



## **AMERICA/GUATEMALA - 14 years after the murder of Mgr. Gerardi, Bishop Vian Morales supports the legacy: working for the weakest**

Guatemala City (Agenzia Fides) - "Guatemala, Never again" ("Guatemala, nunca mas") is the title of the report that laid bare the responsibility of the army in most of the crimes which occurred during the internal armed conflicts, edited and published on April 24 14 years ago by His Exc. Mgr. Juan Jose Gerardi, Auxiliary Bishop of Guatemala City. Two days after its publication, on April 26, 1998, Bishop Gerardi was assassinated.

Bishop Gerardi, head of the Human Rights Office of the Archbishopric, had in fact initiated a project to recover the historical memory (REMHI-Recuperación de la Memoria Historica en Guatemala) with the aim to collect testimony and documentation to get to the truth about crimes committed in the war that lasted 36 years, and had killed about 250 000 Guatemalans, of which about 45,000 missing. 90 percent of the crimes, according to the report, had been committed by the military forces or others (civil patrols sponsored by the State or the "death squads"). To them were attributed the majority of crimes (massacres, tortures, rapes, disappearances, mutilations) committed from 1960 to 1996, where nine out of ten victims were unarmed civilians or indigenous.

In the fourteenth anniversary of the publication of the report, His Exc. Mgr. Oscar Julio Vian Morales, SDB, Metropolitan Archbishop of Guatemala, published on April 24 a letter titled "The Truth shall make you free", which Fides received, where proposes 6 points to consider in the political moment that the country lives.

First: You should not take advantage of the fourteenth anniversary of the martyrdom of Mgr. Gerardi and the election of the new Prosecutor for Human Rights to distort, confuse and attack the Human Rights office of the Archdiocese of Guatemala and its director.

Second: The figure and the pastoral care of Mgr. Gerardi, and the REMHI (Recuperación de la Memoria Historica en Guatemala) inter-diocesan project directed by him, were ecclesial actions and the Church of Guatemala considers the initiative as an evangelical service to the poor and victims of war.

Third: Total support to the work of ODHAG (Oficina de Derechos Humanos del Arzobispado de Guatemala), which for 20 years has represented the "hands that give a caress, the arms that welcome, ears that hear, the merciful face of the pastoral and social action of the Church."

Fourth: You cannot discredit the work of this office, as it is a pastoral and evangelical work for the poor and towards the weakest sectors of society, within the Mission of the Church throughout the centuries.

Fifth: Expressing support to ODHAG with the action in favor of life, human dignity and Human Rights, violated today.

Sixth: All false rumors circulating about their work must be denied: "we will not have reconciliation if you change the truth of the facts known to all."

The statement concludes with these words: "I want to conclude, on behalf of the Archdiocesan Church: the truth shall make you free." (CE) (Agenzia Fides 26/4/2012)