



FIELD REPORT: GUATEMALA PROJECT

March 2007

A request has come from Claudia Samayoa and the Unit for Protection of Human Rights Defenders of the National Movement of Human Rights of Guatemala for protective accompaniment. They have received many death threats for their courageous work of working with human rights defenders in Guatemala and believe that NP and international protective accompaniment could help protect their lives and enable them to continue their important work between April 2007 and February 15 2008. National elections will be held on Sept 7 and Nov. 9 2007 and the time leading up to the elections and for a period after the elections until the new government gets set up is a time when more violence is expected. By Feb 15th – at the latest, they expect the situation to return to “normal” and NP could end its accompaniment.

NP is providing a team of four accompaniers, including a Team Coordinator. The other three accompaniers are volunteers (meaning that they do not receive an offshore salary like Field Team Members in other NP projects) and serve in average for three months in Guatemala.

The total budget for the ten-month project is around 95.000 USD:

Need

The Unit of Protection of Human Rights Defenders have been providing protection with a low level of direct threats against the Unit until May 2006 two telephone intimidation calls where received. After that the Unit perceived acts of surveillance in front of the office. On the night of February 3rd. 2007, its offices where raided and one computer was stolen. Other offices in the same building where raided and the computers and video equipment where stolen too. In the doorknob of our office a death threat was left behind.

Several days latter, a message was sent through a family member of a member of one of the organizations of the building that indicated that the raid was done by the army. There are reasons to believe the information given is credible.

One of the members of the Unit of Protection is Claudia Samayoa who is also a member of the Convergence of Human Rights that is an organization that denounces the existence of clandestine groups, organize crime and social cleansing. Her role in this organization is to investigate those groups.

In the past during the electoral year, she was the only one doing the activities of the Unit and the activities of the Convergence that resulted in high numbers of threats that ended up in the need of international accompaniment and eventually temporary exile.

Since 2007 is an electoral year it is expected that the Unit can be subject to more violence as a group as well as Mrs. Samayoa as a human right defender. So Nonviolent Peaceforce has been asked for its intervention to provide protection for the following 10 months to the Unit.

Objectives

The objective of the project is to ensure the security of the activists of the „Unit of Protection“ against politically-motivated violence they have been threatened with through the volatile period before, during and after the September and November elections.

NP is pursuing this objective by providing individual protective accompaniment.

The work of the team

The work of the first team consisting of Project Coordinator Betsy Crites and so far two other accompaniers (both like Betsy women from the US) has only started in April and will therefore be reported on only in the next Programme Department report.

Report written by Christine Schweitzer (Programme Director)