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SALVADOR

“DISAPPEARANCE” AND KILLING OF AGRICULTURAL WORKERS IN AHUACHAPAN

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SUMMARY

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Since the ARENA administration took office in June 1989, Amnesty International has received numerous reports of violations of human rights, including "disappearance", torture and extrajudicial execution, committed against agricultural workers in the western department of Ahuachapán. Targets of these violations have frequently been cooperative workers involved in land disputes with former landowners, and active members of FEDECOOPADES, a federation of agricultural cooperatives, which defends the social, political and economic rights of cooperativists and is a prominent critic of the present government's agrarian policy.

Six members of the San Cayetano El Rosario Cooperative in Ahuachapán have "disappeared" since their abduction in December 1989, allegedly by members of the army and police.

An agricultural worker at the El Tigre Cooperative in Ahuachapán was killed during a raid on the cooperative reportedly carried out by members of a local military detachment in November 1989.

The bodies of two members of the Administrative Council of FEDECOOPADES were found on 11 January 1990, 12 days after their "death squad"-style abduction in Chalchuapa, Ahuachapán, by armed men in civilian clothing.

Two agricultural workers belonging to the indigenous association ANIS were reportedly shot dead on 10 March in their home in Ahuachapán by members of the local military detachment and another member of the association was killed on the same day by an armed individual in civilian clothing.

Amnesty International is calling for an immediate investigation into these "disappearances" and killings.

This summarizes a five-page document, El Salvador: "Disappearance" and killing of agricultural workers in Ahuachapán (AI Index: AMR 29/16/90), issued by Amnesty International in March 1990. Anyone wanting further details or to take action on this issue should consult the full document.

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**EL SALVADOR DISAPPEARANCE AND KILLING OF
 AGRICULTURAL WORKERS IN AHUACHAPAN**

Since President Alfredo Cristiani took office in June 1989, Amnesty International has received numerous reports of violations of human rights, including "disappearance", torture and extrajudicial execution, committed against agricultural workers in the western department of Ahuachapán. These violations have frequently been committed against cooperative workers involved in land disputes with former landowners, and against active members of the Federación de Asociaciones Cooperativas de Producción Agropecuaria de El Salvador (FEDECOOPADES), a federation of agricultural cooperatives, which defends the social, political and economic rights of cooperativists and is a prominent critic of the present government's agrarian policy. Targets of recent killings have also included members of the Asociación Nacional Indígena Salvadoreña (ANIS), the Salvadorian National Indigenous Association, a pressure-group active in the defence of the land rights of indigenous people.



Under President Cristiani's administration many agricultural workers from cooperatives which benefitted from the Agrarian Reform in the early 1980s have been evicted from their lands, while these have been returned to their former owners. The Supreme Court has issued certain decrees since September 1989 obliging many cooperatives in the western part of the country to return the land or face forcible removal by military authorities. FEDECOOPADES has repeatedly denounced that Roberto D'Aubuisson, president of the Parliamentary Commission for the Evaluation of the Agrarian Reform, has visited dozens of cooperatives accompanied by large groups of heavily armed soldiers with the aim of replacing the presidents of these associations with people sympathetic to the ruling Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (ARENA), the National Republican Alliance party. It also claimed that armed soldiers and civilian gangs organized by ex-Major D'Aubuisson have in recent months attempted to force the members of at least five cooperatives in the department of Ahuachapán off the land.

The unit of the security forces most often cited by human rights workers in connection with these abuses is the Destacamento Militar No. 7, the Seventh Military Detachment, based in Ahuachapán. Its present commander has been publicly accused of responsibility for hundreds of killings and "disappearances" in the last decade and formerly commanded the barracks next to El Playón, a piece of wasteland near the capital notorious for the corpses which were dumped there by "death squads" in the early 1980s.

"DISAPPEARANCES"

Juan Antonio VASQUEZ, 25, member of San Cayetano Cooperative
Julio César VASQUEZ, 19, brother of Juan Antonio Vásquez
Gerardo Antonio SALDAÑA SALAZAR, 24, president of the Cooperative
Leonardo PEREZ NUÑEZ, 23, treasurer of the Cooperative
José Eladio SALDAÑA SALAZAR, 34, driver of the Cooperative
Juan SALDAÑA SALAZAR, 27, secretary of the Cooperative

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Six members of the Asociación Cooperativa "San Cayetano El Rosario", an agricultural cooperative in Llano de la Laguna, department of Ahuachapán, "disappeared" following their detention in December 1989, allegedly by members of the army.

On 4 December 1989, some 200 soldiers of the Destacamento Militar No. 7 (D.M.7), the Seventh Military Detachment, based in Ahuachapán, raided the San Cayetano Cooperative and the homes of several of its members. No arrests were made on this occasion. However, on the night of 5 December 1989, masked and armed soldiers entered the home of **Juan Antonio Vásquez**, a member of the cooperative, and detained him and his younger brother, **Julio César Vásquez**. Without being given time to dress, the brothers were taken away by the soldiers to an unknown destination. Their parents, who witnessed the detention, recognized the soldiers' uniforms as those of the D.M.7. Despite repeated enquiries by the family at the D.M.7 headquarters and at other security force installations in Ahuachapán and nearby Santa Ana, all units have denied holding them and their whereabouts are still unknown.

On 29 December 1989 at around 8.30am, another 13 members of the cooperative were driving to Ahuachapán to make a deposit at the bank and to sell their maize when their truck was stopped not far from the cooperative by two uniformed soldiers of the D.M.7. Six heavily armed men in civilian clothing took **Gerardo Antonio Saldaña Salazar**, president of the cooperative, out of the truck along with **Leonardo Pérez Nuñez**, **José Eladio Saldaña Salazar** and **Juan Saldaña Salazar**. These four were taken away in a white jeep in the direction of Ahuachapán by the men in civilian clothing. As the truck driver was one of those detained, a D.M.7 soldier drove the truck with the remaining nine cooperativists to the headquarters of the National Police in Ahuachapán. On arrival they reportedly saw the jeep in which their colleagues had been taken away. The nine were allowed to leave shortly after. The National Police in Ahuachapán, the D.M.7 and other local security force units have subsequently denied holding the four men, whose whereabouts are unknown.

Members of the family of one of the "disappeared" cooperativists claim that they saw Leonardo Pérez and Gerardo Saldaña in the back of a military truck travelling through Los Magelles, a cantón 3km outside Ahuachapán, at 8.30am on 12 February. Despite renewed enquiries by relatives after that date, the local military units continued to deny the detentions.

According to FEDECOOPADES, to which San Cayetano is affiliated, the "disappearances" have taken place in the context of a longstanding land dispute between the workers at the cooperative and the former owners of the land. Under the Agrarian Reform of 1981, the association was granted ownership of the land which the cooperative members had previously been renting as tenant farmers.

However, FEDECOOPADES reports that since 1981 the former owner of the land has been threatening the members of the cooperative with eviction. In May 1982 the former landowner forcibly drove the workers off the land with the assistance of the National Guard. Although the cooperative reclaimed the land in 1983, the former landowner reportedly threatened that they would be thrown off the land once and for all when the now ruling ARENA party came to power.

On 26 December 1989, three days prior to the detention of the other four "disappeared" cooperativists, the workers at San Cayetano were ordered by another local landowner to leave the land, threatening that if they refused they would be removed by force. Since the "disappearances" the former landowner has begun dividing the land into individual lots [parcelas]. FEDECOOPADES reports that, due to the harassment to which members of the Cooperative have been subjected, over half of the families who lived in San Cayetano have now left.

During 1989 other members of the San Cayetano cooperative were also subjected to human rights abuses by the local military. On 14 February 1989 soldiers of the D.M.7 allegedly abducted **Reyes Coronado Martínez** from his home at 4.00am. He is said to have been held and tortured by the D.M.7, who accused him during interrogation of being a guerrilla fighter. He was released from the D.M.7 headquarters after three days.

The vice-president of the cooperative, **Adelio Ruiz Hernández**, is reported to have been detained on 31 December 1989 by members of the D.M.7 in the town of Ahuachapán. He was held at the headquarters of the D.M.7 and released on 5 January 1990. Amnesty International is seeking further information regarding his treatment while in detention.

KILLINGS

Julio BONITO ESCALANTE

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Members of the El Tigre Cooperative in Ahuachapán claim that D.M.7 soldiers carried out a raid on El Tigre on 1 November, while members of the cooperative were holding a celebration in the cooperative's school. In the attack, troops were said to have opened fire on the crowd killing **Julio Bonito Escalante**, a member of the cooperative. Several others were said to have been wounded in the attack and two cooperativists, including the father of Julio Escalante, were detained.

The cooperative, which is affiliated to FEDECOOPADES, had been under surveillance by troops days before the killing. To Amnesty International's knowledge, no official investigation has been carried out into the attack.

Angel María FLORES, FEDECOOPADES member
Julia del Carmen PONCE, FEDECOOPADES health promoter

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Angel María Flores and **Julia del Carmen Ponce**, both prominent members of the Federación de Asociaciones Cooperativas de Producción Agropecuaria de El Salvador (FEDECOOPADES), a federation of agricultural cooperatives, were reportedly detained in Chalchuapa, near the city of Ahuachapán, on 31 December 1989 by four armed men in civilian clothing. Relatives who were with them at the time allegedly attempted to prevent the detention, but were fought off by the armed men, who then took the detainees away in a vehicle with tinted windows and no number plate.

The relatives appealed to the authorities and made repeated enquiries at local detention centres, including the D.M.7 headquarters, all of which denied holding the detainees.

On 11 January 1990, the bullet-ridden bodies of Julia del Carmen Ponce and Angel Maria Flores were found dumped at separate points on the road between Santa Ana and San Salvador. Both bodies showed apparent signs of torture, including deep cuts and marks indicating that they may have been hung by various parts of the body. To date no official investigation has been initiated into these killings, the circumstances of which are consistent with the pattern of "death squad" activity in recent years.

Other prominent members of FEDECOOPADES have also been targets of arbitrary arrest and torture in recent months. On 18 September soldiers of the D.M.7 detained **Santos Faustino Fabián**, a member of the Administrative Council of FEDECOOPADES, together with a cooperativist colleague, **Pedro Lucha** as they were travelling to Atiquizaya, Ahuachapán. The two men were held for a short time at the D.M.7 headquarters, where Santos Fabián was said to have been tortured with electric shocks, threatened with a hand-grenade and interrogated at knife-point concerning supposed links with the Frente Farabundo Martí de Liberación Nacional (FMLN), the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front.

Efraín CABRERA QUINTANILLA
Cristina ALVAREZ DE CABRERA
Samuel PEREZ JEREZ

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In the evening of 10 March 1990 soldiers of the D.M.7 driving an army truck arrived at the home of the Cabrera family in Cantón La Hachadura, jurisdiction of San Francisco Menéndez, department of Ahuachapán, 3km from the Guatemalan border. They proceeded to arrest **Efraín Cabrera Quintanilla**, a member of the Asociación Nacional Indígena Salvadoreña (ANIS), the Salvadorian National Indigenous Association, beating him severely as they took him away. His wife, **Cristina Alvarez de Cabrera**, pleaded with the soldiers not to kill her husband, whereupon the soldiers opened fire on both of them, as well as on their son. Cristina Alvarez and Efraín Cabrera were killed instantly. Their son survived the attack and is currently in hospital, where he was able to corroborate the testimony of other witnesses.

Leaders of ANIS believe that Efraín Cabrera and Cristina Alvarez had been labelled as subversive merely because they were members of ANIS, an organization which defends the civil, social and economic rights of El Salvador's small indigenous population. ANIS leaders and members have recently been targeted by the military because of their activity in opposition to government policies. Like many other civilian grassroots organizations and pressure groups in El Salvador, ANIS has been accused by the military of support for the FMLN. Following the FMLN military offensive in November 1989, accusations and death threats against prominent ANIS leaders were broadcast on the army-controlled radio.

On the same day as the killing of Efraín Cabrera and Cristina Alvarez, **Samuel Pérez Jérez**, a 20-year-old bus conductor and member of ANIS, was shot dead in El Rosario, jurisdiction of Jujutla, department of Ahuachapán. An armed individual in civilian clothing standing in the road stopped the bus in which Samuel Pérez was travelling. Being the conductor, Samuel Pérez stepped out of the bus to ask why it had been halted. The assailant shot him dead, in full view of the passengers in the bus, and escaped. Though witnesses have identified the killer and given his name to the authorities, the suspect has reportedly not been detained. Although the motive for the killing is unclear, there is reason to believe that it was politically motivated, given the context of repressive acts by the military against members of ANIS. **Rigoberto Perez**, the victim's brother, and other members of ANIS are said to have received death threats since the killing.