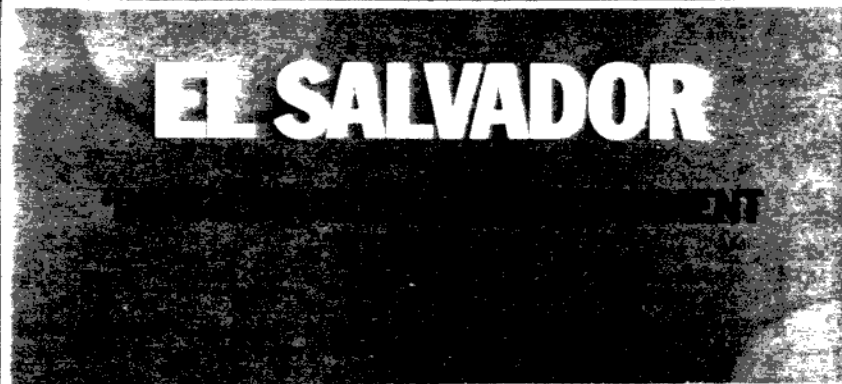


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## CONCLUSIONS

- (1) "Death squad"-style killings and "disappearances" by the government's uniformed and plainclothes armed forces are again increasing and are now the principal human rights problem in El Salvador. Torture continues, too, often involving mutilation and often carried out in conjunction with extrajudicial execution.
- (2) Tens of thousands of people have been the victims of extrajudicial execution and "disappearance" by El Salvador's armed forces since 1980. The annual number of victims declined after 1984 but killings and "disappearances" have not stopped. None of the armed forces officers responsible have been brought to justice, most remain in positions of command.
- (3) The rise in "death squad"-style actions outlined in this report began in 1987 and increased dramatically in the first months of 1988 after the release of most of El Salvador's recognized political prisoners under the terms of the Central America Peace Agreement. Amnesty International is concerned that individuals who might previously have been detained as prisoners of conscience have now become targets for extrajudicial execution or "disappearance".
- (4) The Government of El Salvador continues to evade accountability for "death squad"-style killings and "disappearances" by its uniformed and plainclothes military and security services. These openly illegal actions by the armed forces are routinely attributed to "death squads", which the government maintains act independently and cannot be apprehended. Other deliberate killings of prisoners have been falsely reported by armed forces spokesmen to have been a consequence of armed clashes with opposition forces.
- (5) The testimony of armed forces personnel, the details of thousands of case studies and other information examined by Amnesty International leads to the conclusion that actions attributed by authorities to "death squads" are routinely carried out by regular units of the armed forces which include

the military and the security services, and by special intelligence units that incorporate civilian gunmen under their supervision and control. Some individuals publicly identified as civilian "death squad" personnel have continued to work openly with armed forces units. They have had effective immunity from prosecution and have held credentials as armed forces auxiliaries, as plainclothes agents of the diverse intelligence divisions or members of the legal, paramilitary civil defense system. Evidence of clashes between independent "death squads" and the armed forces has not come to the attention of Amnesty International and leaders and personnel of such bodies are not known to have been detained.

- (6) Statements by government officials and in government media that attack named individuals and leaders of legal labour, human rights and other institutions as sympathetic to the insurgent movement have often preceded the murder or "disappearance" of these individuals. Authorities have not convincingly and publicly condemned anonymous death threats, killings attributed to "death squads" or the open advocacy of "death squad" methods by private individuals and political groups supporting their use as a counter-insurgency tactic of the armed forces.
- (7) Efforts by El Salvador's independent and church-run human rights organizations to investigate these killings have been hampered by the harassment, intimidation, imprisonment, torture, mutilation, extrajudicial execution and "disappearance" of their members. Domestic human rights workers have been endangered by frequent public denunciations in the news media by civilian government and military officials, who accuse them of aiding illegal opposition groups.
- (8) Announced investigations by government bodies and the judiciary into reported extrajudicial executions and "disappearances" have failed to result in public statements clarifying these abuses and with few exceptions have failed to result in prosecutions of armed forces personnel. The few special commissions established under the present government to investigate highly publicized cases in which the semblance of an inquiry has become a political necessity such as the murder of Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero and the murders of American citizens have also failed to produce full and public findings.
- (9) The military court system in El Salvador has routinely failed to prosecute military personnel accused of involvement in torture, "disappearance" and extrajudicial execution. The exclusive jurisdiction of the military courts over members of the armed forces provides a shield behind which armed forces personnel commit grave crimes with impunity.
- (10) In exceptional cases in which military court jurisdiction has been waived - notably the murder in 1981 of two American labour advisers and their Salvadorian colleague - civilian courts have been intimidated and proceedings obstructed by lack of cooperation by the armed forces.

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