

HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN EL SALVADOR

ISSUE

The state of human rights in El Salvador remains a matter of serious concern to the Canadian government. During the 46th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), a resolution on this subject was again adopted by the Third Committee. While acknowledging and supporting advances in the peace process, including the signing of the San Jose Agreement on human rights and the establishment of the United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL), the resolution calls for continued consideration of the human rights situation at UNGA 47.

The UN Commission on Human Rights' Special Representative for El Salvador, Professor Pastor Ridruejo, presented his report in September 1991. The report again underscores the essential link between the Salvadoran civil conflict and human rights violations. While acknowledging President Cristiani's determination to improve the human rights situation, the report reaffirms the persistence of serious violations, perpetrated by extremists on both sides of the conflict. The report recommends that the Government of El Salvador and insurgents (FMLN) redouble their efforts to reach a negotiated settlement, while striving to create an atmosphere of security and social justice necessary to the conclusion of the peace process.

BACKGROUND

The trial of nine members of the El Salvador Armed Forces for the murder of six Jesuit priests, their cook and her daughter in November 1989 resulted in the conviction of Colonel Benavides, the highest ranking officer ever to be brought to trial for human rights abuses, and a second officer. While deeply concerned about the persistence of the civil conflict and attendant human rights violations, and while acknowledging that there still may be unanswered questions surrounding the murder of the Jesuit fathers, the Government of Canada believes that this trial and convictions represent significant progress.

In November, the Salvadoran Legislative Assembly ratified the final elements of constitutional reforms that were contained in the Mexico Accords of April 1991; these were already approved by the previous Assembly. Significant among the reforms adopted are provisions for the creation of the office of Human Rights Ombudsman, the establishment of a "Truth Commission", and measures to increase the independence of the judiciary. The implementation of these measures, and the presence of ONUSAL, should assist in improving the human rights situation in El Salvador.