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## **U.S. Auditors Find Evidence Of Torture & Other Abuses By Contras Against Prisoners**

*by Deborah Tyroler*

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In recent interviews in Honduras by auditors from the General Accounting Office (GAO) and the US Agency for International Development, prisoners taken by the contras said they had been tortured or raped by contra officials. A confidential summary of the auditors' report states that according to the prisoners' testimony, the contras are guilty of human rights abuses. The report said the prisoners "claim to have been raped and tortured by Nicaraguan resistance officials at the time of their detention so they would confess to being infiltrators." The prisoners included Sandinista soldiers captured in combat; Nicaraguan civilians accused of trying to infiltrate the contra camps; and, contras accused of espionage and sabotage on behalf of the Sandinistas. An unnamed State Department official cited by the New York Times said US Ambassador to Honduras, Everett Ellis Briggs, had been "less than helpful" to those investigating the charges against the contras. The official said, "The embassy could have put more pressure" on contra commanders to investigate and correct the problems. At a public hearing on Feb. 8, Rep. David R. Obey (D-Wisc.), chairperson of the Appropriations subcommittee on foreign aid, said he had found the embassy "most uncooperative." The auditors did not say how many abuses had occurred. At least five contras have been accused of torturing prisoners. The auditors' conclusions were based on 22% of those detained by the contras in camps in the Bocay and Yamales areas of Honduras. Under a 1986 law, no contra aid "may be provided to any group that retains in its ranks any individual who has been found to engage in gross violations of internationally recognized human rights." Of the five accused of torture, four have been receiving "family assistance payments" from the US government. The purpose of such cash payments is to "defray basic family living expenses" for senior members of the contra army. In a letter to three members of Congress dated March 17, six of the seven contra directors said, "We do not deny that there have been abuses of human rights by certain of our troops." The letter said that a contra known by the pseudonym Israelita was a "principal offender" responsible for many of the reported human rights violations. Contra spokesperson Bosco Matamoros said a preliminary investigation indicated that Israelita was responsible for the death of one prisoner, a suspected Sandinista agent. (Basic data from New York Times, 03/23/89)

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