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U.N. Human Rights Commission Criticizes Human Rights Conditions In El Salvador

by Deborah Tyroler

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On March 3 in Geneva, the UN Human Rights Commission approved a resolution condemning human rights conditions in El Salvador, but also moved to recall UN special human rights investigator Antonio Pastor Ridruejo. The commission was particularly harsh in its criticism of the performance of the Salvadoran judicial system, and then noted that the situation "could be remedied if both the armed forces and rebels comply faithfully with the accords." Next, the commission called on the international community to provide financial support for national reconstruction efforts. In San Salvador, Phillipe Texier, director of the human rights division of the UN observer mission to El Salvador (ONUSAL), briefed reporters on the contents of the third ONUSAL human rights report to the UN Secretary General, covering the November 1991-January 1992 period. Texier said ONUSAL received 1,055 claims of rights abuses, compared to 1,060 in the August-October 1991 period. Texier reported an "increase of certain kinds of violence including summary executions carried out by paramilitary groups and death threats against religious and members of non- governmental organizations working to promote human rights or in support of [resettlement] communities." The ONUSAL report criticized the "passive attitude of judicial authorities" in investigating murders, such as inadequate autopsies, and loss or destruction of evidence. Texier said ONUSAL received numerous denunciations of torture and other types of abuse against persons detained by the military. He expressed concern over the capacity of the armed forces' internal mechanisms for punishing military personnel responsible for such abuses. The human rights director cited a notable reduction in violence subsequent to implementation of the unilateral cease- fire declared by the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) last year, and a move to terminate aerial bombings by the military. Texier said free transit on the nation's roadways had been reestablished, and that both the military and the rebels had terminated respective recruitment activities. Finally, Texier congratulated the government for "full collaboration" with ONUSAL. Thus far, he added, all requests for information from the government had been met. On March 6, Celia Medrano, leader of the independent Salvadoran Human Rights Commission (CDHES), said recalling the UN human rights special investigator constituted a dangerous and premature move. She pointed out that ONUSAL's mandate is restricted to monitoring civil and political rights, not verification and monitoring of compliance with respect for human rights. Foreign Minister Manuel Pacas said the UN decision reflected recognition of the government's efforts in the peace process. [Basic data from Agence France-Presse, 03/03/92, 03/06/92; Spanish news service EFE, 03/03/92; Agencia Centroamericana de Noticias-Spanish news service EFE, 03/03/92, 03/04/92, Prensa Latina (Cuba), 03/04/92]

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