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El Salvador: Catholic Church Reports On Death Toll For 1988

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Jan. 1, San Salvador Archbishop Arturo Rivera y Damas said that in 1988 at least 186 civilians were assassinated, including 85 by the military, 60 by death squads, and 41 by the guerrillas. In his Sunday homily, the archbishop also said that another 65 civilians, many of them children, had died in land mine explosions. He added, "The numbers demonstrate the magnitude of the human drama that the armed conflict brings to our country." "In 1988, there were numerous cases of abductions and disappearances. In addition, the number of abductions by the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) increased..." Some 65,000 persons, a larger number than all US soldiers who died in the Vietnam War, have been killed in the Salvadoran civil war since 1979. The archbishop denounced the rising number of "extrajudicial" arrests and disappearances at the hands of the security forces, increasing death squad activity and the rising numbers of guerrilla bombings and assassinations. According to cases investigated by the Catholic Church's human rights office, Tutela Legal, in 1988 1,111 deaths occurred related to the war, including deaths during and outside of combat, said Rivera y Damas. This figure is significantly less than numbers reported by the Salvadoran military and the FMLN. In the last week in December, the two reported close to 10,000 casualties, including deaths and wounded. (Basic data from Xinhua, Notimex, 01/01/89)

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