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Salvadoran Church Investigation Finds Atlacatl Battalion Responsible For 1981 Massacre Of 794 Civilians

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On Nov. 10, San Salvador Auxiliary Bishop Gregorio Rosa Chavez told reporters that results of a two-year investigation conducted by Tutela Legal (Catholic archdiocesan human rights monitor) indicated that the elite Atlacatl Battalion was responsible for the 1981 massacre of civilians in the El Mozote area of Morazan department. According to the report, 794 people were killed on Dec. 11-13, 1981, in El Mozote, Rancheria, and Jocote Amarillo in Guacamaya district, and La Joya, Los Toriles and Cerro Panado in Meanguera district. Commander of the military operation, Col. Domingo Monterrosa, subsequently died in a helicopter crash. Rosa Chavez said his office would soon be releasing information on legal proceedings in the case dating from Oct. 26, 1990. Survivors of the massacre have submitted depositions in court in San Francisco Gotera, capital of Morazan. At a Nov. 12 press conference, Rosa Chavez and Tutela Legal director Maria Julia Hernandez said legal proceedings were delayed because survivors were living in Honduran refugee camps until last year. Several survivors were present at the press conference. Hernandez said the investigation had come to a halt because the Supreme Court has refused to authorize exhumation of the gravesites of massacre victims. According to Hernandez, Salvadoran judiciary authorities possess neither the equipment nor the technical expertise required for the exhumation. She added that foreign experts are needed to avoid destruction of evidence during excavation. According to Hernandez, despite the reluctance of judicial and military officials to cooperate in the investigation, testimony provided by survivors has been adequate for Tutela Legal to assemble details on the massacre, including victims' names, and dates and locations of specific events. (Basic data from Agence France-Presse, 11/10/91; ACAN-EFE, 11/10/91, 11/12/91; Notimex, 11/12/91)

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