



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

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## Guatemalans refuse to serve in civil patrols, 1988-1993

*Time period notes: During the Guatemalan civil war*

March

1988

to:

1993

**Country:** Guatemala

**Location City/State/Province:** Quiche

**Location Description:** South Quiche, the Guatemalan highlands

### Goals:

The goal was to uphold Article 34 of the Guatemalan constitution, which prohibited forced servitude. The campaigners worked to successfully refuse service in the Civil Defense Patrols (PAC, "Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil").

“We demand enforcement of Article 34... We the people of Quiche refused to serve in the patrols. We want the army OUT of our communities.”

After 1988 Article 34 became less of platform for defense and the campaigners focused on the goal of refusing service in the PACs and dismantling the PACs altogether.

## Methods

### Methods in 1st segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 004. Signed public statements
- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 101. Refusal of impressed labor
- 120. Withholding or withdrawal of allegiance
- 121. Refusal of public support
- 128. Boycott of government-supported institutions
- 129. Refusal of assistance to enforcement agents
- 139. Noncooperation with conscription and deportation
- 140. Hiding, escape, and false identities
- 171. Nonviolent interjection
- 174. Establishing new social patterns

### Methods in 2nd segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 101. Refusal of impressed labor
- 120. Withholding or withdrawal of allegiance
- 121. Refusal of public support
- 128. Boycott of government-supported institutions
- 129. Refusal of assistance to enforcement agents
- 139. Noncooperation with conscription and deportation
- 140. Hiding, escape, and false identities
- 171. Nonviolent interjection
- 174. Establishing new social patterns

**Methods in 3rd segment:**

- 101. Refusal of impressed labor
- 120. Withholding or withdrawal of allegiance
- 121. Refusal of public support
- 128. Boycott of government-supported institutions
- 129. Refusal of assistance to enforcement agents
- 139. Noncooperation with conscription and deportation
- 140. Hiding, escape, and false identities
- 171. Nonviolent interjection
- 174. Establishing new social patterns

**Methods in 4th segment:**

- 101. Refusal of impressed labor
- 120. Withholding or withdrawal of allegiance
- 121. Refusal of public support
- 128. Boycott of government-supported institutions
- 129. Refusal of assistance to enforcement agents
- 139. Noncooperation with conscription and deportation
- 140. Hiding, escape, and false identities
- 171. Nonviolent interjection
- 174. Establishing new social patterns

**Methods in 5th segment:**

- 101. Refusal of impressed labor
- 120. Withholding or withdrawal of allegiance
- 121. Refusal of public support
- 128. Boycott of government-supported institutions
- 129. Refusal of assistance to enforcement agents
- 139. Noncooperation with conscription and deportation
- 140. Hiding, escape, and false identities

**Methods in 6th segment:**

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 038. Marches
- 039. Parades

- 101. Refusal of impressed labor
- 120. Withholding or withdrawal of allegiance
- 121. Refusal of public support
- 128. Boycott of government-supported institutions
- 129. Refusal of assistance to enforcement agents
- 139. Noncooperation with conscription and deportation
- 140. Hiding, escape, and false identities

**Additional methods (Timing Unknown):**

- 020. Prayer and worship
- 034. Vigils
- 037. Singing
- 040. Religious processions

**Notes on Methods:**

PBI utilized Third Party Nonviolent Intervention during segments 1-4 with methods that included accompaniment, observation/monitoring, and presence.

## Classifications

**Classification:**

Change

**Cluster:**

Democracy

Human Rights

Peace

**Group characterization:**

- Guatemalan Mayan Indians

## Leaders, partners, allies, elites

**Leaders:**

Amilcar Mendez- an educated half Indian and half Caucasian charismatic leader for the Quiche people.

Council of Ethnic Communities “Runujel Junam” or “Everyone Equal” (CERJ)

**Partners:**

Archbishop Penados

Peasant Unity Committee (CUC)

**External allies:**

Peace Brigades International (PBI), Amnesty International, Americas Watch, The World Organization Against Torture, Central American solidarity organizations

Catholic Church

Kennedy Center for Human Rights

The Conference of Evangelical Churches of Guatemala

**Involvement of social elites:**

Vitalino Simolox, a protestant Pastor

## Joining/exiting order of social groups

**Groups in 1st Segment:**

- Americas Watch (exit)
- Amnesty International
- Archbishop Penados (exit) PBI
- CUC
- Catholic Church
- Central American solidarity organizations (exit)
- The World Organization Against Torture (exit)

**Groups in 2nd Segment:**

- Vitalino Simolox (exit)

**Groups in 3rd Segment:**

**Groups in 4th Segment:**

- PBI (exit)

**Groups in 5th Segment:**

**Groups in 6th Segment:**

- Kennedy Center for Human Rights

**Additional notes on joining/exiting order:**

Christian Base Communities in Guatemala were also averting participation in PAC throughout the campaign

**Segment Length:** *Approximately 1 year*

## Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

**Opponents:**

President Cerezo

Guatemalan military

Guatemalan human rights ombudsman, which was an "independent office established by the 1985 constitution to respond to citizen complaints"

**Nonviolent responses of opponent:**

Not known

**Campaigner violence:**

Not known

**Repressive Violence:**

Military assassinated campaign leaders

Participants were threatened and intimidated into complacency with civil patrol conscription

Incarceration and torture

## Success Outcome

### Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

5 points out of 6 points

### Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

### Growth:

2 points out of 3 points

### Notes on outcomes:

The campaigners persistently cooperated to resist service in the PACs despite government violence and oppression. The campaigners were able to organize a way to not cooperate with government enforced service in the PACs. But the complete dissolution of the PACs turned out to be a more complicated goal and was not completely achieved.

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From 1961 to 1996 Guatemalans endured a bloody civil war. During this conflict the military-controlled government fought the leftist guerillas or the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG). These groups fought each other for political control. The extreme violence pushed many indigenous Guatemalans high into the country's highlands or displaced them as refugees into other countries. The indigenous populations became targets for guerilla recruits and government repression. The location of Mayan Guatemalans in the highlands was viewed as a threat to the government because many of the guerilla groups hid in the mountains. Due to the close proximity between indigenous groups and guerilla fighters, the government targeted indigenous groups in military maneuvers because they were likely to sympathize with guerillas and had potential to become future guerillas. In this way the government violently oppressed the Mayan Guatemalans.

In 1981, military dictator Jose Efraim Rios Montt established the "Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil", or civil patrols (PAC), to better control the potentially threatening civilian population in Guatemala. All Mayan men, even as young as eight years old, were obligated to participate in the civil patrols. The patrol members were required to accompany soldiers, provide manual labor for military maneuvers, monitor indigenous communities, and participate in combat as well. Their workweek in these patrols could be up to 24 hours. The work was undesirable because of inadequate pay, long hours, and its interruption of their agricultural work that sustained families and communities. Those who served in the civil patrols were often ordered to commit violent acts and murders against people in their own village. Those who refused to serve were intimidated and threatened until they submitted. Refusal to submit was seen as an indication of opposition and the soldiers killed those who posed opposition. Therefore, Mayans had very little power to leverage in successfully resisting service in the civil patrols.

In 1985, Guatemalan government officials, under President Cerezo, wrote a new constitution. The 34th article of the constitution stated "that no Guatemalan could be forced into servitude." With this change in legislation, Mayan campesinos began asking the charismatic leader and activist Amilcar Mendez if this meant they could discontinue their forced participation in the civil patrols. Mendez encouraged the resistance and coordinated the nonviolent third party intervention of Peace Brigades International (PBI). The international accompaniments accompanied the Mayans to meet with political leaders, but the local military intelligence department continued to successfully intimidate the Mayans, who were not able to resist serving in the PAC. Mendez was then exiled to Canada but returned in 1988 to continue his work in Guatemala.

Mendez began organizing with the Mayans of Quiche. During March of 1988, residents of Zacualpa villages delivered a letter to the President Cerezo to demand that the government enforce the constitutional prohibition against forced servitude (Article 34). The letter also noted the acts of intimidation by military enforcement. In May 1988, labor movement campaigners demonstrated

at the capital. Mendez led about forty Quiche Mayans to the capital carrying banners that read, “We demand enforcement of Article 34” and “We the people of Quiche refuse to serve in the patrols. We want the army OUT of our communities.” Later in May, campesinos from San Andres, Sacjabajá, and Laguna Seca sent the government human rights ombudsman their letters of formal refusal to serve.

By the end of May, Zacualpa civil patrol leaders detained Marcos Canil Saquic, a signer of the letter, and interrogated him until he disclosed the names of other organizers and participants in the resistance. Mendez’ life was being threatened publicly so PBI, Amnesty International, Americas Watch, the World Organization Against Torture, and Central American solidarity organizations intervened to ensure the safety of Mendez. He was accompanied by internationals wherever he went. Throughout June and July Mendez met with communities in the highland to rally support for the campaign against the PAC.

On 31 July 1988, Quiche campesinos and Mendez founded the Council of Ethnic Communities “Runujel Junam” or “Everyone Equal” (CERJ). The group set a platform for their organization and movement against ethnic and cultural discrimination. CERJ was able to further organize and strengthen the campaign against PAC enforced participation. In three months of activity, 78 villages were resisting service in the patrols. The government continued their tactics of repression against the participants in the campaign. But by mid-1989 at least 7,000 Mayans refused PAC service.

Two weeks after CERJ was founded, the military killed activists Pedro Cumes Perez and Valerio Chijal. By November, two more CERJ activists had disappeared. Mendez brought international and national attention to the deaths. He distributed copies of Article 34 among Quiche residents so they could campaign effectively. PBI spent 4 years in Quiche accompanying Mendez and other leaders in the campaign.

CERJ and the Quiche community continued to fight for dismantling the civil patrols. In July 1993 two patrollers, from the village of Xemal, who refused to rejoin the PAC were killed. On 3 August 1993, 4,000 people from Xemal and the neighboring villages took to the streets and protested the actions of PAC and demanded the end of patrols.

By 1994 the government began converting civil patrols into “development patrols.” This complicated the campaign for refusal of service in the PAC. Although the formal campaign officially ended due to this complication, CERJ continued to work for Mayan human rights. In December 1995 Amilcar Mendez was elected into the Guatemalan Congress. In 1996 CERJ became one of the main actors to initiate negotiations with the URNG and the Guatemalan government to dismantle the civil patrols. Recent sources continue to warn against the remnants of PACs, which became organizations with new names or unofficial powers in the highlands.

## Research Notes

### Influences:

1) Previous peasant movements in Guatemala for land and equality. Archbishop Oscar Romero, Christian Base Communities who had been living a life of noncompliance and resistance against the Guatemalan government.

2) The future campaigns of CERJ

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