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## **Jesuit Provincial For Central America: Salvadoran Senior Officers & U.S. Embassy Obstructed Investigation**

*by Deborah Tyroler*

*Category/Department: General*

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At a Nov. 12 press conference in San Salvador, Jesuit Provincial for Central America, Jose Maria Tojeira, asserted that the army continues to block the investigation into the November 1989 murders of six Jesuit priests. The Spanish priest said the investigation conducted by the Salvadoran government has not turned up conclusive evidence because the military does not wish for justice in the case. Tojeira said he was "disconcerted" that the investigation was stalled and may disintegrate in the near future. "The difficult part to clear up in the case is the army," he said, noting that the army had burned evidence, delivered false documents and sent the wrong witnesses to testify. He also accused the US Embassy in San Salvador of covering up evidence throughout the investigation of the assassinations. In addition, said Tojeira, embassy personnel have obstructed the judicial process by transmitting rumors of death threats to persons involved in carrying out the investigation. Notimex reported that according to Tojeira, the embassy's legal adviser Richard Cheedester has managed the "obstruction" with the help of assistants. He added, "I imagine that he is authorized, protected, and supported by Ambassador [William] Walker because despite all protests, he continues in his post." The principal source of stonewalling in the case, however, said the Rev. Tojeira, is the military high command, which "indicates that powerful officers pressured Col. [Guillermo Alfredo] Benavides to give the order" to murder the priests. Benavides, who headed the military academy at the time of the crime, has been identified as the officer who gave the order to officers and soldiers of the Atlacatl Battalion. Tojeira enumerated a series of contradictory statements given to the judge in charge of the murder investigation by senior military officers. He said such contradictions "make us think of the possibility of a conspiracy" by senior officers to confound the investigation, and thus, protect the identity of fellow officers who issued the original orders for the massacre. (Basic data from AFP, Notimex, 11/12/90)

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