

In the last two years, kidnappings, torture, death squad activity, murder and disappearances have continued to occur, targeted at peasants, human rights workers and union activists. For example, in September, Mirna Mack Chang, a social activist, was murdered in Guatemala City, and in October Sebastian Velasquez Mejia, a member of the Grupo d'Apoyo Mutuo, (GAM) was kidnapped and killed. Both these crimes are believed to have been perpetrated by elements associated with the extreme right. Children have also increasingly become the victims of violence, cases of brutality by security forces against street children in Guatemala City are of particular concern. Forced participation in civil defence patrols and forcible recruitment into the armed forces continue; the insurgency has also been accused of forced recruitment.

Any investigation and prosecution of human rights violations is hampered by a faulty and ineffectual judicial system. Police forces are under-manned, ill-trained and poorly paid. Investigating judges are frequently open to bribes and are subject to threats.

The human rights situation is linked to the deep social, economic and political divisions within Guatemalan society. The signing of the "Basic Accord for the Search for Peace through Political Means" in Oslo in March, and subsequent rounds of negotiations throughout 1990 between the insurgency and the various sectors of Guatemalan society have been encouraging developments.

CANADIAN POSITION

The Canadian Government deplores the continuing violations of human rights in Guatemala. We do not believe the government employs violence as an instrument of policy, but are frustrated that it seems unable to control abuses. Canada's newly-appointed Ambassador in Guatemala has been instructed to make human rights an issue of highest priority. Canadian officials regularly register our deep concern about the human rights situation to the Government of Guatemala and have discussed a number of specific cases at high levels. Senior Departmental officials were in Guatemala in October and reiterated Canada's serious concern to officials of the Guatemalan government.