

AI INDEX: AMR 29/03/00

EMBARGOED FOR 24 MARCH 2000

El Salvador : Anniversary of the assassination of Monsignor Romero --Twenty years of impunity

Twenty years ago today Monsignor Oscar Arnulfo Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador, was killed while celebrating mass. Twenty years on the perpetrators of this heinous crime -- identified by the Truth Commission in 1993 -- have not been brought to justice.

Monsignor Romero's criticisms of the human rights violations being perpetrated in El Salvador at the time and his commitment to defending human rights led to his violent and untimely death. As in the cases of tens of thousands of others who were killed, tortured and "disappeared" during El Salvador's 1980-1992 armed conflict, he has also become a victim of impunity as those responsible have never been punished.

In its 1993 report, the Truth Commission found full evidence of the involvement of seven people -- some of the them high ranking military officers -- in the planning and execution of the assassination. The Commission also concluded that the investigation to find those responsible had been inefficient, highly controversial and plagued by political motivations, and that the Supreme Court had played an active role in preventing the extradition of one of the main suspects, thus ensuring impunity for the other high ranking military officers involved in the assassination.

The failure of the Salvadorean authorities to properly investigate and bring to justice all those responsible for executions was recently criticized by the Interamerican Commission on Human Rights (ICHR). In its December 1999 decision, regarding the extrajudicial execution of six jesuits and two women in November 1989, the ICHR also criticized El Salvador's 1993 Amnesty Law because it violates international standards, and called on the authorities to take steps to repeal it.

"The recent ICHR decision is equally applicable to the murder of Archbishop Romero and the thousands of other victims", Amnesty International said.

"As long as impunity persists, Salvadorean society will be unable to attain reconciliation. On this important date Amnesty International urges the authorities in El Salvador to initiate steps to annul the Amnesty Law and to carry out a thorough investigation, according to international standards, in order to bring to justice and punish those responsible for his extrajudicial execution."

"This, Amnesty International believes, would be a proper tribute to Monsignor Romero," the organization concluded.

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