



CENTRAL AMERICA SPECIAL ACTION (CASA)

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E L S A L V A D O R

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CASA 22/83 Arrest of the Coto family and others

1. Marco Antonio COTO VEGA, aged 29, law student, working with displaced persons and refugees at the San Roque refugee centre in San Salvador
2. Dina Isabel RODRIGUEZ ZAVALETA de COTO, aged 28, wife of the above, mother of three-year-old twin daughters, working as the only medical doctor at the San Roque refugee centre in San Salvador
3. Gustavo Adolfo ZELADA RAUDA, teacher in charge of the health education program for refugees at the San Roque refugee centre in San Salvador
4. Roxana Guadalupe FUNES MONTALVO, aged 24, working as a teacher on the education program for refugees at the San Roque refugee centre in San Salvador

Marco Antonio Coto Vega was reportedly detained by agents of the Policía Nacional, National Police, on 27 July 1983 in San Salvador. Next day, armed men in civilian clothes went to Marco Coto's home and arrested his wife, Dina Isabel Rodríguez Zavaleta de Coto, her 54-year-old mother Carmen Herrera Zavaleta, her 18-year-old niece Ana Silvia Méndez Zavaleta, and the Coto couple's three-year-old twin daughters Margarita and Maristella.

At 4.30 pm on 29 July 1983, National Police agents detained four other people as they were leaving the San Roque refugee centre in San Salvador, where they had been delivering food supplies. The four arrested were: Gustavo Adolfo Zelada Rauda and Roxana Guadalupe Funes Montalvo, both teachers at the centre, and Alberto Rivera Contreras and Eduardo Armando Parada, both drivers working for the San Salvador Archbishopric, which runs the refugee centre.

The National Police subsequently confirmed that the eight adults were being held under investigation at their headquarters in San Salvador, but they were permitted no visitors. The three-year-old twins were taken to the Centro de Observación de Menores, Minors' Observation Centre, in San Salvador. They were released on 11 August, reportedly as a result of the personal intervention of Salvadorian President Alvaro Magaña.

On 10 August 1983 the Press Office of the National Police issued a communiqué stating that Marco Antonio Coto Vega, Dina Isabel Rodríguez Zavaleta de Coto, Gustavo Adolfo Zelada Rauda and Roxana Guadalupe Funes Montalvo had been brought before the Juez Militar de Instrucción, military investigating judge. The precise charges against them were not given although the police said that large quantities of subversive propaganda had been found and accused the four of belonging to the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (ERP), People's Revolutionary Army, one of the guerrilla groups that makes up the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN), Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, a coalition of opposition forces at present fighting the Salvadorian Government. The communiqué went on to allege that the San Roque refugee centre, where all four worked and which is run by the San Salvador Archbishopric, was being used to distribute food and other supplies to the guerrillas. It also alleged that Dina Rodríguez was in charge of obtaining medical supplies for the guerrillas and of providing medical attention to ERP members injured in confrontations with the security forces.

The communiqué also acknowledged that Alberto Rivera Contreras, Eduardo Armando Parada, Carmen Zavaleta Herrera and Ana Silvia Méndez Zavaleta had been arrested but that they had been released without charge.

Following their appearance before the military judge, Marco Coto and Gustavo Zelada were transferred on 11 August to the main prison for male political prisoners in Mariona, known as La Nueva Esperanza, The New Hope, and the two women, Dina Rodríguez and Roxana Funes, were taken to the main prison for women political prisoners at Ilopango.

Reports received by Amnesty International indicate that both Marco Coto and his wife Dina were tortured while in the custody of the National Police. According to one report, Dina Rodríguez was threatened that her children's hands would be cut off.

Under Decree 507 of 3 December 1980, the security forces may hold those suspected of terrorism or other treasonous or seditious activities for up to 15 days in incomunicado detention, during which a military judge decides whether or not there are grounds for the continued detention of the person concerned. If so, the case is passed to the jurisdiction of a juez militar de instrucción, military investigating judge, who has to decide, within a period of 180 days after the detainee's arrest, whether the person should be freed or transferred to the civilian courts for further prosecution. At the time when the case is passed to the military investigating judge, the detainee is normally transferred from the place of incomunicado detention (usually a police station or military barracks) to Mariona Prison, if male, and to Ilopango prison, if female. In practice, many political prisoners are detained for longer than the 180 days permitted under Decree 507. Amnesty International is not aware of any political prisoners who have been tried and sentenced since the introduction of Decree 507.

Recommended Action

Please send appeals to the authorities listed below asking for exact details of the charges against the four people still in detention and what stage the proceedings against them have reached. Ask for assurances that internationally accepted standards for a fair trial be adhered to in the proceedings against them. Express concern at reports that Marco Coto and Dina Rodríguez were tortured while in the custody of the National Police and request that a full investigation take place into these allegations and that those responsible be