

THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN EL SALVADOR

ISSUE

El Salvador is making measured progress towards establishing a democratic civil society. However, significant problems remain, including impunity and an inadequate legal system, which must be addressed to improve respect for human rights.

BACKGROUND

El Salvador has been engaged for the past three years in a peace process which has allowed a democratic civil society to begin to take root. Although many social, political and economic issues remain to be resolved, El Salvador's future now appears considerably brighter than its past.

In March and April 1994, El Salvador held national elections in which a broad spectrum of political parties participated. Voting took place in a generally peaceful atmosphere, despite some irregularities and organizational deficiencies in the electoral process. Both rounds of voting were monitored by many domestic and international observers, among them official and non-governmental Canadian delegations. Although the incumbent Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) retained the presidency and won the largest number of seats in the National Assembly, the former guerrilla organization, the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), emerged as the strongest opposition group.

In his report of October 31, 1994, the Director of the Human Rights Division of the United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL) noted a progressive decline in the number of admissible complaints in the post-election period. Some of the improvement was credited to the work of the United Nations-sponsored Joint Group for the Investigation of Politically Motivated Illegal Armed Groups which was created in December 1993 in response to a series of assassinations. Canada and several other UN member states financed the Joint Group's investigations.

On July 28, 1994, the Joint Group released the report of its investigations which concluded that certain groups and individuals had engaged in violent acts for political purposes since the signing of the peace accords in January 1992. Specific evidence collected was delivered to the Salvadoran government in a confidential annex. The Joint Group made a number of recommendations with a view to ending political violence, including strengthening the investigative capacity of the National Civil Police (PNC) and improving the judicial system.

In October 1994, the Government of El Salvador and the FMLN reaffirmed their resolve to fulfil the remaining provisions of the peace accords by April 30, 1995. The United Nations Security Council subsequently gave ONUSAL a final operational mandate to end on that date. Land transfers, reinsertion of ex-combatants, electoral and judicial reform and the outstanding recommendations of the Truth Commission are the major unresolved issues.