



## Call for Investigation into the Murder of Guatemalan Women

Dear Human Rights Activist,

We need your help to contact the Guatemalan authorities about the continuing increase in the number of women and girls abducted and murdered every year in Guatemala. Take action to raise awareness of violence against women and girls in Guatemala, and help ensure that the Guatemalan authorities condemn these murders, and initiate immediate and effective investigations in these cases.

### Background

Between 2001 and March 2006, over 1,900 Guatemalan women and girls have been brutally murdered. Exceptional cruelty and sexual violence characterize many of the killings. Some of the victims had their throats cut, were beaten, shot or stabbed to death. Many of their bodies show signs of rape, torture, mutilation or dismemberment. Many victims were abducted; some were held for hours or even days before being killed.

In post-civil conflict Guatemala, violent crime and homicide are on the increase generally, but the increase in killings of women is skyrocketing out of proportion. Most killings of women have occurred in urban areas, targeting women between 13 and 40 years of age, and primarily from poor sectors of society. The killings reflect a range of motives, but in all cases the victim's gender is a significant factor in both the perpetrators' extreme violence, and the authorities' minimal response. By and large, the Guatemalan authorities have failed to investigate or prosecute crimes against women – even murders. Furthermore, in the few investigations that have taken place, Amnesty International has found serious and persistent shortcomings.

Since Amnesty International released its report on the killings of Guatemalan women in June 2005, the Guatemalan government has created a National Commission to Address Femicide, a National Forensic Institute to improve investigative procedures, and a commission to investigate police abuses against women. The number of special prosecutors units dedicated to investigating the killings of women has increased from two to four, out of a total of 20. The Guatemalan Congress has agreed to pass legislation aimed at eradicating systematic discrimination against women, and has already suspended – provisionally – one of Guatemala's most discriminatory legal provisions.

**However, Guatemalan women continue to encounter widespread discrimination and violence in all areas of their lives. Despite recent government initiatives and increased resources, investigations continue to be inadequate. Police, prosecutors and other authorities continue to use discriminatory terms and practices in cases of murdered women. Public security policies have yet to include a gender-specific focus. And most important, women and girls continue to be abducted, tortured and killed**

Amnesty International calls on the Guatemalan Government to demonstrate its political will to stop these killings by ensuring the full cooperation of all relevant state institutions and by providing the necessary gender training, technical assistance, and resources to bring the perpetrators to justice.

**Take Action!** Send letters to the Ambassador of Guatemala, Jose Castillo, urging Guatemalan authorities to press for concrete and immediate investigations of these killings and calling on Guatemalan government to adopt zero tolerance against violence and discrimination against women.

The Honorable Jose Castillo  
Embassy of Guatemala  
2220 R Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20008

Dear Ambassador Castillo,

I am deeply concerned about the increasing number of women and girls who have been brutally murdered in Guatemala since 2001. A two-year study by Amnesty International has concluded that the victims' gender is a significant factor, not only in the ways these girls and women are killed, but also in the type of response by police and Public Ministry authorities.

To date, over 1,900 women and girls have been killed. Yet according to the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office, only 9% of cases have been investigated, and 40% of cases are simply archived. In cases that are investigated, the work is compromised by delays, lack of communication between state institutions, failures to collect and preserve vital evidence, and deficiencies in forensic examinations. In addition, the discriminatory attitudes of some state authorities towards the victims compound the suffering of their families and hamper investigative efforts.

I welcome Guatemala's recent creation of the National Commission to Address Femicide, the National Forensic Institute to aid investigations, and the commission for internal investigations of police abuses against women. I applaud the Guatemalan Congress on the provisional suspension of some discriminatory legal provisions, and on Resolution 20-2005, for legislation eradicating systematic discrimination against women, and ending impunity for perpetrators of crimes against women. However, I am concerned that despite these initiatives, there are few positive results thus far.

First and foremost, I ask that the Guatemalan government publicly condemn the abduction and murder of women and girls, and issue instructions preventing officials from dismissing or discrediting the serious nature of these crimes. Make clear that the full force of the law will be brought to bear on those accused of violence against women, and that those responsible, both members of the security forces and non-state actors, will be brought to justice.

In addition, I urge you to press for more concrete responses and investigative measures, such as the creation of an urgent search mechanism for women and girls reported missing. Official crime reports and statistics should include the dimension of gender-related violence, such that these data can be used to implement effective policies toward ending violence against women. In particular, there must be sufficient resources provided to the four units focusing on the killings of women within the Public Ministry Special Prosecutor's Office on Crimes against Life, and all Public Ministry officials must have training in human rights, women's rights, and investigative procedures. Public security policies should specifically address violence against women, and provide for adequate protection programs. Public education programs could assist with campaigns promoting zero tolerance against violence and discrimination.

I hope that you will encourage renewed efforts by the Guatemalan government to affirm its commitment to women's rights, focusing all possible resources to bear on stopping the killings of women and girls, and bringing those responsible to justice. In addition, I hope you will encourage Guatemala's legislature to ensure that laws meet international standards, including those of the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women. I look forward to hearing from you about these important concerns.

Sincerely,

Name, Address, City, State

4/1/06