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**EL SALVADOR FURTHER INFORMATION TO AMR 29/29/87 : "DISAPPEARANCE" OF
THREE TRADE UNIONISTS FOLLOWING MAY-DAY DEMONSTRATIONS**

Edwin Ernesto VARGAS AGUILAR, aged 20, a worker at the Beneficio Montealegre (Montealegre Coffee Plant) in Chalchuapa, and a member of the Sindicato de la Industria del Café (SI-CAFE), Coffee Industry Union.

Luis Armando LEMUS URRUTIA, aged 24, a worker at the Beneficio Montealegre, a member of SI-CAFE and of the Federación de Estudiantes Universitarios de El Salvador (FEUS), Federation of University Students of El Salvador and a Social Science student at the University of Western El Salvador.

Julio Ernesto GARCIA LUCERO, aged 18, a baker and a member of the Sindicato de Panificadores (Bakers Union).

The three trade unionists were seized by armed men in plain clothes on 1 May 1987 after participating in Labour Day (May Day) demonstrations in Santa Ana. They were reportedly seized in Santa Ana in broad daylight and in the presence of several witnesses, while on their way home to Chalchuapa. According to eye witnesses, the kidnappers drove a white Cherokee-type car with darkened windows. This type of vehicle is customarily used by the Salvadorian security forces when acting in plain clothes in the guise of the so-called "death squads".

Dr. José Ernesto Carranza Martínez, the Juez Ejecutor (Executor Judge or Investigatory Judge) appointed by the Supreme Court of Justice to look into the case after a writ of habeas corpus was filed on behalf of the three trade unionists by family members, was reportedly refused access to prison cells at the 2nd Infantry Brigade where the three were believed held.

Amnesty International appealed for an immediate investigation into their whereabouts on 7 May 1987 [see UA 123/87 AMR 29/23/87] and renewed appeals on 10 July 1987 [AMR 29/29/87]. The authorities, however, continue to deny their detention.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS

In May 1987, a relative of the three trade unionists reported that a sergeant friend of the family had confirmed with personnel at the 2nd Infantry Brigade that they were holding three trade unionists who had been

captured on 1 May. The sergeant also stated that those responsible for the capture were a man called Mauricio Maria, nicknamed "Chele Maria" and another man whose surname he said was ORTIZ CERNA, but that Mauricio Maria was not actually full-time on the official payroll ("no está a sueldo completo por parte del gobierno").

An eye witness to the abduction later testified to a Salvadorian human rights group that when relating the event to a colleague of his from Santa Ana, and giving a description of one of the captors, his colleague replied that the description fitted that of a man called "Chele Maria", that he was well-known and that he had broken the neck of (despezcuezado) a lot of people.

Col. Oscar Casanova Vejar, then Commander of the 2nd Infantry Brigade, also reportedly confirmed to the wife of a government minister that the three trade unionists were held at the Brigade. Later, however, when the families went looking for their relatives in the 2nd Infantry Brigade, personnel there denied holding them.

In testimony given to a Salvadorian human rights group on 5 June 1987, family members of the three trade unionists stated that when they were finally granted a interview with Col. Casanova on 18 May 1987, the colonel acknowledged that "Chele Maria" had driven a white vehicle on 1 May but that he had not gone out to detain anybody because he had not been given orders to do so. According to the colonel, "Chele Maria" had only gone out to observe. He reportedly added that they [the family] should not continue placing paid advertisements and open letters in the press because "the situation could get worse" ("se puede empeorar la situación").

In response to appeals sent to the Salvadorian authorities on behalf of the "disappeared" trade unionists, several Amnesty International members received a standardized reply from the new Commander of the 2nd Infantry Brigade (see attached), denying that the trade unionists had been detained.

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Santa Ana, 24 de Agosto de 1,987.-



2A. ZONA MILITAR Y 2A. BRIGADA DE INFANTERIA (SANTA ANA)
COMANDO

Con respecto a la carta que me giró con fecha 05 del presente mes, en la que solicita información sobre el paradero de los tres sindicalistas: Edwin Ernesto Vargas Aguilar, Luis Armando Lemus Urrutia y Julio Ernesto Garcia Lucero; tengo a bien informarle lo siguiente:

- 1.- Qué dichos tres sindicalistas nunca han sido detenidos o capturados por Personal de ésta Brigada.
- 2.- Qué el Comando de ésta Brigada, agotó o empenó todos sus recursos en realizar una investigación minuciosa en colaboración de los familiares, Comisión de Derechos Humanos, CICR, y Organismos de Justicia, para tratar de dar con el paradero de los tres sindicalistas, siendo hasta la fecha los resultados negativos.
- 3.- No obstante los esfuerzos realizados por éste Comando y ante acusaciones hechas por organizaciones sindicales, se solicitó a las Autoridades Superiores Competentes, que realizaran una investigación de dicho caso, la cual arrojó - después de varios días de investigación, resultados idénticos a la investigación que ésta Brigada había realizado.

Aprovecho la oportunidad para patentizarle que ésta Brigada - mantiene ante las Organizaciones Humanitarias, uno de los niveles más altos - en cuanto a lo que a Derechos Humanos se refiere.

En espera de satisfacción a su solicitud de Ud.,
Atentamente



Benjamin Ramos Mendoza

Cnel. de Inf. DEM. Benjamin Ramos Mendoza
Comandante de la Segunda Zona Militar
y de la Segunda Brigada de Infanteria

Translation

Santa Ana, 24 August 1988

"With reference to your letter of the fifth of this month requesting information on the whereabouts of the three trade unionists: Edwin Ernesto Vargas Aguilar, Luis Armando Lemus Urrutia and Julio Ernesto Garcia Lucero, it is my pleasure to inform you as follows:

1. That the above-mentioned trade unionists have never been arrested or captured by members of this Brigade.
2. That the Command of this Brigade exhausted all available resources to carry out detailed investigation, in cooperation with with the families, the Human Rights Commission, ICRC, and the Judicial Bodies, in order to establish the whereabouts of the three trade unionists, the results of which are negative to this date.
3. Despite the efforts made by this Command and in consideration of the accusations made by unionist organizations, a request was made to the Superior Competent Authorities for an investigation into this case which, after several days of investigation, resulted in findings identical to those of this Brigade.

I take this opportunity to state that this Brigade maintains one of the highest levels of respect for Human Rights.

In the hope to have satisfied your inquiry, I remain,

Yours sincerely,

Col. de Inf. DEM. Benjamin Ramos Mendoza
Commander of the 2nd Military Zone and
of the 2nd Infantry Brigade

