

**STATEMENT OF REP. JOE MOAKLEY
CHAIRMAN -- SPEAKER'S SPECIAL TASK FORCE ON EL SALVADOR**

OCTOBER 18, 1990

As Chairman of the Speaker's Special Task Force on El Salvador, I am today making a statement concerning a very troubling matter that has arisen in connection with the investigation into the murder of six Jesuit priest and two women in El Salvador last November.

As the report issued by our Task Force last April indicated, an American military officer assigned to the U.S. Embassy in San Salvador came forward on January 2, 1990, with important information that linked Col. Guillermo Benavides, commander of the military school in El Salvador, with the murders. Within two weeks, Col. Benavides was arrested and charged with ordering the crimes.

Members of our Task Force interviewed the American military officer last spring. We have also seen a copy of the statement he submitted to the Salvadoran government last January. That statement was made available to us by Salvadoran authorities after our own government refused to provide it. We have received a verbal summary of the results of lie detector test given to the American officer by the FBI, also last January. In each case, the testimony of the officer is confined to events that occurred subsequent to the murders.

Based on this, I concluded that the testimony of the American officer was limited to information that he obtained after the murders took place.

Therefore, I was distressed to learn very recently that the American officer disclosed information to the FBI last January that concerns an event prior to the murders which, if true, casts a disturbing new light on the entire investigation into the Jesuits' case. The information pertains to an alleged incident that occurred approximately ten days prior to the murders involving Col. Benavides and the Jesuits. If the information is accurate, Salvadoran military authorities should have considered Col. Benavides the prime suspect immediately after the murders took place.

I want to make it clear that I do not know if the information originally provided by the American officer is accurate. It is my understanding that the officer has since recanted a signed affidavit that he provided to the FBI on this subject.

My primary concern, however, is not whether the account is true or false. My concern is that the substance of the account was not provided to Salvadoran law enforcement and judicial authorities until this week, and that it was done only at my urgent request.

The fact is that American officials withheld from Salvadoran authorities, for more than ten months, a statement that I believe is of obvious relevance to the investigation into the Jesuit murders. At best, I consider this to be an unbelievable and inexcusable error in judgement, and I have made my views known in this subject to the Department of State, the Department of Defense and the FBI. I have been assured by officials from

all three agencies that they will cooperate in determining why this occurred. I have also been assured that the American officer will be made available for unrestricted further questioning by the appropriate judicial authorities in El Salvador, should such testimony be requested by the judge in the Jesuits case.

However, today, I've also been told that the affidavit signed by the American military officer will not be made available to the Speaker's Task Force. I find this lack of cooperation on the part of the Administration to be particularly disturbing.

In closing, I want to emphasize what I believe to be the central issue with respect to this incident. The American officer made a statement that was extremely important, but which may or may not be true. It may be that American officials took it upon themselves to dismiss the validity of the statement. I do not believe, however, that this responsibility rested properly with American officials alone. The statement should have been turned over to the appropriate authorities in El Salvador for further investigation and questioning of the American officer and the others involved. The failure to do so cannot be excused.