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El Salvador: Penal Code Reform Legislation Described As Attack On Civil Liberties

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On June 23, Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) legislators introduced a penal code reform package for discussion by a committee of the National Assembly. The objective of the reforms, said ARENA politicians, is to eliminate or reduce "terrorism" by the civilian opposition. If approved by the National Assembly, the bill would authorize prison terms of three to six years for persons who participate in or "condone" terrorist acts. Next, one- to four-year prison terms are specified for persons who are found to have distributed or sold anti-government information, as well as persons who "collaborated" in such distribution and sales. Included here are leaflets and graffiti. Critics noted similarities between the penal code reform package and ARENA's "anti-terrorism law" announced the previous week. This legislation was not introduced for debate in the Assembly. Christian Democrat Deputy Aristides Alvarenga said, "It is clear that freedom of expression, thought, assembly and movement are to be done away with." Hugo Carrillo of the National Conciliation Party described the proposed legislation as "a rosary of reforms that attack all liberties."
Other opposition leaders asserted that terrorism as such does not exist in El Salvador. Instead, Salvadorans are enmeshed in a civil war that originated in profound social inequities. Because ARENA holds a majority in the National Assembly, the party does not require support by opposition legislators to transform the reform bill into law. (Basic data from 06/26/89 weekly report by Salpress-Notisal)

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