

Statement by the American Association for the Advancement of Science on
the release of the Guatemalan Death Squad Dossier

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No one can ever say they didn't know about the disappearances corroborated in this document – these people's fates were richly documented at the time they occurred. In my brief statement today, I will trace only the earliest and the most recent reports that documented a few of the disappearances and executions that are listed in this document. Then I will present evidence to argue that we must understand this document, and these disappearances, as part of a broad strategic shift in the policy of repression in Guatemala.

Using information gathered with help from AAAS affiliates, Amnesty International, Human Rights Internet, and the Guatemalan Human Rights Commission, AAAS presented a report on Feb 20 1985 to Congress – it's in the Congressional Record -- in which the disappearances of a number of scientists, students, medical doctors, and engineers were documented. Twelve of the people listed in that report appear in the Death Squad Dossier.

A year later AAAS published this volume of Case Reports that included these twelve people, along with 176 other students, scientists, doctors, and engineers who had been disappeared or executed.

Let's run the tape forward thirteen years, during which time these cases – and the cases of tens of thousands of other Guatemalans – were pursued vigorously by a number of Guatemalan human rights organizations. The Commission for Historical Clarification – the truth commission for Guatemala -- presented their report to Guatemala and to the world on February 25. In that report, there are additional investigations of some of the cases in this document. Most notably, in illustrative case #48, the Commission documented the disappearances of Edgar Fernando Garcia, Sergio Saul Linares Morales and Ruben Amilcar Farfan whose

widows would later go on to found the Mutual Support Group, known by the Spanish acronym GAM. The names of both Linares Morales and Farfan appear in the death squad dossier, but only Farfan is listed in what seems to be the disappearance log. Farfan is listed in the Death Squad Dossier as #39, and the text below his name reads: “he was located, he put up resistance, he was 300.” This is the euphemism for murder: Farfan was killed.

However chilling this is, we must understand this document in the context of the transition in repressive policy that was occurring at the exact moment this log was being written. Counterinsurgency strategy was changing from a policy of indiscriminate killings focusing on mostly Mayan rural peasants to focused, selective killings and disappearances directed against middle class people mostly in the capital area.

The strategic change between these two modes was so dramatic – at a statistical level – and so complete, so rapid, that it must have been coordinated at the highest command levels of the Guatemala military and security establishment.

As we read this document, we should understand it as the product of a broad policy initiative, a decision to switch from indiscriminate terror in the countryside to selective murder in the city.

SLIDE #1

This slide shows the number of killings and disappearances in Guatemala according to three independently conducted large-scale studies. At the top are data from the Commission for Historical Clarification, in the middle are data from the Human Rights Office of the Archbishopric of Guatemala REMHI project, and at the bottom, data from the International Center for Human Rights Research (the CIIDH). In a study done by AAAS for the Commission, we found less than 15% overlap in the data presented in these three studies.

Three studies, one story: note how consistent all of them are – they all see an enormous peak in 1981-1982 which dominates the entire graph. This is the period in which the Commission speaks of 626 government-committed massacres, and the period in which the Commission charged that the military of Guatemala had committed acts of genocide. But where are the disappearances in the death squad dossier? On the downslope in 1984-1985, AFTER the massive killings had abated somewhat. Let’s change the focus somewhat to understand the difference.

SLIDE #2

This slide shows the number of killings, but note how different it is. The bottom graph shows the number of killings and disappearances in **urban** areas, not overall. 1982, the big year overall, is serious, but not as bad as 1980 or as 1983.

Most importantly for our analysis today, just as the number of killings overall is declining after 1982, in urban areas 1983 and 1984 show significant increases.

SLIDE #3

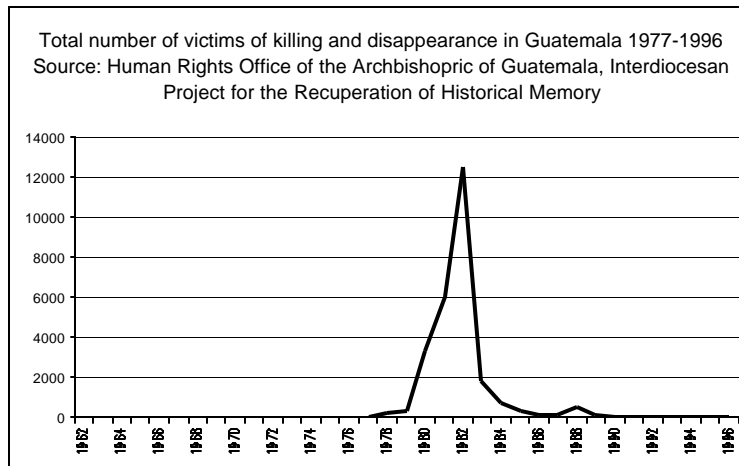
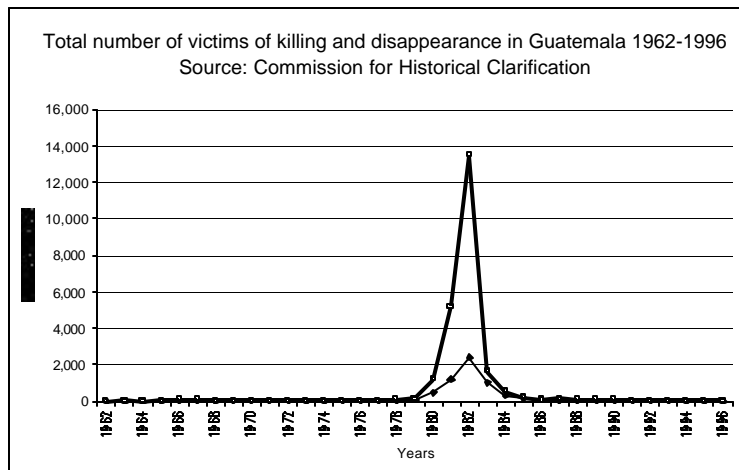
Again, focusing on our period of interest 1983-1985, what we see here is that the proportion of killing victims who are killed one at a time – not in groups with others – increases relative to earlier periods. This graph is evidence of increasing selectivity, increased targeting of victims. The black area in 1981-1982 shows that most victims were being killed in big groups, groups of 10 or more victims, while in 1983-1985 group size decreases so that people are being killed either in groups of 2-10 (the white area) or by themselves, a group of 1 (the grey area).

To get the pattern we see in Slide 3, big massacres have to stop and, as we saw in Slide 2, individual assassinations increase. How might this happen so precisely in time?

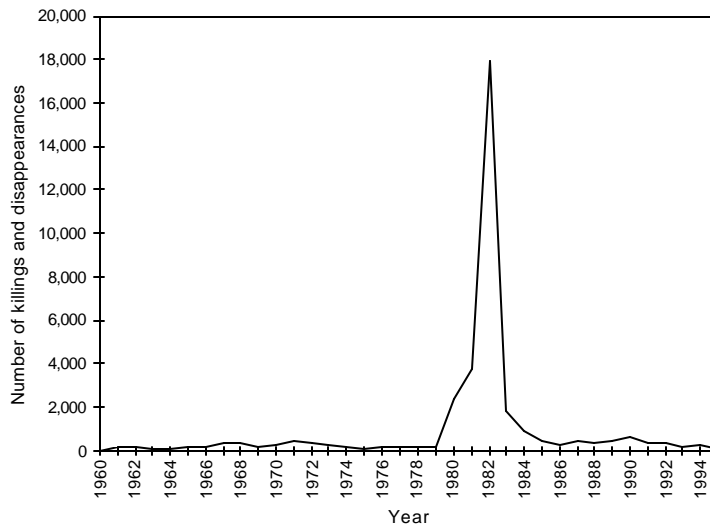
I suggest that a major policy change occurred in Guatemala sometime in late 1983. The government of Mejía Vítores took power in August, 1983, which may be the point at which this shift occurred. The document before us today is a window into that policy. It is a bit of evidence that the disappearances and subsequent killings themselves were planned at an individual case-by-case level.

The statistical evidence that I've presented here suggests that this case-by-case planning was coordinated with broader policy changes. The crimes committed by the compilers of this document were part of a bigger picture – they were policy.

When we talk today about accountability for these actions, we must understand accountability to include those who made this policy. Who had the power to turn off the massacres and turn on selective urban assassinations? Only the military high command had that authority. Accountability cannot include only those who pulled the triggers, or typed the death squad dossier. It must also include those who envisioned hundreds of lives cut short by murder as a hoped-for, worked-for, optimal policy outcome.



Total number of victims of killing and disappearance in Guatemala, 1959-1996
Source: International Center for Human Rights Research & AAAS



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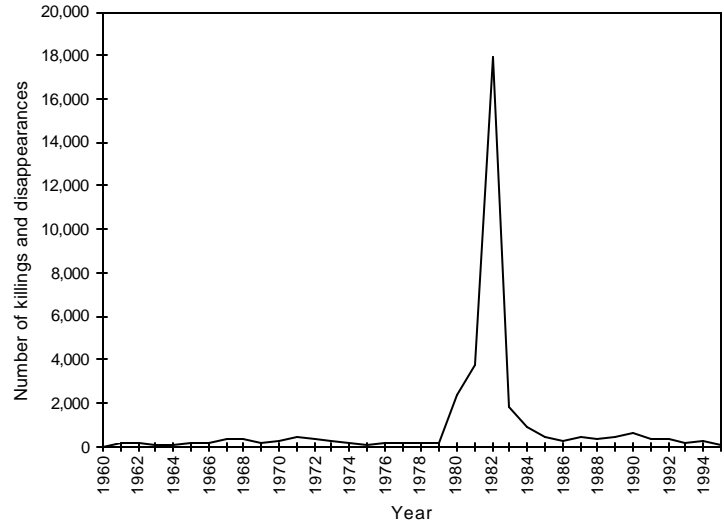
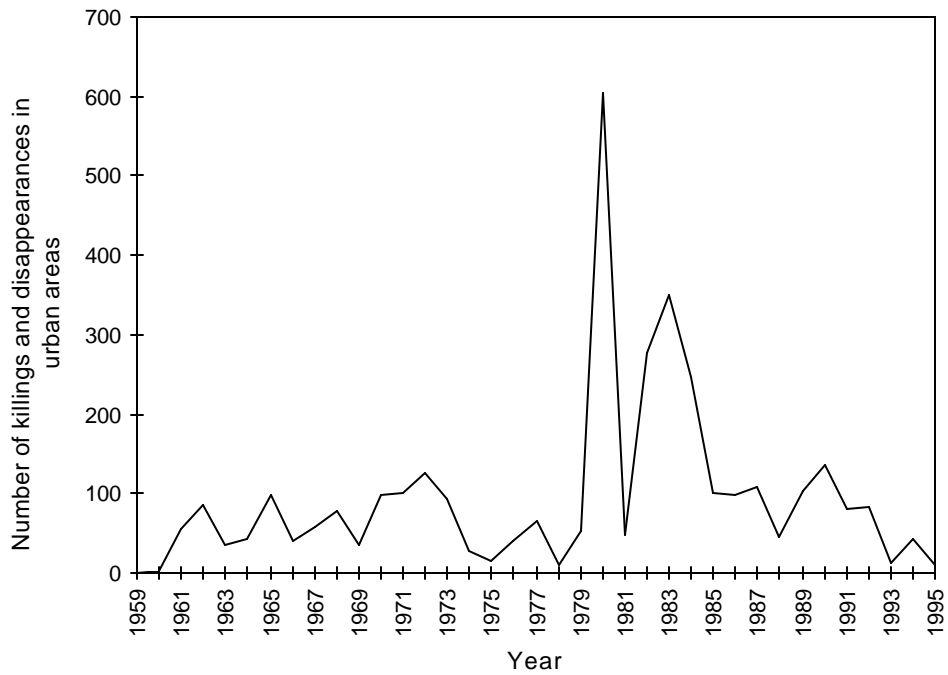


Figure 8.2. Number of killings and disappearances in urban areas, by year, 1959-1995



**Figure 11.4. Percent of victims in group of indicated size,
by year, 1959-1995**

Source: International Center for Human Rights Research & AAAS

