

# Guatemala 'Genocide' Probe Blames State

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A report on human rights in Guatemala during the country's 36-year civil war has accused the state of undeniable responsibility for genocide.

The report by the Historical Clarification Commission said the majority of human rights violations against the country's indigenous Mayan people occurred with the knowledge or by order of the highest authorities of the state.

The co-ordinator for the commission, Mr. Christian Tomuschat, said that after investigating thousands of cases of torture, disappearance and executions, they concluded that at least 200,000 people had died. Hundreds of villages were destroyed and more than one million people driven from their homes during the conflict. State forces are blamed for more than 93% of documented violations of human rights.

## Massive toll

Central America correspondent Peter Greste says it is hard to overstate the scale of Guatemala's civil war that ended just three years ago.

In one of the earliest counter-insurgency operations in 1966, the military killed an estimated 10,000 people to eliminate a band of just 100 rebels.

The need for Guatemalans to document the past and know the truth has driven this commission through its 18-month investigation into human rights violations.

A team of more than 100 human rights workers collected 8,000 testimonies from victims and their families. They interviewed key witnesses, including former military chiefs and guerrilla leaders.

They also conducted 80 detailed investigations into what they described as illustrated cases.

## War crime trials?

According to Nobel laureate, Rigoberta Menchu, with the memory of the war still fresh in the minds of millions of Guatemalans, expectations for the report are enormous.

It could force international calls to consider war crimes prosecutions.

At the very least, human rights workers hope the report will start the process of prosecutions inside Guatemala. To date no senior military officer has ever been convicted of abuses.

The workers also hope it will encourage reconciliation and set up ways to ensure that the war can never be repeated.