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Guatemalan Women Are Being Murdered In The Thousands — Who Will Put An End To The Violence?

—By Karen Musalo and Felecia Bartow at the Center for Gender & Refugee Studies (CGRS)

Published: October, 2006

In just the past five years, over 2,200 young Guatemalan women have been murdered and no one knows who is responsible for their deaths.

Local activists now refer to this human rights crisis as a “femicide” due to the fact that these gender-motivated killings are carried out with extreme brutality specific to the victims as women. Alarmingly, the same phenomenon is also on the rise in other parts of Latin America.

These killings are notable not only for their brutality, but also for the continuing impunity — or exemption from punishment — of those responsible. There have been just twelve successful prosecutions since the killings began, and less than 10 percent of the reported cases of femicide in Guatemala have even been investigated.

In Guatemala, like other countries, there is systematic tolerance for violence against women; one-third of all murders of women in that country are believed to be the consequence of domestic violence, and the legal system does little, if anything, to protect them. This was the case for Rodi Alvarado, a Guatemalan asylum seeker who now lives in the Bay Area.

Rodi Alvarado suffered a decade of brutal battering by her husband, a former soldier. Despite her repeated attempts to seek protection, the police and the courts refused to intervene. Desperate to save her life, Rodi fled to the U.S., leaving her two children with relatives. Rodi's asylum case, which has been pending for eight years, is the subject of intense scrutiny as it will likely decide the future fate of other domestic violence survivors seeking protection in the U.S.

In Guatemala, women like Rodi Alvarado are being raped, mutilated, and murdered every day. The Center for Gender & Refugee Studies (CGRS), which is based in San Francisco, is working to defend asylum for Rodi Alvarado and other women fleeing domestic violence and other fundamental human rights violations. CGRS also seeks to highlight and address the root causes that force these women to flee in the first place.

Please help end violence against women in Guatemala by joining CGRS's campaign to stop the femicides. Visit cgrs.uchastings.edu to learn more about Rodi Alvarado's story and to help preserve asylum in the U.S. for women fleeing domestic violence and other human rights violations. Karen Musalo is the founding Director of the Center for Gender & Refugee Studies (CGRS) and a professor at the UC Hastings College of the Law. Musalo is also Rodi Alvarado's attorney. Felecia Bartow is the Development/Communications Director at CGRS.