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Statement by Congressman Joe Moakley (D-MA)
on the Salvadoran Truth Commission Report

"The Truth Commission's report is a shocking reminder of why there was war in El Salvador and why there is such a great need to see the current peace preserved. Despite threats and attempts at intimidation, the Truth Commission has lived up to its name. Tragically, the truth of which it speaks is not pretty or easy to accept. Thousands of people died in El Salvador over the past 13 years, not as a result of battle, but as a result of murders, torture, sabotage and the use of military technologies, such as land mines, that kill and maim indiscriminately. The Commission is right to condemn -- and condemn by name -- those on the left and right most responsible for these crimes and practices. Those who commit war crimes or violations of human rights should not be allowed to hide behind the anonymity of war; but rather they should be tried, if not in formal court, then at least in the court of public opinion.

In assessing this report, we should all remember that the concept of the commission and the terms of the report were agreed to by both the government and the FMLN at the time the Salvadoran peace agreement was signed. It is not a political or partisan document, nor is it an example of outsiders "meddling" in El Salvador's internal affairs. It is a report demanded by Salvadorans, based largely on testimony provided by Salvadorans, reflecting a Salvadoran truth. The Commission members and staff deserve congratulations for the seriousness, energy and integrity with which they approached their task. Those Salvadorans who aided the Commission in its deliberations have done their country a great service -- and it is my fervent hope that they will be able to resume their personal lives without fear of retribution or personal harm for their cooperation.

It is likely that some of those cited in the report will deny the charges made against them. That is their right, and they deserve a hearing. But the fact remains that some individuals have been denying the palpably obvious for so long that they have lost credibility both within El Salvador and in the world at large. Those individuals have played a significant role in the tragedies of El Salvador's past; it is difficult to see them playing a constructive role in El Salvador's future.

CONGRESSMAN JOHN JOSEPH
MOAKLEY PAPERS
MS 100

(continued...)

Moakley Statement
page 2

In the case of the murders at the University of Central America in 1989 (the Jesuits' case), the Commission's findings are similar to those of the Speaker's Task Force on El Salvador, which I chaired, and which released its own report more than a year ago. The Commission's findings underline my own conclusion that members of the Salvadoran High Command were involved in ordering and in covering up these cold-blooded murders. Accordingly, it is my personal view that no further U.S. military aid should be delivered or obligated to El Salvador as long as senior military officers named in both the Truth Commission and Ad Hoc Commission reports remain in uniform.

Finally, the Commission's report reminds us that truth, no matter how difficult, remains a far better basis than denial or concealment for uniting a people and building a nation. Every page screams out the truth that political tolerance and respect for law are essential to the fabric of any society and to the happiness and well-being of its people. In this vital sense, the Truth Commission's report, while necessarily focusing on El Salvador's past, has provided a road map for El Salvador's future."

-30-