

CHRONOLOGY OF JESUIT KILLINGS INVESTIGATION

November 16

- Father Ignacio Ellacuria, five other Jesuit priests, and a domestic employee and her daughter are killed by gunmen at the University of Central America.
- At approximately 06:30 civilians discover the bodies and church officials are notified. The crime scene is contaminated by civilian on-lookers and media personnel before investigators arrive.
- Salvadoran President Alfredo Cristiani condemns the murders and orders an immediate investigation by the U.S. - funded and trained Special Investigative Unit (SIU).
- The SIU seals the crime scene, gathers evidence, and begins to interview possible witnesses. Autopsies are performed on the victims.
- U.S. Ambassador William G. Walker publicly expresses the U.S. Government's outrage at the crime, calling it "a barbaric act."

November 17

- U.S. pathologists view the bodies and review the autopsies' reports. In a preliminary assessment, they conclude that the SIU is performing a competent investigation and that the autopsies are thorough and professional.
- President Cristiani requests investigative assistance from the U.S., Spain, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

November 19

- Funeral services for the Jesuits are held at the Central American University. Ambassador Walker and President Cristiani attend.

November 22

- FBI agent arrives in country to provide technical assistance to the SIU and to receive a briefing on the investigation.

November 23

- Embassy is advised that a possible eye-witness to the murders, Lucia Barrera de Cerna, is leaving El Salvador for the U.S. for security reasons, with the assistance of the French and Spanish Embassies. Embassy legal officer and FBI agent accompany Mrs. Cerna to Miami in a French military aircraft, after State Department arranges air clearance and immigration authorization.
- Party is met by French and Spanish consuls and local Jesuits. The Jesuits express concerns about security and it is agreed to meet the next day, after the Cernas have completed immigration documentation.

November 24-December 1

- The SIU Director and polygrapher arrive in Miami. Mrs. Cerna and husband are questioned at FBI headquarters by the SIU Director and FBI agents. The Cernas give contradictory versions of what they may have heard and/or seen the night of the murders. After the interviews, the Jesuit community assumes responsibility for the Cernas.

November 30

- The Embassy establishes a task force to formally coordinate on-going U.S. Government assistance to the Jesuit investigation.

December 1

- Ambassador Walker, accompanied by U.S. Southern Command Commander General Thurman, stress the importance of a thorough investigation into the Jesuit killings to the Salvadoran military high command.

December 4

- Embassy officials meet with Roberto D'Aubuisson, (ARENA party President-for-life and Legislative Assembly Deputy) to discuss media reports of his possible responsibility for the killings. He denies any involvement and promises full support to the investigation, including his willingness to be polygraphed.

December 9

- President Cristiani offers a reward (250,000 dollars) for information leading to the arrest of the murderers, as well as relocation outside of El Salvador, if requested.

December 10

- The SIU completes interviewing all officers commanding units in the University area the night of the killings.

December 11

- The SIU establishes a hotline for anonymous callers having information on the murders.
- The SIU identifies the army unit that had conducted a search of the University on November 13, three nights before the murders. The unit is part of the Atlacatl immediate reaction battalion and was under the temporary operational control of Col. Guillermo Benavides, Director of the Military Academy.
- The SIU begins polygraphing soldiers from the units stationed in the area the night of the crime. It also identifies the lot number of the bullets used in the murders.

December 15

- The SIU reports having conducted 147 interviews of soldiers and having run over 300 ballistics tests on the weapons of soldiers who were near the University on November 16.

December 16

- The police officials sent by the Spanish Government to monitor the investigation depart El Salvador. They report that the SIU is conducting an objective, professional and thorough investigation.

December 22

- Col. Aviles, Father Tojeira, the Jesuit Provincial, and Father Estrada, the new Rector of the Central American University, receive a full and detailed briefing on progress in the investigation.

December 20-22

- A member of the U.S. Military Group in El Salvador receives third-hand information implicating Col. Benavides as the intellectual author of the murders. The U.S. military officer does not pass the information to his superior officer.

December 28

- An FBI polygraph expert performs quality control checks on the SIU's polygraph tests.
- The head of the Jesuit order arrives in El Salvador to review progress in the investigation. He meets with President Cristiani and receives a briefing from the SIU.

January 2

- President Cristiani reiterates that the focus of the SIU's investigation is on the military.
- The MilGroup officer tells his superior of the information he received implicating Col. Benavides. Col. Menjivar, the MilGroup Commander, with an Embassy political officer, report this information to Salvadoran Chief of Staff Col. Ponce.

January 3

- The prosecutors and judge assigned the case begin to review the SIU's evidence.

January 6

- Scotland Yard sends a team to review developments in the investigation.

January 7

- President Cristiani announces that the SIU has developed evidence implicating members of the Atlacatl unit in the murders. Two officers and 45 enlisted men in the unit are ordered confined to barracks. President Cristiani also announces the formation of a special military honor board to review the SIU's evidence.

January 8-10

- Staff members of the House Task Force on the Jesuit murders investigation visit El Salvador.

January 9

- A U.S. Department of Justice expert provides quality control on the SIU's ballistics tests.

January 10

- Auxiliary Bishop Msgr. Rosa Chavez publicly states that he and the Catholic Church are satisfied with the progress in the investigation.

January 11

- Supreme Court President Mauricio Gutierrez publicly applauds the investigation and assures that the accused will receive a fair trial. If found guilty they will be punished, whether they are civilians, military, or influential people, he is reported saying in a local journal.

January 13

- President Cristiani announces the findings of the military honor board, concluding that nine members of the military (Col. Benavides, three lieutenants, and five enlisted men) are under suspicion for the murders. Eight are taken into custody, while the ninth, who deserted the army in December, is being sought.

January 18

- Salvadoran Attorney General Colorado announces that his office will act as the official prosecutors of the military personnel implicated in the murders of the Jesuits.

January 19

- The judge announces that there is sufficient evidence to hold all eight prisoners under provisional arrest for the next stage in the judicial process.

January 22

- Defense attorneys file writs of habeas corpus demanding that the eight be released on the ground that the provisional detention order was improperly filed. In addition, the release of Col. Benavides is demanded on the additional ground that he has been implicated by accomplices and under Salvadoran law the testimony of co-conspirators is inadmissible as evidence against other co-conspirators.