

3-22-1989

## El Salvador: Summary Of Events & Statements, March 17-19

Deborah Tyroler

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

---

### Recommended Citation

Tyroler, Deborah. "El Salvador: Summary Of Events & Statements, March 17-19." (1989). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen/2866>

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](mailto:amywinter@unm.edu).

## **El Salvador: Summary Of Events & Statements, March 17-19**

*by Deborah Tyroler*

*Category/Department: General*

*Published: Wednesday, March 22, 1989*

March 16: On Thursday evening, in an interview with the New York Times, Gerardo Lechevallier, a senior Christian Democrat party official and vice minister of communication said, "The guerrillas want the center to disappear so that at last it will be a fight between the classes." March 17: Poll workers in 11 eastern towns resigned. No elections were scheduled in 224 other towns in territory controlled by the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN). Much of El Salvador was brought to a standstill. Sabotage of utilities left most of the country without power or water since mid-week, and by Friday, traffic had almost vanished from the highways. Two mayors resigned. Resignations of mayors have affected more than half the country's cities and towns. The government responded to the rebel campaign to boycott the elections by imposing censorship, ordering local news organizations to refuse to publish or broadcast rebel statements. A radio station in the capital said an interview with a guerrilla commander was stopped in mid-sentence March 16 by the Attorney General's office. March 18: Soldiers began distributing ballots. The FMLN assured the nation's voters they will not be attacked if they go to the polls. Ruben Zamora, coordinator of the Democratic Convergence, said about 100 posters condemning Convergence members as "communist executioners" were plastered on the evening of March 17 along one of the capital's main avenues. Col. Galileo Torres said "no armed forces unit put them up" and that the military was "keeping strictly to the sidelines in the political process." In a broadcast by Radio Venceremos, the FMLN said guerrilla military actions might be intense Sunday but that voters and polling stations would not be attacked. Bulletins ordered all rebel units to refrain from such attacks. Twenty-one US election observers arrived. The group, named by the White House, included congresspersons, state politicians and private citizens. A bomb was hurled at an empty police car parked near the central market in San Salvador, killing one person and wounding six others, police said. Two bombs exploded elsewhere in the capital, injuring at least two people. Meanwhile, only a handful of gasoline stations opened for business throughout El Salvador, following threats from the FMLN. March 19: In a report on March 20, the military said six soldiers and 23 guerrillas died in clashes during the voting. Several poll workers who resigned were replaced. Officials said all but 19 of the country's 262 municipalities held balloting. The election was monitored by about 120 foreign observers, including the US delegation. Security forces killed three journalists: Roberto Navas, 30, a Salvadoran photographer who worked for Reuters; Mauricio Pineda de Leon, 26, of Channel 12 television in El Salvador; and, Cornel Lagrouw, 30, cameraperson for the Dutch television church network IKON. According to his driver, Pineda de Leon was shot to death at a police roadblock near San Miguel, 85 miles east of San Salvador. Defense Minister Gen. Vides Casanova said the van had run a roadblock. Navas was killed and a colleague, Luis Galdamez also working for Reuters, was wounded at a roadblock near an air force base on the outskirts of San Salvador on the evening of March 18. According to the New York Times, Galdamez told friends that the two were returning from work on a motorcycle when they were stopped at the checkpoint where they presented their credentials. Shortly after they were waved through, he said, the soldiers began shooting at them. Lagrouw was shot during a clash between army troops and guerrillas in San Francisco Javier, a

town about 70 miles east of San Salvador. Journalists accompanying Lagrouw said he was hit in the chest by a bullet fired from an army position as troops moved to take back the town. At a press conference, journalists among those who rushed Lagrouw to a hospital in Usulután producer Peter Elenbaas, Lagrouw's co-worker; photographer Bill Gentile of Newsweek; and Arturo Robles of JB Photos said a helicopter gunship strafed their two vehicles. Elenbaas said that it appeared as if soldiers in the helicopter were "playing a game" by firing ahead of and behind the cars. Robles, who was in a jeep ahead of the car carrying Lagrouw, said, "We had signs, and we had four white flags." Under established protocol generally respected by both army and guerrillas, reporters and photographers in El Salvador travel in vehicles marked "Press" or "TV" with white flags attached to car doors. [On March 20, Dutch Foreign Minister Hans van den Broek called Lagrouw's death an "extremely regrettable incident." He told reporters in Belgium that it was an apparent accident and his government was not considering diplomatic steps against El Salvador.] Defense Minister Carlos Vides Casanova said it was not clear who shot the Dutch cameraman and that the helicopter pilot did not identify the news vehicle. The New York Times (03/20/89) cited the Washington Post's Douglas Farah, president of the Salvadoran Foreign Press Association "The military appears to be targeting journalists in some cases and deliberately harassing them in others. We strongly condemn these actions and this attitude." In a dispatch released March 20, the army press office said 43 people had died and 65 were injured during the weekend. The statement said 42 rebels and one soldier had died in election-day fighting, and that 40 of the wounded were civilians. On the same day, the rebels' Radio Venceremos said the army suffered 119 casualties on election day. [On March 21, Democratic Convergence candidate Guillermo Ungo denounced "anomalies" during the voting and in the vote count realized by the Central Election Council. In its March 20 edition, the New York Times mentioned some of these irregularities. Voters in Tenancingo, 40 miles northeast of the capital, stuffed ballots through a wooden slot into a clear plastic garbage bag, which allowed anyone standing nearby to see the vote. In Mejicanos, a large working-class suburb north of the capital, the voting registration list omitted any name beginning with "ch" and all Mejias. In the town of San Rafael Oriente, southeastern El Salvador, election officials resigned March 17. In this town and others, political party workers arrived to take over. A national election official, Juan Gilberto Portillo, said: "I will ask the Central Electoral Council to declare that all the ballots collected here today are null and void." He was reacting to the arrival of a score of workers trucked in by ARENA. ARENA party members overseeing the balloting in San Rafael Oriente acknowledged that they had taken responsibility for opening the election booths. They said they had received authority from national election officials to take charge of the voting. The Times stated that they produced no credentials to document that, and journalists who visited the polling station encountered citizens denouncing the vote as a fraud. Jose Antonio Morales Ehrlich, a local resident who carried a letter certifying him as a poll watcher from the National Conciliation Party, said: "They don't have any right to be doing this. Everyone else is afraid, so they have just taken it into their own hands."] (Basic data from AFP, 03/17/89, 03/18/89, 03/20/89; New York Times, 03/18-21/89; Xinhua, 03/18/89; AP, 03/19/89, 03/20/89; Notimex, 03/20/89, 03/21/89)

-- End --