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El Salvador: On Military Harassment Of Resettlement Communities

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Sept. 3, Mirtala Lopez, Christian Committee for the Displaced (CRIPDES) spokesperson, denounced a recent military attack on the San Jose las Flores resettlement community in Chalatenango department. During the attack, she said, an infant was killed, and 10 persons injured. Lopez said 200 persons rallied in front of the army barracks in the capital city of Chalatenango to protest the incident. When soldiers forcibly dispersed the protesters, several persons were assaulted. According to Lopez, the protesters fled to a church courtyard where Bishop Eduardo Alas intervened on their behalf. Later, Alas and members of the UN observer mission to El Salvador (ONUSAL) escorted the protesters back to San Jose Las Flores and participated in the infant's funeral. Celia Medrano, coordinator of the independent Salvadoran Human Rights Commission (CDHES), told journalists that investigators confirmed army responsibility for the gunfire exchange which resulted in the infant's death. Medrano noted that the army perceives the resettlement communities as Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) strongholds, and residents are subjected to constant harassment. Next, a spokesperson for the Permanent National Debate Committee (CPDN) reported that soldiers pertaining to the Sixth Brigade arrested six Spanish nationals and a Salvadoran reporter in San Marcos Lempa, Usulután department. The spokesperson said the Spaniards were participating in a demonstration led by 450 residents of the Ciudad Romero resettlement community who were protesting a land distribution program implemented by the Salvadoran Agrarian Transformation Institute (ISTA). CPDN identified the Spaniards as Miguel Infausti Naguruza, Roberto Ramos, Eugenia Sanz, Francisco Pescador, Ana Pino and Octavio Rivera. In a communique, the armed forces press office (COPREFA) confirmed the arrests, asserting that the foreigners "hampered soldiers' efforts to disperse the crowd and urged the protesters to resist orders." COPREFA said the purpose of the arrests was to verify the Spaniards' visa status. COPREFA indicated that journalist Rodolfo Martinez was sent before a judge in Jiquilisco, Usulután. The Spaniards were detained overnight by the Treasury Police in San Miguel department and would be transferred to the capital on Wednesday. On Sept. 4, the six men and women were released to Spanish Ambassador to El Salvador Ricardo Peidro. German Cerdas, of the Salvadoran Integrated Development Association (Asociación Salvadoreña de Desarrollo Integral- ASDI), said the Spanish nationals did not participate in the demonstration. According to Cerdas, the six University of Salamanca students arrived in San Salvador in July under a University/ASDI program which sponsors student participation in socio-economic development projects in resettlement communities. Cerdas said the students were returning from visits to two resettlement communities in Usulután when military personnel stopped their vehicle. At that time, the six passengers were arrested. (Basic data from AFP, ACAN-EFE, 09/03/91, 09/04/91)

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