

Mario Manuel Calel Pixcar
6/4/09- Guatemala City

Mario: My name is Mario Manuel Calel Pixcar. I am from Santa Cruz del Quiche from the municipality of Chichicastenango, and y am originally from a village called Chontola.

Rebecca: Do you have memories of life before the armed conflict?

Mario: Before the armed conflict, my family, according to what I've been told, lived a nice life because my family was very united. My mother and father both supported each other in order to support our home. I am the second of three brothers and they would tell me that they felt very happy. My father and mother created an environment where it was possible to live in a healthy way and where my family members did activities, for like chopping wood in the forest. Also, my mother would cook for the family, and took care of the animals that we owned. I think it is very important to know that my family lived a good life in terms of our family environment. But, beginning many years ago, before the armed conflict, Guatemala has also always been a marginalizing and racist system. When my family members would leave their village, they would go out and to sell everything they produced in their community. They would go out to the town to sell, but what would happen is that the people that bought their products would force them to sell their goods for cheaper. My family members would tell them that they couldn't sell them for cheaper because cultivating these good required an entire process and the price that they had was just. But if the people that bought their produce didn't agree with the prices they would simply take it from them. That's why we say that they stole from us. And this happened a lot in our municipality and not only in ours, but in many municipalities throughout the Quiche. And I believe that this is proof of the racism and discrimination that existed in our country. The people that did these things were mestizos and ladinos. And I believe that these problems have affected and continue to affect our country.

Rebecca: When did the armed conflict reach your community?

Mario: The armed conflict had been coming for a long time, before the 1980s. The armed conflict was felt because many people were disappeared, and there were many people that wouldn't return to their homes. The men that went out to work in plantations, would come out here to the capital, and being here meant that a lot of them were disappeared. Since then, the armed conflict was felt. But, what happened in the 1980's represented an explosion in what our country experienced and especially in the community where I am from. That was a community that was hard hit by the internal armed conflict.

Rebecca: What was your experience during the armed conflict?

Mario: The experience was very hard because in several communities in Chichicastenango there were massacres of many families. And that resulted, in me losing a large part of my family. I lost my father, and my grandparents. That fundamentally changed my life because the armed conflict not only affected my family dynamic but

many others. To this day many things haven't come to light publicly like the rapes of women, which the authorities have knowledge of. I'm closer to my mother. She told me that they had to leave their homes in order to save their lives because they received many visits, many many visits in their communities from people telling them to turn over their husband, and since then I haven't seen my father because he was kidnapped. During that time my mother would say, "well, if they kill them they should kill all of us." I remember being a child and my mother carrying me with my sister by her side, and saying they should kill all of us because if one of us is left alive, we would suffer terribly. And the visits from the military were constant, and other families suffered through the same thing. where the greater part of families, the men, were kidnapped and tortured, and as a result, their families were forced to flee their homes. But all of us who left our homes also suffered regrettable consequences. There were children that died of hunger because being forced into the woods in remote areas meant that we lacked proper nutrition. During this time, it rained a lot and many children died because of lack of attention, many others also died because they were found in the woods. In some families parents had to cover their children's mouths because if they were heard they would be killed. As a result of this, many children died of suffocation. These are things that I don't think that have come to public light. And I feel it was a very hard experience that we had during the armed conflict. Not only were our family members, kidnapped, tortured, and murdered, but there were many people who came to our communities later to recruit our young people into military service. And when that happened all the women could say was 'no.' "They want to take our children." "First they took our husbands, they destroyed everything we had." "Now all we have are our children, yet they have already begun taking them." So that was a very hard time that I believe has left a mark on all of our lives that can't be erased. And when one remembers those difficult times I begin to think and say, well it was a truly horrible experience. Because after hearing the testimony of my mother I say, well, it was hard and that is why we continue to feel the impact. And that was one part of the experience of the internal armed conflict.

Rebecca: Do you remember anything specific, like a specific story?

Mario: Yes, I remember several stories, but one that has always had the greatest impact on me is of the way my family members died. Well, they were taken from their homes, but in the houses where they lived there was a kind of ravine and that is where they were executed. They killed them, and the children that they had were left and thrown into the mountains. That is a story that has impacted me because many of those children are now my uncles who were thrown in the mountains. Although they have survived, and when they tell their stories, it just reminds me how my family and other families continue to suffer.

Rebecca: How did you survive?

Mario: As a result of what happened during the armed conflict, we decided to leave the community where we lived. We moved to a town that allowed us to overcome several difficult times. What are these obstacles? Well, some are that we didn't have a house and we didn't have anybody. We didn't know anyone. But, when we arrived in the town my

mother began to work, and she worked and struggled to get us ahead. It's there that we were able to survive. Because of all that happened, we had to leave everything and come to this town in order to survive. That then allowed me to begin a new stage in my life. To study and also to create new expectations for my life. But, that also made me decide that I have to go back to where I was from as well. I constantly go to my old community and I see that it went through a very difficult change. Many people were left psychologically damaged, with fear, and a lot of fear about speaking what happened to them during the armed conflict. Even I feel that I was personally left with scars from that time period, for example a terrible a terrible life change. There are moments when one feels very alone. That pain keeps one from being free in other aspects of life.

Rebecca: And only as a clarification... the people that killed your family were they only the military or the guerrilla's as well?

Mario: The people that killed my family were in great part the military. It was the military that executed my family members. Later, also, a minimal part were civilians that the military sent. Those were the people that were responsible for killing my family members.

Rebecca: What were the other effects that the armed conflict has had on your life up to this point?

Mario: Among the other effects that it has had on my life is that I don't count on a large part of my family, and that continues to affect me. In the sense that my father hasn't been with us. That has imposed a lot of limitations on my life, and on the goals that I set for myself. For example, in my studies I've had to make great efforts in order to continue and succeed. Also, psychologically I have felt bad because of the way we had to live during the armed conflict, that has limited my ability to realize myself. And in realizing what I want out of life. And it has had an effect not only on me, but on my mother who continues to work to this day. Why? Also, because the armed conflict has created a very difficult situation, in which the entire family has had to make great efforts to get ahead. She has to work hard in order to meet the goals that she has for her life.

Rebecca: Why did you decide to give your testimony?

Mario: I decided to give my testimony so that the national community as well as the international community can see that there are many cases that haven't come to light publicly, and for me, it is of great importance that these cases be exposed and that they can say that in Guatemala the armed conflict had a terrible effect on the people, especially the indigenous people. the people that are in communities, but don't have the opportunity to speak out and express what they lived during the armed conflict. Factors such as persecution, threats, and the others I have mentioned, have prevented many people from giving their testimony. But on this occasion, I have taken the initiative to share my testimony so that other people can do it as well, and say what really happened to them during the internal armed conflict.

Rebecca: And the last question...is there anything else that you would like to tell us?

Mario: Yes, I would ask that the international community make efforts to take these cases. These cases that are numerous. So that we can live in peace, and live in a better way. In this country, the only way to live in peace is to place more of our attention on those who lived the armed conflict and to give the children, and the young people, the women, and the girls attention because they were the victims of this situation that ravaged our country, which is the internal armed conflict.