

October 25, 1982

To: Elliott Abrams

Subject: Conference: Guatemalan Human Rights

A conference on "Human Rights in Guatemala" was held Friday, October 21 at Johns Hopkins' SAIS, organized by WOLA and SAIS (ref. attached agenda). Attendance came to around 200, including considerable press. It was announced at the outset that the scheduled evening panel discussion had been canceled because the State Department had indicated it would be unable to attend (laughter), and apparently Guatemalan Embassy participation had been contingent on our presence. WOLA's Reggie Norton (the main organizer, from Gibraltar) then explained why the conference was being held (ref. attached). He warned that the Administration (Steve Bosworth) was preparing to argue the GCG deserves military aid, despite evidence from WOLA, Amnesty International, and many others.

Joe Eldridge then introduced Patt Derian with extensive praise. Patt identified herself sarcastically as our "language instructor", referring to euphemisms for helping "murderous governments", e.g. the Argentine and Chilean. By the "Theory of Relativity" Rios Montt is "better than Lucas". But human rights are not relative; they are clearly spelled out. Reagan says we should not impose our values on others. That is dishonest. We say one thing and demonstrate the opposite. For some purposes we are quite ready to squeeze other Governments. For example, during Koreagate the USG went all out to get Tengsun Park. But only after a bitter bureaucratic fight would we make a modest effort on behalf of the unjustly jailed Kim Dae-Jung. Today we have a deliberate policy of being anti-human rights, worse than under Kissinger. Look at the Washington Post revelations on U.S. Captain Garcia in Guatemala. We are giving Rios Montt help in improving the GCG image, that is, "in evading U.S. law". We had thought the passage of laws would protect the human rights policy, but apparently not.

The next speaker was the Rev. James Dekker, of the Christian Reformed Church, who returned here in September after three years in Guatemala. A resume of his comments is attached. Dekker argued that after brief improvement the Rios Montt Government had escalated "violations in nearly all areas".

A Quiche Indian, Jose Efrain Rosales Marroquin, then spoke in Spanish through an interpreter. He described atrocities in his area with great feeling. Part of his statement is attached. Rosales pleaded that we stop the sending of helicopters, arms and money to the OOG.

The next speaker was Ronald Hoenes, of the Guatemalan Human Rights Commission, apparently substituting for Adrian Sandoval, the Commission President. Hoenes had just arrived here after being "forced to flee" Guatemala. He described the current situation as appalling and the OOG as "one of the most brutal in the world". At times Hoenes was close to tears. At the end he was asked whether he had ever talked with the USO. Hoenes said he had never had an opportunity to do so. One questioner quoted Elliott Abrams as claiming last Tuesday (Oct. 19) that the Guatemalan situation "had improved since July". In reply Hoenes described the San Francisco massacre of July 18. He asserted the Guatemalan Army converts recruits into "monsters" who sometimes actually eat the hearts of dead victims. Hoenes admitted the guerrillas were also guilty of human rights violations but claimed they did not conduct massacres.

Dans Martin, currently with WOLA and a Protestant lay missionary who served three years in Guatemala, then described his recent return there in preparation for the Oxford America Impact Audit update, soon to be released. His full statement (I believe) is attached.

I did not hear the next speaker, Craig Nelson of the Institute for Policy Studies (see program). I was told later he had criticized the Department for worrying about the Miskitos but not the Indians of Guatemala.

At the break for lunch I gave my cards to both Hoenes and Rosales Marroquin, suggesting they call me at any time. Both seemed very pleased.

There was a photo display plus two or three documentaries, which I did not see.

After lunch the conference broke up into workshops. I did not attend.

I missed the press conference. Joe Eldridge told me the GOC had invited the National Conference of Churches to visit the Chimaltenango area, where the Army allegedly has surrounded 5,000 Indians.

George Lister

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cc: Charles Fairbanks, Bob Snyder