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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Center for Advanced Genocide Research Hosts International Conference to Shed Light on Genocide and Resistance in Guatemala**

LOS ANGELES – June 22, 2016 – Twenty years after a civil war and genocide in Guatemala, USC Shoah Foundation Center for Advanced Genocide Research will host an international conference that will shed light on this little-known atrocity.

“A Conflict? Genocide and Resistance in Guatemala,” will run from Sept. 11-14 and feature 23 scholars from around the world who conduct research in multiple disciplines. They will discuss the history and impact of the systematic mass violence that during the early 1980s left 200,000 mostly Mayan Guatemalans dead and more than 1.5 million displaced without basic resources – a genocide hidden under the cover of a 36-year civil war that ended in 1996 with a peace accord.

The conference is being organized by Wolf Gruner, founding director of the Center for Advanced Genocide Research, and Victoria Sanford, founding director of the Center for Human Rights and Peace Studies at Lehman College, City University of New York.

“The Guatemalan genocide has for too long been overlooked,” Gruner said. “By hosting this conference, we hope to spark conversation, gain insight and bring attention to the victims of this terrible piece of history that took place here in the Americas. If we can learn the lessons from genocides and the resistance to them, perhaps we can stop them in the future.”

The conference comes as USC Shoah Foundation adds testimony from survivors of the Guatemalan Genocide to its Visual History Archive, a repository of 53,000 testimonies from survivors of 20th century genocides, including the Holocaust, the Armenian Genocide and the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda. The Institute worked with the Guatemalan forensics organization La Fundación de Antropología Forense de Guatemala (FAFG) to collect 150 testimonies of survivors and witnesses of the Guatemalan genocide, some of them speaking in their native K’iche’.

“This conference, like the addition of the Guatemalan survivor testimonies to USC Shoah Foundation’s Visual History Archive, comes at a critical moment in Guatemalan history,” said Sanford. “With ongoing genocide trials in the midst of contentious public debates and genocide denial, this conference offers a reasoned analysis of the depth and breadth of the Guatemalan Genocide.”

The conference coincides with ongoing efforts to bring accused perpetrators to trial. In May, a court in Guatemala ruled that former military dictator Efraín Ríos Montt will be retried for his important role in the genocide. In a historic decision, Ríos Montt was found guilty in 2013 for his participation in the genocide, but the conviction was quickly overturned on a technicality on the heels of a massive “No Hubo Genocidio” (There was No Genocide) public relations campaign supported by powerful national economic interests. A retrial began in January of 2015 but was suspended within hours after the defense team accused a judge of bias.

Much of the evidence brought to bear against Ríos Montt came from FAFG’s fieldwork. FAFG has spent the past 20 years locating and unearthing mass graves and carrying out forensic investigations into the mass killings of rural villagers and others. Using technology developed after 9/11, the organization has identified hundreds of victims by comparing DNA samples extracted from their exhumed remains to DNA samples of surviving blood relatives.

“This gathering is the first of its kind in international history,” said Stephen Smith, executive director of USC Shoah Foundation. “By convening this group of thought leaders, we not only deepen awareness and understanding of an under-examined chapter of history, we also help to combat silence and ignorance, the two best friends of mass murderers.”

The conference kicks off Sunday, Sept. 11, with a welcoming reception, followed by three days of panel discussions, lectures and workshops. Each will feature simultaneous translation in English or Spanish as needed. In addition to scholarly panel discussions during the day, the conference will also include evening events for the general public and members of the Guatemalan community. For scholars, students and members of the public interested in attending the conference, please contact cagr@usc.edu or visit the conference website at http://sfi.usc.edu/cagr/conferences/2016\_international.

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**About USC Shoah Foundation**
USC Shoah Foundation — The Institute for Visual History and Education is dedicated to making audio- visual interviews with survivors and other witnesses of the Holocaust and other genocides, a compelling voice for education and action. The Institute’s current collection of more than 53,000 eyewitness testimonies contained within its Visual History Archive® preserves history as told by the people who lived it, and lived through it. Housed at the University of Southern California, within the Dana and David Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences, the Institute works with partners around the world to advance scholarship and research, to provide resources and online tools for educators, and to disseminate the testimonies for educational purposes.

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**About Center for Advanced Genocide Research**
The USC Shoah Foundation Center for Advanced Genocide Research is dedicated to advancing new areas of interdisciplinary research on the Holocaust and other genocides. One area of research addresses the fundamental question of what enables people to oppose or resist racist ideologies, state discrimination practices, or the active participation in mass atrocities. Other research interests include Research on Violence, Emotion and Behavioral Change and Digital Genocide Studies.