

2-3-1989

Organization Of American States Committee To Investigate Human Rights Situation In Panama

Deborah Tyroler

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen>

Recommended Citation

Tyroler, Deborah. "Organization Of American States Committee To Investigate Human Rights Situation In Panama." (1989).
<https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen/2703>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in NotiCen by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.

Organization Of American States Committee To Investigate Human Rights Situation In Panama

by Deborah Tyroler

Category/Department: General

Published: Friday, February 3, 1989

In late February, the Organization of American States is sending a committee of international observers to Panama for a human rights inspection, considered a crucial step in the OAS's decision whether to recognize the results of presidential elections scheduled for May 7. The government recently released 26 political prisoners, some of whom had reportedly be held for months. Certain observers say the government is rushing to improve conditions in jails in order to "clean up its act" before the committee arrives. Unnamed human rights monitors cited by the New York Times say that about 20 political prisoners remain in jail, and usually housed with criminal inmates, and that the regime regularly uses torture, including severe beatings and electric shocks. According to Dr. Osvaldo Velasquez, president of the Panamanian Committee for Human Rights, "The situation is horrible, and it's getting worse. They're violating all human rights our political and civil rights." The opposition press was shut down and remains closed and most civil liberties, such as the right to assembly, have been suspended. Conditions in jail for an estimated two dozen officers and an unknown number of soldiers arrested after a coup attempt last March are reportedly very bad. The prisoners are said to have been tortured extensively and denied legal representation and visits by family members. Next, dozens of exiled opposition leaders do not return to Panama because of death threats. Human rights abuses in Panama, according to unnamed rights monitors cited by the Times, are less serious than elsewhere in Central America. For instance, it is common for Panamanians to call monitoring groups to complain that soldiers broke a window or scratched their cars. One case related by an unnamed monitor that caused outrage involved an insurance executive seized by the Army. The executive was dressed in clothes ripped off a prostitute under arrest, and forced to pick up garbage in the street. The monitor said, "It was horrible. The most humiliating thing that could happen to anybody." Rafael Mezquita, director of administration for the Ministry of Finance, said the focus on human rights in Panama is part of the US campaign against his government. He said, "We're not torturing people, pulling nails or breaking arms. We're breaking car windows. You can't judge Panama by foreign standards. Our culture is distinct, our economy is distinct, our Army is distinct." (Basic data from New York Times, 02/01/89)

-- End --