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HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN EL SALVADOR

ISSUE

Although nearly two years have passed since the start of the cease-fire which effectively ended El Salvador's civil war, serious human rights violations persist.

BACKGROUND

Two years after the conclusion of a peace agreement between the Government of El Salvador and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), El Salvador's future remains uncertain. As the country prepares for national elections in March 1994, Salvadorans are apprehensive because of a resurgence of political violence and serious delays in implementing important provisions of the peace accords.

In his eighth report (S/26416 15/09/93), the Director of the Human Rights Division of the United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL) characterized the evolution of the human rights situation as "ambivalent." Acts of politically motivated arbitrary execution, threats of violence and incidents of torture persist, despite improvements in other areas. Criminal violence, fuelled by the accessibility of weapons, has contributed to weakening Salvadorans' sense of security.

On March 15, 1993 the United Nations' Truth Commission released its report entitled "From Madness to Hope - The Twelve-Year War in El Salvador." The report examined in detail over thirty prominent cases which occurred during the civil war. The Commission concluded that members of the Salvadoran armed forces and other state security organizations were responsible for the bulk of gross human rights violations from 1980 to 1991. Of the five factions comprising the FMLN, only the leaders of the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (ERP) readily admitted their role in the assassination of non-combatants (judges and mayors) to the Commission.

The Truth Commission report was lost on the Salvadoran military and judiciary, whose officials responded by denigrating the report and its authors. Also, the Salvadoran government pressed a blanket amnesty law through the National Assembly within days of the report's release.

On July 1, 1993, after months of pressure from the United Nations and the international community, President Cristiani removed from active duty the last fifteen ranking military officers, including the Minister and Vice-Minister of Defence, who were named in a confidential report submitted by the Ad Hoc Commission.

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