

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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UA 385/93 Apparent political killings / fear for safety 1 November 1993

EL SALVADOR

Medardo Brizuela Hernández

Justa Victoria Orellana Cortéz, female

Heleno Hernán Castro, opposition politician

Amnesty International is gravely concerned at the killing of a leader and two other members of the *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN)*, (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front), the former armed opposition group which recently became a political party. These killings come days after the murder of Francisco Véliz, a member of the FMLN's National Council and candidate for deputy in the March 1994 elections (see UA 377/93, AI Index: AMR 29/17/93, 26 October 1993). They further increase Amnesty International's fear for the safety of members of the FMLN and other opposition parties in the run-up to the elections.

Medardo Brizuela Hernández and Justa Victoria Orellana Cortéz, both former combatants of the FMLN from Guazapa, San Salvador, were shot dead by unidentified individuals in Cantón San Lucas on the night of 27 October. Ballistic evidence indicates that Justa Victoria Orellana Cortéz was shot at close range as she was breastfeeding her child.

Heleno Hernán Castro was leader of the FMLN faction *Expresión Renovadora del Pueblo (ERP)*, People's Expression for Renewal, and, like Francisco Véliz, a member of the FMLN's National Council. On 30 October, his body was found in a vehicle on a highway near Santa Cruz Porrillo to the east of San Salvador. An autopsy carried out by the *Instituto de Medicina Legal*, the government's Institute for Legal Medicine, revealed he had been shot several times, including once in the mouth at close range.

The killings of Heleno Hernán Castro and Francisco Véliz have been deplored by the country's political, church and business sectors. In a statement on 30 October, the government also condemned the killings and said it had asked the governments of the United States, Spain and Great Britain to assist with investigations.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

These killings are the latest in a series against members of the FMLN and its electoral ally, the *Convergencia Democrática (CD)*, since the electoral campaign began. Most cases remain unresolved as thorough investigations have not been carried out. Nevertheless, the pattern of killings seems to implicate government forces or agents linked to them. As the electoral campaign intensifies, so too has the climate of threats and intimidations against opposition figures.

The FMLN became a political party earlier this year under the terms of the 1992 Peace Accords which ended the country's 12-year-old armed conflict. The

Accords included commitments and reforms aimed at protecting human rights and putting an end to the massive violations of human rights which characterized the war period. However, many of these reforms have yet to be implemented. Meanwhile, an amnesty law passed earlier this year has meant that those who committed abuses in the past remain free.

Amnesty International believes that the spate of recent killings and threats could be evidence of continued activity by the so-called "death squads". During the war, these clandestine groups or individuals, inextricably linked to state structures, systematically carried out killings and "disappearances" of suspected FMLN members. The Truth Commission, appointed last year by the United Nations to investigate past human rights abuses in El Salvador, highlighted the urgent need for a special enquiry into the activities of the "death squads" because of the threat that these still posed to post-war society. Although there have been substantial reforms to the armed forces, no enquiry into "death squad" structures has been carried out and other recommendations made by the Truth Commission have so far been ignored.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes and airmail letters either in Spanish or in your own language:

- expressing concern at the killing of Medardo Brizuela Hernández, Justa Victoria Orellana Cortéz and Heleno Hernán Castro, particularly in view of several other recent killings of FMLN leaders and members, such as Francisco Véliz.
- requesting that an immediate investigation be carried out into these killings and that those responsible be brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to do all that is in their power to guarantee the safety of members of opposition parties in the months leading to the March 1994 elections;
- calling on the government to comply with the human rights commitments it made in the Peace Accords, by opening a thorough investigation into alleged "death squad" killings and bringing to justice those responsible, so as to send a clear message that human rights violations will no longer be tolerated.

APPEALS TO:

1) President

Lic. Alfredo Cristiani
 Presidente de la República de El Salvador
 San Salvador, El Salvador

Telegrams: President Cristiani, San Salvador, El Salvador

Faxes: + 503 81 0018

Telexes: 20245 RS SAL or 20522 PRES SAL

Salutation: Su Excelencia/Your Excellency

2) Minister of Foreign Affairs

Dr. José Manuel Pacas Castro
 Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores
 Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores
 Boulevard Manuel Enrique Araujo Km. 6
 San Salvador, El Salvador

Telegrams: Ministro Relaciones Exteriores, San Salvador, El Salvador

Faxes: + 503 98 0334/98 0314

Telexes: 20179 RREE SAL

Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:National Counsel for the Defence of Human Rights

Dr. Carlos Molina Fonseca

Procurador para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos

Procuraduría para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos

9ª Avda. Norte y 5ª Calle Pte.

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Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN)

Secretaría de Derechos Humanos

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and to diplomatic representatives of El Salvador accredited to your country

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 12 December 1993.