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E.O. 12356: DECL: 11/10/02
TAGS: PINS, PINR, PINT, SHUM, PGOV, GT
SUBJECT: (S) EVIDENCE OF CONTINUING HUMAN RIGHTS
- VIOLATIONS IN CHIMALTENANGO

REFS: (A) GUATEMALA 8381
- (B) GUATEMALA 8150
- (C) GUATEMALA 7905
- (D) GUATEMALA 7825

1. (S - ENTIRE TEXT)

2. SUMMARY: ON NOVEMBER 2, SOURCE CAME TO EMBASSY AND RELATED THE FOLLOWING FACTS. THE SOURCE STATED THAT THE INCIDENTS WHICH LED TO THOUSANDS OF INDIANS BEING TAKEN TO CHOATALUM WERE NOT THE RESULT OF BATTLES BETWEEN THE ARMY AND THE GUERRILLAS WHICH ALLOWED THE INDIANS TO ESCAPE THE GUERRILLAS. ON THE CONTRARY, THE SOURCE SAID THAT LATE SEPTEMBER HE WITNESSED AN ARMY SWEEP THROUGH THE AREA OF CHOATALUM AND THAT THOUSANDS OF INDIANS WERE FLEEING THE

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ARMY, NOT THE GUERRILLAS. DURING THIS SWEEP, THE ARMY ALLEGEDLY MASSACRED MANY INDIANS. KNOWING THAT THE ARMY HAD ALREADY PACIFIED THE VILLAGE OF LA ESTANCIA DE LA VIRGEN, MANY INDIANS FLOODED INTO THAT VILLAGE SEEKING RELIEF. EVENTUALLY, VILLAGE AUTHORITIES NOTIFIED THE ARMY WHICH THEN TOOK THE REFUGEES TO CHOATALUM. (CHOATALUM AND LA ESTANCIA DE LA VIRGEN ARE BOTH ALDEAS OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF SAN MARTIN JILOTEPEQUE, CHIMALTENANGO.)

3. SOURCE, WHO HAS LIVED IN THE SAN MARTIN JILOTEPEQUE AREA OFF AND ON FOR SIX YEARS, REPORTED THAT THE ARMY CONTINUES TO HARASS VILLAGES AND HAMLETS IN THE AREAS THAT ARE CONSIDERED "NOT AT PEACE WITH THE ARMY". HE CLAIMED TO HAVE TALKED WITH A SURVIVOR OF A MASSACRE WHO HAD REMAINED IN LA ESTANCIA. THIS SURVIVOR TOLD SOURCE THAT THE ARMY KILLED 70 MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN FLEEING ALONG THE PIXCAYA RIVER IN LATE SEPTEMBER. SOURCE, HOWEVER, DID NOT WANT EMBASSY TO REPORT THIS AND LIKE INCIDENTS UNTIL HE HAD RETURNED TO LA ESTANCIA TO FURTHER VERIFY SUCH ALLEGATIONS. SOURCE RETURNED ON NOVEMBER 9, BRINGING WITH HIM 4 MEN AND ONE YOUNG ORPHAN FROM LA ESTANCIA. EMBOFF INTERVIEWED THIS GROUP; DETAILS FOLLOW. END SUMMARY.

4. THE GROUP FROM LA ESTANCIA WAS TOO FRIGHTENED TO COME TO THE EMBASSY. EMBOFF AND SOURCE MET THEM AT A NEARBY CHURCH AND ALL WENT TO AN EMBOFF'S APARTMENT IN ORDER TO SPEAK PRIVATELY.

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DURING A 90-MINUTE DISCUSSION THE INDIAN MEN TOLD EMBOFF WHAT HAD TAKEN PLACE IN THEIR AREA OF CHIMALTENANGO FROM ROUGHLY THE FIRST OF THE YEAR TO THE PRESENT.

5. THEY FIRST STATED THAT THE GENERAL CLIMATE NEAR LA ESTANCIA AND CHOATALUM WAS ONE OF UNENDING FEAR AND UNCERTAINTY. PRIOR TO THE COUP OF MARCH 23, GUERRILLA ACTIVITY WAS FAIRLY CONSTANT IN THEIR AREA. AT TIMES, GUERRILLA BANDS WOULD COME THROUGH AND DEMAND FOOD AND SUPPLIES AT GUNPOINT. THE VILLAGERS HAD TO COMPLY. ON MARCH 19, 1982, AN ARMY UNIT ALLEGEDLY ENTERED LA ESTANCIA AND BEGAN AN INDISCRIMINATE SLAUGHTER OF MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN. THE MEN TOLD EMBOFF THEY AND OTHER VILLAGE MEMBERS SURVIVED BY FLEEING THE AREA, SENSING THAT THE ARMY DID NOT HAVE ENOUGH MEN PRESENT TO KILL THEM ALL. WHEN THEY BELIEVED IT SAFE TO RETURN, THEY DID SO. EMBOFF WAS TOLD SOME 300 PEOPLE WERE KILLED. THE REMAINING VILLAGERS WERE TOO FRIGHTENED TO REMAIN IN LA ESTANCIA; THEY ALL MOVED TO SAN ANTONIO, A SMALL HAMLET IN THE ALDEA OF CHOATALUM, SAN MARTIN JILOTEPEQUE. THEY STAYED THERE ALL OF APRIL, RETURNING TO LA ESTANCIA ON MAY 8. THEY WERE NOW, THEY SAID, "AT PEACE WITH THE ARMY". COMMENT: PRESS REPORTS FROM MID-APRIL CARRIED STORIES OF THE ABANDONMENT OF LA ESTANCIA DE LA VIRGEN.

THESE STORIES DID NOTE THAT THE PEOPLE OF LA ESTANCIA HAD FLED TO SAN ANTONIO. THERE WAS NO MENTION, HOWEVER, OF POSSIBLE ARMY CULPABILITY. END COMMENT.

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6. NEVERTHELESS, THE MEN SPOKE OF CONTINUING ARMY HARASSMENT. ON JULY 25 THE ARMY RETURNED TO LA ESTANCIA AND PICKED 4 MEN OUT OF THE ASSEMBLED CIVIL DEFENSE PATROL; THE MEN WERE NEVER SEEN AGAIN. ON SEPTEMBER 12, THREE OTHER VILLAGERS WERE PICKED UP IN THE MARKET AT SAN MARTIN JILOTEPEQUE; THEY WERE NEVER SEEN AGAIN. ON OCTOBER 19 A YOUNG MAN WAS CAUGHT WALKING ALONE NEAR THE VILLAGE; HE SAW AN ARMY PATROL AND FLED. HE WAS SHOT TO DEATH WHILE RUNNING AWAY AND HIS HEAD WAS THEN RIPPED OPEN WITH MACHETES. HIS FAMILY WAS TOO FRIGHTENED TO CLAIM THE BODY. THAT SAME DAY, THIS SAME ARMY PATROL ALLEGEDLY TOOK TWO MORE MEN FROM THE CIVIL DEFENSE PATROL OF LA ESTANCIA. THESE MEN WERE TAKEN TO SAN MARTIN JILOTEPEQUE. IN AN APPARENT ATTEMPT TO GAIN INFORMATION THROUGH INTIMIDATION, ONE MAN WAS SHOT THROUGH THE HEAD IN FRONT OF THE OTHER. THE SECOND MAN WAS IN THE PROCESS

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OF BEING CHOKED WITH A ROPE WHEN SEVERAL TALL "LADINOS" OR "GRINGOS" APPEARED. THE SOLDIERS QUICKLY RELEASED THEIR PRISONER; THE TALL "LADINOS" APPEARED TO BE VERY ANGRY WITH THE

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SOLDIERS FOR TORTURING THE MAN. COMMENT: IT IS VERY LIKELY THAT THESE "LADINOS" WERE GUATEMALAN ARMY OFFICERS FROM SAN MARTIN JILOTEPEQUE OR CHIMALTENANGO PROPER. IT IS DOUBTFUL IF A MERE "GRINGO" OR CIVILIAN "LADINO" WOULD HAVE HAD THE AUTHORITY TO SO QUICKLY FRIGHTEN THE SOLDIERS INTO RELEASING THEIR CAPTIVE. END COMMENT.

7. THE MEN WENT ON TO TELL EMBOFF THAT MANY OF THE REFUGEES THAT ENDED UP IN CHOATALUM IN OCTOBER FIRST FLED TO LA ESTANCIA DE LA VIRGEN. LA ESTANCIA IS KNOWN AS A "WHITE VILLAGE" AND MANY PEOPLE ALLEGEDLY FLEEING THE ARMY WENT THERE IN LATE SEPTEMBER AND THE FIRST FEW DAYS OF OCTOBER. EMBOFF WAS TOLD THAT ALL THE REFUGEES WERE FLEEING THE ARMY, HAD BEEN FLEEING THE ARMY, AND WOULD HAVE CONTINUED TO FLEE THE ARMY IF THEY THOUGHT THEY COULD HAVE ESCAPED. WHILE SOURCE WAS IN LA ESTANCIA ONE MAN TOLD HIM THAT HE HAD BEEN FLEEING THE ARMY ALONG THE PIXCAYA RIVER WHEN GOG TROOPS CAUGHT THEM AND OPENED FIRE, KILLING SOME 70 MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN. THIS ALLEGEDLY TOOK PLACE IN LATE SEPTEMBER. THE MEN TOLD EMBOFF THAT THE PEOPLE WERE TIRED OF RUNNING FROM THE ARMY AND HAD RESIGNED THEMSELVES TO "DEATH OR PARDON". THE LA ESTANCIA MEN WERE CLEARLY PLEASED TO NOTE THEY HAD RECEIVED THE LATTER IN PLACE OF THE FORMER. THE REFUGEES WERE RESETTLED IN CHOATALUM AFTER THE ARMY WAS INFORMED OF THEIR WHEREABOUTS. (EMBOFF UNDERSTOOD THAT THE MAJORITY OF THE REFUGEES WERE

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FROM THE ALDEAS OF CHOATALUM, XEJUYU, XESUJ, AND CHICOJOM, ALL IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF SAN MARTIN JILOTEPEQUE, CHIMALTENANGO.)

8. THE MEN TOLD EMBOFF THAT THERE WERE STILL SOME VILLAGES AND HAMLETS IN CHIMALTENANGO THAT "WERE NOT AT PEACE WITH THE ARMY". THEY EXPLAINED THAT THESE VILLAGES STILL GIVE

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OCCASIONAL AID TO THE GUERRILLAS, SOMETIMES VOLUNTARILY AND SOMETIMES AT GUNPOINT. THE ARMY, THEY STATED, SEEMED DETERMINED TO END SUCH ASSISTANCE ONCE AND FOR ALL. COMMENT: EMBOFF NOTES THAT THE CHIMALTENANGO ZONE COMMANDER TOLD HIM ON OCTOBER 15 THAT THERE WERE "WHITE, PINK AND RED VILLAGES" IN THE CHIMALTENANGO ZONE. THE COMMANDER DID NOT OFFER, AND EMBOFF DID NOT PRESS FOR, THE DETAILS OF GOG POLICY TOWARD VILLAGES CONSIDERED "RED". END COMMENT.

9. THE LA ESTANCIA MEN BROUGHT WITH THEM A YOUNG GIRL OF APPROXIMATELY 7 YEARS OF AGE. SHE WAS AN ORPHAN, FOUND WANDERING IN THE VICINITY OF LA ESTANCIA ON OCTOBER 1. THE MEN WERE BRINGING HER TO A CENTER FOR ORPHANS AND WAIFS IN GUATEMALA CITY. THE YOUNG GIRL TOLD EMBOFF THAT ON SEPTEMBER 30 SHE AND A GROUP OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN WERE HIDING FROM THE ARMY IN THE COUNTRY-SIDE OF CHIMALTENANGO. A BABY CRIED OUT FROM THE BUSHES THEY WERE HIDING IN AND THEY WERE DISCOVERED BY THE ARMY. THE SOLDIERS, SHE SAID, TOSSED GRENADES INTO THEIR HIDING SPOT, KILLING MANY PEOPLE INSTANTLY. THE YOUNG GIRL WAS WOUNDED IN THE WRIST, HER MOTHER

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AS TOO HURT TO GET UP AND RUN. A SOLDIER CAME BY AND ROBBED THE MOTHER OF MONEY AND JEWELRY. A SHORT WHILE LATER ANOTHER SOLDIER RETURNED AND ORDERED THE MOTHER TO RISE; SHE WAS UNABLE TO DO SO. THE SOLDIER THEN SHOT HER TO DEATH. THIS SAME SOLDIER APPARENTLY NOTICED THE YOUNG GIRL; HE KICKED HER SHARPLY IN THE HEAD, LEAVING HER STUNNED AND PERHAPS THINKING HER DEAD. EMBOFF NOTED HER HEALED HEAD BRUISES; HER WRIST WAS STILL WRAPPED WITH A RATHER OLD AND YET BLOODIED BANDAGE. COMMENT: THE YOUNG GIRL SPOKE FREELY AFTER LISTENING TO EMBOFF TALK WITH THE VILLAGERS FOR AN HOUR OR SO. ALTHOUGH SHE WAS ABLE TO RELATE HER STORY COHERENTLY, SHE STILL SPOKE OF HER MOTHER IN THE PRESENT TENSE. SHE COULD NOT REMEMBER WHERE HER FAMILY WAS FROM AND EMBOFF DID NOT PRESS HER FOR DETAILS. END COMMENT.

10. ON NOVEMBER 6, ALL THE MEN OF LA ESTANCIA DE LA VIRGEN WERE TOLD TO REPORT TO CHOATALUM. WHEN THEY ARRIVED THEY WERE TOLD BY THE ARMY
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TO SIGN STATEMENTS ADMITTING THEY HAD BEEN GUERRILLAS. (THE MEN VIGOROUSLY DENIED BEING GUERRILLAS, NOW OR IN THE PAST. AFTER ALL, THEY TOLD EMBOFF, THEIR VILLAGE HAD BEEN AT PEACE WITH THE ARMY SINCE MARCH.) EACH STATEMENT IDENTIFIED EACH MAN WITH A GUERRILLA ALIAS. THEY TOLD EMBOFF THEY SIGNED OUT OF FEAR; THE MEN JOKED ABOUT IT, BUT THEY WERE CLEARLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES. AN EVANGELICAL PASTOR APPARENTLY REFUSED TO SIGN; HE WAS ALLEGEDLY TOLD TO SIGN OR THE ARMY WOULD "TEAR HIS ASS UP". THE VILLAGERS SAID HE SIGNED. THE MEN ALSO TOLD EMBOFF THEY HAVE BEEN REFUSED PERMISSION TO GO TO THE SOUTH COAST TO WORK.

11. COMMENT: INTERVIEWING EMBOFF DOES NOT DOUBT THE BONA FIDES OF THESE MEN. THEY WERE CLEARLY FRIGHTENED, UNEASY AND, AT FIRST, SOMEWHAT HESITANT TO TALK AT ALL. YET, ONCE THEY STARTED TALKING THEY WERE QUITE WILLING TO BROACH ANY SUBJECT. ALSO, BOTH EMBOFFS WHO DEBRIEFED ORIGINAL SOURCE HAVE A HIGH DEGREE OF CONFIDENCE IN HIS STATEMENTS. THE LA ESTANCIA MEN TOLD EMBOFF THEY DO NOT KNOW WHAT TO

DO. THEY CLAIM THE ARMY IN CHIMALTENANGO WILL STILL GO INTO VILLAGES "NOT AT PEACE WITH THE ARMY" AND KILL UNARMED MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN. THIS IS THE REASON, THEY SAID, THAT SO MANY PEOPLE WERE DISPLACED IN THE CHOATALUM AREA IN LATE SEPTEMBER AND EARLY OCTOBER; THEY WERE ALL FLEEING THE ARMY.

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12. EMBASSY CANNOT VERIFY THE ABOVE ACCOUNTS. NOR, FOR THAT MATTER, CAN WE VERIFY OFFICIAL ARMY BULLETINS OR PRESS REPORTS LIKE THE ONE DESCRIBING THE SITUATION IN LA ESTANCIA THAT APPEARED ON APRIL 18. WE CAN NOTE THAT THE REFUGEES AT CHOATALUM WERE WELL TREATED. WE ALSO NOTE THAT, ACCORDING TO THE ABOVE TESTIMONY, THE ARMY WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR PLIGHT IN THE FIRST PLACE. SUCH INCONGRUITIES ARE NOT UNKNOWN HERE. THE STORY OF THE MAN IN PARA 6 IS A CASE IN POINT. APPARENTLY ABUSED BY SOLDIERS FROM A PATROL, HE WAS ALSO APPARENTLY FREED BY THE INTERVENTION OF ARMY OFFICERS. THE VILLAGERS REALIZE, AND TOLD EMBOFF ON NOVEMBER 9, THAT SOME OFFICERS TREAT THEM WITH RESPECT AND THUS ARE NOT FEARED. OTHERS, THEY MAINTAIN, THREATEN TO KILL THEM FOR THE SLIGHTEST INFRACTION, REAL OR IMAGINED. IN ANY CASE, THE TESTIMONY OUTLINED ABOVE POINTS TO A DISTURBING TREND OF SELECTIVE TERROR AGAINST "RED" VILLAGES BY SOME GOG SECURITY FORCES.

13. DEPARTMENT SHOULD BE ADVISED THAT SOURCE IS LIKELY TO TAKE THE ABOVE ALLEGATIONS TO THE INTER-AMERICAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION. SOURCE TOLD EMBOFFS THAT BEFORE DOING SO, HE WANTED THE EMBASSY TO BE AWARE OF THE SITUATION IN CHIMALTENANGO; HENCE, HIS VISITS AND THE DEBRIEFING OF THE LA ESTANCIA VILLAGERS. END COMMENT. EMBASSY WILL SEND COUNTRY TEAM ANALYSIS OF THESE EVENTS AND THEIR POSSIBLE BEARING ON BILATERAL RELATIONS. CHAPIN

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