

TESTIMONY OF RUBEN I. ZAMORA  
SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE  
POPULAR SOCIAL CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT  
OF EL SALVADOR

SUBCOMMITTEE ON WESTERN HEMISPHERE AFFAIRS  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVE

FEBRUARY 6, 1990

## I. Introduction

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, I bring you greetings from my party, the Popular Social Christian Movement, member of the Democratic Convergence of El Salvador.

I congratulate the committee for its decision to hold this important hearing, and I am grateful for the opportunity to appear before you. In my opinion, the timing of this hearing could not be better. As we speak, Salvadoran society is experiencing a dramatic readjustment, the outcome of which will determine whether it moves towards peace with democracy or continues to sink deeper and deeper into the current vicious cycle of crisis and war.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Members of Congress, in particular the members of this committee, who expressed their support and concern for my safety and the safety of my family when my home was bombed a few months ago. Not since my brother's assassination in 1980 has the violence which pervades Salvadoran society touched me so personally and directly. In addition, I am thankful to you for your continued expression of concern for the safety of my fellow members in the Democratic Convergence upon our return to resume our work for democracy in El Salvador.

## II. The Lessons of the FMLN Offensive

Last November, the FMLN launched its most powerful military offensive of the decade long war. The country was paralyzed for several days. Guerrilla forces took control of sections of the capital city as well as

portions of several provincial capitals. The government responded by declaring a state of siege: they imposed a strict curfew and bombed densely populated areas in an attempt to dislodge the guerrillas. Hundreds of lives were lost and millions of dollars in damage was incurred.

This traumatic experience was both transforming and revealing. Now we must learn from these events so that they are not repeated in the future. The November offensive demonstrated the government forces' serious underestimation of the military capability of their opponent. More than 1,000 guerrillas were able to infiltrate the capital city, belying the military's previous assessment that the FMLN was largely a weakened and irrelevant force.

The events of November also revealed that despite ten years of U.S. training and more than two billion dollars of U.S. military aid, the government troops remain a repressive and relatively ineffective fighting force.

The November offensive was revealing for the guerrilla forces as well. Although they succeeded in demonstrating that they are a real force in El Salvador and therefore an indispensable actor in any negotiated settlement of the conflict, they also learned an important lesson: the urban population is not disposed to insurrection. The FMLN expected an urban uprising to follow its occupation of popular neighborhoods. This insurrection never took place. November 1989 thus showed the FMLN that a total victory through insurrection is not a realistic option.

President Cristiani was also taught painful lessons by the events of November. First, he learned how war dramatically restricts the political space available to civilian leaders in El Salvador. Second, he had to

confront the fact that despite attempts to professionalize the military, the armed forces reverted back to the repressive patterns of the early 1980s.

For us -- the democratic and popular organizations -- the events of the year's end have meant a drastic reduction in the political space in which we live and work. Many of our supporters and activists have been murdered, arrested, and disappeared. Our offices have been ransacked, and our property has been destroyed. Unfortunately, we have come to understand with utmost clarity the tenuous nature of our political freedoms in El Salvador. This experience has reconfirmed our conviction that for El Salvador to undergo a real and irreversible process of democratization, a lasting peace must first be achieved.

### III. Immediate Scenarios

It is evident that only negotiations can lead us out of the present crisis in El Salvador. This was true before the events of November. But its truthfulness is driven home by the weight and force of these recent events that have been so painful for our people. I do not want to call this a "transition moment" because this implies that we are moving from the present situation to another situation previously determined. Rather, we are at a crossroads. Mr. Chairman, I would like to describe two possible scenarios for the future of my country.

One possible scenario is that nothing will change. The war will go on; there will be dialogue but no negotiations; murder and repression will continue; Congress will grant more military aid to the government of El Salvador and move on to other concerns; and, after a few months, Col. Benavides -- the principle officer accused in the Jesuit case -- will be freed due to "technicalities" in the Salvadoran penal law.

Even if some concessions or changes are made to improve the government's image, if no serious negotiations occur, the present crisis will continue. In my country we refer to this as *Cambios para no cambiar* -- changes without the intent to change. For the last ten years we have experienced this phenomenon. The continuation of such policies will lead to a further militarization of Salvadoran society in which both sides seek to demonstrate that they are able to solve the conflict by military means the result of which will likely be another offensive, more killing and bloodshed and the further destruction of political space for democratic forces within the country.

Another scenario would be the initiation of real negotiations. This would mean the beginning of a new political situation in El Salvador. While the far right may attempt to sabotage such negotiations with a wave of terrorism, the desire for peace is strong among the people of El Salvador. In my opinion, there currently exists the possibility to develop a broad consensus movement composed of social and political democratic forces to promote and implement negotiations.

I submit, for your consideration, a time-frame for the development of this alternative.

a) In February and March, the U.N. Secretary General would begin his mediating efforts which would culminate in a very concrete and detailed procedure for the negotiation process and a blueprint for peace in El Salvador.

b) From April to July there would be four months of intense and continuous negotiations among the Salvadoran forces which would take part in a peaceful solution: the government, the FMLN, the opposition

parties, the Permanent Committee of the National Debate, and the National Association of Private Enterprise.

c) The accords resulting from the negotiations would be implemented in the latter part of 1990. Such accords would set the groundwork for municipal and legislative elections in a climate of peace and with the participation of all the political sectors within the country. These elections are scheduled for February 1991.

#### IV. Some Policy Suggestions

Mr. Chairman, my party -- the Popular Social Christian Movement -- is fully committed to the implementation of a political solution to the present crisis. During this period, personal risks have increased considerably as demonstrated by the tragic murders of my colleague, Dr. Hector Oqueli, and the six Jesuit priests. Nevertheless, the imperative to act and the possibilities of achieving our dream of peace have also increased. I appear before this honorable committee to encourage you in your efforts to help achieve this goal.

A year ago while testifying before this very committee, I presented a proposal to link automatic percentage cuts to military aid if negotiations were not opened. Today, the situation in El Salvador is so serious that, in my opinion, percentage cuts ought to be applied immediately and be contingent not only upon the initiation of serious negotiations, but also upon their progress.

I believe that the Congress of the United States could promote peace in El Salvador by offering a clear and specific bipartisan policy, defining negotiations and not war as the primary policy objective. A first step towards this end lies in supporting the initiation of negotiations mediated

by the Secretary General of the United Nations. Within this process, the necessary preconditions for the achievement of a democratic peace in El Salvador could begin to take root: a cease fire; the reform of the government armed forces; and the transformation of the FMLN into a political party.

Mr. Chairman and esteemed members of this committee I make these suggestions with the deep conviction that the achievement of peace in El Salvador has become for us a question literally of life or death. I am also led by the conviction that a good faith effort by the United States to promote a negotiated settlement to this conflict would form the basis for mutual respect and enhanced relations between our two countries.

I would like to conclude my remarks by placing my party's position in the context of the six slain Jesuit priests -- dear friends, each and every one. This committee seeks to ensure that their murderers are brought to justice. No reasonable person takes issue with that objective, and I add my voice and the voice of my party in support of your efforts. But allow me to call your attention to a vital point. These priests held firm to the conviction that human rights could be improved at the margin but that there could be no true human rights without an end to the war. Mr. Chairman and members of this committee, if there is one point I can drive into the consciousness of the American people and the American government today, it is that the Jesuits -- my friends -- were killed for advocating negotiations. They were killed for seeking an end to the war.

What is abundant among the Salvadoran people but lacking within your government and mine can be summed up in one word, and that word is "will." And this, in my opinion, is where the United States Congress plays a critical role. Whatever the overall success or failure of the

pressure you have placed on the Salvadoran government over the years to improve its human rights record, there is universal agreement that it has been perhaps the only weapon available to people of reason within that government to defend themselves against those who live only to trample such rights.

The same principle must be applied to negotiations. Just as President Cristiani needs your nudging and pressure and assistance on human rights, he must operate in an atmosphere where it is clearly understood that the Congress demands, in no uncertain terms, an unwavering effort to end this war. And it must be made credible, to borrow from an American phrase, with the power of the purse strings.

That signal is not being sent. The current administration is technically in support of the goal, but in reality it is not engaged in serious diplomacy. Yet if you take the time to assess the positions of the two sides in this conflict, you will see that the differences are negotiable and worthy of the best diplomatic efforts this great country has to offer.

Those within my country who sit on the tenuous fence which separates reason from madness know that the money may cease to flow if the murderers of the Jesuits are not brought to justice. They have no similar incentive to end this war. The injustice will continue, and the killing will continue, until that signal is received from you.

As I address you today, my faith in God and in my people makes me confident that this tragic ten-year war can come to an end. I live with the hope and the vision that El Salvador will witness the birth of a true democracy with respect and security for all its citizens.

Thank you very much.