



COMADRES

BULLETIN

Volume 1, Number 2 . December, 1989

Committee of Mothers and Relatives of Political Prisoners, Disappeared and Assassinated of El Salvador, "Monsignor Oscar Romero"

IN MEMORY OF FEBE ELIZABETH

The Fall 1989 issue of the Co-Madres Bulletin is dedicated to Febe Elizabeth Velazquez. Febe was gravely wounded and died shortly after a bomb exploded in the office of the National Federation of Salvadoran Workers (FENASTRAS) at 12:20 p.m. October 31. Nine others died with her and 38 were wounded in this massacre. Her life's work and assassination gives proof to her statement that "for the government, we are objects to be destroyed."

We commemorate Febe Velasquez because she lived and died for her people's struggle. In her 27 years, Febe became an exemplary female leader in the trade union movement, as she was a leader in the textile workers union, STITAS, served on the executive board of the National Union of Salvadoran Workers, (UNTS), and was the first woman to serve as head of a labor federation, FENASTRAS. Febe's leadership grew out of her factory work, which she began at age 13 to help support her family. The working conditions in the factory where she worked for many years sewing together Levis and Calvin Klein jeans, led to her involvement and future leadership within STITAS.

We commemorate Febe Velasquez because her blood symbolizes the spilled blood of thousands of people who have spoken out about human and labor rights violations, who have refused to remain silent in the face of death threats and the terroristic tactics of the



government. In the early 1980's, when the death squads were assassinating 800 people a month, Febe was arrested after being elected to head her union. This fall, she received death threats and the "Civic Patriotic Committee" conducted a propaganda campaign in which her photo was slashed by a red "X" on television. As Febe explained in July, "I am not afraid for my life because our struggle is just." Febe gave her life in order that the voice of a suffering people might not be silenced.

As CoMadres remembers the 10th Anniversary of the martyrdom of Jean Donovan, Ita Ford, Maura Clark and Dorothy Kazel on the 2nd of December, and we celebrate our 12th Anniversary on the 24th of December, we accept the challenge of Febe's example, and vow to continue her work in our future. Febe also was a mother of three, including a six-month old baby. Through her leadership in the trade union movement, Febe Elizabeth Velazquez continues to be a midwife to a new life being born in El Salvador.



STOP THE REPRESSION

Co Madres is an organization of more than 500 women that was established as an instrument of struggle and support for mothers and relatives whose family members have been captured, disappeared or assassinated for political reasons. Founded in December 1977 at the suggestion of Monsignor Oscar Romero, the CoMadres represent diverse sectors of society. The organization is a member of a Latin American Federation of Families of the Disappeared, which serves as consultive organ for the United Nations.

Our objectives are: unconditional freedom for all political prisoners; information as to where the disappeared are located; justice and punishment for those responsible for political assassinations and disappearances; suspension of decrees which legally allow security forces to obtain confessions through torture; and support for victims of the war. CoMadres calls for a peaceful negotiated solution to the military conflict which will result in a participatory democracy for El Salvador.

Comadres in Washington serves as a direct line of communication and coordination with the CoMadres in El Salvador, Mexico, Canada and Australia. We are Salvadoran and North American women working to educate and inform U.S. Citizens of current events in El Salvador. Through building national and international solidarity, we seek to raise support to sustain the work of the CoMadres in El Salvador.

A national network of Friends of CoMadres has developed to gathers grassroots support. While the office of CoMadres in El Salvador has been destroyed under the current repression, our international offices and Friends of CoMadres are responding to the urgent petitions of the CoMadres in El Salvador for immediate support.

Friends of CoMadres have offices in upstate New York, Boston, western Massachusetts, Iowa City, Seattle and San Francisco.

This bulletin is published by the Washington office four times a year and seeks to inform U.S. citizens of the activities and initiatives of CoMadres. Correspondence should be directed to:

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EDITORIAL

A PLAN OF EXTERMINATION, NOT NEGOTIATIONS

Recent events in El Salvador have clarified that the government of Alfredo Cristiani and the Republican National Alliance (ARENA) have no rational solution to the military conflict, nor any interest in seeking the benefit of the majority of the Salvadoran people. The government instead has demonstrated only a plan to exterminate every person who is not supporting its own position.

Following the initiative of the Farabundo Marti Liberation Front (FMLN), the ARENA government attended two meetings to discuss an end to the 10 year old war. However, the government brought nothing concrete to the negotiating table. Instead the government has commenced a deadly plan of extermination, directed against the labor and religious sectors. The bombing of the FENAS-TRAS office which killed 10 members and wounded 38 others, the massacre of 9 indigenous persons, the assassination of the six Jesuits and their two workers, the captures of hundreds of Salvadorans and internationals, the ransacking of scores of churches and offices, the daily death threats to religious leaders who dare to remain with their people—all of these testify to ARENA's plan.

In the midst of this activity, it became ridiculous for the FMLN to continue talks with a fascist government. It became naive to think that the insurgency would stand by with crossed arms while their brothers and sisters were being shot down.

In response to the state-sponsored violence, the FMLN left the negotiating table and initiated a national military offensive, centered in San Salvador. The fearlessness and capacity of the revolutionaries took the government's military by surprise. Consequently, the offensive unmasked the fascist nature of Cristiani's government before the eyes of the world.

While the FMLN invaded the capitol, the military of Mr. Cristiani responded with the massive array of armaments the U.S. Government has been sending to El Salvador for the past 10 years, and the inhabitants of poor neighborhoods began to suffer indiscriminate bombings. Simultaneously, the military stepped up its general repression, captures and disappearances of humanitarian workers and leaders within the popular movement.

It has been difficult for the government to conceal the incapacity of the army to confront the FMLN's offensive directly. It has been difficult to conceal the genocide which resulted from the air bombing and strafing. Therefore, the government had to take control of the national media, and the government approved a penal code reform that strictly limits civil liberties. Under the State of Siege, the government began to censor information through the National Information Center, which, in fact, negates any form of objective news reporting.

However, despite the atrocities committed by the army, despite the genocide directed by ARENA and Tandonia [the mass of military officials appointed from the 35th graduating class at the military college], the U.S. government continues to support the inhuman Cristiani regime. Regardless of the world's indignation at such barbarities, the U.S. administration ignores the the indignant demands of its own people for a cease to all aid to the death squad government of El Salvador. Without moral concern or human pity for its Salvadoran neighbors, the North American government decides to vote for more aid to this fascist government of ARENA.

Therefore, the international community must continue to press for an end to U.S. assistance to the regime in El Salvador. From each corner of the world, we must express our solidarity in order to stop the genocide: "No more aid! No more deaths!"



WOMAN ABDUCTED FROM COMADRES OFFICE

U.S. WOMAN HELD 53 HOURS, BEATEN BY TREASURY POLICE

The following was excerpted from an interview of **BRENDA HUBBARD**, concerning her detention from Wednesday, November 15, to Friday, November 17, 1989 by the Treasury Police. The interview was conducted by El Rescate Legal Department on Monday, November 20 in Los Angeles after Brenda left El Salvador. Brenda, 41, lives in Japan and went to San Salvador in order to accompany the Co-Madres on August 3, 1989. As a mother herself, she was strongly moved by the plight of the mothers and extended her stay in order to continue documenting the experiences of the mothers in the Committee and the human rights violations suffered by their families.

At 8:30 a.m. on November 15, 1989, Brenda was upstairs at the Co-Madres office in San Salvador typing a letter. She heard loud voices downstairs. Brenda got up and went to the door to look downstairs and saw a soldier pointing a rifle at her. He screamed at her to enter the sewing room where there were seven Salvadoran Co-Madres members and friends and one other North American, Eugene Terrill of Seattle.

She was still wearing her pajamas at this time. They were told to sit on the floor. The soldiers checked all of their identification and then blindfolded them. While both she and Gene were handcuffed with metal handcuffed (as can be seen in the photo appearing in *La Prensa Grafica*, 11-16-89), the Salvadorans were not handcuffed. The soldiers began hitting everyone with their rifle butts in the head and back. The men—including Gene—were hit much harder than the women. Everyone, however, was hit several times kicked in the back.

"I could hear their bodies hitting furniture and their cries as they were beaten."

--Brenda Hubbard of members of Co-Madres during captivity

She saw at least eight soldiers, but she was aware of more in other parts of the house. The soldiers were screaming obscenities, accusations and threats. The women were labeled whores, bitches, dogs and other foul names. The soldiers accused the Salvadorans and Co-Madres of being a "front" organization for the FMLN and of them being combatants for the FMLN. The soldiers threatened to kill them, including the North Americans. The soldiers were saying such things in between intermittent beatings and ransacking the house.

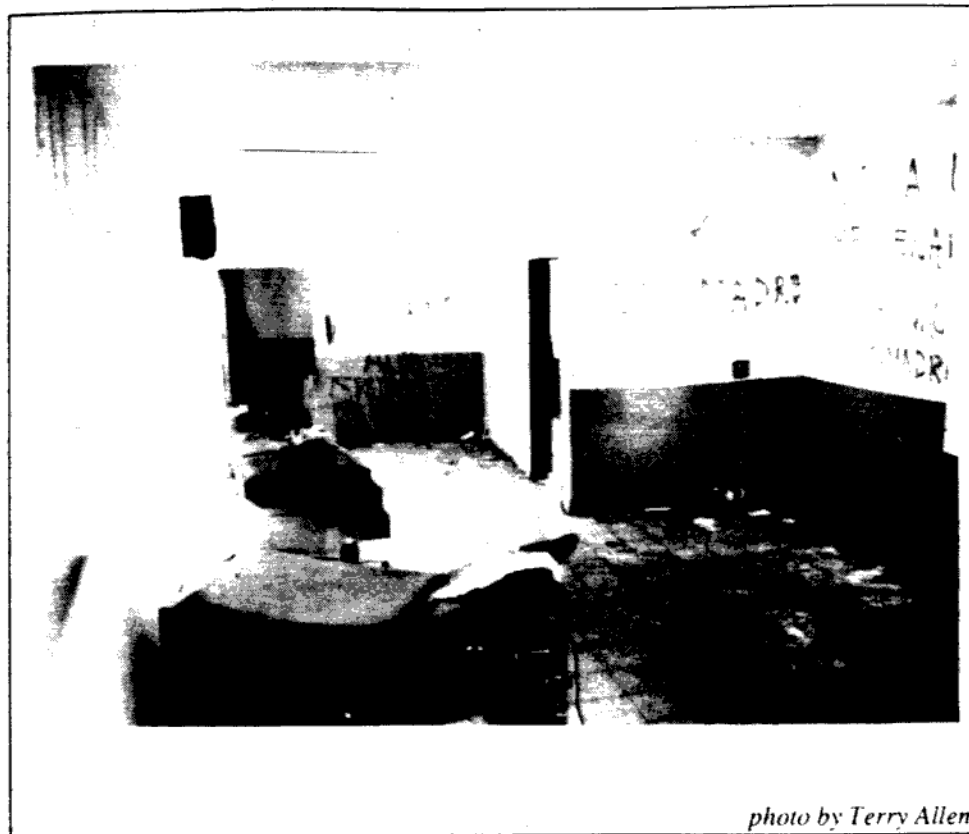


photo by Terry Allen

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SOLDIERS TAKE FALSE PHOTOGRAPH

At one point, twenty minutes into the raid, everyone was taken outside, where the soldiers staged a photograph. The soldiers lined them up in front of the house, facing the street. On the road in front of them the soldiers had placed a huge FMLN banner, with a number of black and red flags on sticks on the ground in front of them. Brenda also noticed that Gene and Pablo (Isidro) had been outfitted in military style clothing for the photo. The photograph was taken and they were taken back inside, sat down and reblindfolded.

OFFICE DESTROYED, EQUIPMENT STOLEN

As the group sat with their hands tied, they could hear the soldiers trashing the house and moving everything out. The soldiers stole everything in the house—including Brenda's suitcase, camera and film, all her work (photos, film and written testimonies), money, and watch. The office was cleared of everything—cabinets, desks, files and the copier.

In 1985, the Co-Madres had received the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights award and a congressional letter of praise for their humanitarian work. The peace award was a

REFUGEES RETURN HOME TO BUILD PEACE

- by Tim Crouse
Building with the Voiceless of El Salvador

Kids surround our car, some jumping on the trunk, as we drive into the refugee camps of Mesa Grande in the pine-covered mountains of Southern Honduras. We see mazes of tin and wood shacks that house the 3,300 Salvadorans who still live in Mesa Grande.

Most of the camp residents arrived here in cattle trucks eight years ago, when they were moved from their first refuge of La Virtud. The Salvadoran and Honduran governments didn't want the population so close to the border, where the FMLN, the Salvadoran rebel army, was active. But the refugees successfully resisted later attempts to move them further into Honduras.

Similarly, on October 10, 1987, 4,500 of them announced to the world nine months earlier that they were going to return home, in one big group, to bring peace through com-

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photo by Mark Anner

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bust of Robert F. Kennedy which was smashed on the ground and the framed letter was taken.

After one hour of this, everyone was taken to what Brenda later found out was the Treasury Police Headquarters where everyone was forced to stand in line facing a wall for many hours. During that time, she could hear the police taking Pablo (Isidro), Carlos and Roberto (male relatives of the disappeared who were working with Co-Madres and were arrested with Brenda) separately into a room at the end of this wall. In the room, they were brutally interrogated—Brenda could hear bodies hitting furniture and their cries as they were beaten. While the remaining CoMadres people were standing in line, the police continued punching them. They were moved around to disorient them. Some of the CoMadres people asked to go to the bathroom but were not allowed to. The police continued to take individuals to other rooms for further interrogation.

While in line, Brenda was sexually harassed. They lifted up her t-shirt that she used for a pajama top, poked her, and stared at her. Also they would open and look down her pajama bottoms and put their hands down her pants, touching her stomach and indicating by their actions that they were threatening to fondle her. She could also hear them making comments about having sex with her.

After a full day of standing in line, Brenda was taken into an interrogating room where they took off her blindfold and handcuffs. She was interrogated for about three hours about political leaders. During that time, she was not hit at all. This is when she found out she was at the Treasury Police. She was interrogated by one person and occasionally another person would come in and ask a single question and leave. When she was left alone in the room, she assumes she

was watched as there was two-way glass in the room.

During this same three hour period, Brenda was taken to a room and fingerprinted and photographed. She was allowed to go to the bathroom. As Brenda's blindfold was tied very loosely, she was able to see out of it on her way to the toilet. She was led down the hall and through the torture room. When she entered the room, she could see a man standing in his underwear, blindfolded, with his tied hands raised above his head. As she walked, she could see three or four large *pilas* (sinks)—large enough that a body could be submerged in them. As she continued to walk, there was another man standing in his underwear, with his arms held outstretched above his chest. She could see that there were other people in the room but she could not see them as clearly.

INTERNATIONAL BEATEN UNTIL UNCONSCIOUS

During her interrogation, in the rooms on both sides of her, she could hear the interrogators severely beating their victims. On the room on her right, there was a Frenchman being severely beaten. She could hear him being punched and it sounded as if they were jumping on his stomach. She also had seen the two men in the rooms on either side of her laying on the ground blindfolded and having to hold their arms above them...

The police put Brenda in a cement cell that was very cold. It had a toilet but the toilet was covered with vomit and excrement. She could hear people being tortured. On the left side of her they put the Frenchman and they beat him until he appeared to be unconscious.

Although it was around 1 or 2 a.m., the police would not let her sleep all night. They banged their guns on the steel door...the blood curdling screams of the people being tortured and the sounds of the police beating their bodies kept her awake through the night.

Very shortly after she was put in the cell, she could hear what she thought were the guerrillas attacking the Treasury Police Headquarters. She could hear the police go into a frenzy and start running up and down the halls screaming and beating people even more. She could see the police putting on their gear and weapons.

The fighting went on until dawn. A plane and a helicopter flew overhead and strafed the area. The bullets sounded so close she thought they were going to come through the ceiling.

At one point, a soldier came to her door, opened the window at eye level and stared at her. Twice a soldier closed the little window and stuck his gun through the food tray door at the bottom of the door, cocked it and said he was going to kill her.

During that time, every once in a while, a soldier would come in to hit, kick or slap her in the head...

The following day, Thursday, she heard the soldiers drag down a table and folding chairs and place them in front of the Frenchman's room. They brought the Frenchman—who had been beaten all night long—and sat him at the table. She could hear them applying a torture technique that made a whooshing noise. It sounded as if they were giving him an enema or forcing something up his nose. He moaned through the whole thing and she could smell hair burning.

All day Thursday, Brenda could hear people being beaten. She was left in her cell. Occasionally, one guy would enter and hit her with a stick.

Finally early Friday morning, they brought her water. Previous to this time she had not been given any food or water. They only let her sleep for an hour or two at a time on Thursday night and Friday. A few hours before she was released, she was given some food.

Brenda was taken to an exit door, where six other U.S. citizens were waiting to be released.



As Brenda's testimony states, seven Salvadorans were captured with her. On Monday, November 27, Apolonia Sophia, Luz Maria Alas, and Milagro Mendoza were released. Rosa Portillo, Isidro "Pablo" Gutierrez, Carlos Alberto Chacon and Roberto Antonio Hernandez were committed to prison the following day. Everything has been stolen from the CoMadres house/office. In recent days, Comadres of El Salvador have urgently petitioned us for money to buy food, for their members. Many are also devoting their effort to aiding the wounded and displaced. Checks may be sent to the Febe Elizabeth Velazquez Memorial Fund, specially earmarked "Emergency Campaign for the Mothers," 421 Seward Square, Washington, D.C. 20003.