EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Amnesty International International Secretariat . 1 Easton Street London WC1X 8DJ 23 August 1988 United Kingdom

EL SALVADOR: "DISAPPEARANCE" OF BALBINO AND LORENZO RAMOS ELIAS

Amnesty International is concerned at the reported detention and subsequent "disappearance" of two brothers, Balbino Ramos Elias, aged 46 and Lorenzo Ramos Elias, aged 48, both jornaleros (day labourers).

According to eye-witness reports, Balbino and Lorenzo Ramos Elias were detained on 27 May 1988 at 6.30 pm at their homes in the canton [hamlet] San José Cortéz, jurisdiction Ciudad Delgado, San Salvador department, by uniformed soldiers of the 1st Infantry Brigade based at San Carlos. Two other people detained with them, were subsequently released. When Balbino and Lorenzo Ramos failed to appear, the family submitted a writ of habeas corpus to the Supreme Court of Justice.

On 28 May, members of the Ramos Elias family went to inquire at the headquarters of the 1st Infantry Brigade into the whereabouts of the two brothers. They say that a soldier informed them that two prisoners, matching the descriptions given by the family, were brought to the 1st Infantry Brigade at 10.00 pm on 27 May, but were transferred to the National Police on the morning of 28 May. The family then approached the National Police headquarters and a local police post, but were informed that no prisoners had been transferred from the 1st Infantry Brigade.

In response to inquiries made by local human rights groups, the commander of the 1st Infantry Brigade, Coronel Oscar Campos Amaya, denied detaining the brothers and issued a communique stating that "...on May 28, 1988 Balbino Ramos and Guadalupe (sic) Ramos, brothers of the ex-Civil Defence commander, Mr. Gregorio Ramos, were kidnapped by terrorist criminals...the kidnapping occurred at 03.00 on 28 May 1988... ["_ 28 de mayo de 1988, Balbino Ramos y Guadalupe Ramos, quienes son hermanos del ex-comandante de la Escolta Civil, Señor Gregorio Ramos, fueron secuestrados por los delicuentes terroristas...El hecho del secuestro ocurrio a eso de las 03.00 el 28 de mayo de 1988...")

In a press conference given in response to the above army communiqué, the family pointed to various discrepancies in the information contained in it. Firstly, the family stated that they have never heard of Gregorio Ramos, (the ex-Civil Defence commander referred to in the army communiqué), nor of Guadalupe Ramos (also referred to in the army communiqué), and that neither were related to them. The family further stated that the brothers Balbino and Lorenzo Ramos Elias were detained on 27 May at 6.30 pm and not on 28 May at 03.00 hours as stated in the army communiqué.

At the time of writing the brothers remain "disappeared" and Amnesty International fears for their safety.

BACKGROUND

Amnesty International has been concerned at the escalation in recent months of human rights violations, including "disappearances", extrajudicial executions and torture, carried out by all branches of the Salvadorian security forces. These abuses have been carried out by security force personnel both while in uniform and in plain clothes. In a number of recent incidents uniformed military personnel have detained people who then "disappeared" or have summarily executed non-combatant civilians, whom they later said had died in combat or had been the victims of guerrilla attacks. (See "Four Cases of Extrajudicial Execution by the Salvadorian Armed Forces", AI Index: AMR 29/12/88 of 30 June 1988).

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