury, for example, claims 15,000 students were killed or disappeared from 1979-80.

Based on our analysis of named cases, we estimate that 88% of the victims were men. Using 1984 and 1985 Embassy data and statistics compiled by the Guatemalan Human Rights Commission (an insurgent front) it appears that about one half of the kidnappings occurred in or around Guatemala City. A third of the incidents took place in the highland departments (see map at Appendix E).

Who are the Kidnappers?

In the majority of individual cases it is not possible to assign specific responsibility for a kidnapping. The perpetrators do not routinely leave "calling cards" or boast of their actions. Unlike the 1960s and 1970s, death squads and guerrilla groups do not claim credit for kidnappings or murders which they carry out.

SECRET

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

SECRET

- 8 -

Although culpability in specific cases is not usually identified, credible asylum depositions, accounts of escapees, and eyewitness reports suggest that government security forces were behind the majority of the 6515 abductions between 1977-85. An analysis of the cases of the 637 persons subject to the Special Tribunals set up by the military in July 1982 reveals that 22 persons which the government admitted holding had been reported kidnapped previously. Another 8 released following abolishment of the Tribunals in 1983 were later kidnapped.

The insurgents have kidnapped businessmen, farmers, farm administrators, and government agents in the past, usually for ransom or to frighten others from working for the authorities. The guerrillas still kidnap a few military commissioners in isolated rural areas, but normally they kill opponents outright. In our opinion the insurgents are now relatively minor players in kidnappings.

We believe criminal gangs composed of off-duty police and detectives, an occasional army officer, and former members of security forces and bodyguards are, or have been, behind a significant, but unquantifiable number of cases. That President Cerezo believed it necessary to abolish the detective corps and reorganize the police command is an indication of the role of these organizations in human rights abuses and crimes. Police salaries are low, training is minimal, and corruption is rampant among the country's police forces. Judicial and police inefficiency and corruption stimulate and reinforce private systems of "justice", causing a spiral of violence in the society. At one point in 1983 it was said a contract for a simple murder could be purchased for 25 quetzales.

Given Guatemala's visible income disparities, it is to be expected that common criminals also resort to abductions to raise funds. An American resident of Antigua was kidnapped for ransom in 1984 by a gang that included a former priest. Kidnapping is one area in an otherwise moribund economy which has grown regularly in recent years. Wealthy families employ bodyguards as a matter of course. Some have kidnap insurance. Since policies have standard clauses forbidding publicity, a systematic bias of underreporting criminal kidnappings is built into the system.

SECRET

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

SECRET

- 9 -

The inescapable conclusion is that most of the disappeared have in fact been kidnapped by security forces. Further, the various security forces of the capital and other urban areas were the only bodies capable of widespread abductions, or technically complicated murders or abductions such as the assassination from a moving vehicle of retired General Manuel Sosa Avila in March 1985 on the capital's main thoroughfare as he was returning from Sunday lunch with his daughter and grandchildren; past guerrilla kidnappings in the cities were almost always for ransom and difficult to carry out successfully.

Modus Operandi

The 1985 OAS Human Rights Commission report on Guatemala provides the most thorough account of the modus operandi of kidnapers in Guatemala. Briefly, groups of from four to twelve heavily armed individuals usually dressed in civilian clothes snatch individuals off the street or from their homes. The kidnapers often arrive in private cars or vans with polarized windows. In street abductions, the kidnapers know who their target is, either because an informer or another kidnap victim who knows the victim is in the vehicle. At times the neighborhood is surrounded by mobile police units or foot patrolmen while the operation is underway. The police never interfere and rarely are these abductions registered in police files. Often the kidnapers identify themselves as members of the police or DIT detective force to passers-by or the victims' relatives. Most seizures at home take place at night. The abductors usually ask by name for the victim, and if he or she is not home, usually wait. Shortly after a kidnapping, men dressed in civilian clothes arrive at the victim's house, and using the victim's keys, search the premises for specific items. Rural abductions are believed to be carried out by military forces or paramilitary groups linked with specific military units.

Once captured, the victim is taken to interrogation centers --at military bases, police stations or safe houses-- where information about alleged connections with insurgents is extracted through torture. The victim's family and friends never receive an official notification of the abduction and usually never ascertain with certainty whether the relative is dead or alive. Police and military units routinely deny having held the victim. Families resort to unofficial connections

SECRET

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

SECRET

- 10 -

to obtain information about the initial whereabouts of the victim from relatives in the police or security forces, or from friends with official connections.

To our knowledge, no member of the military, police, security forces, or paramilitary groups has ever been prosecuted, convicted, and sentenced for participation in politically-related abductions, although cases of arrest of off-duty security force personnel caught while engaged in free-lance abductions for profit have been reported in the press. At most, military personnel may be disciplined by dismissal from the army. This record gives rise to the pervasive belief in Guatemalan society of a police and military above the law and the arbitrary and capricious use of government power.

Fate of the Disappeared

Very few of those abducted in Guatemala ever reappear alive. Most are killed after several hours or days of interrogation. In the past, in cases where security forces were involved, victims were held long enough to extract information valuable to the counter-insurgency effort, then shot. (There is no evidence of the existence of long-term political prisoners held in clandestine facilities.) In many cases the victims were tortured to obtain information (Appendix F provides details.). The Guatemala authorities in the past have alleged that many of the missing have gone abroad for training in Soviet bloc countries, or to the United States as illegal aliens. This is probably true in only a few cases. One political asylum applicant stated that before coming to the United States he had "disappeared" in order to receive EGP training. However, we believe such occurrences are few and far between, and statistically insignificant. [REDACTED]

B1

[REDACTED]

Guatemalan government spokesmen in the past have claimed that many disappearances are really cases where persons have gone to the United States for economic motives without telling their families. We have detected no evidence that this accounts for an appreciable number of cases of disappearance. We do not see why an intending illegal alien would fake a

SECRET

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

SECRET

- 11 -

disappearance or fail to notify his family of plans to leave Guatemala for the U.S. While Guatemalans come to the US for economic reasons, none of the 863 political asylum applications (many frivolous) examined during the past year had been reported as disappeared.

Not all kidnapping cases end in death. Abductions perpetrated by criminals or moonlighting police often end with the victim being released after payment of ransom. In other cases, the security forces may decide to "turn" an insurgent for use as a guide or informer. In still other cases, individuals mistakenly kidnapped are released after the abductors realized their mistake and the victim promises not to discuss the incident. There have been cases where the kidnap victim escaped to tell of the experience. However, the Guatemalan press rarely follows up on earlier reporting, and relatives almost never notify the press when their kin are located or reappear. Both factors contribute to the underreporting, in absolute numbers, of violent acts based only on public sources. Bodies located alongside the road are often unidentifiable and most relatives of the missing probably never learn definitively what happened to the victim.

Political Roots of Violence

During the early 1960s there were few kidnappings. In 1963 only two cases were reported in El Imparcial. Between 1964-1967 a total of 27 were reported kidnapped. The first recorded case of systematic kidnapping occurred in Guatemala in the spring of 1966 when, weeks before the Peralta military government turned the government over to the elected civilian government of Mendez Montenegro. Security services kidnapped 28 leftists, communist students and intellectuals, and politicians who had been arrested over the previous several months. Among those disappeared and later executed clandestinely was the head of the orthodox communist party, Leonardo Castillo Flores. His death radicalized the party and helped fuel the FAR insurgency during 1966-68. The purpose of the disappearances--to intimidate the left from involvement in politics--was to become one of the principal goals of such tactics by government agents and paramilitary groups linked with right wing political parties like the MLN.

SECRET

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

SECRET

- 12 -

As the insurgent movement gained force in the 1970s, the security forces began to use kidnappings to an ever greater extent, particularly in urban areas and against labor leaders, students, academics and political opposition leaders. Increasingly it appears that the purpose was to extract information that might lead to the discovery of urban terrorist cells. The tactic apparently accomplished its intended purpose -- by 1984 insurgent networks in the capital had been decimated. At the height of this repression (1979-1982), many were also simply murdered, intimidation being the intended goal. A side effect was the death of many innocent persons who were accused of being insurgents by vengeful neighbors or others eager to eliminate personal, business or political rivals by proxy.

Recent Trends in Kidnapping

We have arranged our data chronologically in order to reconstruct the monthly totals from 1977 and to analyze the trends under the regimes of Generals Lucas Garcia, Rios Montt, and Mejia Victores. Our purpose was also to see how accurate our monthly human rights reports have been and whether the trends we have seen and acted upon were accurate in retrospect. Through this approach we also wanted to see how well other groups did in identifying trends and monthly totals.

Major findings:

Under the last three military governments the rate of reported kidnappings has increased, according to our statistics (Appendix H). The increase may reflect more thorough reporting of incidents through time by a larger number of monitoring groups, hence we cannot be sure whether the increase is real or only apparent (see Appendix C for a discussion of methodology).

During the Lucas regime, from July 1, 1978 through March 23, 1982, some 2261 persons (an average of 1.62 daily) were reported missing or kidnapped. General Rios Montt was in office from March 23, 1982 to August 8, 1983. During his administration the daily incidence of abductions rose to 1.73 (866 cases). General Oscar Mejia served from August 1983 until

SECRET

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

SECRET

- 13 -

January 14, 1986. From August 8, 1983 through the end of this study (December 31, 1985) reports of kidnappings rose substantially to 3.29 daily (2883 cases).

The apparent increase in the rate of abductions under General Mejia may have stemmed from the abolition of the Special Tribunals created shortly after Rios Montt took office. Following the promulgation of a one-month amnesty, on July 1, 1982 Rios Montt announced the formation of these secret military courts to try suspected insurgents. The Tribunals operated until September 1, 1983, when, following widespread international criticism, General Mejia abolished them. While the Tribunals functioned it appears the rate of kidnappings dropped. For instance, the monthly kidnapping rate in 1981 was 74. In the first half of 1982, before the creation of the Tribunals, the reported monthly rate was 68. During the rest of 1982, the rate dropped to 50 cases a month. During the eight months of 1983 that the Tribunals functioned, the kidnapping rate dropped to 43 monthly. After the abolishment of the Tribunals, the kidnapping rate rose again to an average of 109 each month. The month after the Tribunals ceased, 183 cases were reported, the fourth highest monthly figure in our study.

Only a small percentage of those processed through the Tribunals were reported kidnapped. During this period, the security forces often announced the arrest of insurgent suspects, a break with past practice. Following the elimination of the Special Tribunals, it seems that the security forces simply began to kidnap suspected insurgents, including some who had passed through the Tribunals and been released.

Throughout 1984 the abduction rate remained high -- 137 cases a month. However, in 1985 the rate plummeted to slightly over 60 cases a month. This drop may reflect the concern of the Mejia government to improve the human rights situation as it prepared to turn power over to an elected civilian government in early 1985.

Prospects for Future

SECRET

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

SECRET

- 14 -

US Policy

That there is a gap between the rhetoric of justice and the reality of violence in Guatemalan society is not surprising. That there are as many dedicated lawyers, jurists and police still committed to working toward the establishment of an impartial system of justice after Lucas Garcia and the violence of the early 1980s is what is astounding. It is this seed which U.S. policy should be directed toward nurturing in the coming years.

What role, if any, can U.S. policy play in reducing or ending disappearances in Guatemala? There is little or nothing we can do to stop kidnappings by criminal gangs or the insurgents. On the other hand, there are a few steps we can take to help eliminate officially-sanctioned abductions or operations by paramilitary groups. First, we should help President Cerezo rebuild public confidence in the police if Guatemalans are to eliminate the practice of disappearances. Honest and competent police will be needed to resolve kidnappings by extra-legal groups that will try to continue the practice of abduction for political reasons. Today the citizenry is afraid to go to the police with information about abductions since the prevalent belief is that members of the police and the army are responsible. There have been instances when a concerned citizen bringing eyewitness information to police attention is himself kidnapped.

The Cerezo government is committed to establishing a fully functioning justice system. However, judges as well as witnesses are still subject to intimidation and newly-appointed court officials may remain reluctant to prosecute kidnappers, especially if they are thought to have powerful connections, among military officers, politicians and businessmen. (Although the new Constitution guarantees judges lifetime tenure, judicial officials recognize that coups occur and new Constitutions follow.) We should have information to share with Cerezo when the first important case occurs. In El Salvador, under AID auspices, we have provided funds to protect judges and witnesses. We should ask Cerezo whether he is interested in establishment of such a program in Guatemala, and how else we might assist him in gaining control over his security forces.

SECRET

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

SECRET
- 15 -

The Guatemalan Constitution provides the legal framework for protection of human rights. A human rights ombudsman-- selected by Congress-- is established for the first time to monitor human rights and report on such abuses. The Guatemalan Congress has yet to select the ombudsman or write the law guiding the work and the immunities that the individual must have to be effective. We should assist this individual in every way possible. In particular, we should invite the person to Washington at an early opportunity to show high level support and to indicate our interest in close cooperation. A copy of our catalog of the disappeared should be shared with the ombudsman. Embassy officials should maintain close liaison, sharing information on cases.

[REDACTED]

B1

[REDACTED]

B1

While the left will remain a threat to the Cerezo government, the far right and unrepentant elements of the army and police may be an even greater obstacle to eliminating kidnapping as an internal security tactic. We need much better understanding of the plans and operations of such groups. A few highly publicized disappearances and killings of GAM members or others could easily undermine our efforts in Congress to assist Guatemala economically and militarily. As Cerezo moves forward with his reform program, and as labor attempts to assert its rights under the Constitution, extremists can be expected to react violently as in the past. U.S. citizens could become objects of attack if we are perceived as contributing to the reforms through our aid programs.

[REDACTED]

B1

Finally, we should be more rigorous and systematic in using our ability to deny visas to individuals known to be involved in violence. This will require better intelligence on death squad activists (such as those linked to the MLN and FUA political parties) than we now have. We also should extradite persons wanted for violence in Guatemala.

SECRET

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

SECRET

- 16 -

Our study of the disappeared indicates that, of all of the human rights monitoring groups, we did the best job of collecting data and reporting trends. However, we failed to capture the magnitude of the problem in absolute terms in our monthly human rights reports, reporting only 30% of the actual number of cases that occurred from 1981-1985 that eventually came to light (Appendix H). We need to make greater efforts to incorporate other organization's data into our own analysis, particularly information from Amnesty, the OAS and church groups. Although closely linked to the ORPA guerrillas, the Guatemalan Human Rights Commission data should also be incorporated into the Mission's human rights data bank. We did not find evidence that the GHRC invented any of the cases it cited, although it did attribute all cases to government security forces.

We should share case data so that other independent, responsible monitoring groups will have greater confidence in our annual reports and our ability to state the facts accurately. We should also share this information with our European allies, and in turn request their data on human rights abuses. Our Embassy in Guatemala should canvas religious, labor and other contacts monthly for case information to include in its violence reports. Regular monthly meetings with Western European diplomats to share data and impressions might help build the confidence of our allies in our data and sources.

Embassy Guatemala should also be encouraged to hire an extra local employee to establish contacts in rural areas and report on human rights trends outside Guatemala city. Consideration should be given to delaying the monthly human rights reports somewhat and classifying them in order to incorporate data from sources other than the newspapers. At present most Mission elements do not contribute data on human rights violations to the political section for inclusion in its monthly violence wrapup. All Embassy elements should contribute information in their possession to the compilation of the monthly assessment, and at year end revised annual statistics should be issued for use in the annual human rights report.

SECRET

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

SECRET

- 17 -

Drafted: ARA/CEN:JCason
Research/Co-analysis: ARA/CEN:LSchiveley
Cleared: ARA/CEN:DDlouhy
ARA:WGWalker
ARA/CEN:RHMelton
ARA/CAR:RBlahn (subs)
S/S-O:BWitajewski(subs)
ARA/PPC:CSereseres(subs)
ARA/CAR:Phil Taylor (subs)
ARA/CEN:VMartinez(subs)

Doc. 2454c
3/28/86

SECRET

UNCLASSIFIED