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Salvadoran Soldiers Open Fire On University Students

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On the evening of July 17, soldiers opened fire on a small group of student demonstrators on the University of El Salvador (UES) campus in San Salvador. Students said the soldiers fired to prevent some 30 demonstrators from leaving the campus. Eight civilians were reported injured, including a US citizen. No soldiers were reported wounded. The protest was called to demand that military officials release several recently abducted students, including Rene Cruz, an economics student and leader of the General Association of Salvadoran University Students (AGEUS). Students say soldiers arrested him July 16. The army has denied that Cruz is in their custody. Several students, who spoke with AP on condition of anonymity, said the soldiers fired to keep the demonstrators from leaving the campus. According to a military statement, troops were returning shots fired from inside the campus. The statement said, "During the protest, police defused a car bomb 500 yards from the 1st Infantry Brigade headquarters, near the school." It did not say whether the military believed the protest and the bomb were related. In a telephone interview with AP, 1st Infantry Brigade commander Col. Francisco Elena Fuentes said Soviet-made AK-47 rifles were fired from inside the school and that firebombs were thrown. An unidentified Red Cross worker told AP that ambulances were not allowed onto the campus until the shooting stopped, two hours after the disturbance began. He said eight people were taken to hospitals, including a man who identified himself as Robert Drennon, 33, of New York City. Drennon, who said he has been studying Spanish on a student exchange program, told reporters: "When I heard the shots I ran and I broke my leg." The Red Cross did not describe the injuries suffered by the other seven protesters who were taken to the hospital. In an interview with Notimex, secretary general of the General Association of Salvadoran Students (AGEUES), Vinicio Penate, blamed the government and the military for the attack that "caused at least five gunshot wounds, and various broken limbs and head wounds." Residents of the area said that for 1-1/2 hours, soldiers shot used rifles, grenade launchers, bazookas and bombs. Col. Fuentes said the bombs were molotov cocktails and that they were thrown by the students. About 2-1/2 hours after the shooting began, the students were evacuated by a group headed by university authorities who said they had successfully negotiated with government officials. In a call to a local radio station, and in broadcasts over its own radio stations, the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) said that its urban units were not involved in the university incident. A report aired by Radio Venceremos on July 18, the FMLN stated no rebel units were operating Monday near the university, nor in the northern sector of San Salvador. The only armed persons in the vicinity, said the FMLN, were soldiers who quashed a student demonstration, and then conducted a search and seizure operation. The report added that the soldiers "embroiled themselves in shooting at each other." Soldiers pertaining to the 1st Infantry Brigade have surrounded the campus for the past several months. According to the FMLN, the military has recently escalated its harassment and persecution campaign directed at UES. On July 14, FERS (High School Revolutionary Students Federation) and AGEUS (General Association of UES Students) placed an ad in the newspaper El Mundo denouncing recent attacks against students, professors and university facilities. Summarized below are incidents involving persons affiliated with UES during the month of July. July 6: David Antonio Guerrera Toledo, a social sciences student at the Santa Ana campus, was abducted by a group consisting of both uniformed and civilian-dress members of the Treasury Police. Guerrera is
a former student leader. On July 7 at about midnight, his home was searched by soldiers pertaining to the 2nd Infantry Brigade. On July 8 at dawn, soldiers occupied the neighborhood where Guerrera resides, and set up surveillance activities. As of July 17, the Treasury Police and other military authorities have refused to confirm his capture. July 6: Ana Maria Juana Antonio Medina Moran, 37, was captured at midnight at her home in Santa Ana by members of the Treasury Police in civilian dress and white-face. She is the mother of a student at the Santa Ana campus and an election supervisor for the Democratic Convergence, a coalition of opposition parties. She was released July 11. July 8: Ricardo Salizar, a law student at UES, San Salvador, was captured by Treasury Police at approximately 5:00 a.m. at his home in the Cucumacayan neighborhood. He was released a few days later. July 8: David Martinez, a student of composition at UES was captured at his home in Soyapango around 5:30 a.m. by uniformed members of the Treasury Police. He was released a few days later. July 10: Marcos Maroquin, a 17-year-old politically active high school student, was captured by Treasury Police on his way to school. Teachers and a majority of the student body (about 1,100 persons) occupied the school and refused to attend classes until Maroquin was released. On July 13, his sister, Zoila Elizabeth Maroquin, a biology student at UES, was captured by Treasury Police at approximately 1:00 pm in her home. As of July 17, Marcos Maroquin had been released, while Zoila Elizabeth Maroquin remained in custody. July 11: Cecelia Del Carmen Rodriguez Segura, a sociology professor at the UES west campus, was captured near her home in Santa Ana by heavily armed men in civilian dress who were traveling in a jeep. Colleagues claim members of the 2nd Infantry Brigade were responsible for the abduction. As of July 17, military authorities have not confirmed that she is in custody. July 12: Elguiz Santana Canales, a law student at UES, was captured by members of the Air Force. He was forcibly removed from a van traveling to the campus. After several beatings, he was later released. July 13: Juan Ramon Garcia Parada, a high school student, was captured by members of the Treasury Police. As of July 17, military authorities have not confirmed that he is in custody. July 16: At approximately 6:30 pm, Rene Antonio Cruz, a 28-year-old economics student was abducted at a bus stop near the UES campus in San Salvador by four heavily armed men in civilian dress. On July 17, the Treasury Police acknowledged that he was in custody. Cruz is a members of the AGEUS executive committee. According to university students, helicopters equipped with M60's buzz the campus three to four times daily, and often fly as low as 50 to 60 feet above the ground. All forums and cultural events on the campus are also subjected to helicopter overflights. Since December 1988, UES has been intermittently surrounded by military troops. Students are frequently searched before they are permitted to enter the campus. The biology department and engineering buildings at UES in San Salvador were bombed as was an auditorium on the San Miguel campus. The homes of the UES vice rector and dean of the humanities department were also bombed. The assistant dean at the Santa Ana campus has been killed, alongwith several university students. (Basic data from AP, Notimex, Xinhua, 07/17/89; Radio Venceremos, 07/17/89, 07/18/89)