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El Salvador: Soldiers Terrorize Members Of Clergy With Automatic Weapons Fire

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Aug. 25 at a press conference in San Salvador, Spanish Jesuit priests Nicolas Alvarenga and John Cortina told reporters that on Aug. 20, they were targets of automatic weapons fire of soldiers who "shot to kill." The priests serve in the San Salvador parishes of Arcatao and San Jose las Flores, respectively. The incident took place when the priests were en route to Guarjila, a community of displaced persons. Cortina said the incident was not "accidental," and added that a few days before the shooting, members of an elite battalion told residents of San Jose las Flores they planned "to suck the blood of the priests who work in the area." The reverend added that a bullet hit the roof of their vehicle, only 10 centimeters from his head. Alvarenga said, "Upon arriving in the community, when we left the vehicle, other shots impacted only a meter from the car. They shot at us three more times. The shooting came from the same place, the echo was the same, and the caliber was the same." Next, the priests emphasized that only army troops were present in the area. Cortina stated that the attack was likely not against him personally, but rather against the church, "against the Jesuits because we are engaged in pastoral work in El Salvador." Alvarenga and Cortina also reported that on the same day, soldiers fired at the home of a group of clergywomen residing in Guajira. Alvarenga said, "The sisters were spread out on the floor when we arrived. There were seven bullet holes in the house." At a separate press conference, President Alfredo Cristiani said he had received a report on the incident from the army high command. The report indicated that the priests had been caught in "cross-fire." (Basic data from 08/25/90)

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