

Council to oversee Guatemala archives

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GUATEMALA CITY --A newly created international council of experts will oversee and protect extensive police archives exposing atrocities committed during Guatemala's 36-year civil war, a top human rights official said Wednesday.

The official, Sergio Morales, said the so-called International Consultative Council will include archive specialists from Argentina, Uruguay and the U.S., including Kate Doyle of the Washington-based National Security Archive, a private, nonpartisan research group.

"We want the archive to last so that anyone with interest in knowing what happened to their families can come in the future and investigate," Morales said.

The archives are closed to the public while experts restore and catalog all the materials, many of which have been damaged by water or time. So far, they have restored only 2.1 million documents, 2.5 percent of the total number of archives detailing 105 years of police activity in Guatemala.

During Guatemala's 1960-1996 civil war, the police identified and even killed political opponents, according to a U.N. Truth Commission report.

Doyle said the documents could help prosecutors build cases against those who carried out atrocities during the war, which claimed the lives of about 200,000 people.

She said the council will help lobby for a law designed to protect the documents and ensure that the information they contain is eventually open to the public.

The archive was discovered by accident in July 2005 during a search for explosives in an abandoned police warehouse in northern Guatemala City.