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Christian Democrat Activist Shot To Death In San Salvador Suburb

by Deborah Tyroler

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On the evening of Dec. 12, Christian Democrat Francisco Bonilla Campos, 32, was shot to death in Soyapango, a southern San Salvador suburb, while participating in voter registration. According to Christian Democrat spokespersons, including four witnesses, Bonilla Campos was assassinated by members of the Municipal police pertaining to the Republican Nationalist Alliance (ARENA). The witnesses charged the killing was under the orders, and in the presence, of that party's mayor of Soyapango. Arena presidential candidate Alfredo Cristiani, in a statement read at a press conference on Dec. 13, said his party "lamented the violent death" of Bonilla Campos, and said that while he saw no evidence that the mayor or the party was linked to the killing, ARENA would cooperate with the judicial investigation. Cristiani also said that the party "lamented and condemned" what he described as the Christian Democrats' use of the case for political ends and accused presidential candidate Fidel Chavez Mena of acting as judge and jury. Christian Democrat leaders said Bonilla Campos was part of a group of nine persons, including three Christian Democrats, one ARENA member and five of the National Conciliation Party, who were registering voters in Soyapango. Political violence has escalated as the March 19 elections approach. In addition to daily assassinations, abductions and death threats, the ARENA headquarters in Soyapango and other areas have been bombed and FMLN (Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front) rebels have killed eight mayors and several judges outside the capital. On Dec. 18 during his Sunday homily, San Salvador's Archbishop Arturo Rivera y Damas mentioned Bonilla's death and condemned recent assassinations of politicians of nearly all persuasions. Investigations by the Church, he said, indicated that ARENA members had participated in the killing of the Christian Democrat activist. Rivera y Damas also condemned what he described as the guerrillas' new practice of assassinating local officials. According to the Archbishop, in the previous week three mayors had resigned from their posts after being threatened by rebels. Such actions by the FMLN, said the archbishop, contradict the spirit and word of the guerrillas' commitment to national dialogue and a political solution to the war via negotiation. The Church, he said, firmly denounces killings of political opponents by any and all factions. (Basic data from Washington Post, 12/14/88; AP, 12/18/88)

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