



# Genocide in Guatemala



The death toll in the Guatemalan civil war exceeds that of El Salvador, Nicaragua, Argentina and Chile put together. The ethnic cleansing that took place exceeds that of Bosnia. Yet, there has been little international attention focused on the real situation there. Over 200,000 people were killed or disappeared during the 36-year-long civil war and figures show that Guatemalan state and military authorities were responsible for 85% of the deaths and had committed acts of genocide.

## THE "SCORCHED EARTH" POLICY

**Crimes:** The early 1980's was the most bloody and violent period of the war, which began as a result of the U.S. sponsored coup in 1956. During this time, the U.S. government heavily funded the military under the dictatorships of Romeo Lucas Garcia and Efraín Rios Montt, as part of its Cold War against communism.



Rios Montt, a graduate of the U.S. School of the Americas, used the money and military equipment to back his "scorched earth" policy, an attempt to literally wipe out the indigenous Mayan cultures and communities. During his short stint in power (less than 2 years) he and his military command oversaw countless massacres, some of which completely eliminated entire communities, and close to 20,000 were murdered or disappeared.

What was the U.S. response? President Ronald Reagan called Rios Montt "a man of great personal integrity and commitment" and "totally dedicated to democracy."



**Impunity:** Rios Montt is not just a symbol of Guatemala's violent past but also of its continuing impunity—he and his cohorts have been associated with numerous cases of corruption and political violence. Despite his record, Rios Montt was just elected to his third consecutive term as President of the Guatemalan Congress and in June he was again appointed leader of his right-wing political party: the FRG. In fact, he and his party

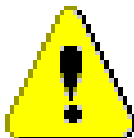
are seeking ways to place him as the FRG candidate for president in the 2003 elections. (The Constitution says it is illegal for someone to run for president if they were involved in a coup against the state, but the FRG are convinced they can get past this.)



## GENOCIDE TRIALS: HOPE FOR A NEW GUATEMALA

In June 2001, the Association for Justice and Reconciliation (a group of survivors and family members of those killed in the war) launched a genocide case against Rios Montt. While this was a big step for the human rights community, many fear that there will be an increase in violence against those involved with the case. The human rights situation has deteriorated drastically throughout 2002. In fact, on June 7<sup>th</sup>, a clandestine organization with apparent links to the army high command faxed a death threat to 11 prominent human rights organizations. The fax was signed 'Guatemaltecos de Verdad' (True Guatemalans) and described those named as enemies of the state, and said they would soon be killed.

Despite the fact that Rios Montt is still in power and regardless of the imminent danger, the survivors are again risking their lives in the search for justice.



So we demand:  
Bring to justice those responsible for the  
genocide in Guatemala!