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## **Lutheran Bishop Medardo Gomez Returns Briefly To El Salvador; U.S. Clerics Study Reports Of Military Harassment**

*by Deborah Tyroler*

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On Jan. 6, Lutheran Bishop Medardo Gomez returned to El Salvador, escorted by a group of US clerics. Gomez fled the country Nov. 26 after receiving several death threats. At that time, dozens of foreign church workers were expelled from El Salvador by the government. Salvadoran clergy and lay workers received death threats, were subjected to diverse forms of abuse ranging from harassment to murder. Many remain in prison. Gomez told reporters: "I am not a criminal, I am not a terrorist, I am a pastor, and our work is to worry about the poor and is not inspired by any social ideology." According to AP, the 12 clergypersons accompanying Gomez included the Revs. Roger White, Anglican bishop of Milwaukee; Arthur McGovern, a Jesuit priest from Detroit; Peter Rogness, Lutheran bishop of Milwaukee; and Cristina Gronn, vice president of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. AFP reported that 13 US clergy and Gomez had arrived to examine reports of harassment by the military of Salvadoran church workers. Gronn said the delegation would celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany with Salvadoran religious communities, provide security for Gomez and express support for all those church workers still being persecuted. Gomez did not say how long he will remain in El Salvador: "I know conditions do not exist for me to live freely, doing my work...There are military groups who are persecuting the church." He added that he "does not want to hold the (military) high command responsible because they have officially told us the armed forces have nothing against the churches...My struggle now will be to pray and speak abroad about dialogue and negotiations and create conditions for a pacification process in El Salvador." Gronn said the delegation has asked President Bush to suspend military aid to the government of President Alfredo Cristiani to pressure him into resuming the cease-fire talks. The US currently provides \$1.5 million daily in economic and military assistance. During a press conference, the Catholic, Lutheran, Baptist and Episcopalian bishops said some 50 Salvadorans representing different churches had been arrested since Nov. 11. Other religious workers have received death threats from death squads, the bishops said. (Basic data from AP, AFP, 01/06/90)

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