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Deborah Tyroler

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El Salvador: Military Blamed For Attack On Resettlement Community, Illegal Arrest Of Human Rights Workers

by Deborah Tyroler

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On the evening of Jan. 10, a fragmentation grenade tossed into a resettlement community in Panchimilama, 35 km. from San Salvador, killed Salvadoran Jose Sixto Montoya, 35. Five persons were injured, including two foreign Lutheran Church workers. Deborah Cohen, 26, of New York, and Evan Fox Decent, 21, sustained shrapnel wounds. Red Cross workers said Decent was in serious condition. About 350 refugees reside at Panchimilama. Residents said they suspected soldiers of lobbing the grenade into the camp, and that have been harassed by soldiers since arriving in the community. On Jan. 11, in a statement the Christian Committee for the Displaced of El Salvador (CRIPDES) said that troops stationed near Panchimilama "launched the grenade against humble peasants." Spokespersons for the US Embassy and the Salvadoran army said that investigations were underway to determine who was responsible for the attack. Next, the Commission for the Defense of Human Rights in Central America (CODEHUCA) denounced the army for illegally detaining human rights activists Celia Medrano of El Salvador and John Hammond of the US. The arrests occurred on Jan. 10 in the community of Jucuaran, Usulután department, located about 80 miles from San Salvador. Armed forces spokesperson Col. Galileo Torres said he had no information about any arrests. CODEHUCA said that the two were conducting an investigation into human rights abuses by the military when they were detained by infantry soldiers. Hammond, a sociology professor at Hunter College, is a volunteer for the Commission for Human Rights in El Salvador (CDHES). Medrano is a member of CDHES. CODEHUCA said the CDHES has been a frequent target for kidnappings and assassinations. (Basic data from AFP, AP, 01/11/89)

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