



CENTRAL AMERICA SPECIAL ACTION (CASA)

Amnesty International, International Secretariat, 10 Southampton Street,
London WC2 7HF, England. Telephone: 01-836 7788 Telex: 28502



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E L S A L V A D O R

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CASA 27/81 Detentions and killings by the Treasury Police

I 8 July 1981

Reports have been received by AI that on 8 July 1981 in the canton of Loma de Ramos, department of Guazapa, 41 persons were detained either in their homes or in a sports stadium by the Treasury Police (Policía de Hacienda) acting with auxiliary paramilitary civilians. Those detained included women and children. They were taken to Concepción in Quetzaltepeque where they were reportedly murdered. On 10 July the bodies of all those detained were found with marks of torture. The women, including a girl under 12, had been raped.

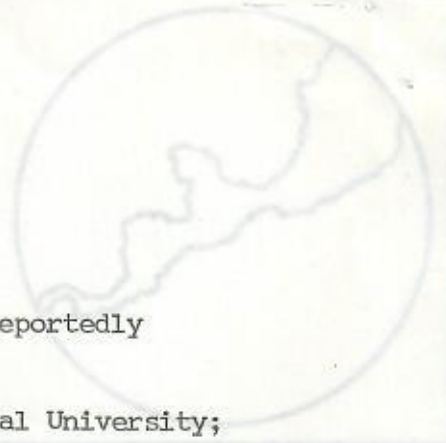
II 4 June 1981

The Treasury Police were earlier implicated in an incident on 4 June 1981 at 12 pm in the canton of Pino de Soyapango when the following people were arrested by the Treasury Police:

José Alfredo VASQUEZ MARTINEZ, aged 15
René PENA MEDRANO, aged 14
Roberto RAMIREZ VARGAS, aged 18
Ovidio VASQUEZ MARTINEZ, aged 19
Alfredo RAMIREZ, aged 20
Guillermo PENA MEDRANO, aged 23
José Alberto LEMUS ORELLANA, aged 26
José Emilio VASQUEZ MARTINEZ, aged 32

They were later found dead on El Angel bridge, 14 kilometers to the north of the capital, San Salvador. The bodies had been decapitated, and had been slashed in various places. Relatives of the victims cite the Treasury Police as responsible for the murders, as they recognized them at the time of the arrests. Residents of the area have protested ^{against} the killings, and have stated that 8-10 bodies are found each day in this region.

.../...



III 18 May 1981

Two weeks earlier, on 18 May 1981, the following people were reportedly detained by the Treasury Police:

José Ricardo GIRON, aged 27, psychology student at the National University;
José Antonio MONGE GUARDADO, aged 30, worker;
Florencia CHAVARRÍA, aged 21;
José Felix RAMÍREZ, aged 28, trader.

Their whereabouts since then are unknown. AI is gravely concerned that they may "disappear" or be killed in custody.

IV 7 April 1981

A previous incident in which the Treasury Police had also been implicated occurred on the night of 7 April 1981 when more than 20 people, including several youths were taken from their homes in San Nicolas de Soyapango*, a suburb to the east of San Salvador, by a group of men, some of them in uniform, and were later found dead. On 9 April, Amnesty International called on the government of El Salvador to open an investigation into this incident (see AI document AMR 29/25/81 "Amnesty International appeals to El Salvador Government over Apparent Death List issued by Army").

Initially, Salvadorian authorities claimed that the victims had died in an armed confrontation with the police, but residents of the area insisted that some of those who died had been shot on the spot, while others were taken from their homes by the Treasury Police, and their bodies were found later. Some of the bodies found elsewhere had their hands bound, a fact totally inconsistent with the official explanation that the victims had died in a shoot-out with the police. Later, however, both Salvadorian and US officials (in the latter case, speaking on behalf of both the US Embassy in San Salvador and the Department of State in Washington) said that 'individual units' of this security force had apparently been involved, and US officials stated that Salvadorian and US officials were cooperating to investigate the incident. Press reports on US officials' public statements promising an investigation into the 7 April incident are quoted on page 3 (below).

* It is not clear whether San Nicolas de Soyapango and the canton Pino de Soyapango (mentioned above in incident II) are in the same area.

Press Reports of statements by US officials concerning 7 April incident implicating the Salvadorian Treasury Police

A correspondent of the Washington Post reported on 12 April 1981 that

"A State Department official, speaking to reporters on the condition that he not be identified by name, said that the United States now understands that officials of El Salvador's Treasury Police have confirmed that some of their forces were involved in the shooting".

Similarly, a London Times correspondent stated on 10 April 1981 that

"Representatives of the American Embassy have investigated and confirm news reports that it was an act of gratuitous violence by the security forces, probably a group called the Treasury Police".

Other press comments on the incident included the following:

"US officials were tending to doubt the Treasury Police story, and believe that the police probably overreacted to shots fired at a 21-man police force when it moved into the area".

(Associated Press news item reported in the International Herald Tribune of 16 April 1981).

"What was different about the Soyapango shootings was that the government publicly acknowledged that members of the security forces had been involved. Official spokesmen said that the residents were killed in a shoot-out between government forces and leftist guerrillas". (Washington Post Foreign Service report on 9 April 1981).

"The regular army of El Salvador played no role in the incident which took place last Tuesday, during which approximately 20 civilians were shot to death, according to a statement made yesterday by State Department spokesman William Dyess. The United States government, Dyess added, were presently in close contact with the Salvadorian authorities in an effort to determine the details of the incident...

...William Dyess and the spokesman for the White House, Larry Speakes, said that the US government considered that "the reinforcement of the regular army and of the Salvadorian government offered the best means of achieving stability in that country".

(Associated Press news item reported in Voz del Interior (Argentina) on 10 April 1981).