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Activist, poet tells experience of torture

By Evelyn Renata Rueda
Times Staff Writer

Maria Guardado, a Salvadoran activist and poet who was tortured in 1980, spoke to Cal State L.A. students last Wednesday at a special screening of a documentary which tells her story.

"When you are interested in seeing videos like these, you realize that life in third world countries is terrible," Guardado said through a translator to the attendants. "This video is a very tiny part of the civil war in El Salvador."

The film, *Testimony of Maria Guardado*, was four-and-a-half years in the making. Filmmaker Randy Vasquez followed Guardado through demonstrations which sought justice for immigrants and punishment for the people responsible for her tortures were.

Vasquez finished the film in August 2001. He started submitting the film to various festivals, but because of the terrorist events of Sept. 11, most festivals rejected the film due to its critical content of U.S. foreign policy. Maria's testimony was finally accepted by the Havana Film Festival.

"I knew it was a special story," said Vasquez of Guardado's experience. "I had a lot of high hopes for it. There is not a lot of films on recent Salvadoran history."

Vasquez spent a week in El Salvador with Guardado as she

visited relatives and attended rallies and retold her story.

During the late 1970s, Guardado was working with various unions that opposed the war and the murder of innocent people by the military. Her political activities made her a target to Salvadoran security forces. She was kidnapped on Jan. 12, 1980, at 5 p.m. in the city of San Miguel.

They offered her \$50,000 if she gave the names and addresses of the people that she worked with. She refused to tell.

Thus began the most horrific experience of her life.

She was dragged into a room, where electrical shocks, were applied to her breasts and genitals. One of the 10 or so men who had kidnapped her raped her.

Since she wouldn't talk, they forced a wooden stake into her rectum.

She was then taken to another place for more extreme torture.

They sent in a psychologist to persuade her to talk. "I feel pity on you," the psychologist told her as he encouraged her to talk and end her suffering.

She would not talk.

"Terrible tortures followed" which were ordered by a man with an American accent, Guardado said.

Knowing of her disappearance, and in disagreement with the military's operations, Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo



Photo by Katy Boggio/UT

Maria Guardado spoke fervently about the injustices done to her and the possibility of CIA involvement in her torture.

Romero made a plea to the military for the deliverance of Guardado and other prisoners.

Her torturers dumped her body on a street in San Miguel and left her for dead. Her chest, arms and back were broken.

Naked and in pain, she asked

a taxi driver to take her to her home. "I want to die at home," she told the driver. The driver was scared—it was past midnight and he faced death if he was caught with an enemy of the military.

Because of his opposition to the war and U.S. military aid to El

Salvador, Archbishop Romero was killed on March 23, 1980 while giving mass. Thirty-nine people were killed during his funeral procession.

"I'm one of the voices of the

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