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## **U.S. Medical Team Says Salvadoran Army Conducts Campaign Against Health Care Workers**

*by Deborah Tyroler*

*Category/Department: General*

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In an article published this week in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, a team of seven US medical specialists said the Salvadoran military has conducted a nationwide campaign against doctors and health-care workers and attacked guerrilla field hospitals in violation of the Geneva convention. The team comprised of five doctors, a congressional staff aide, and a lawyer visited El Salvador for a week in June. The article said, "The arbitrary refusal to allow the delivery of medical services, medicines and other essential goods imperils the health of many Salvadorans." The team said the Salvadoran army violated the 1949 Geneva convention by having attacked several rebel field hospitals and routinely denying doctors and health workers access to conflict areas. The convention specifies that medical personnel be protected, and the right to medical care for the wounded and sick. The team found that health care workers were subjected to long delays in obtaining passes required to visit rural areas, were routinely turned away at army roadblocks, and are rarely permitted to take more than a few doses of medicine into rural areas. Moreover, the military interferes with public health campaigns. In one case appearing in the report, army troops confiscated vaccines, detained medical personnel and canceled a government- approved Roman Catholic Church-sponsored campaign to inoculate 1,000 children in Chalatenango department. The medical team said the persecution of medical personnel was part of a campaign to obstruct religious and relief workers in order to undermine support for the guerrillas. Lindsey Gruson of the *New York Times* said the report includes several outdated statistics. The report states that the Ministry of Health provides little or no health care to the vast majority of Salvadorans, and the government has actively obstructed medical education. Health care in El Salvador, said the team, is likely to continue deteriorating "disastrously." Next, the investigators said they had not found "any instance of systematic or intentional disruption of health care" by the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) rebels despite a determined effort to document such abuses. The team noted other types of rebel human rights violations and said the rebel campaign of economic sabotage had frequently prevented Salvadorans from receiving necessary medical care. (Basic data from *New York Times*, 10/19/89)

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