

# Bolivia



La Paz, Bolivia. Mural on the wall of a park in memorial of persons who disappeared during Banzer's regime. *Photo courtesy of Roberto Guerra.*

**In 2006, EAAF conducted two missions to Bolivia. During its mission to Santa Cruz de la Sierra, EAAF assisted on the search for the remains of José Luis Ibsen at the request of ASOFAMD and CIEDEF. EAAF also participated in a seminar on forensic investigations organized by CIEDEF in La Paz.**

## BACKGROUND

Between 1964 and 1982, Bolivia was primarily led by military rule.<sup>1</sup> The reformist party, Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (*Movimiento*

*Nacionalista Revolucionario*, MNR), had held the Bolivian Presidency from 1952 until 1964, but increasing conflicts between government-armed militias, and between political leaders within the MNR, forced the government to

rely on the army to keep control.<sup>2</sup> In 1964, General René Barrientos Ortuño led a military coup, claiming the need to restore social order.<sup>3</sup> This began the 18 years of military governments lasting until 1982. During this time, security forces allegedly committed massive human rights violations, including torture, disappearances, forced exile, illegal detentions, and arbitrary executions.<sup>4</sup> In 1971, segments of the MNR cooperated with the military to install General Hugo Banzer Suárez as President. In 1974, General Banzer consolidated his power by removing MNR civilian politicians from his government, replacing them with military

appointments.<sup>5</sup> During his rule, priority was placed on social order and there was a suspension of political activities and crackdowns on labor organizations.<sup>6</sup> General Banzer was forced to call elections in 1978 due to economic instability. From 1978 to 1980, six subsequent interim and military governments were unable to hold power for prolonged periods.

In 1980, General Luis García Meza led another military coup, promising to hold democratic elections in one year. His time in office was allegedly marked by severe human rights abuses and corruption tied to the international narcotics trade.<sup>7</sup> Upon announcing his Presidency would continue beyond the stipulated year, popular unrest forced him from office. Thereafter followed another series of short-lived military governments, which gave way to an elected civilian government in 1982.<sup>8</sup>

According to the Association of Families of the Disappeared and Martyrs for National Liberation (ASOFAMD), a Bolivian NGO, over 14,000 persons were illegally detained, at least 6,000 went into exile, and nearly 150 disappeared during the military dictatorships from 1964 to 1982.<sup>9</sup> Further, during the 1970s, Bolivia was involved in Operation Condor, the covert exchange of intelligence and political prisoners among Latin American governments.<sup>10</sup> According to ASOFAMD, of the 76 Bolivians who disappeared

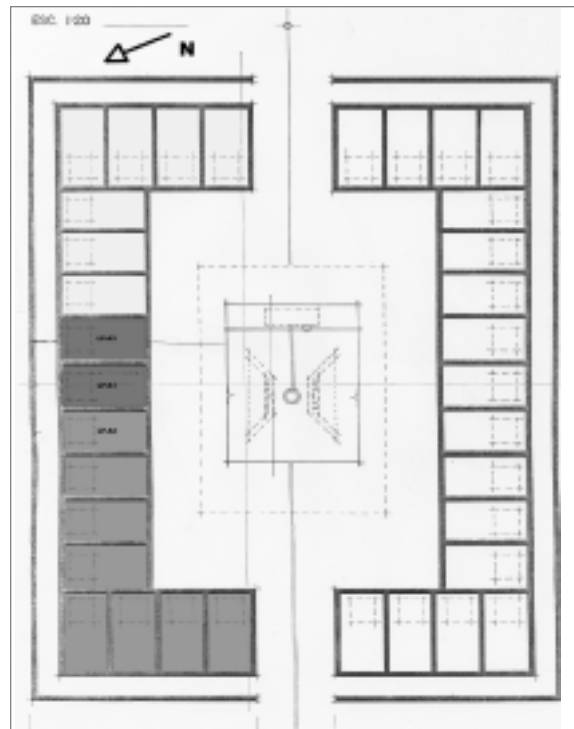
during General Banzer's regime, 35 disappeared in Argentina and 8 in Chile.<sup>11</sup>

### Accountability

Upon the return of democracy in 1982, President Hernán Siles Suazo appointed the National Commission of Inquiry into Disappearances,<sup>12</sup> a bicameral congressional commission that was the first investigation of its kind in Latin America.<sup>13</sup> The Commission investigated cases of disappearances, but not other violations such as torture or illegal detention.<sup>14</sup> However, judicial cases related to the commission did not progress because of a lack of political or financial support and those indicted were released.<sup>15</sup> The Commission disbanded after two years without presenting a final report.<sup>16</sup>

As part of a separate proceeding, in 1984, a group of civil, labor, and religious organizations lobbied Congress to launch the "Trial of Responsibilities against Luis García Meza Tejada" to investigate crimes committed during his regime.<sup>17</sup> In 1986, Congress presented the case before the Supreme Court, but, reportedly to protect General Banzer, banned possible inquiries into human rights violations that occurred under other regimes.<sup>18</sup> In 1993, the Supreme Court sentenced García Meza to 30 years in prison. His former minister of the interior, Luis Arce Gómez, and other close supporters, were also convicted.<sup>19</sup> García Meza himself, having fled to Brazil, was extradited in 1995 to serve a 30-year jail term.<sup>20</sup> Banzer later returned to serve as democratically-elected President from 1997 to 2001, before ill health forced him to step down and ultimately lead to his death in 2002.<sup>21</sup>

In 2000, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights of the Organization of American States held the Bolivian state accountable for the disappearance of the university student José Carlos Trujillo Oroza, which occurred in the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra in 1971. The court ordered the state to pay reparations to the family, locate and return the remains, and prosecute those responsible.<sup>22</sup> The decision was an important step towards overturning impunity in Bolivia.<sup>23</sup>



A map of the burials in the ASOFAMD Mausoleum, which allegedly contains the remains of persons disappeared during Banzer's regime. Photo courtesy of ASOFAMD.

In 2003, the Bolivian government formed the Inter-institutional Council to Solve Cases of Forced Disappearances (CIEDEF) in order to investigate around 150 cases of state-sponsored disappearances that took place between 1964 and 1982. In 2006, the Inter-American Court declared that progress in this regard had been slow, specifically in relation to recognition of the legal necessity to locate and return remains.<sup>24</sup>

## EAAF Participation

At the request of ASOFAMD, EAAF has conducted missions to Bolivia in 1991, 1995, 1996, 1997, and 2004. In 1995 and 1996, EAAF had helped locate the remains of Che Guevara and his comrades in the interior of Bolivia. In 2006, EAAF traveled twice to Bolivia as part of a delegation sponsored by the Argentine Fund for Bilateral Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (FO-AR).

### First 2006 Mission

At the request of ASOFAMD and CIEDEF, Silvana Turner traveled to Santa Cruz de la Sierra from September 5 to 8, 2006. The objective of the trip included advising the local District Attorney's Office on the search for the remains of José Luis Ibsen Peña, who disappeared on February 28, 1973, and acting as a consultant for CIEDEF on the recovery of remains of people reportedly assassinated and/or disappeared between the 1960s and the 1980s.

Rainer Ibsen Cárdenas, a 22-year-old university student, was reportedly

detained by state agents in Santa Cruz de la Sierra in October 1971 and executed in a staged escape on June 21, 1972. In 1973, while searching for his son, José Luis Ibsen Peña also disappeared. In 2005, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights declared the Ibsen case admissible.<sup>25</sup>

As mentioned before, in 2000, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights of the Organization of American States held the Bolivian State accountable for the disappearance of the university student José Carlos Trujillo Oroza, which occurred in the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra in 1971. The court ordered the state to pay reparations to the family, locate and return the remains, and prosecute those responsible.<sup>26</sup> That same year, the case against those allegedly involved with the disappearance of Trujillo Oroza was expanded by the First Criminal Chamber of the Superior District Court of Santa Cruz to include the cases of Rainer Ibsen Cárdenas and José Luis Ibsen Peña.<sup>27</sup> Investigations into their fates are being carried out in the 7th District Court of Santa Cruz.<sup>28</sup> Both Trujillo Oroza and Jose Luis Ibsen Peña had been detained at the state prison El Parí, in Santa Cruz de la Sierra.

At the request of the District Attorney's Office, EAAF visited La Cuchilla cemetery in Santa Cruz de la Sierra to evaluate the excavations conducted recently by members of the Institute of Forensic Investigations in relation to the Trujillo Oroza, Ibsen Peña and Ibsen Cárdenas case. The district attorney assigned to the case, Dr. Pilar Cuellar, had ordered

the search for clandestine burials of disappeared persons in La Cuchilla in an effort to locate the remains of José Luis Ibsen Peña. According to testimonials, trucks were known to have entered the cemetery carrying corpses. The excavations in the section of the cemetery for unmarked burials was first done by hand and then with a backhoe. It produced inconclusive results, and it remained unclear whether or not the recovered skeletal remains are relevant to the current investigation. EAAF met with officials from the district attorney's office in charge of the investigation, with the two forensic doctors involved in the case, with ASOFAMD representatives, and with relatives of the victims in order to assess the course of the exhumations. Based on this information, EAAF made recommendations to the District Attorney's Office on how to continue the forensic investigation. These included ceasing excavation by backhoe and pursuing further analysis of the remains recovered. DNA testing at a Bolivian laboratory was planned at the time of EAAF's visit.

In addition, EAAF met with Danilo Villamor, a physical anthropologist working for the National Archaeology Department of the Vice-Ministry of Culture (DINAR), and other Bolivian forensic scientists. They discussed collaborating on the investigation of past human rights violation cases and the strengthening of local forensic anthropology. EAAF would provide theoretical and practical training.

EAAF also gave a lecture on forensic anthropology to graduate legal med-

icine students at Gabriel René Moreno Science University, in Santa Cruz de la Sierra.

### Second 2006 Mission

Between October 30 and November 1, 2006, Silvana Turner traveled to La Paz to participate in the CIEDEF-organized seminar “Application of Forensic Anthropology to the Investigation of Forced Disappearances.”

Following meetings with the justice minister’s legal advisor and CIEDEF’s technical team, CIEDEF requested EAAF’s technical assistance in the search for persons that disappeared between 1964 and 1982. The project

entails investigating over 150 cases of Bolivians who disappeared during the military regimes of Hugo Banzer, Alberto Natusch Busch, and Luis García Meza, including guerrillas who disappeared at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s in the regions of Teoponte and Ñanchahuazú. The Teoponte case involved the exhumation and analysis of skeletal remains corresponding to 26 of the 47 guerrillas reportedly killed by the Bolivian army in 1970. As part of the preliminary staging, the team recommended advancing the historical investigation of the case, contacting and interviewing families of the persons killed in

Teoponte, collecting their physical data, and gathering additional information on burial sites.

The request from CIEDEF includes also training local professionals in forensic anthropology.

The team also was requested by ASOFAMD to consult in 2007 about remains of the disappeared in the ASOFAMD mausoleum located in the General cemetery of La Paz. The government has given the alleged identities of these remains, among them Rainer Ibsen Cárdenas, but none of these identifications have been assessed scientifically.

### ENDNOTES

1. Bolivia’s military rulers included General René Barrientos Ortuño, 1964-1969; General Alfredo Ovando Candía, 1969-1970; General Juan José Torres 1970; General Hugo Banzer Suárez, 1971-1978; Colonel Alberto Natusch Busch, 1979; and General Luis García Meza, 1980-1981.
2. Mayorga, Rene Antonio and Stephen M. Gorman. 1978. National-Popular State, State Capitalism and Military Dictatorship in Bolivia: 1952-1975. *Latin American Perspectives* 5 (2): 89-119.
3. Gill, Leslie. 1997. Creating Citizens, Making Men: The Military and Masculinity in Bolivia. *Cultural Anthropology* 12(4): 527-550.
4. Cuya, Esteban. 1996. Las comisiones de la verdad en América Latina: Bolivia. Ko’aga Rone’eta. <http://www.derechos.org/koaga/iii/1/cuya.html#bol>.
5. Mayorga, Rene Antonio and Stephen M. Gorman. 1978. National-Popular State, State Capitalism and Military Dictatorship in Bolivia: 1952-1975. *Latin American Perspectives* 5 (2): 89-119.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Morales, Waltraud Queiser. 1992. Militarising the Drug War in Bolivia. *Third World Quarterly* 13 (2): 353-370
8. *Ibid.*
9. Cuya, Esteban. 1996. Las comisiones de la verdad en América Latina: Bolivia. Ko’aga Rone’eta. <http://www.derechos.org/koaga/iii/1/cuya.html#bol>. See also, ASOFAMD. “Lista de Asesinados – Desaparecidos.” In *Gobiernos dictatoriales en Bolivia: Coronel Hugo Banzer Suárez (1971-1978)*, <http://www.asofamd.com/ebanzer.php?d=2>.
10. Albarracín, Waldo. *La impunidad en Bolivia: Los regimenes democráticos en Latinoamérica y la impunidad*. Presented at the international seminar, “Impunity and Its Impact on Democratic Processes,” Santiago, Chile, December 14, 1996.
11. ASOFAMD. “Lista de Asesinados – Desaparecidos.” <http://www.asofamd.com/ebanzer.php?d=2>.
12. *Comisión Nacional de Investigación de Desaparecidos Forzados*.
13. Hayner, Priscilla B. 2001. *Unspeakable Truths: Confronting State Terror and Atrocity*. New York: Routledge, pp. 52-53.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Llorenti, Sacha. No date. Bolivian Movement against Impunity. “Impunity in Democracy.”
16. Hayner, Priscilla B. 2001. *Unspeakable Truths: Confronting State Terror and Atrocity*. New York: Routledge, pp. 52-53.
17. *Ibid.*
18. In 1979, Representative Marcelo Quiroga Santa Cruz initiated a “Trial of Responsibilities against General Banzer” before the Bolivian Parliament; however, the trial did not progress and Quiroga was assassinated reportedly by security forces in 1980 during García Meza’s regime. Banzer was later elected president in 1997. ASOFAMD, “Testimonio histórico de la lucha contra la impunidad en Bolivia,” presented at the conference “Impunidad y sus efectos en los procesos democráticos,” Chile, December 14, 1996; [http://www.nuncamas.org/investig/semnar/seminar\\_22.htm](http://www.nuncamas.org/investig/semnar/seminar_22.htm).
19. Cuya, Esteban. 1996. *Las comisiones de la verdad en América Latina: Bolivia*. Ko’aga Rone’eta. <http://www.derechos.org/koaga/iii/1/cuya.html#bol>.
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21. Whitehead, Laurence. 2001. Bolivia and the Viability of Democracy. *Journal of Democracy* 12 (2): 6-16.
22. Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. *IACHR 2006 Annual Report: Bolivia: Trujillo Oroza Case*. <http://www.cidh.org/annualrep/2006eng/chap.3u.htm>.
23. The Trujillo family is a case in point: they initiated the legal process related to José Carlos’ disappearance in 1972. Twenty years later, they filed a complaint with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, which elevated it to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in 1999. See, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Trujillo Oroza Case, Judgment of January 26, 2000, Inter-Am. Ct. H.R. (Ser. C) No. 64 (2000). <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/iachr/C/64-ing.html>
24. Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. *IACHR 2006 Annual Report: Bolivia: Trujillo Oroza Case*. <http://www.cidh.org/annualrep/2006eng/chap.3u.htm>.
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27. Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Trujillo Oroza Case, Judgment of January 26, 2000, Inter-Am. Ct. H.R. (Ser. C) No. 64 (2000). <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/iachr/C/64-ing.html>
28. *Ibid.*