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**At Least 29 Girls Killed in Fire at Guatemala Teen Shelter**

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The death toll from a fire at a government-run home for abused teens in Guatemala rose Thursday to 29 with nearly 40 others injured, local media reported, after dozens of residents had escaped the overcrowded home following an overnight melee the day before.

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A crowd of relatives, many of them wailing with grief, gathered outside the Virgen de Asuncion home for children up to 18 years old, in the municipality of San Jose Pinula, some 15 miles southwest of the capital, Guatemala City.

Nery Ramos, the head of Guatemala's national police, initially said from the scene that 19 girls were confirmed dead, and later the number rose to 29, local media re. Burnt bodies partially covered in blankets were strewn across the floor of a blackened room in the home, pictures posted on Twitter by the firefighters showed.

"This is a painful situation," Ramos said, adding that the fire had been started by a group of young people at the center, a public institution where conditions are often dismal, with widespread overcrowding, as an act of public mutiny and an attempt to escape. Local media said more than 800 children lived there, despite its capacity to hold only 500.

Tuesday night, riot police were sent in to quell unrest over the crowded living conditions at the home during which some 60 residents escaped, images on Guatemalan television news showed. Pablo Castillo, a spokesman for Guatemalan police, told Reuters that 38 children had been transferred to local hospitals with burns, some of them severe. Authorities have been working to identify victims, but said DNA tests might be necessary for some remains.

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Outside the home Wednesday, Andrea Palomo told reporters in tears that she had brought her 15-year-old son to the home to discipline him. But he told her he was mistreated and complained that gang members there tattooed the children.

"We have been given no information since last night," Palomo said outside the home, which takes in children who have been abandoned as well as victims of abuse and trafficking.

The home is run by the ministry of social welfare, with the attorney general for human rights deciding which children are placed in the home. Hours after the fire, President Jimmy Morales expressed his condolences in a statement, and declared three days of national mourning in the country.

Over the years, the shelter, named the Virgin of the Assumption Safe Home, has received many complaints of its dismal living conditions and instances of abuse.

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