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El Salvador: Rebels Implicated In Execution Of U.S. Military Advisers Surrender To Judicial Authorities

by Deborah Tyroler

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On March 13, the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) released a communique announcing that two rebels implicated in the January 1991 execution of two wounded US helicopter crew members "voluntarily decided to turn themselves over to Salvadoran judicial authorities." The FMLN expressed the hope that this decision would "contribute to consolidation of the national reconciliation process, which requires compliance with the new legal framework arising from the negotiations." The FMLN reiterated objections regarding possible extradition of the two men to the US. In subsequent comments to reporters, US State Department spokesperson Richard Boucher said, "Those responsible should respond before the US judicial system for violation of US laws." He added that the gesture made by the FMLN "does not in and of itself assure that persons ultimately responsible for this crime will face justice." On March 16, Justice Minister Rene Hernandez said the two rebels would not be extradited to the US. He added, "If they are Salvadorans, they should be tried by [Salvadoran] juries and not face charges for their actions under the laws of another country." According to Hernandez, the FMLN had made the right decision, noting that the action constituted a significant change in the rebels' apparent trust in the judicial system. Furthermore, he said, the gesture provided an opportunity for the judicial system to show that it is capable of carrying out justice. On March 17, the two men accused of executing the US military personnel, Severiano Fuentes ("Aparicio") and Ferman Hernandez ("Porfirio"), surrendered to judicial authorities in Chinameca, San Miguel department. After eight hours of testimony before presiding judge Dinora de Lazo, Fuentes and Hernandez were transferred to La Esperanza prison, located near San Salvador. The defendants will remain at La Esperanza until they go to trial. (Basic data from Associated Press, 03/13/92; Agence France-Presse, 03/13/92, 03/14/92, 03/16/92, 03/17/92; Agencia Centroamericana de Noticias-Spanish news service EFE, 03/17/92)

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