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Eulogies For Jose Napoleon Duarte

by Deborah Tyroler

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Former Salvadoran President Jose Napoleon Duarte died on Feb. 23, nearly two years after being diagnosed with terminal cancer. Summarized below are statements on Duarte's accomplishments, intentions and failures, and actions taken in his honor. Humberto Centeno, leader of the labor confederation, Salvadoran National Workers Union (UNTS): "He was a prisoner of the High Command and of the Reagan administration. He never truly had the opportunity to implement the programs he believed in...Things might have been different in this country, but due to the Army and the intervention of the United States, [his government] resulted in greater poverty and repression. The workers know how to forgive errors. We recognize his desire was to create a better future for the country." US Ambassador William Walker said Duarte was "a man who showed the same courage during his long illness that he showed during his life." Statements from the White House, Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica, and Panama referred to Duarte as the "father of democracy in El Salvador." Ruben Zamora, a leader of the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR), said Duarte "opened the way for democracy in the Seventies...but he and his people were mistaken in the Eighties. Our best memorial to him would be to retake his original principles." The general command of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front immediately offered condolences to Duarte's family and the Christian Democrat Party, and announced a unilateral two-day truce to permit foreign visitors and the Salvadoran people to pay their respects. On the afternoon of Feb. 23, the Salvadoran cabinet awarded Duarte the country's highest honor, known as the Jose Matias Delgado award. (The same award was presented to the president of Taiwan on Feb. 22 during an official visit by President Alfredo Cristiani.) Thousands paid their respects at the Don Rua Church where Duarte's body lied in state on the following day, and the Salvadoran Cabinet declared three days of national mourning. Many representatives of foreign governments attended the funeral on Feb. 25, including US Vice President Dan Quayle, Guatemalan President Vinicio Cerezo, and Costa Rican President Oscar Arias. [Basic data from 02/19-26/90 weekly report by El Rescate (Los Angeles, CA)]

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