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El Salvador: U.S. Citizen Jennifer Casolo Released From Prison, Deported

by Deborah Tyroler

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On the evening of Dec. 13, Jennifer Casolo was released from prison and deported to the US. Accompanied by US Ambassador William Walker at Comalapa International Airport, Casolo reiterated her innocence when she was permitted to speak briefly with a few reporters. Casolo was released into the custody of the ambassador, who picked her up in a black Cadillac escorted by Jeeps on Wednesday at the women's prison at Ilopango on the eastern outskirts of the capital. The caravan went to the airport and entered through a restricted entrance. Casolo was put on an Eastern Airlines flight to Miami and taken to an undisclosed location upon her arrival, said the Rev. Daniel Long, chairperson of Christian Education Seminars, who traveled with her on the plane. At a news conference, President Alfredo Cristiani said Casolo was released due to insufficient evidence by the same judge who ruled Dec. 8 that evidence was adequate to try her on charges of storing arms for the Salvadoran rebels. Cristiani said, "If the evidence against her becomes sufficient, she will be summoned to return for trial," although he acknowledged little could be done to force her to return. The president added, "I am morally convinced that Miss Casolo is guilty." Cristiani said he had not been pressured by the US government to order Casolo's release. The New York Times reported that an unidentified State Department official suggested doubts remain about Casolo's innocence. The official was cited as saying, "There are real, compelling issues about how the weapons got there and why her personal effects were found with them...Our position was not to lean or pressure or strongly urge or condition assistance to El Salvador on her release in any way." On Dec. 14, David Romero, the military court clerk handling the case, said that Judge Guillermo Romero Hernandez had also signed an order for the release of the two Salvadoran women and five men arrested in the same case. (Basic data from AP, 12/13/89, 12/14/89; AFP, 12/13/89; New York Times, 12/14/89)

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