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Deborah Tyroler

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Amnesty International Says Washington Has Not Taken Action To Curb Contra Human Rights Abuses

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Jan. 21 Amnesty International (AI) publicly charged that Washington has taken no significant steps to end human rights abuses by the contras, including the mutilation and execution of civilians. The London-based organization's accusations were made in a letter to Secretary of State George Shultz. Amnesty spokespersons said the organization had requested assurances from Washington that US aid to the contras will not lead to further mistreatment of civilian or military captives. The letter, they said, was made public because it was the second one sent to Washington seeking such assurances, and no reply was received for either letter. In a Jan. 20 interview with UPI, AI spokespersons said the Oct. 21 letter to Shultz gave details of incidents in March and July 1986 in which contra forces were reported to have abducted civilians whose corpses were later found mutilated. The letter said, "Amnesty International believes that the United States government has not acted consistently with its assurances that it is seriously concerned to prevent [such abuses]." Moreover, Washington "must be considered to have helped shield the forces responsible for [the abuses] and thereby to have increased the likelihood that abuses continue to be committed." According to Amnesty spokesman Sean Stiles, more contra human rights abuses have been reported since October. He said Amnesty was releasing the text of the letter "not to put anyone on the spot, but to let people know what our concerns are and how serious they are." According to Amnesty the effectiveness of a human rights monitoring group responsible to contra forces established with the assistance of the US government is questionable. The number of reports of human rights abuses has not declined since the group was created. Last year, Amnesty criticized the CIA for providing contras based in Honduras with a manual prepared in 1983 which proposes the "selective assassination of civilian local government officials, police and military personnel." The letter from AI Secretary General Ian Martin to Shultz said, "Your government has frequently dismissed charges of human rights abuse by (contra) forces as being politically motivated, apparently without making a thorough and impartial investigation of them. Many such reports concern abuses of the kind expressly encouraged by the CIA manual." At a Jan. 20 press briefing in Washington, State Department spokesperson Charles Redman said State would not comment on the AI report because it had not yet been "studied."

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