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## **Costa Rica: Report By Independent Human Rights Commission**

*by Deborah Tyroler*

*Category/Department: General*

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On May 16, the independent Human Rights Commission (CODEHU) released a report on civil, political, social and economic rights abuses in 1989 and 1990. The commission asserted that Costa Rican security forces practice torture, and arbitrary and illegal arrest of individuals and members of entire groups. CODEHU charged that prisoners were frequently kept ignorant of the reason for their arrest, were not read their rights, nor permitted to speak with a lawyer or communicate with family members. The commission said recorded 16 cases of torture and rape. The report said overcrowding in prisons is a major problem. Costa Rican law requires incarceration of persons accused of drug offenses. Many of these defendants languish in prison for years before their cases are prosecuted. Next, the commission pointed out that while the Costa Rican military was abolished 42 years ago, there are currently 18 public security corps with a combined total of 28,169 members. Many security corp members have received military training from US Special Forces officers at the School of the Americas (Ft. Benning, GA, US), the Chilean Carabineros and Guatemalan Kaibiles. The report mentioned public spending cuts, especially in education and health services, described as an abuse of the right to a standard of living which meets basic needs. CODEHU said that since 1985 incomes of the majority of Costa Ricans had decline, and un- and underemployment have increased, result of economic austerity policies recommended by multilateral financial institutions. Spending on social welfare programs is currently 10% less than in 1985. Over half of all Costa Rican children between the ages of 12 and 17 are not in school. Meanwhile, said CODEHU, in 1989 the government spent \$50 million to stimulate exports, equivalent to 25% of the budget deficit. Since 1989, consumer price inflation has increased from 9.95% to 27.25% per year, causing an average 25% decline in purchasing power. CODEHU cited International Labor Organization (ILO) statistics which show that 67% of the nation's labor force earns less than the official minimum wage. (Basic data from Inter Press Service, 05/14/91; AFP, 05/16/91)

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