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Inauguration Of Salvadoran President Cristiani: Summary
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On June 1, Alfredo Cristiani of the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) was installed as president of El Salvador. About 6,000 people attended the ceremony, including delegates from 36 nations and members of the new and former administrations. An estimated 7,000 soldiers and police stood guard at the fair grounds in San Salvador where the swearing-in took place, and at hotels and government buildings. Among the foreign guests were the presidents of Honduras, Guatemala and Costa Rica, and foreign ministers of Mexico and Venezuela. The US delegation was headed by Sen. Richard Lugar (R-Ind.). Commandos of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) bombed transmission towers Wednesday night, knocking out power in 90% of the country. Electricity for the ceremony had to be provided by generators powered by gasoline and diesel.

May 31 also marked the beginning of an indefinite traffic ban called by the FMLN. On Thursday morning, streets in San Salvador were empty. In his speech, Cristiani offered to open immediate dialogue with the FMLN, but asserted he would not negotiate government policy or share power. He proposed that the two sides begin a "permanent" dialogue which neither side could suspend until the war ended. Next, Cristiani called on the government to establish a commission to study how to incorporate the rebels into the country's political life. The talks, he added, should take place outside El Salvador, preferably in a Central American nation. Cristiani blamed the civil war (nine years of fighting and an estimated 70,000 dead) on "marxist-leninist forces" who wanted "to disguise misery with a totalitarian collectivism." [The FMLN announced Wednesday that the rebels had killed or wounded 720 government troops in the past month. Military spokespersons said government forces killed 197 rebels and wounded another 175 in May. The military also accused the rebels of killing 49 civilians, wounding 62 others and kidnapping 16 noncombatants.] The new president accused the outgoing administration of Jose Napoleon Duarte of leading El Salvador into its most serious economic crisis by disabling "the national productive apparatus, promoting disorder, corruption and misery." He promised to "deregulate" the economy, and privatize banks and import-export firms nationalized in 1980. "If we want to promote investment and increase productivity, we must eliminate the bureaucratic shackles and requirements that are the source of corruption," said Cristiani. He denied earlier reports that he intended to reverse the nation's land reform program. Cristiani, 41, is a wealthy businessperson and coffee plantation owner.

Trained in the US in economics and business administration, he speaks fluent English. His political career began in 1984, when elected to the ARENA executive committee shortly after party founder Roberto D'Aubuisson's electoral defeat to Christian Democrat Jose Napoleon Duarte. Cristiani became ARENA party chairman in 1985. Since then he has worked to clean up the party's "image," after years of accusations linking D'Aubuisson to death squad killings. Roman Catholic Church sources say the death squads killed 45,000 Salvadorans in the early 1980s. Cristiani was elected to the National Assembly in 1988. He resigned his seat to campaign for the presidency. During the inauguration ceremony, D'Aubuisson was twice hailed with thunderous applause and chants of his surname. Between 1981 and 1988, El Salvador received $3.5 billion in aid from the US. Despite the aid bonanza, the rebels maintain control over a large portion of national territory, and in recent months rebel military actions have become increasingly frequent and coordinated on multiple fronts. (Basic data from AFP, Notimex, 05/31/89, 06/01/89; DPA, AP, New York Times, 06/01/89)