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El Salvador: Notes On Events Commemorating Nov. 16, 1989 Massacre Of Jesuit Priests

by Deborah Tyroler

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Nov. 11: In Washington, church sources announced that a group of Catholic bishops and archbishops would join a delegation of religious leaders from the US and other nations in El Salvador to commemorate the first anniversary of the murders of six Jesuit priests and two women. The eight people were assassinated by Salvadoran soldiers on Nov. 16, 1989. The delegation will be headed by Milwaukee Archbishop Rembert G. Weakland. The clergypersons are to participate in a religious service scheduled for Friday at the Central American University (UCA) in San Salvador. Among other members of the group are Las Cruces, New Mexico Bishop Ricardo Ramirez, and San Francisco Auxiliary Bishop Carlos Sevilla. The delegation has been invited to visit several churches and communities by Chalatenango Bishop Eduardo Alas, and San Salvador's Archbishop Arturo Rivera y Damas. According to a communique by the Milwaukee archdiocese, a group of Jesuits, headed by the Rev. Pat Burns, president of the US Jesuit Conference, will also travel to El Salvador to "emphasize the need for justice" in the murder of the six priests, and "thousands of assassinations" by Salvadoran soldiers that have not yet been solved. Rev. Richard Buhler, secretary of Jesuit Conference's refugee and international affairs department, and member of the delegation to El Salvador, told reporters: "The brutality of the murders, and the role of the Jesuits in the articulation of proposals in the search for a peaceful solution to a decade of war in El Salvador" sparked the world's conscience. Shana Grossman of the Milwaukee archdiocese said that in 80 US cities over 200 commemorative events by church groups and other organizations have been planned for Nov. 16. On Friday in Washington, a group of US and Salvadoran citizens plan to organize a vigil in front of the White House to include protests against US military and financial aid to the Salvadoran government for the past decade. In San Salvador, in commemoration of the killings, Archbishop Rivera y Damas reiterated the Catholic Church's demand for dialogue and negotiations between the rebels and the government. The events of November 1989, said the prelate, brought home once again to Salvadorans "the horrible drama of the war." He added that the "magnitude of suffering makes a similar action in the future ethically unacceptable." In reference to the circumstances under which the Jesuit priests were murdered, the archbishop said, "their lives were brutally cut short...within a climate of extreme irrationality created by the armed forces radio network." Nov. 13: In San Salvador, leaders of the National Salvadoran Educators Association (ANDES) and the Permanent Committee on National Debate for Peace (CPDNP) said the government and the armed forces high command continue to hide evidence pointing to the persons responsible for the Jesuit murders. ANDES leader Julio Cesar Portillo accused President Alfredo Cristiani and senior military officers of manipulating judicial proceedings in the case. CPDNP leader Rosario Acosta asserted that the case will not be resolved as long as the Salvadoran judiciary permits military impunity. Portillo added, "The judgment and punishment of those responsible for the massacre of the Jesuits could serve as a symbolic case for what has happened to all Salvadorans." The Committee said it had scheduled a series of commemorative acts beginning on Nov. 14. (Basic data from AFP, 11/10/90; Notimex, 11/13/90)

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