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EL SALVADOR: Repression of students, teachers and university staff

Amnesty International has received numerous reports in recent months of human rights violations directed against students, teachers and workers in academic institutions. Particular targets have been staff and students of the University of El Salvador (UES) in San Salvador, and its dependencies outside the capital, and members of the Asociación Nacional de Educadores de El Salvador (ANDES 21 de Junio), National Union of Teachers of El Salvador.

The UES has long been characterized by successive governments as "subversive" and there have been numerous incidents of human rights violations including arbitrary arrest, torture and ill-treatment, "disappearances" and extrajudicial execution. It was closed for an extended period after government forces attacked the campus and killed an estimated 40 people in June 1980. It was re-opened a few years later, but government denunciations, and attacks on university personnel and students have continued to be reported.

The following is a brief summary of some of the human rights violations and related events reported between November 1988 and February 1989 with students, teachers and academics as the target:

Apparent extrajudicial executions

Seven students and teachers have been reported killed during the past six months in circumstances which suggest that the perpetrators belonged to the armed forces or to one of El Salvador's so-called "death squads". The authorities claim these are independent extremist groups of the right and left beyond its control. Amnesty International, however, believes these are made up of regular troops and police - that is, that they form an intrinsic part of the security apparatus. In October 1988 Amnesty International published its report "El Salvador: "Death Squads" - A government strategy" (AI Index AMR 29/21/88) which documented the alarming new surge of killings by such "death squads" and the evidence which suggests that "death squad"-style killings are carried out by police and military personnel acting in plain clothes but under the orders of superior officers. Amnesty International is not in a position to point at government responsibility in all the cases described and is aware that the information available is limited. Indeed, the creation and modus operandi of the "death squads" are aimed precisely at avoiding accountability.

One case is that of **Raúl Santos Escamilla Umaña**, a worker at the UES, who was shot while in the university cafeteria on the afternoon of 3 October 1988. According to reports, two armed men in civilian clothes approached him from behind and one shot him in the head. He died in hospital several hours later. Raúl Santos Escamilla was a member of the

university workers' association ASTUES (Asociación de Trabajadores de la Universidad de El Salvador). He had been detained in June 1987 when getting off a bus in the centre of San Salvador with a student. The two were taken to the headquarters of the National Police where they were questioned with regard to accusations of collaboration with the guerrilla movement. They were released without charge after three days.

On 14 November 1988, **Jorge Alberto Martínez González**, a security guard (custodio) in the Centro Universitario de Occidente, Western University Centre in Santa Ana, about 35 miles west of San Salvador, was shot dead. He was Organizational Secretary (Secretario de Organización) of ASTUES in the Western University Centre. There had reportedly previously been death threats against him in leaflets given out by armed individuals in plain clothes.

The following day, four students handing out leaflets outside the university protesting the killing of Jorge Alberto Martínez González were detained by members of the First Infantry Brigade. They were reportedly tied up, interrogated and beaten. They were freed soon afterwards following a protest at the detentions. During a rally and press conference called by the students that evening, soldiers reportedly shot at demonstrators and fired tear gas at them.

On 16 December, **Rosa Imelda González Medrano**, professor of law and head of the law faculty of the Western University Centre was killed outside her home in Santa Ana. She was shot five times by unknown individuals. She had just returned from attending a demonstration in the capital seeking more government funding for the university. According to reports, she had been followed by men in an unmarked vehicle for two days prior to her death. Rosa Imelda González was a member of the university's teachers' union, Asociación de Docentes de la Universidad de El Salvador (ADUES).

The body of **Ulises Lara Guzmán**, a 20-year-old student of medicine at the UES was found on 16 January in the Vista Hermosa suburb of San Salvador. He had been shot. A judicial official said he had apparently been a victim of paramilitary death squads. Ten days later **Rodolfo López**, a student of economics at the UES was shot dead outside his home.

Marco Antonio Flores Cubas a student at the UES, was detained on 2 February in the Colonia Miramonte of San Salvador by a group of individuals, some of whom wore the uniform of the National Guard. The detention took place in front of family members. Marco Antonio Flores was beaten and forced into a blue pick-up truck with darkened windows. His body was found the following day in Puerto de Acajutla, department of Sonsonate.

Another teacher whose killing is of concern to Amnesty International is **Miguel Angel Lazo Quintanilla**. He was detained on 22 February at 7 pm by members of the Air Force in Ciudad Credisa, department of San Salvador. Six days later his body appeared in La Pedrera. He was a member of ANDES.

Another ANDES member, **María Cristina Gómez**, was killed on 5 April. She was reportedly abducted at around 11.15 that morning from the school where she where she worked by three armed individuals dressed in civilian clothes. She was taken away in a silver-coloured Cherokee wagon

with darkened windows and private number plates P-21295. Her body was found an hour later near the entrance to the cemetery of Antiguo Cuscatlán in San Salvador with four bullet wounds. At the time of her abduction she was working in the John F. Kennedy school in the Colonia Santa Lucía, Ilopango, San Salvador. Cristina Gómez was also a member of the Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Salvadoreñas (CONMUS), National Coordinating committee of Salvadorian Women. She had four children.

Attacks on the campus, including bomb attacks

There have been numerous reports in recent years of military incursions on to the university campus. On 17 November 1988, for example, some 30 members of the First Infantry Brigade reportedly made a violent entry on to the campus of the UES and threatened students. The following day, a high-ranking official of the First Infantry Brigade appeared on Channel 12 television accusing students and teachers of the UES of involvement in guerrilla activity. The army has long denounced the university as a "front" (*fachada*) for the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN), Farabundo Martí Front for National Liberation, a coalition of several armed opposition groups. The army officer threatened that military action against staff and students would be stepped up.

On the night of 22 December, a group of about 50 armed men, some in uniform and others in civilian clothing cut their way through a fence around the campus of the UES in San Salvador, placed and detonated three bombs in the departments of Biology and Science and Humanities. A night watchman (*custodio*) in the biology department, Roberto Gómez Aguirre, was shot and killed when he went to investigate the noises at the outset.

Between 28 December and 13 January, a military cordon was maintained around the UES in San Salvador and soldiers searched people entering and leaving. They claimed the university was a front for urban guerrilla activity and that weapons were stored there. The military guard led to numerous detentions of university workers, teachers and students, all of whom were released after brief periods.

There was a bomb attack on 10 January 1989 on the main auditorium of the Eastern University Centre in San Miguel. There were no casualties, although the auditorium was destroyed.

On 13 January, bombs exploded in the homes of three university professors, including the Dean and Vice Dean of the Faculty of Science and Humanities. The bombs caused considerable damage but no injuries.

Death threats

University personnel, among others, have frequently been the target of death threats. The rector of the university in San Salvador, Luis Argueta Antillon, for example, received death threats from the so-called Acción Anticomunista Revolucionaria de Exterminio (ARDE), Revolutionary Anticomunist Extermination Action group, a new self-proclaimed "death squad". On 21 December, ARDE issued a communiqué declaring that because it considered the Salvadorian armed forces incapable of stopping terrorist actions, for every bomb or car bomb exploded by the terrorists, it would explode at least one bomb in the house of opposition leaders, university personnel and members of trades unions it had identified as linked to guerrilla activity. Luis Argueta was among those singled out. Other

university personnel received similar threats the following month, including Herberth Wilfredo Barillas, the Vice-Rector of the UES, and Mario Alfredo Cabrera, its Administrative Manager (Gerente General).

Victor de Jesús Ramos Urrutia and Jaquelin Astrid Peñate Hernández, members of the Students' Society of the Western University Centre, were taken violently from their homes in Santa Ana on 15 January by eight armed men dressed in civilian clothes but who reportedly identified themselves as agents of the National Police. They were taken away in a yellow van with darkened windows. The day after their detention, ARDE issued a communiqué stating that it was holding the students and threatening to kill anyone in the UES who continued activity seeking their release. However, the following day (17 January) the two students were acknowledged to be in the custody of the Treasury Police, Policía de Hacienda. They were released on 21 January, no evidence having been found of their participation in illegal activities.

ARDE also reportedly claimed responsibility for the 10 January bomb attack on the Eastern University Centre.

Amnesty International is urging a prompt and impartial investigation into the reported killings of UES staff and students in recent months and that those responsible be brought to justice. It is also urging that thorough investigations be conducted to determine who is behind death threats issued against university personnel and other personalities; and who was responsible for the attacks on university installations, and that those responsible be brought to justice.

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