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HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN EL SALVADOR

ISSUE

The peace accords signed on January 16, 1992 by the Government of El Salvador and the armed opposition Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) ended a terrible twelve year long civil war. An estimated 75 thousand Salvadorans, largely civilians, were killed in the conflict, many thousands more were injured and 1.5 million persons were dislocated or fled the country.

During the civil war gross violations of human rights, including assassination, torture and kidnapping were perpetrated by elements of the Salvadoran military, other government security forces and clandestine "death squads" which were suspected of having links with the military and security forces. The FMLN was also accused of human rights abuses, although to a lesser extent.

Since the cease-fire came into effect on February 1, 1992, the level of violence in El Salvador has decreased substantially. However, the Canadian Government is concerned by continuing incidents of human rights violations in that country.

In accordance with UNCHR resolution 1992/62 and ECOSOC decision 1992/237, a report on the human rights situation in El Salvador was prepared by an Independent Expert, Prof. Pedro Nikken, and submitted to the UNGA on November 13, 1992. Prof. Nikken stated in his report that the termination of the civil war had eliminated a major source of human rights violations. However, he observed that violations of human rights persist and that the resources available to the civil society to combat these violations were inadequate. His report concluded that only rapid and complete fulfilment of the provisions of the peace accords could secure justice and social stability.

BACKGROUND

Although the civil war in El Salvador ended in 1992, the causes of that conflict remain: widespread poverty, concentration of wealth and power in the hands of an elite, a penchant for the violent resolution of disputes, a sclerotic and corrupt justice system, and political polarization characterized by fear and mistrust.

The Salvadoran peace accords, which incorporate significant reforms to the military, judicial, electoral and social institutions of the country could, if fully implemented, provide the basis for the development of a strong, democratic civil society. Long term commitment by the international community is necessary to ensure that the political, military, legal and social reforms agreed to in the peace accords are carried out.