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**EL SALVADOR: EXTRAJUDICIAL EXECUTION OF TEN PEASANTS**  
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Massacre in the cantón (hamlet) of San Francisco

On 20 September 1988, some 100 uniformed soldiers from the Jiboa Battalion attached to the 5th Infantry Brigade arrived at the hamlet of San Francisco, jurisdiction of San Sebastián, San Vicente department. In the early hours of 21 September the army rounded up 40 residents from the hamlet and took them to the local schoolhouse. The 40 were told by an officer in charge of the operation that "Ustedes por tontos están aquí por colaborar con la guerrilla" ("you are here for being stupid and collaborating with the guerrillas"). The soldiers returned to the schoolhouse at mid-day on the same day and read out the names of five people, four women and a man. The five were taken outside, they were blindfolded and their hands bound behind their backs, and they were then led away. One of the five detained, Rosa Emilia Rivas, was taken away also bound and blindfolded, to a derelict house where she was questioned about her son who is living away from home. She replied that she was afraid that if she didn't send him away he would be recruited by the guerrillas. She was subsequently released.

Those being held in the schoolhouse report that six additional detainees were taken away with the four that had already been removed from the schoolhouse in the direction of the caserío (estate) of La Cebadilla cantón El Rosario in the same jurisdiction of San Sebastián. Those in the schoolhouse stated that at approximately 3.00pm, they heard a series of explosions, and rapid gunfire coming from the direction in which the detainees had been taken. The soldiers then returned to the hamlet. According to those held in the school, one of the soldiers approached the schoolhouse, opened a window of the schoolhouse and said "pobrecitas las criaturas que no tienen papá, porque las mamás ya no van a regresar" ("poor little fatherless children, their mothers will not be coming back").

The residents held in the schoolhouse were subsequently released and told by the soldiers not leave the hamlet. They were also told not to tell about what had happened to them, or they would suffer the consequences. The residents stated that they could identify some of the soldiers as they were from the area.

The following day, 22 September, the bodies of the ten detained were found in a ravine on the road leading to the La Cebadillas estate, with their hands bound. The bodies were bullet-riddled, with bullet wounds to the back of the neck and head, as well as in the chest and face. The victims were identified as María Jesús Sibrián 27, José Ulises Sibrián Rivera 40, Jesús Zepeda Rivas 65, María Teresa de Jesús Argueta, 47, María

Zoila Rivas 38, José Atilio Rivas Rivas, José Félix Alfaro Abarca 40, Nicolás Flores Alfaro 27, Francisco Alfaro 50, and José María Flores Arias 29.

A relative of one of those killed said "They used to do this sort of thing by night, so we didn't know who it was, but this time we saw them because it was day-time."

In a series of army communiques issued by the armed forces press office, COPREFA, the army first stated that there had been an armed confrontation between the Battalion Jiboa and the guerrillas near the the La Cebadilla estate, during which eight guerrillas had been killed. However, in a second communiqué issued by COPREFA, after villagers stated the dead had been taken away from the village by uniformed soldiers, the army stated that those killed were peasants from the hamlet of San Francisco, who had been captured for "collaborating with the terrorists and when they were being taken to be investigated, they were ambushed by a group of subversive delinquents, during which eight peasants were killed along with two terrorists" ("colaborar con los terroristas, y cuando los conducían para investigarlos, los emboscó un grupo de delinquentes subversivos, muriendo los ocho campesinos, y dos terroristas").

In spite of threats made against them by the armed forces, local residents have continued to denounce the killings as having been carried out by the armed forces. Apparently in response to their denunciations and widespread local and international condemnation of the massacre, an investigation is being conducted under the auspices of the Juzgado de Primera Instancia (Judge of the First Instance) of San Sebastián. An exhumation was ordered and forensic experts who examined nine of the ten bodies indicated that the cause of death was from high calibre bullets to the head and neck, fired at a distance of 20-25 centimetres. The then Armed Forces Chief-of-Staff, General Adolfo Blandón subsequently reported the arrest of a major and a lieutenant attached to the Fifth Infantry Brigade, but local human rights monitors report that no such arrests were ever carried out, nor have orders of detention been issued against those believed to have been involved in the massacre.

#### BACKGROUND

The killings at San Francisco have occurred in the context of a serious deterioration in El Salvador's human rights situation over the last 18 months, as described in a recent Amnesty International report El Salvador: Death Squads - A Government Strategy, published by Amnesty International in October 1988. The report details an escalation of "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions carried out by the police and military - acting both in uniform and in plain clothes in the guise of the so-called "death squads". These clandestine paramilitary groups achieved notoriety in the early 1980's when they claimed responsibility for the murder and "disappearance" of thousands of people from all sectors of Salvadorian society. Their activities later declined, but are once again on the rise. The Salvadorian government maintains that "death squad"-style killings are the work of extremist groups beyond its control. However, there is overwhelming evidence that the squads are made up of regular troops and police - that they form an intrinsic part of the security apparatus.

Amnesty International's report details, for example, the killing of three labourers from Soyapango, whose bodies were found abandoned "death-

squad"-style in a ravine on 16 April 1988, some distance from their homes. Although the airforce, which regularly patrolled the area where they lived, denied having detained the men, eye witnesses stated that they had been taken into custody on 14 April by men in military uniform, whom they believed to have been from the airforce.