

of the Geneva Conventions.

In Guatemala, a newly elected civilian government has committed itself to reform in the field of human rights. However, progress continues to be slow. The persistence of death-squads and new cases of disappearances are cause for profound concern. The key in Guatemala is to respond to the humanitarian and development needs of the Guatemalan people, while supporting a process which leads to positive change and effective democratic government ensuring full respect for human rights.

In South America over the past five years, a wave of popular revulsion against authoritarian regimes and military juntas has resulted in a rapid transition to democratic rule, and to a number of new governments resolutely committed to the defence of human rights. But Paraguay remains an island of troubled isolation. And in Chile, thirteen years after the initiation of military rule, a spiral of violence blocks the return of democratic constitutional rule which protects human rights. The re-institution of a state of siege has tightened the noose on freedom of expression and circumscribed further freedom of association. There are new allegations of torture and extra-judicial assassinations to add to the sorry history of exiles and disappearances.

How do we handle such situations in the work of this organization? How do we respond to serious allegations propounded by credible individuals, groups and organizations? There are, we believe, several points worth making:

First, Mr. Chairman, this committee and other related bodies should not be allowed to become mere chambers of complaints and forums of lost causes. While institutional mechanisms are necessary to permit the presentation of information and to allow for objective follow-up, existing procedures are slow and selective. The reporting measures of the covenants and conventions are simply not enough.

We require a multi-faceted approach that consists of a number of basic elements: an ability to act rapidly in urgent cases, perhaps through the good offices of the Secretary-General or the Chairman of the Commission on Human Rights; a capacity to establish fact-finding and conciliation missions as medium-term measures; and a longer-term strategic approach which might include comprehensive recommendations to reinforce the capacities of states to safeguard human rights. The working group on disappearances has already provided a model of what is feasible in limited circumstances. What is now necessary is more of the same on additional themes.