

EL SALVADOR ONLINE

A WEEKLY PUBLICATION OF THE WASHINGTON CENTER FOR CENTRAL AMERICAN STUDIES

No. 234

September 30, 1991

THIS WEEK IN EL SALVADOR ... The government and the insurgency signed a broad peace accord in New York City. The trial of nine officers and soldiers accused of murdering six Jesuits and their two housekeepers ended in the conviction of two officers and the acquittal of seven others. A refugee aid worker received another death threat from a far right group. The United Nations Observer Mission to El Salvador filed its first report and the National Assembly passed a series of electoral reforms.

PEACE ACCORD SIGNED IN NEW YORK

In an historic accord signed on September 25, the government of El Salvador and the General Command of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) agreed to purge the Salvadoran military of human rights violators and reduce it in size, to create a national police force under civilian authority in which members of the FMLN would participate, and to establish a national peace commission to supervise and coordinate the implementation of all past, present and future agreements.

The pact, which was hailed as a breakthrough by both sides, sets the framework for the final stage of negotiations to end the war.

United Nations Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar, who mediated the talks which resulted in the Accord, said that his objective in inviting President Alfredo Cristiani and the five commanders of the FMLN to the U.N. had been met.

"It is my firm hope that this agreement overcomes the stalemate in the negotiations, that efforts will begin shortly which will lead us to agreements on the substantive issues still pending and on a brief and dynamic ceasefire," the Secretary General declared.

Alvaro de Soto, special emissary of the Secretary General, said he believed there was a possibility that a final agreement could be reached this year.

The peace commission, to be known as the National Commission for the Consolida-

tion of Peace (COPAZ), will be established eight days after the National Assembly ratifies a ceasefire agreement. It will be composed of two representatives from the government, one civilian and one military; two representatives from the FMLN and one representative from each of the political parties presently seated in the National Assembly. San Salvador Archbishop Arturo Rivera y Damas and the United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL) will enjoy observer status on the commission.

In addition to purging the Armed Forces of human rights violators and reducing the army in size, the Accord also calls for restructuring the education of the military and police forces, and a redefinition of the basic mission of the military within the society, including a role subordinate to civilian authority.

The Accord also establishes an agenda for negotiating the creation of a National Civilian Police (PNC), a goal already agreed upon in the April 27 Mexico Accords.

PNC personnel are to be chosen by a process that is "pluralistic and non-discriminatory," and would allow for the recruitment of members of the FMLN as well as other civil sectors. The new national police would be independent of the military and operate under civilian authority.

The present Security Forces — the Treasury Police, the National Guard and the National Police — would be disbanded.

Significantly, the Accord includes an

agreement to respect the "current ownership of land in the conflictive zones" and abide by the dictates of existing land reform law. This was the first instance in which the issue of land tenure was linked to the process of a negotiated peace. It would allow villagers in areas largely controlled by the FMLN to retain, for the time being, the lands they presently occupy and farm. Future disposition of the lands is subject to further negotiation.

Talks are scheduled to resume on October 12, under a "compressed agenda" outlined in an addendum to the New York Accord. Under the compressed agenda, both sides will be meeting non-stop until a final solution is reached. The themes they have agreed to discuss are the Armed Forces, Security Forces, the National Intelligence Directorate (DNI), and "paramilitary entities" such as the civil defense and armed reservists; judicial and electoral reform; economic and social themes; arrangements for a ceasefire; and participation by the FMLN in the political life of the country.

The New York Accord was reached after ten days of negotiations. Both Cristiani and the General Command remained in New York throughout the session. However, Cristiani was absent at the final signing. Oscar Santamaria, the head of the government negotiating team, Colonel Mauricio Ernesto Vargas and David Escobar Galindo signed for the government. Commanders Schafik Handal, Francisco Jovel (Roberto Roca), Salvador Sanchez Ceren (Leonel Gonzalez), Eduardo Sancho Castaneda (Ferman Cienfuegos) and Joaquin Villalobos signed for the FMLN. (SP 9/25-26; AP 9/26; CSM 9/27; ER 9/26; MH 9/25; NYT 9/26; RS 9/26; UPI 9/26; WP 9/26-27; WT 9/26; WC-CAS Report)

SALVADORANS WELCOME ACCORD WITH OPEN ARMS

Salvadorans from across the political spectrum welcomed the signing of the September 25 peace accord in New York, hailing it as a victory for peace and a major step toward a final resolution of the conflict.

Rumblings were heard on the far

right, however, where resistance to the idea of incorporating members of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) into a new national police force was fiercest.

President Alfredo Cristiani declared "We have made important progress in negotiations to ensure that 1991 will be the year of peace." He expressed optimism that "total agreement for an end to the conflict may be a reality in the very near future."

The head of the government negotiating team, Minister of the Presidency Oscar Santamaria, said the government is "very satisfied" with the accord, and called it a "transcendental step."

"This is a day of great jubilation for the Salvadoran people," he declared.

Leaders of the rebel negotiating team also spoke in glowing terms of the agreement they had reached.

Schafik Handal called it a "victory for democracy" and "a very great advance."

Salvador Sanchez Ceren called it a "great victory of the political-military struggle undertaken by the Salvadoran people."

Eduardo Sancho said the agreement marked the beginning of "the disarticulation of the military pincers which have maintained the dictatorial system for decades."

"The agreement opens an irreversible path for peace," said Salvador Sanabria, a member of the Political-Diplomatic Commission (CPD) of the FMLN.

Roberto Canas, also of the CPD, said "I believe that the big winner in this situation is civil society."

"We are on the way to the consolidation of civil society and the submission of the Armed Forces and the Police to civil power, so the big winner is the population," he explained.

He added hopefully, "We want to announce to all Salvadorans, on December 15 at the latest, that the war is definitively ended and that not only the war is ended but the causes which originated it are also ended."

Negotiator Mercedes del Carmen Letona explained that "the FMLN is very satis-

fied" with the agreement. "We think this is the first stone in the construction of peace in the country. October 12 will be the beginning of the final stage. This is irreversible."

Fidel Chavez Mena, the Secretary General of the Christian Democratic Party (PDC), called the accord a "very positive and encouraging step forward," but warned of "discordant voices that hope to block or undermine the negotiating process."

Humberto Centeno of the National Union of Salvadoran Workers (UNTS) proclaimed that he believed that at last we have "arrived at the moment of working for peace, democracy and social justice."

Roberto D'Aubuisson, Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) party leader and National Assembly deputy, called the agreement "the beginning of peace," but denied the FMLN would be allowed to participate in a civilian police force.

Vice-President Francisco Merino called the prospect of FMLN participation in a new civilian police force "a rumor with evil intentions."

Other rightists, however, were more approachable on the issue.

Colonel Sigifredo Ochoa Perez, director of the Lempa River Hydroelectric Executive Commission (CEL), said FMLN participation in a civilian police force is "feasible ... if they meet the requirements and end insurgent activity."

"Those who feel uneasy" with this arrangement, "will have to swallow it," Ochoa said. "The Armed Forces must be subordinate to political power and respect the agreements that the government signs to end the conflict," he maintained, adding, "It is more important to halt the bloodbath and facilitate the incorporation of the rebels to the society and together begin national reconstruction than to raise objections in minority sectors opposed to the peace process."

"All democratic sectors must support the agreements," said Ruben Zamora, vice-president of the National Assembly and leader of the Democratic Convergence (CD). We "will support the President against any other forces that oppose the agreement."

Said Auxiliary Bishop of San Salvador

Gregorio Rosa Chavez of the accord, "Reason has finally triumphed over force."

He called upon his fellow Salvadorans to "look for a society in which there truly is fraternity, justice, and reconciliation after twelve years of armed confrontation." (SP 9/26-27; AP 9/26; ER 9/25; PI 9/25; RS 9/26)

BENAVIDES CONVICTED IN JESUIT CASE

After a three-day trial and more than five hours of deliberation, a five-member jury on September 28 convicted Colonel Guillermo Alfredo Benavides Moreno, former head of the Salvadoran Military Academy and the highest-ranking army officer ever charged in a human-rights crime in El Salvador, of the November 16, 1989 murders of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter at the Central American University (UCA).

Benavides was convicted of ordering the murders, for which he faces a maximum 30 years in prison, but was acquitted on charges of having committed "acts of terrorism" and "conspiring to commit acts of terrorism."

One other of the nine officers and soldiers charged with the crime, Lieutenant Yushy Rene Mendoza Vallecillos, was convicted of the murder of 15-year-old Celina Maricet Ramos.

Lieutenant Jose Ricardo Espinoza Guerra, Second Lieutenant Gonzalo Guevara Cerritos, Sergeants Antonio Ramiro Avalos Vargas and Tomas Zarpate Castillo, Corporal Angel Perez Vasquez, and Privates Oscar Mariano Amaya Grimaldi and Jorge Alberto Sierra Ascencio, the last tried in absentia, were acquitted of the murders.

The co-defendants, who included six members of the elite, U.S.-trained Atlacatl Battalion, went on trial on September 26 before Judge Zamora in a special chamber of the Supreme Court building.

The trial date was kept secret in advance reportedly because Judge Zamora feared potential jurors would refuse to show up if they knew the case for which they were being selected. Jury selection took place in secret on September 24.

On the opening day of the trial, which was televised, more than 100 people

packed the courtroom, to which access was severely restricted.

The three women and two men of the jury, selected from a pool of twelve, listened to testimony from behind a wooden partition, while the accused sat facing an audience made up of their relatives and those of the victims; members of the press; and some 50 observers, including U.S. Ambassador William Walker, several other foreign diplomats, five Spanish parliamentarians and representatives of the Catholic Church and human rights organizations.

The reading of a summary of thousands of pages of evidence in the case finished at mid-day on the second day of the trial, after which arguments for the prosecution and the defense began.

Defense attorney Raul Mendez Castro complained that the case had been "saturated with foreign intervention" and called the Jesuit order "a powerful group of people in the world" which "dominates senates and even whole governments."

Private prosecutor Henry Campos Solorzano, on the second day of the trial, declared to the court that "others involved in this crime, those intellectual authors who hide like cowards in the shadows, should be punished after this trial in the name of the peaceful reconciliation of all Salvadorans."

The same day, police in riot gear beat and forcibly dispersed demonstrators from the UCA who gathered to read a press statement calling for the conviction of the accused and the arrests of the masterminds of the crime. The next day, on the day the verdicts were read, some 200 family members of Armed Forces officers led by an army colonel marched outside the courthouse, chanting pro-military slogans and denouncing "intellectual terrorists," apparently referring to the slain Jesuits.

Police did not interfere.

After the verdict, Jesuit Provincial for Central America Jose Maria Tojeira said the outcome was "unsurprising," while suggesting it was "very difficult to believe that a single person is responsible for these killings."

"I'm not overly bothered by the

acquittal of those of lower rank, though I believed there was sufficient evidence to convict them," Tojeira explained, adding "I believe it is correct that the jury placed the blame going upward in rank, and we should keep looking up the ranks for more of those responsible."

The Jesuit order and others have maintained from the first that there was broad high-level involvement in the UCA murders and a widespread conspiracy extending to U.S. government officials to cover up the crime.

On September 29, the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights issued a statement from San Salvador describing the convictions as "an important break in the cycle of impunity."

They remarked, however, that they did "not view the trial itself as a triumph for the Salvadoran justice system" because "from the outset, the process leading to these convictions was gravely flawed."

The Committee also drew attention to the widespread speculation that Benavides and Mendoza "will soon benefit from a general amnesty or pardon" and called on President Alfredo Cristiani "to declare his personal commitment to allowing the convictions ... to stand."

U.S. Congressional Representative Joe Moakley (D-MA), who heads a task force monitoring developments in the Jesuit case, offered "Some people may be stroked by the conviction of a colonel, but if they're talking about intellectual authors, let's go for the real ones higher up in the ranks."

Jim McGovern, an aide to Representative Moakley, expressed disappointment "that the people who actually did this horrible crime are not going to pay."

"But again, I think it is important that Benavides has been convicted and I think we need to look upward and find out who gave Benavides the order," he added.

Presiding Judge Ricardo Zamora of San Salvador's Fourth Penal Court has one month to sentence the two convicted officers. He has announced that he will be leaving the country shortly after he hands down sentence, apparently for his own protection. (SP 9/24, 9/27, 9/29;

AFP 9/26, 9/29; AP 9/26, 9/29; ER 9/27; RNS 9/27; RS 9/26-27, 9/29; UPI 9/26, 28-29; WP 9/30; WC-CAS Report)

CRIPDES LEADER RECEIVES FOURTH THREAT

On September 24, Mirtala Lopez, head of the Christian Committee for the Displaced of El Salvador (CRIPDES), received another death threat, her fourth, from the Salvadoran Anti-Communist Front (FAS), a shadowy right-wing group of unknown membership.

FAS members surrounded CRIPDES headquarters in their automobiles at 5:30 a.m. that morning and posted the threat on the door of the office.

"Don't try to run, our arms are aimed at your body," the message said.

In a paid ad in Diario Latino on September 24, CRIPDES charged the "High Command of the Armed Forces" and the ruling Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) party with responsibility for the threats. The refugee group declared that it would "continue with the fight of our people for a country with justice, peace and real democracy."

On September 27, an annual humanitarian award given by the Jimmy Carter Foundation was granted to Mirtala Lopez and the six Jesuits murdered by the military in 1989.

The United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL) has agreed to investigate the threats against Lopez.

Meanwhile, on September 24, construction worker Miguel Angel Martinez was found shot to death in San Salvador, according to ONUSAL and the non-governmental Human Rights Commission of El Salvador (CDHES). Another construction union worker, Guillermo Ramirez, was found dead in a main street in San Salvador the same day. Celia Medrano, a leader of the CDHES, said the army was conducting a terror campaign because it did not want progress at the peace talks which took place recently in New York.

In other human rights news, the Committee of Unemployed and Dismissed

Workers of El Salvador (CODYDES) held a protest on September 24 on behalf of 200 workers who were recently fired.

Police attacked the demonstration and tried to arrest leader Balmore Arevalo and four others, CODYDES said.

CODYDES leader Antonio Chacon asserted that at the end of the protest one of the activists was missing.

Residents of the Segundo Montes City in Morazan reported harassment by the army. The townspeople said that on September 22 at around 10:00 a.m., military vehicles arrived in the area and soldiers began to fire at Cristina Gonzales and her three children, who were tending their fields at the time. Then the soldiers reportedly shot at a truck carrying civilians who were just returning from a peace march. In the settlement of San Luis troops fired tear gas at a group of inhabitants injuring 20, including two journalists. (SP 9/22-28, CJA 9/27; DL 9/24-26; VOB 9/27)

ONUSAL ISSUES FIRST REPORT

The United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL) on September 24 released its first report, finding fault with both the Salvadoran army and the rebels it has fought for more than a decade.

The 24-page report expressed concern about the high number of violations, the lack of information from the Armed Forces, Security Forces and justices of the peace in the conflictive zones, "the abuses and practices of the civil defense," and "the impunity in violations of human rights."

The document mentioned the August kidnapping of Gregorio Zelaya, a wealthy Usulután planter, by the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) and said the kidnapping of Guillermo Sol Bang, a Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) party leader, is still under investigation.

"Kidnapping and forced recruitment are violations of the San Jose Agreement," noted the monitor's report, referring to

the July 26, 1990 human rights accords reached between rebel and government negotiators.

On the army attack on residents of Segundo Montes City, Morazan province, on August 17-18, ONUSAL said "there is no proof" of the army's contention "that guerrillas were inside the community at the moment."

"The objective of the attack was to intimidate the population," the ONUSAL report concluded.

The report also concluded that the killing of a nine-month-old baby and the wounding of other civilians in San Jose Las Flores September 4 was the result of civilians being "in the line of fire" of military positions. U.N. observers were unable to establish if the rebels were in the town at the time.

U.N. officials declined to say exactly how many complaints of human rights abuses they have received since opening their offices July 26, but did say the five regional offices have received several dozen complaints each. The report listed human rights violations, but reached no conclusions.

The ONUSAL mission was established at the invitation of the FMLN and the Salvadoran government in support of ongoing negotiations aimed at ending the 11-year-old civil war. (ER 9/24; PG 9/25; UPI 9/24)

ASSEMBLY RATIFIES ELECTORAL REFORMS

On September 24, in a unanimous vote, El Salvador's National Assembly ratified seventeen reforms to the Salvadoran constitution. Included among the reforms is a provision to replace the country's present Central Electoral Council (CCE), on which the three largest parties were represented, with a new Supreme Electoral Tribunal made up of representatives of the four largest parties now sitting in the National Assembly and a representative selected by the Supreme Court.

The new tribunal will allow for participation by the Democratic Conver-

gence (CD), a center-left coalition which won the fourth-largest share of Assembly seats in elections this past March. According to CD leader Hector Silva, the reforms are an "important step" in preventing any kind of electoral fraud in the next elections, scheduled for 1994.

The reforms are part of a package of constitutional amendments which the government and the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) agreed to at the negotiating table in April. They were ratified by the outgoing Assembly on April 30, but Salvadoran law requires that constitutional amendments be ratified by two consecutive Assemblies.

The Assembly agreed on July 24 to consider reforms dealing with human rights, electoral reforms, the judiciary, and the role of the Armed Forces, in that order. Human rights reforms were passed on September 11. Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) party legislators have refused to consider passage of military reforms until after a ceasefire has been signed. (SP 9/25; AFP 9/26; ER 9/26; IPS 9/25; ESOL 9/16)

UMBRELLA GROUP FORMED TO BATTLE CHOLERA

In a move aimed at coordinating efforts to halt the development of a cholera epidemic in the Salvadoran countryside, some 35 popular and human rights organizations have formed the Inter-Organizational Health Committee (CIS).

The CIS plans to have 21 doctors, 42 nurses and 84 health promoters working in 42 centers for rehydration, treatment and education in eight of El Salvador's 14 provinces.

As of September 21, cholera had claimed three lives in El Salvador, and a total of 105 cases had been confirmed with another 700 possible.

Health Minister Colonel Lisandro Vasquez Sosa said the cholera virus, entering from Guatemala, had contaminated two western lakes: Guija and Coatepeque.

Dan Epstein, an information officer for the Pan American Health Organization

(PAHO), expressed pessimism about the Latin America-wide prospects for a halt to the spread of the disease, which PAHO reports has struck some 300,000 people and killed more than 3,000 since January, mostly in Peru and Ecuador.

He declared, nevertheless, that the disease was "easily preventable if countries are willing to make the commitment." (AFP 9/21; DL 9/23; ER 9/23; TGM 9/20)

REBEL TRUCE ENDS, COMBAT CONTINUES

The signing of agreements between rebel and government negotiators in New York on September 25 also signaled the end of the insurgents' unilateral "good-will" truce at midnight that day.

The truce went into effect nationally on September 14, three days before the peace talks began. But the rebel claim that its units had inflicted 110 casualties on army troops in defensive engagements from September 14-21 underscored the intensity of army sweeps in the north, central and eastern parts of the country.

Calling from New York City, Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) commander Salvador Sanchez Ceren (Leonel Gonzalez) confirmed the truce's end over a San Salvador radio station, but said the FMLN would be willing to continue the measure if the government also agreed to suspend its military actions.

A new round of fighting began at 5:30 a.m. the next day when the FMLN's National Army for Democracy (END) ambushed First Infantry Brigade troops on the Northern Highway between Apopa and Guazapa, killing two soldiers, according to local media.

A UH-1H air force helicopter crashed before dawn on September 24 at El Tule hill, near Cinquera, in Cabanas province, according to the Armed Forces Press Committee (COPREFA).

The military said no one was hurt or killed in the accident, which resulted from bad weather. The helicopter went down in an area where rebels and army troops had reportedly battled fiercely in

previous days.

In skirmishes September 24, rebel Radio Farabundo Marti reported that END actions included an ambush of an army unit in Cabanas province that killed two government soldiers. COPREFA declined comment on the report.

That same day, two rebels were killed and another was wounded in a clash near the town of San Jose Las Flores, and two more END members were wounded in fighting outside the town of Chinameca, located in San Miguel province, the military said.

On September 23 COPREFA reported the capture of Cesar Antonio Erazo Cruz, 25, a rebel combatant wounded in a September 21 firefight at San Antonio, Cuscatlan province. Cruz was interviewed by a San Salvador TV station in the hospital that same day, saying that his patrol had clashed with members of an Atlacatl Battalion patrol who wounded him in the leg.

"A companera was hit and they killed her," said Cruz, referring to a female rebel combatant later identified by Radio Farabundo Marti as 22-year-old Celia Roseanna Escalante.

Peasants who helped bury Escalante near where she died said her body exhibited bullet wounds in the cheek, arm, and stomach and showed signs of having been raped. The FMLN said it would formally complain to the United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL) about the Escalante killing.

COPREFA reported six rebels were killed in the fighting at San Antonio.

On September 23 COPREFA reported one soldier killed in the province of Morazan.

The FMLN said on September 20 that 48 hours of fighting at Los Mazariego and Los Lirios, Cuscatlan province, left the army with 21 casualties.

In related news, on September 21, the FMLN and the END issued a statement over rebel Radio Venceremos that demanded the Salvadoran army cease special military operations directed at destroying the rebel radio's installations, adding that the army had launched such a sweep on

September 17 near Cacaopera, in Morazan.

The army failed to achieve its goal, said the communique, calling the maneuver "an aggression and a conspiracy against the ideas that are feared so much."

Said the rebels, "this is a signal that the Armed Forces are unwilling to tolerate the freedom of speech and ideas which is precisely one of the FMLN's demands at the negotiating table."

The rebels also called on the U.S. Embassy "to suspend the technical support

by U.S. advisers, who supply sophisticated direction finding equipment to the Armed Forces to locate Radio Venceremos."

Meanwhile, the Vice Minister of Public Security, Colonel Inocente Montano, revealed in a September 21 speech that the National Police security force unit, during ten years of war, had been attacked by the FMLN 2,287 times, resulting in the deaths of 8,219 policemen and the wounding of 27,151 others. (SP 9/24, 9/24; AP 9/25; ER 9/20, 9/23, 9/26; FBIS 9/25; UPI 9/23)

Sources: Salpress (SP), Agence France-Press (AFP), Associated Press (AP), Christian Science Monitor (CSM), Inter Press Service (IPS), Miami Herald (MH), New York Times (NYT), Philadelphia Inquirer (PI), Religious News Service (RNS), Reuters (RS), Toronto Globe and Mail (TGM), United Press International (UPI), Washington Post (WP), Washington Times (WT); Diario Latino (DL), La Prensa Grafica (PG); Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), El Rescate (ER); Christian Urgent Action Network on El Salvador (CUANES), Voices on the Border (VOB); El Salvador On Line (ESOL).

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