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U.S. Legislators Call On Bush Administration To Support Salvadoran Investigative Commissions

by Deborah Tyroler

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In a May 28 letter addressed to US Secretary of State James Baker, several members of Congress requested that the Bush administration cooperate fully with the work of two investigative commissions (the ad hoc and Truth commissions) established under the auspices of the Salvadoran peace accords. Signatories to the letter included US Sens. Christopher Dodd (D-CT) and Patrick Leahy (D-VT) and Reps. Joe Moakley (D-MA), Lee Hamilton (D-IN) and David Bonior (D-MI). The letter calls on the administration to provide members of both commissions with access to classified and non-classified documents. The ad hoc commission, which is charged with overseeing the process of purging human rights abusers from the Salvadoran armed forces, is comprised of Salvadoran attorneys Abraham Rodriguez, Eduardo Molina and Reynaldo Galindo Polh. The Truth Commission will investigate major human rights violations committed during the civil war. Truth Commission members are former Colombian president Belisario Betancur, former Venezuelan foreign minister Reinaldo Figueredo and Thomas Buergenthal, former chief of the Inter-American Court for Human Rights. The legislators observed that the issues of impunity, human rights violations and abuse of authority "go to the heart of the [Salvadoran] conflict." They asserted that work to be performed by the two commissions was essential for assuring long-term success of the peace process. According to the legislators, the US State Department, Pentagon, Central Intelligence Agency, the US Embassy in San Salvador and other US government agencies have "an enormous amount of documents, profiles, information and reports, both classified and non-classified, which could significantly contribute to the work of the two commissions." The letter indicated that "Although we are aware of the difficulties and sensitive nature of divulging certain classified information, we firmly believe that given sufficient political will to cooperate with these investigative bodies," US officials could provide large amounts of information. On June 4, deputy defense minister Gen. Orlando Zepeda asserted that the army had no objection to use of information that US officials might provide concerning military officers. Zepeda added that the armed forces were fully committed to cooperating with the two commissions. He said that the armed forces high command had already turned over the service records of over 3,000 officers to the ad hoc commission. (Basic data from Agence France-Presse, Agencia Centroamericana de Noticias-Spanish news service EFE, 06/03/92; Salpress, 06/04/92)

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