

February 6, 1990

Dear Senator:

The actions of the Salvadoran soldiers, who before dawn on November 16 murdered six Jesuit priests along with their housekeeper and her teenage daughter, shocked the civilized world and dealt a heavy blow to the already slim hopes for peace in that tormented nation. But the response—or lack of response—of the Bush administration and the acquiescence of the U.S. Congress are also outrageous. It appears that U.S. aid will flow uninterrupted to the armed forces responsible for these crimes, despite overwhelming evidence that the November murders are part of a widespread and deliberate pattern of abuses.

Many members of Congress and the administration seem to believe that this case was an isolated incident, or that it was carried out by “right-wing extremists” outside the control of the Salvadoran government and military establishment. These views are refuted by a great deal of evidence, including a major report issued by Amnesty International in November 1988. This AI report, “El Salvador: ‘Death Squads’ – A Government Strategy” states:

The Salvadorian Government maintains that ‘death squad’-style killings are the work of extremist groups beyond its control. However, there is overwhelming evidence to suggest that the squads are made up of regular troops and police... The Salvadoran ‘death squads’ are simply used to shield the government from accountability for the torture, ‘disappearances’ and extrajudicial executions committed in their name.

The Amnesty International report covers the presidential years of Jose Napoleon Duarte. The situation has not improved under President Alfredo Cristiani and the ARENA party. As two researchers from Human Rights Watch, another respected group, wrote last month, “\$1 billion in funding has failed to sanitize an army of murderers. . . . the pervasive pattern of violations belies the notion that a few rogue bands are responsible for the continuing terror.” The murder of the Jesuit priests, their cook, and her teenage daughter was in fact only one of the latest crimes in an ongoing, consistent pattern of repression by the army and government. Since 1980 *tens of thousands* of civilians have been murdered by the army, but their deaths often go unnoticed by the media when the victims are less prominent than Father Ignacio Ellacuria and his colleagues.

An honest and complete investigation of the eight murders at the University of Central

America is far from certain; in the innumerable killings, tortures, and 'disappearances' carried out by the armed forces, *none* of the officers responsible have ever been brought to justice. However, even should these eight murders be resolved it would not change the fact that the Salvadoran military routinely carries out acts of terror and repression. Far reaching reform would still be absolutely necessary.

The signers of this letter have joined to mail this vital report from Amnesty International to all United States Senators, to insist that its basic findings must no longer be ignored and to call for a *fundamental* change in U.S. policy toward El Salvador. By means of a rapid phase-out of military aid, the United States should pressure the armed forces toward genuine negotiations for peace and to end the repression; the "blank check" policy followed to date provides no such incentives. During the negotiations, the military must be required to rid itself of and prosecute those responsible for human rights violations, and to end all use of its "Death Squad Strategy." Moreover, *all* future aid should be conditioned on genuine improvement as reported by *independent* human-rights groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

The people of this country, and of Central America, can no longer tolerate a policy which purports to support "moderate forces" in El Salvador, while the true moderates, such as the Jesuit priests, are murdered with guns supplied by the U.S. government. It is time and past time for Congress to call a halt to a policy which has only prolonged the suffering of the Salvadoran people, and to chart a new course.

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