El Salvador: Americas Watch, Spanish Legislators & Jesuit Order Call For Reopening Investigations Into Jesuit Murders

Deborah Tyroler

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen

Recommended Citation
El Salvador: Americas Watch, Spanish Legislators & Jesuit Order Call For Reopening Investigations Into Jesuit Murders  
by Deborah Tyroler  
Category/Department: General  
Published: Friday, December 20, 1991

In a report released Dec. 12, the US-based human rights organization Americas Watch called on the US government to determine definitively the level of responsibility of Salvadoran military officers prosecuted in the Jesuit murder trial, and to decide whether the Salvadoran government carried out a thorough and exhaustive investigation. Americas Watch noted that legislation approved by the US Congress in 1990 conditioned further US military to El Salvador on the government's ability to prove that it had fully investigated and prosecuted the Jesuit murder case. The report said, "We do not believe that such an investigation was carried out and therefore recommend complete suspension of military aid" in 1992. Next, Americas Watch said the Salvadoran government should follow through on investigating the possibility that Col. Guillermo Benavides, sentenced in September for giving the order to men under his command to kill the priests, in turn acted under orders or in cooperation with higher ranking officers. Americas Watch called on the Salvadoran army to dismiss the seven military personnel acquitted in the trial. The rights monitor organization said, "It would be a perversion to allow admitted assassins to continue serving in the military where they will be free to commit other crimes." Finally, Americas Watch urged the US government to deny any of the nine military personnel tried in the case entry into the US at any future time.

In Madrid on Dec. 15, in a report submitted to the Spanish parliament, legislators charged that the Salvadoran army and government withheld evidence and acted deliberately to obstruct the judicial process during the investigation and prosecution of suspects in the Jesuit murder case. The report, compiled by Spanish legislators who attended the trials of suspects in September, will also be presented to the European Parliament and the US Congress. The report cited problems in the following areas: "evidence gathering; withholding of evidence; lack of collaboration and deliberate interference on the part of the armed forces and some parts of the government; and, efforts to coerce the jury." In addition, the report noted that the judicial proceedings were undermined by "lack of independence in the Salvadoran judicial system and of an independent judicial police." The delegation said the "process did not allow for the investigations to proceed to the final consequences. Therefore, only a partial purge of those responsible was possible, and other persons presumed responsible were not implicated." The delegation's report noted the following: "The armed forces are accustomed to acting with absolute impunity within a framework of ongoing violations of the most basic human rights." While applauding the verdict as a "break with the principle of impunity for actions by the armed forces," the report said there is no "guarantee that this will apply in the future." On Dec. 18, Jesuit Provincial for Central America Jose Maria Tojeira and Central American University (UCA) rector Francisco Estrada formally requested that the Salvadoran legislature appoint a special congressional committee to investigate the identity of persons responsible for planning and ordering the Jesuit massacre. Tojeira told reporters that the Jesuit order was convinced that the "intellectual authors" of the crime had not been prosecuted, and was therefore requesting the opening of new investigations. He said the most compelling evidence that the true authors
of the crime were being protected was the "enormous cover-up efforts which occurred after the crime." (Basic data from Notimex, 12/12/91; Agence France-Presse, 12/15/91, 12/18/91)

-- End --