

**INTERNATIONAL MISSION FOR OBSERVING AND DENOUNCING VIOLENCE
AGAINST WOMEN IN GUATEMALA
MAY 12 & 14 2009, GUATEMALA CITY.
SYNTHESIS REPORT**

1. INTRODUCTION

The Petateras of Guatemala, in coordination with Feminist International Radio Endeavor (FIRE) and JASS (Just Associates), convened a fact-finding mission in Guatemala from May 12-15, 2009. The international mission drew from the support and coverage given to the Nobel Women's Initiative's (NWI) biannual conference titled "Redefining Democracy," which met in Antigua from May 10-12.

The mission responds to the need to draw international attention to the grave violations of women's rights in Guatemala as a result of rising violence against women and to mobilize resources and solidarity to combat this scourge of violence. It is a response to recent reports of violence against human rights defenders, and the lack of justice in the face of rising femicide and the hundreds of cases of rapes and other assaults during the years of armed conflict.

This undertaking is part of the Observatorio de Transgresión Feminista/Feminist Transformation Watch strategy driven by the Petateras and allies which was launched in 2006 as "a methodology and a political action that seeks to support, protect and make visible the transformative actions of women to challenge and transform the systems and practices of patriarchal power". This particular Observatorio took the process one step further by conducting a search for information and connections through meetings with several Guatemalan women's and human rights organizations in order to deepen the contextual understanding of the issue and promote actions rooted in the realities and analysis of those involved.

2. PARTICIPANTS AND ACTIVITIES OF THE MISSION

International delegation (attending and virtual): The delegation consisted of 18 human rights and women rights activists, journalists, communicators, and international human rights lawyers from Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Spain and the United States.

Name	Organization	Country
Gladys Torres	CIMAC	Mexico
María Suárez	RIF-Petateras	Costa Rica
Valerie Miller	JASS-Petateras	United States
Alejandra Bergemann	JASS-Petateras	Mexico
Katerina Anfonsi	RIF	Costa Rica
Lisa VeneKlasen	JASS-Petateras	United States
Marusia López	JASS-Petateras	Mexico

Name	Organization	Country
Margaret Thompson	RIF	United States
Sandra González	Asociación de Trabajadoras de la Maquila en representación de MADRE (Maquila Workers' Association representing MADRE)	Guatemala
Mercedes Hernández	Plataforma de Mujeres Artistas contra la Violencia de Género (Platform of Women Artists against Gender Violence)	Spain
Rhonda Copelon	International law expert	United States
Yarman Jimenez	RIF	Costa Rica
Ana Luisa Ahern	JASS	United States
Carrie Wilson	JASS	Canada
Patricia Ardón	JASS-Sinergia No'j-Petateras	Guatemala
Magdalena Chololtío	Sinergia No'j-Petateras	Guatemala
Walda Barrios	UNAM-G/Petateras	Guatemala
Guadalupe Salinas	Sinergia No'j	Nicaragua

A large number of activists and organizations in the region and from other parts of the world participated virtually in the Observatorio through FIRE broadcasts, La Cuerda and CIMAC news productions and the JASS blog. A total of 33 organizations tuned in to the broadcasts and expressed their solidarity and willingness to support the findings of the fact-finding mission. Virtual observers came from Fiji, Spain, Nicaragua, United States, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Canada, Panama, Philippines, Chile, El Salvador, Honduras, Zimbabwe and Argentina.

Nobel Women's Initiative's Declaration in Support of Guatemalan Women. At the end of its conference in Antigua, at the request of the Guatemalan Petateras, the Nobel Women's Initiative released a statement expressing their solidarity with the women of Guatemala and denouncing the growing violence against women in the country:

"We have witnessed the strength, courage and resistance of Guatemalan women as they work to advance their rights and those of the whole of society, amidst enormous challenges and threats to their wellbeing and that of their families and communities. Guatemalan women struggle in a context of insecurity and violence that they have faced throughout history and continue to face today."

Interviews with organizations and the "All United Against Violence" Forum. The international delegation met with several women's and human rights organizations and public institutions, including CONAVIGUA, Moloj, Sector de Mujeres, and the Human Rights Commission.

The Guatemalan Petateras also organized a Forum on Violence at San Carlos University, where international and Guatemalan feminists (including women from Sobrevivientes, UNAM-G and the Maquila Workers' Association) shared testimonies and facts and shed light on the context of the situation of violence in Guatemala. The delegation also participated in a briefing with the country's Representative of the International Commission against Impunity.

Artistic activities. The international fact-finding mission also included a presentation of the play *The Labyrinth of Butterflies* at the Teatro de Bellas Artes to an audience of 500 people.

3. What did we witness?

- The situation of violence against women and the impunity in the justice system.
- The diversity of efforts and struggles that the Guatemalan women are undertaking.
- The specific demands of indigenous women.
- The coordination process between social movements.
- The role of the media.

4. Outcomes

KEY LESSONS

- **The importance of directly involving the victims, survivors and actors who are taking action to eliminate violence** given the complexity of the situation and the fact that it remains largely unrecognized by the international community and many international human rights bodies. Likewise, the situation has been outside of the agenda of media as media coverage diminished following the signing of the Peace Accords.
- **Violence in Guatemala is a structural problem of impunity and corruption.** Far from diminishing, the violence in Guatemala has increased and diversified in its forms and actors. The impunity and corruption that has existed since the days of armed conflict has undermined the ability to build democratic institutions and the rule of law, has facilitated the spread of a culture of violence, and has permitted the maintenance of old de facto powers and facilitated the proliferation of new ones. Families, businesses and warlords linked to organized crime, criminal groups, gangs and other forms of drug trafficking and clandestine security forces that remain from the days of the conflict exercise local control, infiltrate state institutions and impose fear throughout the country. These groups go beyond the borders of Guatemala and are linked to criminal gangs in Mexico and Central America. Because of this the border areas have become some of the most violent areas in the country.
- **The lack of personal security experienced by women in the face of increasing violence.** The impunity that came along with most of the cases of violence and sexual abuse against women during the conflict, among other things, helped to develop a culture of tolerance with respect to violence against women. What once was carried out by the military and clandestine security forces is now being practiced by family members and acquaintances, as well as criminal groups. Women are often forced to live with their attackers as a small number of cases end up being resolved. A growing fear is provoked by violence of criminal groups operating in the shadows that are difficult to control and use violence in a systematic way. The bodies of women are continually the object of violence of these groups: during initiation rituals, as a form of reward, as a mechanism of population control, etc. The increase in femicide in recent years and the brutality with which violence is exercised is therefore not surprising.
- **The growing criminalization of social movements and the attacks on their struggle by criminal groups particularly affect activists and human rights defenders.** Attacks on human rights defenders and their causes which have been traditionally perpetrated by the army and security forces of the State, are now also carried out by criminal groups, putting defenders at serious risk when they report on the

violence, corruption and impunity that characterize the army, state security entities, and criminal groups. Women's organizations and activists have suffered an increase in threats and attacks on their integrity by these groups when denouncing femicide cases. The threats and harassment also target defenders' families and many of them have expressed fear that their children may be kidnapped, raped and/or murdered. Because of this situation, some families of human rights defenders and activists put pressure on them (sometimes with violence) to leave their social and political work.

- **Women, their organizations and even specialized institutions that have been created for the promotion their rights in Guatemala demonstrate an unwavering resilience, resistance and infinite creativity to organize,** train, mobilize and inform themselves in order to fight under adverse conditions of social depreciation and misogyny as a result of the social status of women, ethnocentrism and the double and triple working hours they have to take on. In this situation they rely on their strengths and their ability to link with regional and international initiatives and organizations to share knowledge, strength and endurance.
- **Feminist visions on gender violence are not sufficient in a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural country like Guatemala where indigenous women make up more than half of the population.** It is necessary to promote a more systematic discussion of shared and different experiences and to take up again the document from the International Indigenous Women's Forum (IIWF) about violence (2006) and the proceedings from the Women Actors for Change Festival and similar initiatives on the topic.
- **The type of missions and Observatorio strategies promoted by the Petateras and their allies provide a mechanism that enables us exchange innovative confluences, collective political power and feminist action** to confront social breakdown, the dismantlement of the rule of law, the economic policies of the market and the systematic violation of human rights in a transformative manner. Various international organizations have expressed interest in monitoring feminist action in Guatemala, including: the International Indigenous Women's Forum (IIWF), the International Women's Tribune Centre (Centro Internacional de la Tribuna de la Mujer), the Nobel Women's Initiative (NWI), MADRE and the Women's Media Center which was founded by Jane Fonda, Gloria Steinem and Robin Morgan and has journalistic links around the world.

VIOLENCE AGAINST GUATEMALAN WOMEN: FIGURES AND CASES¹ :

- In 2007, Guatemala was placed third in Latin America in terms of women's deaths. However, in 2009 it moved into first place according to a report by the International

¹ RIF, Context of the Observatory Mission on Denouncing" ("Contexto de la Misión Observatorio de Denuncia"). Ana Gladis Ollas, Women's Rights Defender of the Human Rights Attorney's Office, interview under the framework of the Observatory Mission. Norma Cruz, director of Sobrevivientes, Foro Todas Unidas contra la Violencia. Lucía Pellecer, Introductory meeting of the Observatory Mission. Claudia Samayoa, director of the Unit for the Protection of female and male Human Rights Defenders - Guatemala, interview within the framework of the Observatory Mission. 2006 Report of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders. Carlos Castrana, responsible of the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala, interview within the framework of the Observatory Mission.

Commission against Impunity in Guatemala.

- Violence in Guatemala generates costs of more than USD 300 million, which is equivalent to 7% of its GDP.
- 3,107 women in Guatemala died between 2001 and 2007 as a result of violence.
- Since the Law against femicide was passed in May 2008, only two perpetrators have been sentenced even though in the same year 722 women died from violent acts, 75% of them as a result of femicide. Out of the total number of women murdered, 32% were killed in their homes, 43% outside their homes and 25% in unknown locations.
- So far in 2009, 265 cases of femicide have been registered and in 26 of those cases, the women were found dismembered. Last year the number of femicides increased by 457%.
- In 2008, 39,400 reports of domestic violence were taken to the courts, 95% of which were presented by women.
- Since 2008, 2000 reports have been made to the Attorney General's Office for Crimes against Women.
- After Colombia, Guatemala is the Latin-American country with the highest number of murders of human rights defenders.
- 195 cases of threats or harassment against human rights defenders were registered in 2007.
- Cases of violence against human rights defenders have increased since 2006 due to their investigations of cases of femicides, with the percentage of human rights defenders attacked increasing from 26% to 36%
- Some recent cases of violence against human rights defenders include:
 - On 5th February, 2007, Angélica González, a legal attorney for the human rights organization CALDH, found a note in her vehicle threatening her and the organization's legal team.
 - The Institute for Comparative Studies in Criminal Science of Guatemala reported incidents of intimidation, threats, theft of identify documents and kidnapping as a result of their work defending an indigenous woman raped at a police station by two police officers.
 - Gladys Monterroso, a renowned human rights defender, was kidnapped and tortured in March 2009. During the period of her captivity, Gladys was subjected to physical, psychological and sexual abuse by her kidnappers.
 - In May 2009, Norma Cruz, Director of Sobrevivientes, was threatened by organized crime groups after reporting a drug trafficker for raping and killing women.

MONITORING PROPOSALS

- **Strategic communication for action:**
 - The Petateras Bulletin, FIRE, CIMAC, La Cuerda, the Petateras' and JASS' websites and blogs will continue to disseminate information and developments with respect to violence against women in Guatemala
 - The Petateras and allies will make use of their relationships with various media to promote a continuous campaign in several languages against violence against women in Guatemala and the culture of impunity. Media outlets include RIMA web, Red de Periodistas, SEMLAC, ISIS International, Red de LIMPAL/WILPF, International Women's Tribune Centre, The Women's Media Center, La Red de Mujeres de la Asociación Mundial

de Radios Comunitarias (AMARC), Open Democracy, Global Voices Online, AWID's weekly newsletter and Christiane Amanpour from CNN, among others.

-Create a group of "Observatory ambassadors" with representation from each continent which monitors the situation and pursues media and political action of solidarity in response to incidences of violence against women in Guatemala. Request that the Petateras in the US look for a public figure that can promote this cause and for JASS Southern Africa and JASS Southeast Asia to do the same. Request that the Petateras in the Netherlands to do the same in Europe.

-Take advantage of the launch of the UN Secretary-General's Campaign against Gender Violence to mobilize public opinion, design and advance a campaign about the special case of Guatemala and the Mesoamerican region, send a letter to the Secretary General, UNIFEM, UNFPA, UNESCO and UNICEF calling for attention to the situation in Guatemala and in the region and offering our support for their actions in response.

-Request financial and technical support from Mexican organizations so that Sobrevivientes and other organizations can exchange data including information on gender violence in Guatemala that is available from state, government and social agencies.

-Coordinate with MADRE to create a campaign on the impact of violence on women working in maquilas.

- Pay attention to the relationship between violence and HIV/AIDS to contribute to the connection of Guatemalan struggles with other initiatives.

-Invite human rights organizations involved in and working on human rights issues in Guatemala to join the Observatory and to incorporate it into their campaigns.

- **Reporting of cases and protection of human rights defenders**

- Create a section for urgent actions on our websites and through our media tools.

- Establish a list of rest houses where defenders can recharge their batteries when needed.

- Request for Petateras around the world to collect information about violence against defenders in their countries in order to produce a Mesomeric report on the situation.

- Facilitate regional exchanges of protection strategies and methodologies.

- Link up with the International Human Rights Defenders Campaign.

- **International denouncement through international human rights instruments.** Contribute to the building of international legal and political solidarity strategies so that Guatemalans have support to contest violence locally.

- Monitor and support the cases led by Sobrevivientes at the Inter-American Court.

- Connect the Women's Ombudsman with UN programs and resources from the UN Secretary-General's Campaign to End Violence against Women.

- Assess support for the proposal for a Tribunal carried out by UNAMG.

- Find out from CICIG what cases are currently at the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

- Assess the possibility of requesting a hearing at the Inter-American Commission about the Guatemalan case before its next session in November.

- Investigate, with Guatemalan specialists, what processes are available in order to exhaust internal channels in Guatemala.

-Review the eight shadow reports presented by organizations and the State to the UN and what has taken place following their presentation in order to carry out a campaign to put pressure on the government to respond.

-Link our initiative with the UN Secretary-General's Campaign to End Violence against Women and with UNFPA's campaign against sexual violence.