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UNCLAS GUATEMALA 05964

E.O. 12356: N/A  
TAGS: OTRA, OREP, ASEC, PREL, PHUM, GT  
SUBJECT: CODEL MCCURDY'S MEETING WITH GAM LEADERS

1. SUMMARY. CODEL MCCURDY MET WITH MUTUAL SUPPORT GROUP LEADERS NINETH DE GARCIA AND ISABEL DE CASTANON ON JUNE 2. MRS. GARCIA AND MRS. CASTANON TOLD THE CODEL THAT THE MUTUAL SUPPORT GROUP IS AN ORGANIZATION OF RELATIVES OF 1,467 "DETAINED AND THEN DISAPPEARED" PEOPLE WHICH IS STRUGGLING TO LEARN THE FATE OF IT MEMBERS' MISSING LOVED ONES. MRS. GARCIA SAID THE GAM IS A "HUMANITARIAN, AND NOT A POLITICAL ORGANIZATION." SHE STATED THAT THE GAM HAS BEEN ACCUSED OF TRYING TO DISCREDIT THE CEREZO GOVERNMENT, A CHARGE SHE DENIED. MRS. GARCIA AND MRS. CASTANON SAID THEY DID NOT HOLD PRESIDENT CEREZO RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DISAPPEARANCES, BUT THAT AS PRESIDENT HE WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR SEEING THAT "JUSTICE IS DONE." SHE SAID THE GAM WANTS FOUR CONCESSIONS FROM THE GOG: FIRST, THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A COMMISSION TO INVESTIGATE THE WHEREABOUTS OF THE DISAPPEARED; SECOND, A REPEAL OF THE AMNESTY DECREE; THIRD, JUDGEMENT AND PUNISHMENT OF THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DISAPPEARANCES; FOURTH, AN OPEN CONDEMNATION BY CEREZO OF THE AUTHORS OF THE DISAPPEARANCES. MRS. GARCIA ACCUSED THE GUATEMALAN ARMY OF CONDUCTING A "DESTABILIZATION CAMPAIGN" AIMED AT DISCREDITING AND SPLITTING THE GAM. SHE SAID THIS CAMPAIGN WOULD FAIL, AND THAT THE MILITARY WOULD BE FORCED TO ACT VIOLENTLY AGAINST THE GAM. SHE APPEALED TO THE CONGRESSMEN TO HELP GUARANTEE HER SECURITY AND WELL-BEING. SHE MADE THE SAME APPEAL TO THE CHARGE AS SHE WAS LEAVING THE MEETING. LATER THAT DAY, THE CHARGE CONVEYED USG CONCERN FOR THE SAFETY OF MRS. GARCIA AND OTHER GAM MEMBERS TO PRESIDENT CEREZO, WHO ASSURED THE CHARGE THAT HE WOULD DO EVERYTHING HE COULD TO PROTECT MRS. GARCIA. END SUMMARY.

2. CODEL MCCURDY MET WITH MUTUAL SUPPORT GROUP (GAM) LEADERS NINETH DE GARCIA AND ISABEL DE CASTANON ON JUNE 2. MRS. GARCIA AND MRS. CASTANON TOLD THE CODEL THAT THE GAM IS AN ORGANIZATION OF RELATIVES OF 1,467 "DETAINED AND THEN DISAPPEARED PEOPLE" WHICH IS STRUGGLING TO LEARN THE WHEREABOUTS OF ITS MEMBERS' MISSING LOVED ONES. MRS. GARCIA DESCRIBED THE GAM AS A "HUMANITARIAN, AND NOT A POLITICAL ORGANIZATION." SHE SAID THE GAM HAS BEEN ACCUSED OF TRYING TO DISCREDIT THE CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT OF VINICIO CEREZO, A CHARGE WHICH SHE DENIED. SHE SAID THE GAM IS NOT "FIGHTING WITH THE GOVERNMENT, BUT INSTEAD DEMANDING A BASIC RIGHT" - TO LEARN THE FATES OF "OUR HUSBANDS, FATHERS, AND SONS" WHO WERE ILLEGALLY DETAINED BY THE GOG.

3. MRS. GARCIA SAID THAT GAM IS NOT OPPOSED TO PRESIDENT CEREZO, AND THAT IT REALIZES THAT CEREZO IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DISAPPEARANCES OF ITS MEMBERS' RELATIVES. HOWEVER, SHE INSISTED THAT AS PRESIDENT IT IS HIS RESPONSIBILITY TO SEE THAT "JUSTICE IS DONE." SHE SAID THAT MAKING SUCH A "HUMANITARIAN CALL" TO THE PRESIDENT IS NOT "ASKING THE IMPOSSIBLE." SHE POINTED OUT THAT THE GAM IS NOT "TALKING ABOUT TRASH OR BROOMSTICKS, BUT HUMAN LIVES." SHE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT SOME OF THE DISAPPEARED MIGHT BE DEAD, BUT SAID IN THAT CASE THE GAM WANTS THE "LEGAL STATUS" OF THE DISAPPEARED CLARIFIED. IN OTHER WORDS, THE GAM WANTS THE GOG TO ADMIT THAT SOME OF THE DISAPPEARED ARE DEAD AND TO TURN THEIR BODIES OVER TO THEIR FAMILIES.

4. MRS. CASTANON SAID THE GAM WANTED FOUR CONCESSIONS FROM THE GOG: FIRST, THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A COMMISSION TO INVESTIGATE THE WHEREABOUTS AND FATES OF THE DISAPPEARED; SECOND, A REPEAL OF THE AMNESTY DECREE; THIRD, JUDGEMENT AND PUNISHMENT OF THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DISAPPEARANCES; AND FINALLY, A PUBLIC CONDEMNATION BY PRESIDENT CEREZO OF THE AUTHORS OF THE DISAPPEARANCES. SHE ASSERTED THAT THE GAM HAD "LEGAL AND MORAL AUTHORITY" TO ASK FOR THESE CONCESSIONS. SHE NOTED THAT THE GAM HAD

ALREADY REACHED AGREEMENT WITH THE PRESIDENT ON FORMATION OF THE COMMISSION, AND THAT THE GAM HOPED FOR "A PRECISE AND SCIENTIFIC INVESTIGATION" INTO EACH OF ITS 1,467 CASES OF DISAPPEARANCES.

5. IN RESPONSE TO A QUESTION FROM THE CODEL ABOUT THE ORIGINS OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN GUATEMALA, MRS. GARCIA SAID THAT "DISAPPEARING PEOPLE" BEGAN IN 1966 UNDER THE GOVERNMENT OF GENERAL PERALTA AZUDIA. SINCE THEN, SHE ASSERTED, 40,000 PEOPLE HAD "DISAPPEARED." SHE ATTRIBUTED SUCH POLITICAL VIOLENCE TO THE "CONCENTRATION OF WEALTH IN THE HANDS OF A FEW," INCLUDING FOREIGN BUSINESSES WITH TIES TO "MONOPOLIES." SHE ASSERTED THAT SUCH CONCENTRATION PROVOKED SOCIAL DISTURBANCES, AND THAT THE WEALTHY RESPONDED TO THE DEMANDS OF THE POOR WITH VIOLENCE AND REPRESSION. SHE DESCRIBED THIS VIOLENT RESPONSE AS "AN UNDECLARED WAR," AND INDICATED THAT HER HUSBAND AND OTHER MISSING RELATIVES OF GAM MEMBERS WERE THE VICTIMS OF THIS WAR.

6. REFERRING TO THE CASE OF HER HUSBAND, EDGAR FERNANDO GARCIA, WHO WAS ABDUCTED IN FEBRUARY 1984, MRS. GARCIA SAID HE WAS A STUDENT AND UNION LEADER WHO "FOUGHT FOR THE INTERESTS OF THE WORKING CLASS." SHE SAID HE WAS A LEADER OF THE CAVISA (CENTRAL AMERICAN GLASS COMPANY) UNION, AND A MEMBER OF ITS NEGOTIATING COMMITTEE. THE CAVISA UNION HAS BEEN AFFILIATED WITH THE AUTONOMOUS FEDERATION OF GUATEMALAN UNIONS (FASGUA), AN UNDERGROUND LABOR CENTRAL WHICH IS THE TRADE UNION ARM OF THE GUATEMALAN COMMUNIST PARTY (PGT). ACCORDING TO MRS. GARCIA, HER HUSBAND WAS ABDUCTED AND DISAPPEARED BECAUSE OF HIS WORK ON THE NEGOTIATING COMMITTEE ON BEHALF OF "THE WORKING CLASS."

7. MRS. GARCIA SAID THAT HER COUNTRY HAS NOT "KNOWN PEACE" IN HER LIFETIME. SHE ALSO ASSERTED THAT "DISAPPEARANCES AND KILLINGS CONTINUE" UNDER THE CEREZO GOVERNMENT. SHE SAID THAT THERE IS "NO SECURITY FOR THE PEOPLE" IN GUATEMALA, AND THAT STUDENT, UNION, AND PEASANT LEADERS ARE SINGLED OUT FOR ATTACKS. IN MOST COUNTRIES, SHE TOLD THE CODEL,

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PEOPLE ARE CONSIDERED INNOCENT UNTIL PROVEN GUILTY. HOWEVER, IN GUATEMALA PEOPLE ARE GUILTY UNTIL PROVEN INNOCENT, AND THEY ARE DEAD BY THE TIME THEY ARE PROVEN INNOCENT.

8. MRS. GARCIA AND MRS. CASTANON SAID THAT GAM'S ACTIVITIES HAVE UPSET THE GUATEMALAN ARMY, AND THAT THE MILITARY HAS UNDERTAKEN A "DESTABILIZATION CAMPAIGN" AGAINST THE GAM. ACCORDING TO MRS. CASTANON, THE ARMY HAS ACCUSED MRS. GARCIA AND THE GAM OF BEING COMMUNISTS AND OF HAVING TIES TO "FOREIGN COMMUNIST GROUPS." MRS. CASTANON DESCRIBED THIS ATTEMPT TO "DISCREDIT" MRS. GARCIA AS BEING EXTREMELY DANGEROUS, BECAUSE IN GUATEMALA TO CALL A PERSON A COMMUNIST IS TO "MAKE THEM A TARGET" FOR ATTACK. SHE ALSO ACCUSED THE ARMY OF TRYING TO SPLIT THE GAM AND CONFUSE ITS MEMBERS BY CREATING A GROUP CALLED THE ORGANIZATION OF FAMILIES OF THE DISAPPEARED (ORFADE). MRS. CASTANON ALLEGED THAT ORFADE, WHICH SHE SAID IS FICTITIOUS, HAS DISTRIBUTED PAMPHLETS ACCUSING MRS. GARCIA OF USING THE ANGUISH OF THE DISAPPEARED FOR HER OWN FINANCIAL GAIN. THE PAMPHLETS CHARGE MRS. GARCIA WITH USING MONEY THE GAM HAS RAISED TO FINANCE TRIPS TO EUROPE AND OTHER LUXURIES.

9. MRS. GARCIA SAID THE ARMY'S ATTEMPT TO DISCREDIT AND SPLIT THE GAM WOULD FAIL, AND THEREFORE THE ARMY WOULD HAVE TO RESORT TO MORE VIOLENT MEANS TO REPRESS THE GAM. SHE ENDED HER MEETING WITH THE CODEL BY APPEALING TO THE MEMBERS OF THE CODEL TO HELP GUARANTEE HER PERSONAL SAFETY AND THAT OF OTHER MEMBERS OF THE GAM.

10. SHE MADE THE SAME APPEAL TO THE CHARGE AS SHEBT

WAS LEAVING THE MEETING WITH THE CODEL. LATER THAT DAY, DURING A MEETING BETWEEN PRESIDENT CEREZO, AMBASSADOR HABIB, AND THE CHARGE, THE CHARGE CONVEYED TO THE PRESIDENT USG CONCERN FOR THE SAFETY AND WELL-BEING OF MRS. GARCIA AND ALL THE GAM MEMBERS. THE PRESIDENT ASSURED THE CHARGE THAT HE WOULD DO ALL HE COULD TO PROTECT MRS. GARCIA AND THE GAM.

11. COMMENT. AFTER WITNESSING SEVERAL PREVIOUS PRESENTATIONS TO CODELS, EMBOFFS FIND THE GAM MEETING WITH CODEL MCCURDY DIFFERENT FROM PREVIOUS BRIEFINGS FOR CODELS IN THREE SIGNIFICANT AREAS. FIRST, MRS. GARCIA WAS MUCH LESS EMOTIONAL DURING HER MEETING WITH CODEL MCCURDY THAN ON PREVIOUS OCCASIONS, AND DID NOT DIRECTLY CRITICIZE THE EMBASSY OR THE USG. IN HER LAST MEETING WITH A LARGE CODEL, DURING THE DECEMBER 8 PRESIDENTIAL RUNOFF ELECTION, MRS. GARCIA DEVOTED A CONSIDERABLE PORTION OF HER TALK TO ATTACKING THE EMBASSY'S SUPPORT FOR MILITARY REGIMES SHE CONSIDERED RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DISAPPEARANCE OF HER HUSBAND. DURING THE DECEMBER MEETING SHE ALSO EJECTED AN EMBASSY OFFICER FROM THE ROOM WHEN SHE ANNOUNCED SHE WANTED TO SPEAK TO THE CONGRESSMEN AND SENATORS "IN PRIVATE." THIS TIME, THREE EMBASSY OFFICERS AND THE CHARGE WERE PRESENT THROUGHOUT HER PRESENTATION.

SECOND, THIS MARKED THE FIRST TIME MRS. GARCIA HAS OFFERED A CODEL AN ANALYSIS OF THE ROOTS OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN GUATEMALA. IN THE PAST, SHE HAS CONCENTRATED ON THE RESULTS OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE - THE DISAPPEARED RELATIVES OF GAM MEMBERS. DURING HER MEETING WITH CODEL MCCURDY, HOWEVER, SHE DELVED INTO

WHAT SHE VIEWS AS THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CAUSES OF THE VIOLENCE.

FINALLY, SHE SPENT A CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT OF TIME DENYING CHARGES THAT SHE IS ATTEMPTING TO DISCREDIT THE CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT OF VINICIO CEREZO. SHE ALSO WAS AT PAINS TO DENY CHARGES THAT SHE IS A MARXIST OR HAS ANY TIES WITH COMMUNIST GROUPS. IN THE PAST, MRS. GARCIA HAS FOCUSED MORE ON ATTACKING MILITARY GOVERNMENTS THAN DEFENDING HERSELF AND THE GAM. END COMMENT. GAMBLE

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