

Dear Friends,

Every spring time a conversation happens between my two friends, Javier and Carmen (Ixcán Ministries' Guatemala staff). The conversation goes like this: *"Ya viene la fecha. Y que vamos a hacer? No hemos hecho nada."* "The day is coming and what are we going to do? We haven't done anything."

They are referring to the tragic event they lived through on May 26th, 1983. The people call it the 'Massacre of the Playa'.

During that time, community members in Santiago Ixcán believed they could begin to move about more freely as there hadn't been an armed conflict for months. The village leaders decided that it was safe to send a group to weed the community corn planted on fields along the Xalbal River's banks and beyond. The area is called 'The Playa'.

None of the seventy or so men, women, teenagers and children walking in single file knew that a squadron of guerilla soldiers (with a vendetta against the community) hid amidst the trees and vegetation of the thick jungle waiting to attack. Without notice, a barrage of bullets from automatic rifles pierced the air. "It was like in a war movie," said Javier. "The firing just went on and on without end." Screams, cries and moans of the fallen and wounded joined the cacophony of madness.



Fourteen-year-old Carmen crouched and ran as a bullet whizzed by the right side of her face, scorching her hair and ear. She watched her younger sister, Victorina, just steps ahead of her, fall lifeless to the ground. Javier, age eleven, farther down the trail, crawled on his hands and knees for safety when he felt a burning sensation in his right lower leg. He sat stunned, crying and looking at his limb that bled while hanging limply like a rag. A few feet away, he saw his older brother, Carlos, sitting hunched over, lifeless.



In the end, eight people were murdered and four wounded that fateful sunny day in May.

Mules carried the dead and wounded back to the village, the limp bodies strapped on their backs like hunted deer. Amid cries and wails, the grief-stricken community members frantically buried the dead (in some cases placing two bodies in one grave) in a cemetery created near the village center. The original cemetery was too far away from the village square and they felt afraid of another attack.

So, one spring morning while praying, I felt God's prompting- *This is the year*. I met with Javier and Carmen and asked, "Is it time we do something for the victims of the massacre? Should we have a monument made with their names on it?" Both agreed wholeheartedly. We mobilized. Families of the victims assumed the responsibility of having a cement cross made at the site of the massacre; Ixcán Ministries provided funding for the monument that contains the names of the victims.

On the early morning of May 26th, fifteen of us packed into two pickup trucks and drove toward the Playa. When we arrived, we hiked from the road to the site of the massacre. The makeshift path twisted and turned through the thick jungle. After twenty minutes, with sweat running down our faces, we came to the cleared spot where a cement cross lay on the ground ready to be raised and blessed. We knelt on the jungle floor around the cross as prayers echoed from the holy site. Teary-eyed family members of the dead sat on stumps of trees and on the ground and watched three men lift, then plant the cross in a freshly dug hole. Some of the women placed cut flowers at its base and lit candles. Carmen shared her testimony, and the scripture from Mathew 10:28 was read – "Don't be afraid of those who can only kill the body, but not the soul..." Then a eucharistic minister blessed the cross with a flower dipped in holy water.

"I had never come to the place where my father was killed," one woman lamented, her voice breaking, who was a baby at the time.

At the church the rest of the community waited. It was a Sunday.

When we arrived at the church an hour later, the Celebration of the Word and communion service began. The theme of the massacre was woven throughout. Javier shared his testimony and Santos, a gifted catechist, preached a moving sermon. To close, we all moved outdoors to the front of the church where



stood a marble plaque with the names of the victims. As Santos read the name of each one of the deceased, Carmen lit a white candle at the base of the monument surrounded by white flowers.

This was not just any service. We remembered collectively those who lost their lives that day, their memory no longer just etched in the hearts of family members they left, but now etched in ours as we saw and heard their names.

It was important to do this, more than I knew at the time.

Teresa Samayoa, friend and board member, summed it up well in a letter she wrote to Javier and Carmen. She said...

*The persons that today we are going to celebrate, have never disappeared from your memory or your hearts. But today we are going to share publicly the testimony of the survivors. Today we are going to put a monument in its permanent and visible place in the village. Today we are going to again mention their names, to lift up from the ground their bodies that fell. We are going to again tell the story of this act of bloodshed that has marked the life of the village. Why is it important to do this? Because silence causes harm.*



I was surprised to see how this event, even after forty-one years, still triggered tears and profound sadness in so many. Perhaps the lone cross in the jungle, and the simple monument in front of the church will be touchstones of healing for the survivors and their families and a testimony of faith to the next generations that are to come.

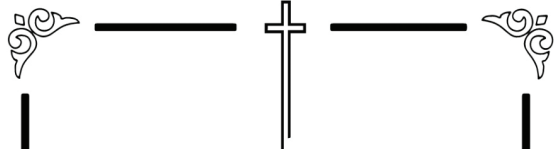
May the souls of the faithful departed through the mercy of God rest in peace.

Thank you for your financial support and prayers for our mission in the Ixcán jungle. We are deeply grateful. Know that you are in our prayers.

Sincerely,



Kathy Snider



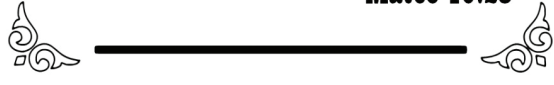
**En memoria de:**  
**Las víctimas de la masacre  
de la Playa Buenos Aires.**

**26 de Mayo 1983**

- Carlos Aurelio Gonzáles Pérez
- Cornelio Sarat Oxlaj
- Félix Ordoñez Chanchavac
- Victorina Victoriana Jiménez Cardona
- José Jiménez Cardona
- Pedro Gómez Herrera
- Antonia Tzoy Us
- Magdalena Chanchavac Hernández

**No teman a los que solo pueden matar  
el cuerpo, pero no el alma, teman más  
bien al que puede destruir alma y  
cuerpo en el infierno.**

**Mateo 10:28**



### Mission Update:

Mission Update: We are in the dry season in the Ixcán --when the rains stop, the temperatures rise, and wells, springs and rivers dry up. This year, the heat (100 – 110 degrees Fahrenheit most days) has been more intense than usual. Most of the cardamom and corn crops have withered and many people are sick with colds, respiratory infections, and fevers. It is a crisis affecting much of the world. Ixcán Ministries' projects continue to support the community by way of food, water, and medical assistance. We are praying with the people for the rains to return in June. Kathy will return to the U.S. on June 21st.

### OUR MISSION STATEMENT

Ixcán Ministries is a Christian lay mission serving as a ministry of presence with the Maya people in the Ixcán jungle of Guatemala. We act as a bridge between cultures for the exchange of gifts to transform lives and society.

Our programs include- Scholarships, Community Library, Women's Micro-business, Medical, Housing, and Food Assistance, Spiritual and Pastoral Accompaniment, and Promotion of Peace and Justice.

Ixcán Ministries is a 501(c) 3 organization. Your contributions are tax deductible.

Contact us or send a donation to:  
Ixcán Ministries  
PO Box 51  
Mandan, ND 58554

[www.ixcanministries.org](http://www.ixcanministries.org)  
[ixcan\\_ministries@yahoo.com](mailto:ixcan_ministries@yahoo.com)  
Kathy Snider, Director  
(701) 425-1914

Purchase Ixcán Creations products at:  
**Tienda Marleny**  
[ixcan\\_ministries@yahoo.com](mailto:ixcan_ministries@yahoo.com)