

via fax 011 502 2413 8658

Francisco Jose Jimenez Irungaray
Minister of the Interior of Guatemala

via fax 011 502 2411 9124

Lic. Jose Amilcar Velasquez Zarate
Attorney General & Head of the Public Prosecutor's Office

September 14, 2008

Dear Sir:

We are gravely concerned for the safety of the fifteen volunteers for the Guatemalan Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) who work with youths at risk of joining gangs. On the night of August 10, three YMCA volunteers – **Eliazar Hernandez, Mario Gamez and Juan Navarro** – went to the house of Eliazar Hernandez about 9pm after finishing work at the YMCA office. Late that night, after receiving a phone call, they left the Hernandez house, telling others present that they would be back soon. The three young men's bodies were found by farm workers early the next morning on a farm approximately 10 km south of Amatitlan, Guatemala Department. They had been cut with machetes, severely beaten and then killed by a single shot to the head.

We are aware that the pattern observed in these murders has been repeated over and over in Guatemala. We are also aware that, according to police records, 5,781 people were murdered in Guatemala in 2007 and yet less than 2% of these killings resulted in a conviction. In February 2007 UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions issued a report criticizing Guatemala for fostering impunity for killings and noted that the police are involved in killings of those thought to be "socially unacceptable."

We therefore urge that you

- order an immediate and thorough investigation into the killings of the three YMCA volunteers, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- ensure that immediate measures are taken to guarantee the safety of the 15 remaining YMCA members, in strict accordance with their wishes;
- refrain from making any statements about the killings or the victims which could prejudice the investigation.

Thank you for your prompt attention.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Coordinator

CC: Guatemalan YM ~ via US mail
Francisco Villagran de Leon, Guatemalan Ambassador to the US ~ via fax: 202 745 1908
Stephen McFarland, US Ambassador to Guatemala ~ via fax: 011-502-2334-8477
Paolo Carozza, US member of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights~ via fax: (202)458-3992
Guatemala Desk, US State Dept ~ via fax: 202-647-2597
US Senators Brown & Voinovich ~ via email
US Representatives Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Latta, Regula, Ryan, Sutton ~ via email

The following people hereby urge you to take action on this matter as indicated in this letter: