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El Salvador: Mayors Resign In Response To Threats By Fmln

by Deborah Tyroler

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In December, at least 35 mayors resigned after eight contemporaries were killed by the FMLN. According to government statistics, almost 40% of El Salvador's 265 registered municipalities are now without an elected mayor. This state of affairs is the result of the civil war, which prevented elections in about 50 towns last March; resignations provoked by rebel threats; and, rebel executions of several mayors in recent months. As of Jan. 7, 38 mayors had resigned in the previous 30 days, and more resign every day. The Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) is believed to have executed nine mayors in October and November. In broadcasts via Radio Venceremos, the FMLN has asserted that killing and threatening mayors proves that the guerrillas are an "emerging force." Next, the rebels claim that the government does not have the right to political control in areas where it does not have absolute military control. Letters delivered to many mayors have given the officials 72 hours to resign their positions or face being "brought to justice" by the FMLN. Those who ask to stay in their villages, the rebel radio has said, would be allowed to do so, provided the request is made publicly. Many local officials have appeared on evening television resigning their positions, pledging to stay out of politics, and requesting the FMLN to permit them to stay in their villages. In November, the Anastasio Aquino Central Front of the FMLN in November warned all mayors and justices of the peace in La Paz department to resign or face death, and most of the mayors have since resigned. The resignations leave the army, which has been seeking control of civic action programs, as the only government representatives in much of the countryside. El Salvador's rural crisis has been exacerbated by the worst coffee harvest in 30 years, with production falling by 50% to 70%. The harvest, which usually extends into February, has already ended in many areas of the country. (Basic data from Washington Post, 01/08/89; New York Times, 01/09/89)

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