

REMARKS BY

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AT THE
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Let me begin with a story.

Late in the evening on Thursday, February 2nd, a group of Salvadoran National Guardsmen stormed into the home of Mario Antonio Flores Cubas and forcibly removed him.

Mario was an economics student at the University of El Salvador. As many of you may know, this university has been the target of a great deal of violence in the last few weeks.

News of Mario's abduction reached a member of my staff, who was visiting El Salvador with a small delegation, at around midnight on Thursday. He and a professor from MIT, who was also on the trip, took a cab to the National Guard headquarters at about 1:am in the morning, in hopes of being able to locate Mario.

After about 30 minutes at the National Guard headquarters, they were told that Mario was not being held by them.

On Sunday February 5th at 1:30 AM Mario was found dead in a small town outside San Salvador. His body was severely beaten; all his vertebrae were crushed; he was strangled; and he was shot in the head.

Mario Antonio Flores Cubas is not well known or famous. You probably will never hear his name again. Like so many others in El Salvador, he has become yet another victim to the senseless violence that plagues that country.

I did not personally know Mario or his personal political views. But no matter what his sympathies or political beliefs, this example of torture and murder is clearly wrong.

I believe that a peaceful resolution to the conflict in El Salvador requires that the Salvadoran Government protect the security of civilians wishing to participate in the political life of their country, including opponents and critics of the government. It seems to me that this is a most essential component in achieving peace and democracy in that war-torn country.

At the present time, I do not believe that the Government and the military of El Salvador have the political will necessary to protect and respect the rights of those who disagree with them.

Human rights violators are not prosecuted in El Salvador. In fact, there has not been one single instance where a member of the Salvadoran military has been prosecuted for a human rights violation against a Salvadoran civilian. And, sadly, the Salvadoran Supreme Court has terminated further action on bringing to justice the murderers of Archbishop Oscar Romero.

In the midst of this very violent period, there have been a few hopeful signs. One is the proposal for negotiations by the FMLN. This proposal, in the words of the Salvadoran Archbishop Rivera y Damas, "is a substantial change in the guerrilla position" that should prompt a dialogue that could lead to an end to the fighting. Essentially, the proposal would open the way for the armed opposition to participate in the elections--and respect the outcome.

Whether or not the FMLN is sincere in their proposal, opportunities for dialogue in El Salvador are few and far between. When either side makes a proposal--the United States should encourage the two sides to sit down and talk.

I am pleased that the Bush Administration has, thusfar, kept an open mind on this proposal and has encouraged the Duarte Government to review its apparent rejection of the FMLN plan. The Administration should go one step further--it should make it clear that a failure to pursue peace initiatives will result in a cutback of U.S. aid.

After nearly a decade of war and over \$3 billion dollars in U.S. assistance it is clear that a military solution to the war in El Salvador is not feasible. The cost has been high in U.S. dollars--but it has been even higher in Salvadoran lives.

Over 70,000 Salvadorans have already been killed as a result of the war. And well over 1 million are displaced inside and outside the country.

As you are well aware, many have come to seek safety within the borders of the United States.

Sadly, the response of our government has been to turn a cold shoulder to the plight of the Salvadorans. Despite the overwhelming evidence of violence and human rights abuses in El Salvador, the U.S.

government still maintains what I call a "scorched earth" policy when it comes to Salvadoran refugees.

* The Justice Department has refused to implement our asylum laws in a fair and objective manner--thus, making asylum an inadequate option for many Salvadorans.

* I.N.S. continues its policy of rounding up Salvadorans for detention and deportation--despite the dangers they may face if returned.

* The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, has made it difficult--if not impossible-- for many Salvadorans to work; even in the most menial jobs.

* And, as a result of the lack of any legal status, Salvadoran refugees continue to be exploited by slum landlords and unscrupulous employers.

This is all part of the Justice Department's "scorched earth" policy. They have gone out of their way to close off all options that might provide any relief for the Salvadorans. Their hope is: if we can't deport them, we will force them out by denying them any sort of sustenance. They are engaged in a cruel policy of "constructive deportation."

This is wrong. This is inhumane. And this type of behavior is unbecoming of a great nation like ours. It must change.

Many of you in this church have stood with me during the last six years in support of the so-called Moakley-DeConcini bill, which would temporarily suspend Salvadoran deportations until the violence in that country has calmed. In fact, this bill was born in a meeting with constituents of mine in Jamaica Plain, who brought this matter to my attention several years ago.

You recognize, as I do, that it is simply not safe for many Salvadorans to return home at this time.

We have passed the bill twice in the House of Representatives and we have raised the issue to national prominence.

I have reintroduced the bill, once again, in the present Congress. I have also sent appeals to President Bush, Secretary of State Baker and Attorney General Thornburgh, urging that the Administration, with the stroke of a pen, grant Salvadorans relief through extended voluntary departure. And, to drive this point home, I have requested a face to face meeting with the Attorney General to discuss this matter.

The bill I have proposed is a very modest and reasonable relief.

Quite frankly, I wish we could do more. But, given the political realities in Washington, I realize we cannot.

The bill is not designed as a political statement; rather, it is a humanitarian gesture to protect the lives of Salvadorans.

To a child pulled out of an American grade school, and deported to his homeland, only to have his leg blown off by a land mine, it is of small difference whose land mine it is.

It could be that of the Salvadoran military or it could be that of the rebels they fight.

All that matters to his family is the pain of the child and the tears of his mother.

All that matters to us, is that he was placed in harm's way by our Government, acting under law, to wrench him from the safety of this Nation.

We must change our laws--and we must resolve, once and for all, that we will never allow this callous treatment of refugees to repeat itself.

I hope I can count on you to remain firm in your commitment and support for the bill. I want you to know that your support in the past has made all the difference in the world. I need it again.

I believe we can win. And I believe we can forge a more humane
refugee policy towards Salvadorans and other Central Americans that
could save many lives.

Thank you.