

Statement by Congressman Joe Moakley
April 30, 1990

Shortly after the November 16th murders of six Jesuits and two women at the University of Central America in El Salvador, Speaker Tom Foley appointed a 19-member Democratic task force to monitor the Salvadoran government's investigation into these horrible crimes -- and to look into related issues involving respect for human rights and judicial reform in El Salvador.

After five months of fact-gathering -- which has included travel to El Salvador and numerous meetings and interviews with Salvadoran and U.S. officials, members of the Jesuit community, and human rights leaders -- the Task Force today is releasing an interim report summarizing our findings to date.

It is important to stress that this is an interim report -- and not a final report. We do not believe that the investigation into the murders of the Jesuits is complete -- and Members of the Task Force will continue to monitor this case and other related matters.

The most important general findings of the Task Force to date are that:

1) The murders of the Jesuits reflect problems within the Salvadoran military that go far beyond the actions of a particular unit on a particular night. The murder of the Jesuits grew out of an attitude of suspicion and anger towards activist segments of the church that remains all too widespread within the Salvadoran armed forces and other segments of Salvadoran society. Major reforms within the military are necessary to make a recurrence of such crimes unlikely; to insulate the judicial process from military pressure; and to strengthen Salvadoran democracy.

2) The early stage of the investigation was characterized by good police work. This is an advance from the early 1980's when similar crimes would not even have been investigated. The Task Force believes that this was due to strong efforts by President Cristiani and an understanding by some in the military that aid from the United States would be cut if progress wasn't made.

3) Despite the good police work, those now charged with the crime might not have been arrested if an American military officer had not come forward in early January with information concerning alleged involvement of Salvadoran Col. Alfredo Benavides in the case.

4) Furthermore, the Task Force was very disappointed that, to date, the investigators have made almost no effort to determine whether senior military officers other than Col. Benavides might have had a role in ordering, or in covering up the crimes.

5) Just as disturbing to us is the fact that, in recent months, the investigation and preparations for prosecuting the case have come to a virtual standstill. This is true both with respect to any investigation of possible senior officer involvement in the crimes, and to the gathering of further evidence against those already arrested. This lack of continued progress, coupled with certain aspects of Salvadoran law, make it less and less likely that full justice will be done in this case.

In short, the investigation has stalled. And unless there is an all out commitment on the part of Salvadoran authorities to renew the investigation now, there is no reason to believe that complete justice will be served in this case.

Our report is tough -- but it is fair and balanced. Those of us on the Task Force represent varying views on the issue of U.S. aid to El Salvador -- however, we have come together in agreement on the views and findings in this report.

Not since the murder of Archbishop Oscar Romero, has a human rights crime in El Salvador been so widely and internationally condemned. If justice fails in this case -- as it has in so many other cases -- it will send a chilling message to all who dissent from official government policy or who want to play a more active role in the political life of El Salvador that they must do so at great personal risk. That would be exactly the wrong signal to send now as negotiations between the government and the FMLN are about to begin.