

# **amnesty international**

## **EL SALVADOR**

### **VIOLATIONS AGAINST CHURCH WORKERS SINCE THE STATE OF SIEGE**

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Summary

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Amnesty International is concerned at the alarming increase in human rights violations directed against religious leaders and church workers in El Salvador in recent weeks. Since the intensification of the armed conflict, six Jesuit priests have been killed in circumstances suggesting their extrajudicial execution. Dozens of church workers of various denominations have been detained and there have been frequent allegations of ill-treatment of detainees. Numerous churches and premises belonging to religious organizations have been raided by the security forces, and lay workers as well as members of the clergy have received death threats.

This summarizes a six-page document, El Salvador: Violations against church workers since the state of siege (AMR 29/33/89), issued by Amnesty International in December 1989. Anyone wanting further details or to take action on this issue should consult the full document.



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**EL SALVADOR:           Violations against church workers  
                          since the state of siege**

Amnesty International is concerned at the alarming increase in human rights violations directed against religious leaders and church workers in El Salvador in recent weeks. Since the intensification of the armed conflict, six Jesuit priests have been killed in circumstances suggesting their extrajudicial execution. Dozens of church workers of various denominations have been detained and there have been frequent allegations of ill-treatment of detainees. Numerous churches and premises belonging to religious organizations have been raided by the security forces, and lay workers as well as members of the clergy have received death threats.

Religious workers have been prime targets of military counter-insurgency activity since the launch of a major offensive by the Frente Farabundo Martí de Liberación Nacional (FMLN), the Farabundo Martí Liberation Front on 11 November. Following the offensive, President Cristiani declared a nation-wide state of siege and imposed a 24-hour curfew in areas of most intense conflict. The armed forces mounted aerial attacks using bombs, rockets and helicopter gunships on FMLN positions in the poorer and most densely populated neighbourhoods of San Salvador, causing thousands of civilian casualties.

The military crackdown against church workers has been accompanied by renewed accusations that they have links with the FMLN and have helped prepare the current rebel military offensive. Such accusations, broadcast by radio, were levelled against Padre Ignacio Ellacuria, Rector of the Universidad Centroamericana and against other Jesuit priests at the UCA days before their assassination on 16 November by uniformed men believed to have been members of the security forces. Government security forces have also detained and harassed dozens of religious workers in churches which have provided refuge and health care for people forced out of their homes by the conflict.

The church has long been a target of military repression. For decades the church's defense of the rights of workers, peasants and slum-dwellers to join trade unions and other grassroots organizations has lead to accusations of "subversive activity" by the authorities, who suspect the church of support for the FMLN. Liberation theology has been denounced by the armed forces as a "subversive doctrine" and those who advocate the church's "preferential option for the poor" have for years been singled out as targets for human rights violations. Church workers and leaders, including Archbishop Oscar Romero, were amongst the hundreds killed during the upsurge in military-inspired "death squad" activity in the early 1980s.



The church has come under attack for its active denunciation of such violations. The August/September issue of the UCA journal Estudios Centroamericanos included an overview of the human rights situation since the coming to power of the ruling ARENA party. Its author, Father Segundo Montes, director of the UCA's Human Rights Institute, was one of the six Jesuit priests murdered at the UCA on 16 November. There have been frequent attempts by the military to destroy the UCA printing press, most recently in a bomb attack in August. The extreme right has for more than a decade accused the Jesuit order and the University of fostering subversive left-wing ideology.

The following is an account of some of the human rights violations and related events reported in recent weeks with church workers as the target.

### **Apparent Extrajudicial Executions**

Ignacio ELLACURIA, Rector of the Universidad Centroamericana (UCA)  
 Segundo MONTES, Director of UCA Human Rights Institute (IDHUCA)  
 Ignacio MARTIN-BARO, Vice-Rector of UCA  
 Armando LOPEZ, ex-Rector of the UCA in Managua, Nicaragua  
 Juan Ramon MORENO PARDO, professor at UCA  
 Joaquín LOPEZ y LOPEZ, professor at UCA  
 Elba RAMOS, cook at the UCA, and her daughter  
 Celina RAMOS (aged 15)

On 16 November 1989, six Jesuit priests, their cook and her daughter were murdered at the Universidad Centroamericana (UCA), the Central American University in San Salvador. According to eye-witness reports, at about 1.00am uniformed soldiers carrying automatic weapons entered the priests' residence on the campus of the University. The six priests were allegedly interrogated by the soldiers before being shot in the head. The Jesuit residence was reported to have been raided by soldiers two days before the killings, and several of the priests are said to have received threatening accusations broadcast on the army-controlled radio. The fatal attack occurred during a dusk to dawn curfew that is strictly enforced by the armed forces, whose units had been surrounding the University grounds since the FMLN offensive. A letter reportedly sent by several army officers to the international press on 30 November accused the Director of the Treasury Police of having given the order to execute the priests and a Treasury Police captain of being the officer responsible for carrying out the killings.

President Cristiani has stated that the government intends to investigate the killings and prosecute those responsible, even if these are found to be members of the military. Amnesty International, in a telex to President Cristiani on 21 November, urged the government to make public the results of the investigation and the methods by which they are reached, and to bring to justice those responsible. The judge appointed for the investigation is Ricardo A. Zamora, a member of the special government commission established to investigate the killing of Archbishop Romero in March 1980. Despite the accumulation of evidence implicating military personnel in Romero's assassination, the case remains unresolved.



### Churchworkers currently detained

Juan Antonio "Berti" QUIÑONES, co-director CREDHO, vice rector Episcopal Church

Luis Gustavo LOPEZ, head of the Episcopalian church's education department

José Eduardo SANCHEZ CASTILLO, building superintendent

Randolfo CAMPOS BENAVIDES, CREDHO lawyer

Alex Antonio TOVAR FLORES, parish priest of Episcopal Church

José Candelario AGUILAR ALVAREZ, maintenance worker at Episcopal Church

José Horacio GUZMAN, maintenance worker

Julio César CASTRO RAMIREZ, community worker

Luis SERRANO, Rector of Episcopal Church

Nine members of the Episcopal Church of San Juan Evangelista were detained on 19 and 20 November during raids on the church and on their homes by uniformed soldiers of the National Guard. All are involved in the Asociación de Concientización para la Recuperación Espiritual y Económica del Hombre (CREDHO), the Awareness for Spiritual and Economic Recovery of Man, a social services program of the Episcopal Church. Six other church workers detained with them were released by 30 November.

The nine are accused of complicity in the bomb attack by the FMLN on the joint Chiefs of Staff headquarters on 30 October 1989. They have been charged under Article 470 of the amended Penal Code with aiding and abetting terrorist activity and are currently in Mariona Prison awaiting trial. The newspaper El Mundo reported on 1 December that the case might be heard before a military court.

Church sources have received reports that many of the detainees have been ill-treated. At least one of the church workers detained on 20 November is reported to have been tortured by the National Guard in order to reveal the whereabouts of the Rector, Reverend Luis Serrano, who had gone into hiding. Luis Serrano was detained later that day and held in Troncal del Norte Prison, where he was allegedly beaten and denied visits.

Amnesty International is concerned that the evidence against the church workers may be based on confessions obtained under duress. In an example of the customary use of the media by the authorities to prejudge the cases of detainees, the army-controlled Radio Cuscatlán reported on 1 December that Luis Serrano had admitted that two lorries used in the attack on 30 October had been loaded with explosives at the church. The broadcast also stated that CREDHO was financed by a "front group" for the rebels (organismo de fachada) which received aid from "so-called solidarity churches" in Europe, the USA and Australia.

The attack on the Joint Chiefs of Staff headquarters on 30 October, in which one civilian was killed, is believed to have prompted the bombing the following day of the offices of the Federación Nacional Sindical de Trabajadores Salvadoreños (FENASTRAS), the National Trade Union Federation of Salvadorian Workers. Despite assurances by President Cristiani that there would be an investigation into the attack, which left ten dead and at least thirty wounded, the government has not found and brought to justice those responsible and the case remains unresolved.



Estela CRUZ BUSTAMANTE, director of kindergarten at Colonia 22  
 José SANTANA LOPEZ, catechist  
 Santiago de Jesús VASQUEZ, choirmaster at Colonia 22

The above are church workers from the Colonia 22 refugee project, who were detained in Ciudad Credisa, San Salvador on 30 November, during a raid on the parish church by the Treasury Police. They were believed to be being held at the Treasury Police headquarters, where they were denied access to family and legal counsel. A Spanish Dominican priest detained with them has been released on condition that he leave the country. To Amnesty International's knowledge they have not been charged. Estela Cruz had received several death threats in previous weeks.

### Short-term detention and deportation of foreign church workers

Jennifer CASOLO

A representative in El Salvador of the U.S.-based Christian Educational Seminars, Jennifer Casolo was arrested on 25 November after police allegedly found explosives and machine gun rounds buried in her home in San Salvador. She was held for 18 days in Ilopango prison on charges of acts of terrorism subversive association and possession of firearms. At a pre-trial hearing, she denied the charges against her. She was released on 13 December and deported to the United States. President Cristiani told a news conference that the presiding military judge had ruled that there was insufficient evidence to keep Jennifer Casolo in jail. Nevertheless he added that the judge would continue collecting evidence and El Salvador could request her extradition if sufficient proof arose of her involvement with the FMLN. Church sources believe the evidence may have been fabricated by the authorities in order to "prove" links between the church and the FMLN, and to justify the arrest and deportation of foreign church workers.

Numerous other foreign church workers have been held in short-term detention before being deported or warned to leave the country. Twelve Lutheran church workers from Europe and the United States were held for a day at the headquarters of the Treasury Police. Though no formal charges were brought against them, they were publicly accused by the Director of the Treasury Police of collaborating with the guerrillas and told to leave the country. Some of the detainees reported having been beaten and threatened while in detention.

The Treasury Police also held six international workers detained on 20 November at the Episcopal Church. The National Guard, who carried out the arrests, are reported to have given as the reason for their detention the fact that foreign workers "could be subject to attack" ("podian estar atentados") and that there was concern for their safety. According to church sources, they were made to sign a document that said they had been suspected of collaborating with delinquent terrorists but that no proof had been found. They were released later that day on condition that they leave the country.



Father Miguel Andueza, a Dominican priest from Spain, was detained in Santa Ana by uniformed men on 20 November. He was held at two detention centres for 30 hours and was released following the intervention of the Spanish embassy.

Amnesty International is investigating further reports of detentions in various parts of the country of Salvadorian church workers and foreign workers involved in relief projects.

### Death threats and harassment

Prominent church leaders have received persistent death threats since the state of siege was imposed. The residence of Archbishop Rivera y Damas was reported to have received a telephone call saying "tell those priests we are going after them". The day after the killing of the Jesuit priests at the UCA, the Archbishop claimed to have heard voices over a loudspeaker at the headquarters of the First Infantry Brigade gloating over the killings and threatening to kill "more communists". The head of the Lutheran Church, Bishop Medardo Gómez, has fled the country following a stream of death threats against him.

A letter sent to the Vatican by the Salvadorian Attorney General, Mauricio Colorado, on 19 November urging Pope John Paul to withdraw "progressive" Catholic bishops from El Salvador, has been interpreted as a coded death threat to religious leaders. The letter states that the authorities "fear for the lives of those bishops who persist in promoting the dubious ideology of the Church of the Poor" (sienten preocupación por las vidas de algunos obispos que persisten en mantener viva la dudosa ideología de la Iglesia de los Pobres).

Six members of the Parish Church of Teotepeque were named in a flyer, distributed around the town on 23 November, which accused them of being communists and enemies of the people. The flyer is signed "The Permanent Committee of National Salvation" (Comité Permanente de Salvación Nacional) and shows a priest holding a rifle terrorizing a village. Residents of the town claim to have seen uniformed soldiers distributing the flyer. The six are actively involved in the pastoral work of the church, which is reported to have been subject to harassment by civil defence and army troops since early 1988.

Church centres which have taken in refugees and displaced people since the conflict have been targets for attack and many of their staff have received threats. On 14 November, troops surrounded the church of Santa María Madre de los Pobres in Soyapango, where approximately 100 refugees were taking shelter, and warned that the church would be bombed if it was not evacuated. When the parish priest, Father Daniel Sánchez, explained that the grounds were property of the Archdiocese, a soldier shot at his feet. The following day, the church was attacked by soldiers who tossed a grenade onto the roof, injuring two people. The parish was forced to close its refuge operation later that day. Father Daniel Sánchez was detained five days later by the National Guard.



The offices of the Jesuit provincial in El Salvador report having received death threats and the El Despertar refugee centre in San Antonio, which is staffed by Jesuits, has been raided and attacked by troops on several occasions. In areas of San Salvador and San Miguel where intense fighting has taken place, many non-combatants seeking refuge in local churches have been moved on by the military, while the premises of numerous church and humanitarian organizations involved in refugee work have been raided and ransacked.

### **The state of siege and new "anti-terrorist" legislation**

The state of siege, declared on 12 November and renewed for another month on 8 December, suspends certain constitutional guarantees and civil liberties. The authorities have emergency powers to hold detainees for up to 15 days in administrative detention, before being handed over to the courts. Amnesty International has noted the increasingly systematic use of torture during administrative detention in recent months and is concerned that the extended detention period allowed under the state of siege will encourage further ill-treatment and torture of detainees. The emergency legislation also allows for civilians to be tried by military courts in certain circumstances. According to human rights sources in El Salvador, there have been no such cases to date.

The National Assembly has also approved legislation to amend the Penal Code. This legislation gives the government sweeping powers to crack down on dissent, outlawing "propaganda that subverts the public order" and severely limiting the right to peaceful protest. The law also makes punishable by five to ten years imprisonment the promotion of activities or declarations "in which other states or organisations are invited to interfere in the internal affairs of El Salvador". Amnesty International fears that the legislation may lead to the imprisonment of prisoners of conscience and will make increasingly difficult the reporting of human rights abuses by the church and local human rights groups.