

Keynote Address of the IEC Founding Conference

Why We Call Dr. Abimael Guzman the Most Important Political Prisoner in the World Today

by **Massoud Rahimi**

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We here today represent the millions around the world who have supported the campaign to defend the life of Dr. Abimael Guzmán. In this hall we have people representing Peasants, workers and students from Bangladesh sitting alongside those from the inner cities of the United States; people from the high reaches of the Andes in Peru and Bolivia alongside those from Germany. Alongside those from the Himalayan mountains of Nepal; there are Turkish workers from Germany, a representative from South Africa, a representative from Australia and people from more than 33 different countries, from every section of the people and from every continent on earth. Together, we truly represent a worldwide movement against the outrageous treatment of Dr. Guzmán.

Yet since October 15, no one but Fujimori's thugs has seen Dr. Guzmán. He is still in solitary confinement, and even the Red Cross cannot get in. He has no lawyer; he has no guarantee of medical treatment. And he is still under the threat of death. The people of Peru and throughout the world have shown that they are determined not to accept these threats; it is up to us in this room to make sure that their voice is turned into a mighty roar that stops the vicious U.S.-backed Fujimori regime in its tracks.

From the moment of Dr. Guzmán's arrest, this broad and diverse campaign rose up around the world to defend him. This is because he is the most important political prisoner in the world today.

Why do we say this?

One answer is that we have heard it many, many times ourselves, for instance, from behind the walls of far-off Buca prison in Turkey. There, nearly a hundred political prisoners, who are on hunger strike against the vicious U.S.-backed Turkish regime, united their voices in defense of this man, Dr. Guzmán.

But you don't have to go so far as Buca Turkey to see this. You only have to pick up your local newspaper, and you can read that the imperialists and reactionaries themselves have singled out Dr. Guzmán as the world enemy number one. That sacred institution of the U.S. government, the U.S. Senate, unanimously passed a resolution hailing the capture of Dr. Guzmán - when else have they done such a thing? The rulers in Washington hate this man so much that one Congressman, Torricelli, even called right in the halls of Congress for Dr. Guzmán's execution. For what other person today has the entire secret police of a country been mobilized to track him down, under the guidance of the CIA itself? And the CIA continued its own bloody tradition of political assassinations and counter-insurgency as they played a direct role in tracking down Dr. Guzmán. All this amounts practically to a holy crusade against Dr. Guzmán, and all these forces have been aided at every step by the world's media, who have tried to demonize him as the devil incarnate, without a single virtue.

It was, above all, the U.S. itself which singled out Dr. Guzmán.

Why has the U.S. singled out Dr. Guzmán like this, and what do they want to accomplish?

They are first of all trying to save their control of Peru and crush the hopes for radical change of its people. As we say in the IEC Call, millions of them look to Dr. Guzmán as their political leader. For centuries, the Peruvians people have been bled dry by the dominant rich Western countries - and the only item on the U.S. agenda is that this goes on and on and on. This is why we say, U.S. Hands off

Dr. Guzmán --- Yankee Go Home!

They are also trying to send a message to anyone who dares oppose them anywhere in the world that they will be crushed. When U.S.-backed Fujimori regimes tries to bury Dr. Guzmán alive, they are trying to bury alive all the rebellion and dissent that opposes them. Yet Dr. Guzmán himself showed better than anyone that they can never succeed in this. For even in the darkest hours of his confinement, when the Fujimori regime wanted to present an image of a beaten and defeated man to the world, instead Dr. Guzmán roared like a lion, and it was this roar of uncowed defiance that was heard round the world, even in the darkest dungeons of Buca, Turkey, and Leavenworth, USA.

The determination of the U.S. to get Dr. Guzmán was reflected in the actions of its puppet, Fujimori; when the U.S. pulls the strings, Fujimori dances. Dr. Guzmán's trial trampled on the most elementary rights of the defense, with its hooded Spanish Inquisition justice, its military trial, its secret session, its refusal to hear any legal arguments on Dr. Guzmán's behalf. This reached a new low last month when they imprisoned Dr. Guzmán's attorney, Dr. Crespo, for life, just for being his lawyer. When they locked up Dr. Crespo, they were saying that those who oppose them have no rights to a defense at all, not even the right to a lawyer, in fact, no rights period.

This singling out of Dr. Guzmán is seen too in the fact that they are building a special prison just to hold this one man! The outrageous treatment of Dr. Guzmán goes hand in hand with the entire reign of terror that the U.S.-Fujimori dictatorship maintains over the poor of Peru - through disappearances, rape, murder and the repeated massacres of the political prisoners there.

When looking over this entire process of the hunting down, capture and imprisonment of Dr. Guzmán it can be seen that the U.S. is trying to set a reactionary precedent. In the rapidly changing world situation that they call the New World Order, the Yankee rulers above all are determined to step out aggressively against any opposition to their interests, particularly in the Third World. Part of this is trying to mount a campaign to divide up resistance movements into acceptable or unacceptable, according to their own big power interests. For instance, they now have labeled Kurdish fighters in Saddam Hussein's Iraq as acceptable, while they say Kurdish fighters in NATO Turkey are unacceptable, and so are Irish fighters in the United Kingdom and the Tamils in Sri Lanka. And for them, the PCP, who is supported by no foreign power, is the worst of all, and anyone who talks about its rights or the rights of Dr. Guzmán, whom they now have put in prison for life, is an apologist for terrorism - which some members of our own delegations have been threatened with.

This effort has, unfortunately, been aided by the major international human rights group in the world, like Americas Watch and even Amnesty International. These groups go around equating the acts of the movement led by the Communist Party of Peru, which has risen up in arms against a reactionary government, with the murderous acts of the Fujimori regime and the Peruvian armed forces. This is the new meaning of the codeword: "human rights abuses."

This is the reactionary new precedent they are trying to set with Dr. Guzmán's case. This is seen in the new laws they are passing in many of these countries where the struggles are going on that they consider "unacceptable." In Peru, Turkey and other places they are making "terrorism" a legal category, such as the "apology for terrorism" charge I just mentioned. This kind of development, plus the recent arrest of any lawyer who dares to defend political prisoners has enraged many lawyers and human rights activists around the world.

So their talk of human rights is only covering a new and reactionary offensive in which Dr. Guzmán's capture, trial and imprisonment are on the center stage. And who are they anyway, to talk about human rights --- these, people who have tried to bomb Iraq into the Stone Age? And who today uses "human rights" as a pretext to invade where ever they want and set up regimes run by the U.S. Marines?

All this is what they mean by "human rights." And for them to have what they call their human rights, they were determined that Dr. Guzmán had to be stripped of all his rights.

To summarize then:

Dr. Guzmán was singled out by the U.S., its ruling institutions and tracked down by its secret police, because they consider him their most dangerous opponent.

His capture was used by them to try and crush opposition to their rule in Peru and around the world.

And they are using his case as a key precedent in their overall effort to divide up resistance to them, split it into acceptable and unacceptable, and by doing this isolate the so-called unacceptable movements from any support.

This is the challenge they have thrown down before us --- it is a battle we must fight. Refusing to fight them, refusing to defend the life of Dr. Guzmán, would mean giving in to this entire reactionary agenda not only in Peru but around the world. But by fighting, by gathering the potential that we have only just begun to tap in this campaign, we can instead deliver them a powerful blow; defending the life of Dr. Guzmán will mean handing a sharp setback to their entire effort.

Can we succeed?

We can already say that the campaign so far has had an important impact around the world and in Peru itself. Even *Le Monde*, France's main newspaper, stated that the military in Peru wanted to kill Dr. Guzmán on October 15, but could not. The reason: they feared what they called "international pressure." Fujimori and his ilk, the CIA and such types, do not like the eyes of the world focused on them. In fact, they hate it.

We should take heart too from a living example whose speech will be read today. I am speaking of Jose Maria Sison, who was the founding Chairman of the Communist Party of the Philippines. Mr. Sison too was captured by the secret police of the U.S.-backed government; he too was at first imprisoned in atrocious conditions, but an international campaign on his behalf helped force the Marcos dictatorship to ease up on his conditions of imprisonment. Finally after tumultuous events in his country, Mr. Sison was freed.

We must understand too that the Fujimori regime is weak and isolated. They are hated by some members of the mainstream press, lawyers' organizations, rival political parties, and even members of the government itself have appeared on international TV to denounce Fujimori, including for the deep involvement in the drug trade of his advisors like Vladimiro Montesinos. The Red Cross has publicly denounced the regime because of the conditions they place on visits to political prisoners and because of the recent revelation that their private visit to Dr. Guzmán shortly after his capture was secretly taped by the government. The Red Cross has made this kind of public denunciation only a few times in its history.

It is the regime and the forces of reaction who are in fact isolated especially when you look at things on a world scale. There are some groups and individuals, even some who in other ways take a stand with people, who have stood aside from this campaign or even opposed it. They have their opinions and we hope reality will change their views. But millions more people around the world also have their opinions, which are based on knowing well the same hellish forces which reign in Peru. This campaign is giving voice to them in a way that is rare in this world.

Even as the forces of reaction try to isolate our campaign, like when they've treated our delegations as apologists for terrorism, they've only made trouble for themselves and strengthened the resolve and numbers of people who are disgusted and enraged by the reactionaries.

Our forces stretch around the world. It is true that the diversity of our forces poses certain difficulties: it is seven difficult to speak with each other sometimes, but we have shown we can overcome that too. No, we have to say our diversity is much more a source of strength.

If we understand the basis of our uniting in this campaign and the importance of advancing it, then through the course of the struggle and debate at the rest of the conference, we will emerge stronger and more united. We must get down seriously in this Conference, so that in leaving here, we can return with a new stronger and more powerful organization to take the campaign to another level. Then, the voices of the peasants from the flatlands of Bangladesh will merge with those from the

ghettoes of the U.S., from the vast urban sprawl of Mexico City and the outback of Australia. And these voices will converge into a mighty roar to Defend the Life of Abimael Guzmán!