



PAINING REALISED BY FAMILY MEMBERS OF THE VICTIMS of Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa, Guatemala

WE NEED EVERYBODY TO KNOW



The conflict

The mural painting presented here was realised by family members of victims of the internal armed conflict in Guatemala. With this painting the families, both adults and young people, wanted to visualise the acts of violence that took place in Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa on the south coast of Guatemala, and the consequences of this violence for the victims. The violent conflict lasted for 36 years (1960 – 1996) and, according to the Historical Clarification Commission of the United Nations, in that period approximately 200,000 persons died or were disappeared, the majority at the end of the 70s and at the beginning of the 80s. Until this day, none of those responsible for the atrocities committed in Santa Lucía during the conflict have been judged.

Santa Lucía

The work of the group of family members of victims of Santa Lucía illustrates the enormous strength of the survivors. The objective of the group, which consists mainly of women, is to dignify their loved ones, to reconstruct and write down historical memories, to demand reparations, and seek justice. They organised themselves, accompanied an exhumation process, exchanged experiences with other victim groups, etc. As part of this process they realised a book with testimonies entitled, “Because we wanted to get out of so much poverty” (in Spanish “Porque queríamos salir de tanta pobreza”). In the book members of the group speak about the lives of the persons that were murdered or disappeared as well as about the impact this had on the surviving family members. With their work they want to contribute to the creation of a state where the rule of law prevails and in which human rights are respected and impunity is no longer the norm. In this effort the group is accompanied by various organisations, including the Association Verdad y Vida, ACJ, ECAP, FAF-G, the AHPN, Avanco and Impunity Watch.

Mural painting

With this mural both youngsters and adults paint what the book expresses in words and photos, thus contributing to a tradition to visualize history in images. The survivors of the conflict share their stories with younger generations. These young people generally have no knowledge about the conflict, its causes and consequences, because it is not spoken about in their families, nor in their schools. The citations of several persons that participated in this process demonstrate the process of reflection that this activity provoked. The painting is an educational tool and will be used in schools and with other groups to share the history of Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa, in the hope that this will contribute to reflection and change, so that the youth of Guatemala will one day live in a country that respects the human rights of all its citizens.

Impunity Watch

Impunity Watch (IW) supports and aims to strengthen the work of victim organisations – like the group of Santa Lucía. IW believes that it is key that victims of armed conflict can make their voices heard, claim their basic rights and become key actors in processes of peace building, truth finding, justice, reparations and non-recurrence. IW facilitates connections between local victim groups and relevant processes at the national and international level. In this way victim groups get to know both these processes as well as relevant key actors, while at the same time being able to influence them. IW moreover works to facilitate contacts with diplomatic sectors to ensure that victims’ voices are being heard at these levels and to strengthen the position of victim groups. IW facilitates exchanges between victim groups of different regions in an effort to contribute to their processes of formation, to increase their knowledge about other initiatives and to create support networks.

www.impunitywatch.org



In my painting appear several women holding hands. This is a representation of the group of women that has been formed now and that jointly work towards a better future.

Mardoqueo, 30 años



I painted the exhumation because this is something we achieved. The fact that we achieved this exhumation strengthened us. We have the hope to find our loved ones, even if it is only their remains.

Dora, 50 años



We need everybody to know what happened in Guatemala. Many people say that we have to leave the past alone, that we have to forget, but no, the past leads to the present.

Pedro, 19 años



I like to work on mural paintings because there is much participation. Because of the mural paintings the people become aware of history, because they see that our history, our culture, is still alive.

Cristian, 18 años



Our parents fought for a just salary in the sugarcane industry and also for a dignified home. We painted the cross, the little house, the bible, the flower, the maize and the sugarcane. We thought that these things, that were very important, should decorate the border of the painting.

Alicia, 45 años



I painted what my aunts told me had happened to my grandfather. He was picked up from his house, from there they took him in a pick-up with black windows, they put him in there and took him away. They never heard of him again. It is 33 years since he was disappeared and my father was about to turn four years old when they took him.

Paola, 13 años



This activity helps us to cope, to better understand what happened in the period of the armed conflict. I would like to keep on realising activities like this one so that other youngsters and children that are growing up become aware of the suffering of our families and so that they know the history of our place.

Carolina, 16 años



At the time when we were making the mural painting, I felt the same as at the moment when these things happened, like when they took my brother. But in the end I felt satisfied because working all together, united, is very beautiful and we know that with this painting the history of Santa Lucía will remain.

Rosa, 54 años