

Statement by Congressman Joe Moakley
on behalf of the
U.S. Congressional Delegation
Camino Real Hotel
San Salvador, El Salvador
February 14, 1990

Shortly after the heinous murders of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her young daughter on November 16, 1989, Speaker Thomas Foley appointed a special 18 member task force, chaired by myself, to monitor the Salvadoran Government's investigation into the murders and to report back to him. The Republican leader in the Congress, Robert Michel, appointed 5 Republican Members, led by Congressman Bud Shuster, to join the task force on its visit to El Salvador on February 11 - 14.

We have just completed an intensive 4 day visit to El Salvador. During our stay we have been briefed extensively by our Ambassador and his staff and by the Special Investigative Unit (SIU) which has conducted the investigation into the murders. We have met with President Cristiani; the Army Chief of Staff, Col. Ponce; Vice Minister of Defense, Col. Zepeda; with the Jesuit Provincial for Central America, Father Tojiera; the Jesuit Rector of the University of Central America, Father Estrada; with Archbishop Rivera y Damas; the Attorney General; the judge handling the case; other religious groups; defense lawyers; FMLN defectors and many others.

All the members of this delegation would like to express our deepest appreciation to the Salvadoran Government, the United States Embassy and a special thanks to the Society of Jesus, who have shared with us both their pain and wisdom.

Our focus in the meetings has been fourfold:

1. To determine whether the investigation has led to the identification of all those responsible for the murders.
2. To ascertain whether it is likely that they will be brought to justice.
3. To gauge the overall climate of respect for human rights in El Salvador.
4. To assess the prospects for an end to the war and a lasting peace.

With respect to the investigation, we believe that it has been characterized by good police work on the part of the SIU and we commend the Salvadoran Government for this. The technical aspects in this case appear to have been handled well. We believe, however, that the investigation should not end and that important leads and

allegations remain to be fully investigated -- namely reports which suggest that the intellectual authors of the murders may not have been identified and suggestions that there may be a cover-up of this crime by some in the armed forces. We note in this connection that Colonel Ponce told us that not one person in the military -- not one -- came forward to report to him the complicity of any member of the Army in the murders. We, therefore, join with our Ambassador in insisting that these specific allegations must be thoroughly investigated.

With respect to the next phase of the judicial process, we fear that presently available evidence may be insufficient to bring all the murderers to justice. We are deeply concerned about this prospect -- and strongly support current as well as possible new efforts by the United States to assist in every possible way the Salvadoran Government in its investigatory and judicial efforts.

With respect to the overall climate of human rights, we have strong concerns. First, we condemn -- in the strongest possible terms -- the FMLN offensive and the needless bloodshed which resulted. In prosecuting the offensive, the FMLN is guilty of serious violations of human rights and caused a serious setback to the prospects for a peaceful settlement to the war.

With regard to the Salvadoran armed forces -- a central question for the task force is whether the human rights problems in El Salvador -- including the Jesuit killings -- are the actions of a few renegade military figures or whether, in fact, they stem from attitudes and actions that go to the very heart of the armed forces and other major institutions in this country. Encouraging genuine change in these institutions remains the greatest challenge facing El Salvador; a challenge that despite enormous investments of money and effort, has not yet been fully met. Given the tragedy of the Jesuit case, it is particularly important that the armed forces be able to distinguish as an institution between those who take up arms against the government and those whose religious and political convictions simply place them at odds with the government.

Lastly, with respect to the prospects for peace, we believe that the way to end the fighting is through negotiations. Both here in El Salvador and in the United States, the Congress is being urged by some to end military aid to El Salvador or condition aid on peace negotiations between the Salvadoran Government and the FMLN. We strongly urge the opening of honest dialogue that can lead to an end to the fighting and to peace with freedom and justice for all Salvadorans.

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

MEMBERS WHO TRAVELED TO EL SALVADOR

Members of the Speaker's Special Task Force on El Salvador

Hon. Joe Moakley (D-MA), chair
Hon. David Bonior (D-MI)
Hon. Daniel Glickman (D-KS)
Hon. Steny Hoyer (D-MD)
Hon. Barbara Kennelly (D-CT)
Hon. Frank McCloskey (D-IN)
Hon. Jim McDermott (D-WA)
Hon. Matthew McHugh (D-NY)
Hon. George Miller (D-CA)
Hon. Gerry Studds (D-MA)

Republican Members Accompanying the Task Force

Hon. Bud Shuster (R-PA)
Hon. Bob Dornan (R-CA)
Hon. David Dreier (R-CA)
Hon. Bill McCollum (R-FL)
Hon. Bob McEwen (R-OH)