

## GUATEMALA

# Guatemalan Indian Activist Rigoberta Menchu Arrested

After seven years of exile, four representatives of the RUOG (the United Representation of the Guatemalan Opposition) arrived in Guatemala on April 18, accompanied by a large international delegation including the aides of several U.S. Congressmen. The purpose of the RUOG's trip was to meet with Guatemala's National Reconciliation Commission and, in the words of RUOG member Rigoberta Menchu, "to observe if indeed there is a political opening in the country."

Shortly after their arrival, Indian leader Rigoberta Menchu and ex-Dean of the University of San Carlos, Dr. Rolando Castillo, were seized by anti-riot squads of the Guatemalan National Police, arrested and charged with "attacks against the internal security of the state." Two other members, Frank LaRue and Marta Gloria de Torres, were not arrested. The airport was sealed off by hundreds of security forces and local press trying to enter the airport to cover the arrival, were attacked by secret service agents who destroyed their equipment.



photo: GNIB Archive

*Rigoberta Menchu*



After the arrests, RUOG members LaRue and Torres gave an impromptu press conference. "We came to promote reconciliation between Guatemalans and thought that there had been a change in the country in regards to human rights. . . We never thought we would be welcomed by such a display of police force."

When the RUOG announced its plans to send the delegation, the Guatemalan government had said its members would be required to apply for political amnesty. Rigoberta Menchu, a Mayan Indian and internationally known defender of the rights of her people, stated that "I will not request [political] amnesty because I have done nothing wrong. My work is to denounce human rights violations, because my father, mother and brothers were assassinated." Menchu added that she is a member of the Committee for Peasant Unity (CUC), a campesino organization pushed underground by government repression in 1980.

The arrests triggered sweeping international protests. In the U.S., despite a complete lack of press coverage, many progressive organizations activated their emergency response network. Thousands of telegrams were delivered to President Vinicio Cerezo. Seven hours later, bowing in part to international pressure, the Guatemalan government released Rigoberta Menchu and Rolando Castillo.

In support of the RUOG, thousands of university students and members of the Mutual Support Group organized with signs and banners and marched through the streets of Guatemala City to the Court of Justice. After Menchu and Castillo were released, the students continued to the hotel where the RUOG delegation and the international observers were staying. There, an informal gathering took place outside the hotel in spite of the obvious presence of intelligence service personnel taking notes on the attendants.

The atmosphere was particularly tense due to a full-page advertisement published in the Guatemalan press the previous day by Mano Blanca, threatening the life of the RUOG members should they return. Mano Blanca is the pseudonym for a death squad that has operated for many years in the country.

According to LaRue, "Mano Blanca now represents the dissenting sectors in the military," which are opposed to any Guatemalan participation in the Central America peace process. To compound the threat, the offices of Mexicana (the airline which flew in the delegation) were bombed in Guatemala City.



*In spite of the publicized "democratic" government in Guatemala, repression and injustice against indigenous people continues.*

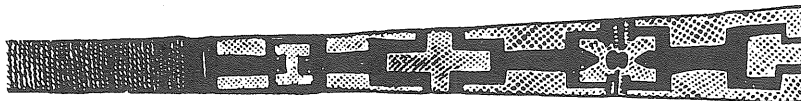
The RUOG was formed by prominent Guatemalans in exile in 1982, at the height of the massacres committed against the country's population. Since then it has operated internationally (in particular at the United Nations) to denounce the government-sponsored repression against the people of Guatemala.

In spite of the difficult political climate, and in part because of manifestations of popular support, RUOG members decided to continue with the planned schedule of meetings for the week but had to forego trips to Quiche and Solola.

During the week, meetings were held with the National Reconciliation Commission, the Archbishop, the Human Rights Attorney, the newly-established International Red Cross and the Congressional Human Rights Commission. A series of meetings also took place with unions and other popular sectors. Included in the meetings were the Unity for Labor and Popular Action (UASP),

labor federations (UNSITRAGUA, CUSG, CTGT, FENASTEG), some of the largest unions (STINDE) and a student coordinating body representing several campus associations.

(Adopted from an article by Daniele Ross-deutscher of the Guatemala News and Information Bureau (GNIB).)



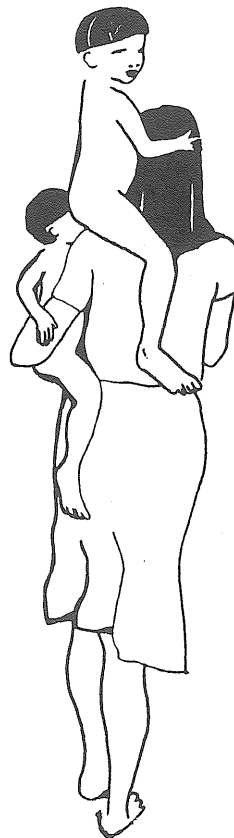
## Guatemalan Indian Woman Abducted

On July 4th or 5th, Maria Elena Gaspar Xum-pax (21 years old), a Canjobal Indian who has resided in Indiantown, Florida, since 1979, was abducted when she returned to her village in the Huehuetenango Province of Guatemala. Gagged and blindfolded on the street in Barillas, she was taken away in a car by men in plainclothes. She was held incommunicado without food for more than three days, and was apparently tortured. Maria Elena has now been released and is back home in Florida.

Please send letters denouncing these actions to:

Hon. President Cerezo  
Palacio Nacional - Zona 1  
Guatemala City,  
Guatemala, C.A.

Hon. Gen. Hector Gramajo  
Ministro de Defensa  
Palacio Nacional - Zona 1  
Guatemala City,  
Guatemala, C.A.



DESIGNO: MARIA CAROLINA