

1-25-1991

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### Recommended Citation

Tyroler, Deborah. "El Salvador: Massacre Of 15 Civilians." (1991). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen/4959>

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## **El Salvador: Massacre Of 15 Civilians**

*by Deborah Tyroler*

*Category/Department: General*

*Published: Friday, January 25, 1991*

Before dawn on Jan. 22, 15 civilians were killed in their beds in Canton El Zapote, a neighborhood of Ayatuxtepeque, located 8 km. from San Salvador. The victims included six women, several adolescents and a 70-year-old man. Local residents told the Agence France Presse that the bodies found in six of the community's 10 homes were lying face down and several were partially clothed. According to AFP, the victims had been shot and stabbed, and the hands of some were bound. The armed forces press agency (COPREFA) attributed the murders to "problems between families in the area." Jesus Hernandez, brother to one of the victims, denied that the murders were the result of a family feud. Survivor Elizabeth Aragon described the assailants as "men dressed in black, wearing boots, masks and carrying rifles and knives." On Wednesday, the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) released a statement asserting that the army and death squads organized the massacre in an attempt to intimidate opposition party supporters, and thus dissuade them from participating in the March elections. According to the rebels, the massacre was "provoked by the release of US military aid, and carried out by government troops who sought to take advantage of global preoccupation with the war in the Persian Gulf." Supreme Court spokespersons on Jan. 24 told reporters that autopsy results indicated three of the bodies displayed bullet wounds "probably from high velocity rifles." The skull of one of the victims was crushed, and another had his hands bound behind his back. According to the spokespersons, the autopsies confirmed that none of the six female victims had been raped. (Basic data from AFP, 01/22/91, 01/23/91; ACAN-EFE, 01/22/91, 01/24/91)

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