

Testimony of Alexandra Aquino-Fike
Congressional Briefing: Investigating Forced Disappearances in El Salvador's Civil War
and Implications for the Justice System Today
Washington D.C.
April 14, 2016

My name is Alexandra Aquino-Fike. I was born on July 21, 1979 to Sylvia Rosales Escalante and Mauricio Aquino Chacón. I am a proud graduate of Wellesley College, UC Berkeley School of Law and the Harvard Kennedy School. I'm the Vice President of Development at Hispanics in Philanthropy. This is a story of my early beginnings, which have made me into the person I am today.

On the Wednesday of Holy Week in April of 1981, uniformed and heavily armed members of the Policía de Hacienda, one of the Security Forces of the Salvadoran Military, stormed into my family's house in San Salvador before the stroke of midnight. Before my poor mother's eyes, soldiers forced my father into a military truck with other prisoners who were tied up. They told my mother that my father was to be taken in for investigation. And despite the protests of my mother and granduncle, a retired military Colonel who had awoken to see the arrest of my father, the soldiers drove off with my father in that truck. The Minister of Defense, Gen. Guillermo García, confirmed the arrest to my granduncle. But on the following morning, the chief of the Treasury Police, Col. Francisco Morán, denied that my father had been detained. I was only 18 months old. I never saw my father again.

My father was detained and literally "disappeared" from his family, friends and community without any formal charge or adjudication. Like 10,000 other Salvadorans, my father was a victim of forced disappearance at the hands of the Salvadoran military during the civil war. Although my father's family and my mother sought answers through meetings with various government officials, through newspaper ads begging for information, and recently through a

legal inquiry through El Salvador's version of the Freedom of Information Action (FOIA), we have never received any official answer regarding what happened to my father. To this day, his status remains "Disappeared."

Mauricio Aquino Chacón was raised in a middle-class family. Among his class and community, issues of social justice, poverty, and human rights violations were not a concern. As an executive with a multinational corporation, my father could have easily turned a blind eye to the conditions of the poor in El Salvador. But when the tortured bodies of union workers, students and peasants began to turn up in the public spaces of working-class neighborhoods and rural towns, my father stepped up to help the voiceless in any way he could. As a young man, he joined the fight for a democratic country with a government that lifts its people out of poverty and ensures justice for all.

I am proud to be the daughter of Mauricio Aquino Chacón. When I think about my father, I have 3 basic wishes:

- 1) I hope that he did not suffer much before he undoubtedly was killed for his dream of a better El Salvador;
- 2) I hope to one day give him the sacred burial he, like everyone us, deserves;
- 3) And, I hope, that he is proud of me.

I especially hope I'm making him proud through the work I'm doing with these other children of the Disappeared, with my mother, with family, friends and allies, and hopefully with your support – to pressure the U.S. and Salvadoran governments to give us answers about what happened to our parents, to help us find their remains, and to ensure that these abuses of human rights *never, ever* happen again in El Salvador.

Each of you is here because in some way, you also recognize that our work in El Salvador is not finished. As a U.S. citizen, I'm here this week to ask members of our government, policy experts, community leaders, anyone who can help influence policies and action, to remember these victims of forced disappearance from El Salvador's civil war. Each of you can help us on our path towards truth, justice and reconciliation.

There are certain actions that the Salvadoran and/or the U.S. government can and should take to help bring truth and reconciliation to the families of the Disappeared.

- 1) Create a National Commission in El Salvador charged with finding adults who were forcibly disappeared during the Salvadoran civil war.
- 2) Pressure the Salvadoran Attorney General to carry out investigations of forced disappearances during the civil war with the utmost due diligence.
- 3) Provide access to military files in El Salvador regarding the forced disappearance of individuals, clandestine/secret jails or torture centers, during the civil war.
- 4) Declassify files in the State Department and the Central Intelligence Agency containing information on all operations and activities carried on by the Salvadoran Armed Forces or any security force or paramilitary entity that resulted in the extrajudicial action including execution and forced disappearance of individuals, clandestine or secret jails, torture centers, clandestine or secret burial grounds related to all forced disappearances of an estimated 10,000 men and women in El Salvador during the civil war.

These are our goals. I know we have much work ahead of us, but, as an attorney and a true believer in the rule of law, I live *by* and *for* these words, made famous by Dr. Martin Luther King:

"The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice."

Thank you.

Alexandra Aquino-Fike
Co-Founder of the Mauricio Aquino Chacón Foundation

* * *

About the briefing:

Sponsored by the Mauricio Aquino Foundation, the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), the Due Process of Law Foundation (DPLF), and the Center for Human Rights at the University of Washington, in conjunction with the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission and the Central America Caucus in the House of Representatives. More information at www.ourparentsbones.org