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PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF ALL HUMAN RIGHTS, CIVIL, POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS, INCLUDING THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT

**Written statement* submitted by Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental
organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is
circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[20 February 2008]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the
submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Violence against women: The case of Guatemala

Despite the peace treaty of 1996 which was meant to put an end to the horror of the war and to pacify the country, violence in general and in particular against women have been growing alarmingly fast in Guatemala. On 8 March 2005, a Special Commission for the Investigation on Femicide in Guatemala was established, chaired by the Minister of Women's Affairs, Mrs Gabriela Núñez Pérez. This special focus on the tragic fate of more and more women in Guatemala who become victims of sexual abuse and homicide is highly appropriate.

Among the victims is a considerable number of women of Maya descent. No one knows exactly how many are to be bemoaned as there is no data material that indicates indigenous status. Society for Threatened Peoples (STP) acts on the assumption that the number of victims of femicide of indigenous origin can hardly be overestimated. In fact Maya women are at the losing end of the social scale in many respects: as women in a male-dominated country, as members of a discriminated indigenous people that is being suppressed despite the fact that it forms the majority of the population, and as female victims of harassment, sexual abuse and homicide. They are an eminently vulnerable group, easy prey for violence. Therefore, in order to recognize the dimension of the tragic fate of indigenous women in Guatemala, it would be preferable not only to prosecute cases of violence a lot more extensively than it is being done but to analyze the data also according to ethnic criteria.

During counterinsurgency campaigns led by the Guatemalan army during the early 1980s the vast majority of women who became victims of human rights violations were members of Mayan indigenous groups living in rural areas. Today most of the reported murder victims in Guatemala are ladino women living in urban areas of the country. But many cases remain unreported because relatives are too scared to approach the authorities. Women – mostly between the age 13 and 30 – are raped, tortured, mutilated, murdered, and often left behind in very public places. These brutal murders and the failure of the state to address them properly have left women terrified. Cases of violence against women are rarely prosecuted. Therefore it is impossible to provide exact data on the number of victims. All sources agree, though, that since 2000 homicides against women in Guatemala are increasing considerably each year. Thus according to one source, 665 cases were registered in 2005; 527 in 2004; 383 in 2003 and 163 in 2002. Altogether up to 3,200 women were murdered from 2000 until the end of 2007. Their murderers have been encouraged by the failure of the prosecution to bring them to court and the high probability to remain unpunished.

STP acknowledges that Guatemala has ratified the majority of international and regional instruments providing protection for women's rights, among others the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (1982), its Optional Protocol (2002) as well as the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (1995). Moreover Guatemala's Constitution affirms the principle of equality between the sexes. However, the authorities failed to install an effective justice system offering the women efficient protection. Characteristically, the penal code does not define violence against women in the family, including marital rape, and sexual harassment as a criminal offence. But domestic violence is responsible for many of the crimes committed against women.

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the Human Rights Council to:

- address femicide in Guatemala,
- urge the Government of Guatemala to end impunity for perpetrators of sexual violence and to provide a more efficient protection for women,
- ask the Government of Guatemala to launch special programmes to assist and support indigenous women who are especially threatened to become victims of sexual violence.
