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EL SALVADOR

RECENT ATTACK ON MARIONA PRISON IN
DISPUTED CIRCUMSTANCES

Background

Amnesty International has been gravely concerned at the incident at Mariona men's prison, La Esperanza on 28 August 1987, in which a number of detainees, including political prisoners José Vladimir Centeno López, Fermín Rauda and José Antonio Cerón, and common prisoners José Antonio Cartagena and Héctor Antonio Anzora, were reportedly wounded by shrapnel from gun-fire and grenades.

Amnesty International is aware of various official statements concerning the events of 28 August, according to which the attack was carried out by opposition forces, or that the prisoners sustained their injuries in the course of an attempted escape.

The organization has received other information, however, which suggests that the prison may in fact have been assaulted by members of the security forces, with the possible collusion of regular prison guards. According to the information received by Amnesty International, the prison was attacked at approximately 1.00 in the morning, following a meeting held by political detainees to mark the one year anniversary of the presentation by the group of prisoners' relatives, the Co-Madres Committee, of a legislative bill asking for an amnesty for El Salvador's political prisoners. The prisoners state that shooting reportedly continued for some minutes, despite pleas from prisoners using megaphones, who asked guards and soldiers to stop firing on the prison. A number of foreign journalists and human rights monitors who inspected the prison after the attack have told Amnesty International that the location of the bullet holes and other damage to the prison appears to confirm that the firing took place from outside the prison, and that the firing appeared to have come from the direction of the guard towers which surround the prison. Amnesty International further understands that in addition to the prison guards normally stationed outside the political sector and around the prison, it would have been customary at the time of the shooting for a heavy guard made up of soldiers from the First Brigade and National Guardsmen to have been on duty around the prison's perimeter. Amnesty International is also aware from its own visits to Mariona Prison that it would have been difficult if not impossible for persons who did not have the cooperation of those guarding the prison to have been able to attack the political sector of the prison where several of those wounded were injured as this section lies within the common law section of the prison and cannot be accessed without passing through the defenses surrounding both the prison itself and those that are normally mounted around the political sector. However, according to Amnesty International's information, there were no military casualties and no prison guards were wounded in the attack.

Amnesty International has also been gravely concerned at reports that the most gravely wounded of the prisoners, José Vladimir Centeno, was not removed from the prison for urgent medical treatment until some 19 hours after the shooting, during which time official spokesmen continued to maintain that no prisoners had been injured in the incident.

Amnesty International's Concerns

Given the serious discrepancies in the various versions of the events of 28 August, Amnesty International is concerned that investigations be immediately initiated into the circumstances surrounding the attack on Mariona Prison. Should official personnel be found to have been in breach of standards concerning the care and protection of prisoners, Amnesty International urges that they be brought to justice.

Amnesty International is also asking that information be made public concerning the current state of health of José Vladimir Centeno and the other prisoners injured in the attack and that the appropriate government and prison authorities ensure that they be accorded adequate medical care.