

1-17-1990

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Deborah Tyroler

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Recommended Citation

Tyroler, Deborah. "Prominent Salvadoran Social Democrat Leader Assassinated In Guatemala." (1990).
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Prominent Salvadoran Social Democrat Leader Assassinated In Guatemala

by Deborah Tyroler

Category/Department: General

Published: Wednesday, January 17, 1990

On Jan. 13, the body of Salvadoran Hector Oqueli Colindres, 45, deputy secretary general of the National Revolutionary Movement (MNR), was discovered in Jalpatagua, Jutiapa department, Guatemala, 80 km. southeast of Guatemala City. Gilda Flores, an attorney and deputy of Guatemala's Social Democrat party (PSD), who was driving Oqueli to the airport in the capital when they were kidnapped on Friday morning, Friday, was also found dead, according to an MNR spokesperson. Both had been shot in the head. Oqueli's party is part of the Socialist International (SI) and he was its secretary for Latin America and the Caribbean. The organization includes moderate, leftist non-communist parties, including major European parties like West Germany's Social Democrats. Oqueli, who arrived in Guatemala Thursday afternoon, was planning to meet with an SI delegation in Managua before proceeding on to a meeting of Latin American social democrat leaders in Ecuador. Before his body was found, Oqueli's party condemned his kidnapping, saying it "demonstrates again the insecurity that exists in our country." Oqueli, like many other progressives, left El Salvador after a military coup in 1980. He returned to the country in 1987 to participate in politics. In November 1989, Oqueli and other leftist and progressive politicians fled El Salvador for days or weeks. Their flight was prompted by state security forces' response to a massive rebel offensive. No one claimed responsibility for the slayings. Secretary general of Guatemala's PSD, Mario Solorzano, said the attack "proves that there is coordination between paramilitary groups in El Salvador and Guatemala." Solorzano said he had advised Guatemalan President Vinicio Cerezo of the murders and that the president promised a thorough investigation. Guatemalan Interior Minister Carlos Morales said "foreign commandos" who had been operating in the country "for some time" were responsible. He said the attack appeared to be aimed specifically at Oqueli, not Flores. In a statement read over rebel Radio Venceremos, the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) blamed Oqueli's murder on retired army colonel Roberto D'Abuisson, founding member of the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA), and known leader of Salvadoran death squads. The FMLN said there were "known contacts between ARENA and d'Abuisson with the rightist National Liberation Movement" in Guatemala. On Jan. 14, Oqueli Colindres was buried in San Salvador's central cemetery. The burial was attended by relatives and friends, members of the MNR and of the Christian Democrat Party (PDC). An MNR spokesperson said a memorial service had been scheduled for Jan. 16, with the attendance of representatives from Socialist International committees, and European and Latin American Social Democrat parties. However, he added, the service was brought forward at the request of Oqueli's family members. Guillermo Ungo, MNR secretary general, was attending an SI convention in Ecuador at the time of the killing. Oqueli was scheduled to participate in the same meeting. MNR sources were cited as saying that they hoped the death of their leader would not serve as an obstacle in attempts to renew peace talks between the government and the FMLN. (Basic data from AP, AFP, DPA, 01/13/90; Notimex, 01/13/90, 01/14/90)

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