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8,000 Salvadoran Refugees In Colmoncagua, Honduras, May Be Forced To Repatriate

by Deborah Tyroler

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An estimated 22,000 Salvadoran refugees remain in Honduras after a mass repatriation of 4,500 from the Mesa Grande camp in October. According to US-based solidarity organizations and Central American sources, 8,000 refugees residing in Colmoncagua, Honduras, are being threatened with forced repatriation. Colmoncagua is located close to the Salvadoran border (Morazan department). This camp was established in 1980 and 1981. Most residents fled massacres and other abuses by the Salvadoran armed forces in Morazan. Today, the majority of refugees in Colmoncagua are children and elderly persons. The US, Honduran and Salvadoran governments reportedly wish to move them out of the area in order to install more military bases near the Salvadoran border. The refugees in Colmoncagua reportedly wish to remain in Honduras until security threats are significantly reduced in their homeland. In a Dec. 4 broadcast from Morazan department, the Salvadoran rebel station Radio Venceremos reported that Col. Abraham Garcia, coordinator of the Honduran government's refugees commission (CONARES) visited Colmoncagua on Dec. 1. Garcia reportedly planned to locate agents in the camp to apply pressure on residents to return to El Salvador. The Salvadorans told Garcia that installing his people in the camp would have no effect on their intentions to remain in Honduras. Highlights of a recent communique issued by the Colmoncagua refugees concerning a recent visit by Col. Abraham Garcia, coordinator of the Honduran government's refugee commission (CONARES), follows: Col. Garcia's visit to Colmoncagua on Nov. 25 was not announced in advance to any member of the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR). After he had toured the camp in a vehicle, the residents decided to speak with him when he returned in early afternoon. On his return, Garcia was accompanied by a Col. Turcio. In response to the refugees' complaints about military harassment including road blockades into and out of the camp, and surveillance teams surrounding the camp, and statements on their disinterest in repatriation, Col. Turcio reportedly attempted to run over Salvadorans holding a banner and others attending the impromptu demonstration. He also brandished a pistol in their faces. Shortly thereafter, a military patrol was sent inside the camp, and the entire area was surrounded by soldiers. On Nov. 28, daily newspaper The Herald (Tegucigalpa) published a diplomatic note signed by Foreign Relations Minister Carlos Lopez Contreras addressed to the UN High Commission on Refugees: "We wish to denounce the ongoing aggression perpetrated by Salvadoran refugees in Colmoncagua against Honduran authorities, especially Cols. Garcia and Turcios. These Salvadorans have not shown the proper respect for high-level authorities while residing in Honduran territory. We will not permit the infiltration of the camps [by FMLN insurgents]...We therefore request to procure the repatriation of said foreign population...or their relocation to a third country. We hope that [the Commission] will collaborate in this effort." (Basic data from Casa El Salvador, Los Angeles, CA; Frontera News, Berkeley, CA)

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