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El Salvador: Occupation Of Costa Rican Embassy Ends Without Violence

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Oct. 6, members of the Federation of Committees of Mothers and Relatives of Political Prisoners, Disappeared and Assassinated People of El Salvador (FECMAFAM) released 12 hostages and left the Costa Rican Embassy after a 28-hour occupation to protest human rights abuses by President Alfredo Cristiani's government. The hostages and 20 FECMAFAM members were taken away in six International Red Cross vehicles at about 1:30 p.m. No one appeared to be injured. Salvadoran government spokesperson Mauricio Sandoval told reporters the hostages were taken to Red Cross headquarters in San Salvador for medical checks before being sent home, and that the activists returned to their organization's office. Sandoval said charges may eventually be filed against some of the persons involved. He added that some activists who had been armed apparently left their weapons "inside the offices or hidden," because they boarded the Red Cross vehicles unarmed. [See CAU 10/06/89 for details of occupation.] The activists arrived in small groups Thursday morning, pretending to be applying for visas, then seized the embassy and took 16 hostages. They later allowed Ambassador Jesus Fernandez, who had heart trouble, and some employees to leave along with visitors who were there on business. Sandoval called the embassy takeover "an affront to the government and people of Costa Rica...a violent action that makes no sense." He reiterated that FECMAFAM has "direct links" to the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN). For eight years, the federation has protested kidnappings and killings by rightist death squads. The activists received guarantees of safety from government security forces before leaving the embassy. On Thursday, the Costa Rican Foreign Ministry established contact with the FMLN command to express its concern over the occupation by an "FMLN front group." The rebels denied any links to the takeover, but offered to intercede with the FECMAFAM. (Basic data from AP, Notimex, Xinhua, 10/06/89)

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