

Dear Congressman Moskley,  
**El Salvador:**

*please compare  
HR 399 -  
The President's certification is illegal!  
ANN O Berry*



**Oxfam America**  
115 Broadway, Boston, MA 02116

**An Oxfam America Special Report**

by Jim Phillips, Oxfam America Program Associate in Development Education



A Salvadoran refugee casts a poignant glance behind him as Salvadoran paramilitary personnel kidnap him and others from La Virtud refugee camp in Honduras. Photo was taken by Oxfam America's Projects Officer for Latin America, Rusty Davenport, who pursued the kidnappers at risk to his own life and eventually managed to get them released. Refugees are kidnapped and taken back across the border into El Salvador where they are tortured and killed.

**The present refugee situation.**

Today there are thousands of displaced persons and refugees from El Salvador packed into makeshift camps in that country and in neighboring Central American countries and the United States. Most of these refugees did not want to leave their homes in El Salvador. It is a question of survival. Most want to return, if and when conditions in their homeland improve.

Who are they? Why have they fled? Why is Oxfam America involved in their situation?

**Who are the refugees?**

"There is a mixture of everything. They are all poor people. They come from the right and they come from the left. The majority are children—80 percent, 90 percent of the refugees that we have are children. There are people who are completely neutral, too. . . . The biggest thing that they have in common is fear—the fear that drove them out of El Salvador and the situation of fear that they've encountered in Honduras." (U.S. Catholic missionary, talking about his parish near the Salvadoran border in Honduras.)

The majority of the refugees are women, children and old people. They are ordinary people looking for survival and a better way of life. They leave their homes for a combination of political and economic reasons.

Most estimates agree that there are now well over 100,000 refugees from El Salvador living in camps in Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Mexico, Belize, Panama, and Costa Rica, and hundreds of thousands more in the United States. But no one really knows exactly how many there are.

**Why are there refugees from El Salvador?**

"There are approximately 20,000 refugees in the particular area where I am working, and they didn't show up by accident. Because of the situation in El Salvador—lack of human rights, lack of justice, lack of concern for the people and outright torture—projects for the annihilation of the people—the people were forced to run, to flee for their lives. That is how they ended up in Honduras." (U.S. missionary working in camps in Honduras.)

People flee El Salvador for several reasons, the most important of which are violence, landlessness and hunger.

**1. Violence.**

In El Salvador, violence, torture and fear undermine all attempts to continue a "normal" life for most Salvadoreans:

-Jose, a peasant and catechist (priest's assistant) returned to his home one evening to find his wife and daughter murdered. He was accused of using religion for subversive purposes.

-Pedro Escobar, typesetter and father of five children, saw his employer dragged by masked gunmen from the shop where he worked, taken to the country and left dead by the roadside. Escobar, fearing for his own life, fled the country.

"I had never planned to come to the United States because in El Salvador I had a good job, and I had to leave everything there. Because I was in a union, I was considered a threat. And three other workers in the union were considered a threat, too. Someone came and told us, 'Be careful, you are going to die soon. Don't even sleep in your house because something will happen to you.' So I left, but my friends stayed in El Salvador. After six days, I called my house. My mother said, 'Don't come back because last night they

killed your friends and came here looking for you." (A Salvadoran refugee in the United States.)

Almost everyone who has left El Salvador as a refugee during the past year cites political violence, mostly by members of the government's own security forces, as a major reason for leaving.

**2. Landlessness.**

In El Salvador during the past ten years, peasants and rural people have been increasingly pushed off their lands—a serious situation in a country where most people must live by farming. In 1961, about 12 percent of the rural people of El Salvador were without land, and in 1980, an estimated 65 percent had no land. Large landowners have been expanding their production of coffee, cotton, sugar and beef, which they export to the United States. To do this, they must absorb the plots of small farmers and peasants. The security forces and military have sometimes aided this process, burning or destroying the crops of peasants and small farmers. With no land, peasants and rural people are even more vulnerable and hungry.

**3. Hunger.**

Because they are losing their land, and because more of the best land is being used by big landowners to grow crops for export, people are less able to grow food crops for their own consumption. El Salvador has begun importing food from other countries in order to feed its own people. So Salvadoreans must pay higher prices for food. During the past decade, Salvadoreans have had one of



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the lowest per person intakes of calories in the entire Western Hemisphere: 1500-1800 calories a day (2300 is the recommended minimum to maintain normal activity and health). People are increasingly hungry in El Salvador.

### What is the U.S. response?

Official U.S. policy, which labels the current military-dominated Junta "moderate," supports it with increased military and economic aid, a hastily-planned land reform, and support for elections in 1982. This unrealistic search for a "middle ground" has in practice led to increased militarization and violence rather than to a negotiated settlement. Before he was killed last year, Archbishop Oscar Romero of San Salvador pleaded with President Carter to stop all U.S. military aid to El Salvador because, Romero said, such aid was used mostly to kill innocent Salvadoreans. The Archbishop's plea was ignored. Under President Reagan, U.S. military aid has further increased.

The U.S.-backed and planned land reform which began in March, 1980, has also been severely criticized. Many critics say the reform was ill-conceived, is unworkable in the current violent situation, and may actually make the situation of many Salvadoreans worse than before and contribute to the stream of refugees. The peasant cooperatives set up in Phase I of the reform have been subverted:

*"A squad of more than 20 men in National Guard uniforms, with complete battle dress and an armored car, drove to a government agricultural cooperative with a list of cooperative leaders considered to be subversive. Twelve of the leaders—the local directors who were supposed to carry out government-related reforms—were killed, and 160 families fled in terror." (Washington Post, July 1, 1980).*

### Elections.

Phase II of the reform was never begun. The land involved in this phase is mostly owned by powerful political and military figures, and produces the bulk of the country's export crops of coffee and cotton. During the next year, an Oxfam America report (*El Salvador Land Reform: Impact Audit*, by Larry Simon and Jim Stephens) indicated that the current land reform may, in the long run, actually push more peasants off their land and further decrease the country's production of food for local consumption. The report further concluded:

*"Most peasants consider the reform a cruel hoax intended to buy time and divert international attention from counterinsurgency campaigns terrorizing the population. While agrarian reform remains their most ardent wish, they are fleeing their promised land." (New York Times, Jan. 6, 1981.)*

The United States is supporting elections planned by the current Salvadoran government for 1982. The major opposition to the Junta's rule, including the guerrilla groups and the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR) refuse to participate in the elections, and

## CENTRAL AMERICA ADVOCACY STATEMENT

(As directed by Oxfam America Board of Directors)

In order to help the people of Central America create conditions favorable to their development, we are compelled to address the political issues which have shaped the present tragedy.

The roots of upheaval in El Salvador and Guatemala are found primarily in the appalling inequity and injustice which characterize their social and economic order. Legitimate and peaceful movements for social change have been blocked by the military and police establishments.

Opposition to this intolerable condition has led to a state of war in El Salvador, and civil strife in Guatemala. Development is all but suspended due to the increasing repression and rapidly escalating warfare. Oxfam America's efforts in Central America are increasingly restricted to the care of displaced persons and refugees.

Oxfam America, therefore, calls upon the U.S. administration and Congress:

- to end bilateral military and economic assistance to El Salvador; not to reinstate bilateral military assistance, and to end economic aid to Guatemala until genuinely representative and non-repressive governments come to power in the two countries.
- to encourage the coming together of representatives of the FMLN/FDR and of representatives appointed by the government Junta of El Salvador for talks leading to a political solution to the present conflict;
- to provide extended voluntary departure status and political asylum for Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees in the United States until circumstances permit their safe repatriation;
- to increase official humanitarian assistance for the care of displaced persons and refugees in El Salvador and Guatemala and to press for internationally-guaranteed security for Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees in Honduras and other countries.

Oxfam America calls upon the U.S. people and Oxfam America's supporters:

- to study the issues behind the Central American crisis in order to promote informed action;
- to promote the above recommended actions and changes in U.S. government policy;
- to take part in fundraising programs that support Central American displaced persons and refugees. □

other critics have also questioned their fairness. The acting Catholic Archbishop of San Salvador, Monsignor Arturo Rivera y Damas, recently pointed out that elections in a climate of on-going violence may not be any real solution to the country's strife (*New York Times*, Dec. 7, 1981.) Elections under the guns of government security forces, elections which do not include fairly all the major factions in the current strife, cannot succeed in solving the country's problems and slowing the flow of refugees.

### Salvadoran refugees in the United States.

While Salvadoran refugees often face death, torture and fear in camps within El Salvador and Honduras, they also face harsh treatment and questionable legal processes when they seek safety in the United States. Recent ecumenical religious groups visiting the large refugee camp in El Centro, California, report:

*"There is a deliberate attempt by the U.S. government to isolate the refugees in out-of-the-way detention centers and to 'encourage' them to sign voluntary deportation papers which result in their immediate deportation. The refugees have little, if any, legal assistance. Due process is a joke. . . ." (Tucson Ecumenical Council.)*

### What is Oxfam America's response?

As a private, non-political development agency, Oxfam America has been supporting self-reliant local development projects in Central America for years. The current reign of terror in El Salvador is now preventing all possibility for real social and economic development in that country. Meanwhile, the need and number of the refugees grows daily. In this situation, Oxfam America is moving to address the immediate plight of the refugees within El Salvador itself and in Honduras—with relief assistance. It is also moving to address the larger, underlying causes of the refugee crisis. The first of these, the violence and political strife, must be resolved before the economic reasons of landlessness and hunger can be adequately addressed. Oxfam America agrees with slain Archbishop Romero, and calls upon the U.S. government to end military aid to El Salvador at this time. It also agrees with Archbishop Rivera y Damas, and supports a process of democratic and representative negotiation involving both the Junta and the FDR before truly representative and meaningful elections can be held. Oxfam America calls upon the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service to recognize the plight of Salvadoran refugees in the U.S., and to provide them extended status and political asylum. Recently, the Board of Directors of Oxfam America approved an Advocacy Statement on Central America which includes these and other proposals. □

To obtain a copy of *El Salvador Land Reform: Impact Audit*, send \$3.50 plus postage to our Resource Librarian.

## "Under President Reagan, U.S. military aid [to the El Salvador Junta] has increased. . ."



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Congressman Joseph Moakley  
221 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington D. C., 20515



**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, D.C. 20515**

June 18, 1982

Honorable Alexander Haig  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We are writing in behalf of the relatives of American churchwomen slain in El Salvador in 1980, and their attorneys, the Lawyers Committee for International Human Rights.

In December, 1980, four American churchwomen were brutally murdered in El Salvador. What followed was an extremely dubious investigation plagued with uncertainties and delays. Five suspects are now awaiting trial in El Salvador, but a reasonable critique of the investigation suggests that responsibility for this heinous crime goes well beyond the five individuals who have been charged.

The relatives of the slain churchwomen have attempted to ascertain what has delayed the investigation and whether it has indeed been complete and accurate. Their requests for cooperation from U.S. agencies in this matter have been met with incredible delays and unresponsiveness.

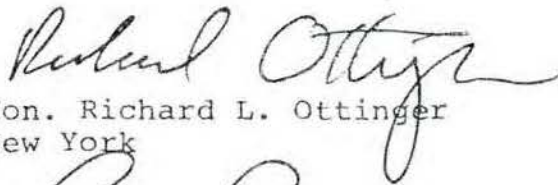
We urgently request that you do everything in your power to expedite the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request that has been filed with your agency in behalf of the families of the slain churchwomen by the Lawyers Committee for International Human Rights. Specifically, we urge you to immediately release all cables, memoranda, reports, letters, or other records which relate either to the deaths of Jean Donovan and Sisters Ita Ford, Maura Clarke and Dorothy Kazel in El Salvador on December 2, 1980, or to any investigations into those deaths which have taken place since December 2, 1980.

The families of these gallant women have already experienced the trauma of having their loved ones brutally murdered in El Salvador. For U.S. agencies to be dragging their feet in complying with the law is not only a remarkably inhumane way to conduct their business but is also a violation of the spirit of the Freedom of Information Act.

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Given the urgency of this matter, we request your compliance with this request by July 2, 1982.

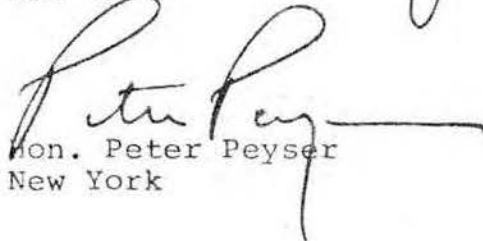
Sincerely,



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24TH DISTRICT, NEW YORK

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**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, D.C. 20515**

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WASHINGTON, DC 20520

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WASHINGTON, DC 20535

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