

# amnesty international

## EL SALVADOR SELECTED CASE HISTORIES

JULY 1990

SUMMARY

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The attached external document recent cases of killings, "disappearance" and torture in El Salvador. Though the cases included do not constitute an exhaustive list of those reported to Amnesty International this year, they serve to illustrate the current pattern of human rights abuses.

Many of the cases were researched by an Amnesty International delegation which visited the country in April/May 1990. The preliminary findings of this visit were made public in a news release issued on 26 June 1990 (AMR 29/23/90), which outlines Amnesty International's current concerns in El Salvador.

The news release states that killings, "disappearances" and torture continue to be committed with impunity in El Salvador despite pledges by civilian and military authorities that steps are being taken to prevent and investigate these abuses. Cooperative members, trade unionists, and church and other community workers are prime targets of persecution.

At least twenty killings attributable to "death squads", believed to members of the military and security forces acting in civilian guise, have been documented since the beginning of the year. These and other recent killings by uniformed members of regular military units have so far gone uninvestigated. Little has been done by the authorities to investigate and clarify the whereabouts of those who have "disappeared" following detention in recent months. The testimonies of recent detainees illustrate the continuing and routine use of torture during initial military or police custody as a means of extracting information.

Amnesty International welcomed the government's stated willingness to discuss human rights issues and noted certain proposed reforms, including the setting up of a human rights commission within the armed forces and a 24-hour office within the judiciary to give information regarding the whereabouts and legal situation of detainees.

However the organization is calling for concrete measures to be adopted to protect detainees and to bring those responsible for violations to justice. The lack of effective investigations into these and other recent cases only serves to reinforce the impression that killings and other abuses can continue to be carried out in El Salvador with impunity.

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**EL SALVADOR      SELECTED CASE HISTORIES**

**KILLINGS BY UNIFORMED SOLDIERS**

**Roberto VASQUEZ, cooperative leader**

Roberto Vásquez, president of the El Carmen agricultural cooperative in Zacatecoluca, La Paz, and a member of the agricultural cooperative federation FEDECOOPADES, was shot dead during a raid on the cooperative by soldiers of the Destacamento Militar de Ingenieros de las Fuerzas Armadas (DMIFA), the Military Detachment of Engineers of the Armed Forces, on 20 April 1990. A neighbour said that after hearing shots, he saw four soldiers carrying Roberto Vásquez, who was still alive and pleading for the soldiers to put him out of his misery. The soldiers left Roberto Vásquez lying on the ground and prevented neighbours from attending to him. He died about an hour after being shot.

The soldiers remained in the community all night, forbidding access to the body, which they claimed was that of a "guerrillero". The next day, the Armed Forces Press Committee (COPREFA) reported that a "guerrillero" had been killed in combat at the cooperative the previous day. Neighbours who witnessed the events said there had been no armed confrontation in the cooperative that day. COPREFA has since announced that an official investigation has been opened into the case, but to Amnesty International's knowledge there is no evidence of any results.

**Francisco SANCHEZ, day labourer (jornalero)**

Francisco Sánchez was reportedly shot without warning by a group of uniformed soldiers of the Destacamento Militar No4 (DM4), the Fourth Military Detachment, as he climbed the steps of a friend's house in San Francisco Gotera, Morazán on the evening of 22 May 1990. The next day an officer of the DM4 arrived at the house of the Sánchez family, accompanied by soldiers dressed in civilian clothing, to apologize to the relatives of Francisco Sánchez for what the soldiers had done. To Amnesty International's knowledge, the soldiers responsible for the killing have not been brought to justice.

**"DEATH SQUAD"-STYLE KILLINGS**

**Unidentified corpse**

The unidentified body of a man of approximately 30 years of age was found on 31 May 1990 in a shopping centre in Santa Ana, two blocks from the headquarters of the National Police. The body had deep cuts on the face and arms, caused by a sharp weapon, and the left eye had been gauged out. Human rights workers investigating the killing believe that the victim was killed elsewhere and then dumped at the place he was found.

Numerous unidentified bodies, mutilated and dumped in this manner, have been appearing in the streets of San Salvador, Santa Ana and San Miguel in recent months. Though in many cases there are no witnesses to the killings, the circumstances in which the bodies appear are consistent with the pattern of abductions and killings by so-called "death squads", believed to be members of the armed and security forces acting in civilian guise.

**Carlos COLOCHO LAINEZ, trade unionist**

A 40-year-old construction worker and member of the Construction Workers' Union SOISCES, Carlos Colocho was shot and killed by two men in civilian clothing on 20 March 1990 while at work on a building site in Tonacatepeque, San Salvador. The men arrived at the site and told Carlos Colocho that they wanted to settle some accounts with him. As Carlos Colocho started to run away, both men fired at him. Before leaving the site, the assailants, who claimed they were members of the Air Force, warned the other workers not to get involved unless they wanted the same to happen to them. Despite a preliminary investigation undertaken by the local justice of the peace and the National Guard, those responsible for the attack have not been identified or brought to justice.

**Angel María FLORES**

**Julia del Carmen PONCE, both cooperative workers**

Both prominent members of the agricultural cooperative federation, FEDECOOPADES, they were reportedly detained in front of relatives in Chalchuapa, Santa Ana on 31 December 1989 by four armed men in civilian clothing. Their detention was denied at all local detention centres and military headquarters. On 11 January 1990, their bullet-ridden bodies were found dumped along the San Salvador-Santa Ana road, both showing apparent signs of torture. (See Disappearance and killing of agricultural workers in Ahuachapán - AMR 29/16/90 March 1990.)

## TORTURE

### **Teacher held by National Guard and Treasury Police**

A Spanish national working as a teacher in Chalatenango was detained on 4 June 1990 by members of the National Guard in the outskirts of San Salvador. He alleged that he was taken to a local military installation where he was blindfolded, beaten repeatedly and threatened with death. He claimed that during interrogation he received sharp blows to the ribs and was tortured with cigarette burns on various parts of his arms. He was kept overnight without sleep with his hands bound to his feet.

The next day he was tied up once again and left outdoors in his underpants, exposed to fierce sunshine, as a result of which he suffered first degree burns. He was then taken to the headquarters of the National Guard and transferred later that day to the Treasury Police headquarters, where he was interrogated further, examined by a doctor and threatened with the "electric chair" [silla eléctrica] and other tortures. On attempting to escape, he was severely beaten by several police officers. After two and a half days in detention, he was released without charge and told to leave the country within 72 hours. Two medical examinations subsequently carried out by independent doctors concluded that the injuries observed on the detainee were perfectly consistent with his description of the ill-treatment to which he was subjected.

### **Churchworker held by DM6**

A churchworker from Sonsonate was detained in May 1990 by uniformed members of the Sixth Military Detachment (DM6) in Sonsonate. According to church sources in El Salvador, he was held at the DM6 headquarters for three days, during which time he constantly interrogated about his work in the parish. During interrogation he was blindfolded, beaten on the abdomen and head and hit in the back with a rifle butt. Three times he was hung by the wrists, with his hands behind his back, and pulled down when his feet left the floor. After three days he was transferred to the National Guard and was released four days later.

### **A family of churchworkers held by the National Police**

A married couple, both prominent members of their local parish, were detained at their home along with their two daughters, aged 2 and 4, and the wife's brother and sister in April 1990 and taken to the headquarters of the National Police. The children were reportedly separated from their parents and the whole family was interrogated about their work at the church. The wife's sister was stripped and subjected to sexual humiliation during long periods of interrogation. The 4-year old was questioned at length about her father's work. The father was transferred after two days to Mariona prison, accused of collaboration with the armed opposition group, the Frente Farabundo Martí de Liberación Nacional (FMLN), the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front. The rest of the family was released after one day.

### **Cooperative worker held by DM7**

The following is an extract from the testimony given to Amnesty International delegates by a 42-year-old cooperative member detained for

three days at the DM7 in Ahuachapan in March 1990.

"They began to beat my legs with a stick or a gun perhaps, because I couldn't see, but I could certainly feel the blows, and I was naked... They beat me all over, on the chest, the arms from the elbows upwards, and the legs and they pounded my toes with a gun. Afterwards another one came in who they said was going to punish me. They tied a rope around the middle of the handcuffs and strung me up by the hands, which were still tied behind my back, and they began to hit me in the chest."

["Empezaron a golpearme las piernas con un garrote o con un fusil quizás, porque yo no veía, pero la verdad es que yo sentía los golpes, y estaba desnudo...Me golpearon todo lo que es el tórax, el pecho, los brazos del codo para arriba, las piernas, los dedos del pie, ahí lo machacan a uno con el fusil. Después entró otro que era el que me iba a castigar. Me pasaron un lazo en medio de las esposas y me colgaron de las manos, siempre atadas atrás y ahí empezaron a golpearme en el pecho."]

**Extract from the testimony given to Amnesty International by a church worker detained by the Treasury Police in November 1989**

"They put the capucha [rubber hood lined with lime] on my head...The pressure and sense of suffocation were too much to bear...Then they said to me, "Since you don't want to confess we're going to string you up. Then they hung me by the feet. I could feel my head spinning. It was terrible. Then I fainted...After kicking me up off the ground they pulled me by the hair and took me to a place where there was a kind of barrel. They plunged my head in it and the water was freezing, with bits of ice in it...there came a moment when I couldn't feel anything. Then they said, "Confess, confess that you're a guerrillera."

["Me pusieron la capucha... Era demasiada la presión y la asfixia... Después de eso me dijeron -Como no quieres confesar ya te vamos a guindar. Entonces me guindaron los pies. Sentía que la cabeza me daba vueltas. Era terrible. Después de eso yo me desmayé...Después que me levantaron a patadas me llevaron del pelo a otro lugar donde había como un barril, y allí me metían la cabeza y el agua estaba helada, hasta con trozos de hielo...ya hubo un momento en que no sentí nada. Entonces me decían -Confesá, confesá que sos guerrillera."]

**DEATH IN CUSTODY**

**Julian ROSALES LOPEZ, carpenter**

A 42-year-old carpenter from Ciudad Delgado, San Salvador, he was detained on 2 February 1990 by uniformed and armed members of the Atlacatl battalion. He was held for a day at the church in San José Cortes and then taken away in an army truck to an unknown destination. His family asked for him at numerous military and detention centres but all denied holding him. On 8 February they were told he had died at the headquarters of the National Police in San Salvador. An autopsy was carried out which established that Julian Rosales had died as a result of severe head injuries, reportedly caused by the torture he had suffered at the hands of the National Police. The body also had injuries to the chest and abdomen.

**"DISAPPEARANCES"**

**Oscar Armando GARCIA JIMENEZ, 16, day labourer**  
**Mauricio Adalberto CERNA GRIJALVA, 16, student**  
**Raul Edgardo MEJICO IBARRA, 16 (approx.), labourer**  
**Milton Mauricio PEÑATE CHACHAGUA, 21, baker**

Oscar García Jiménez was abducted from his home by a sergeant from the Seventh Military Detachment (DM7) on 26 April 1990 and driven away in a pick up truck to an unknown destination. To Amnesty International's knowledge, he is still "disappeared". Oscar García had previously been detained for 3 days in December 1989 at the DM7 headquarters, where he claimed to have seen three young men whose whereabouts are also currently unknown:

16-year-old Mauricio Cerna Grijalva, a student from Atiquizaya, Ahuachapán, and his friend Raul Méjico Ibarra were detained on 23 December 1989 outside Raul Méjico's home in Atiquizaya by five armed men in civilian clothing, believed to members of the intelligence section (sección 2) of the DM7. They were forced into a van with no number plates and taken to an unknown destination. Milton Peñate Chachagua was also captured on 23 December and taken away in the same van.

On his release in December, Oscar García contacted the families of the "disappeared" men he had seen in detention, as a result of which he became the object of periodic surveillance by the same sergeant of the DM7 who is reported to have captured him.

**Rogelio RENDEROS PANAMEÑO, 16, day labourer**

In the afternoon of 30 March 1990, Rogelio Renderos Panameño, a 16-year-old jornalero, was taken away by uniformed soldiers of the Regimiento de Caballería, the Cavalry Regiment, as he sat listening to music near his home in Santa Tecla, La Libertad. Later that afternoon, a friend of Rogelio Renderos reportedly saw him sitting in a coffee field surrounded by soldiers. Since then his whereabouts are unknown. His family and human rights organizations have made enquiries at the headquarters of the Cavalry Regiment, where his detention has been repeatedly denied.

**Juan Antonio VASQUEZ      Gerardo Antonio SALDAÑA SALAZAR**  
**Julio César VASQUEZ      José Eladio SALDAÑA SALAZAR**  
**Leonardo PEREZ NUÑEZ      Juan SALDAÑA SALAZAR, all agricultural workers**

All members of the San Cayetano Cooperative in Ahuachapán, they "disappeared" following their detention by men in civilian clothing and uniformed soldiers of the DM7 on 5 and 29 December 1989. (See Disappearance and Killing of Agricultural Workers in Ahuachapán AMR 29/16/90)

**Erick ROMERO CANALES, 17, student**

A student from Apopa, San Salvador, Erick Romero Canales was detained in front of witnesses near his home on 18 November 1989 by uniformed soldiers of the Primera Brigada de Infantería, the First Infantry Brigade.

He was kept overnight at a military post two blocks from his home,

where his mother was allowed to visit him and bring him food. A First Brigade lieutenant at the military post reportedly told Sra Canales that he had been ordered to capture her son because the latter had been accused of being a member of the FMLN.

The next morning his mother watched as he was taken away by First Brigade soldiers in an army jeep, blindfolded and with his hands tied. Since then his whereabouts are unknown. His mother made repeated enquiries at the headquarters of the First Brigade, and at police headquarters around the capital, but all denied holding him. The presentation of a habeas corpus writ and constant enquiries to the military and judiciary by human rights organizations have so far proven equally fruitless.

According to the mother, ten days after the arrest the First Brigade lieutenant that had arrested Erick Romero told her that he had been ordered by a superior officer to kill her son, but that he had told this officer to "give the boy a chance, because we don't know whether he is [a guerrillero] or not" ("que le dieramos una oportunidad, porque no sabemos si es o no es [guerrillero]"). His mother also claims to have been threatened and warned by the military not to pursue the search for her son.

## **MILITARY ATTACKS ON CIVILIANS**

### **Two injured in military attack on a refugee resettlement in Santa Marta**

Two teenagers were injured when soldiers of the Second Military Detachment (DM2) opened fire on civilians in the community of Santa Marta, department of Cabañas, a community resettled by former refugees. Following an in-situ investigation, Tutela Legal, the human rights body of the Archdiocese of San Salvador reported that on 16 May 1990, after a confrontation between the FMLN and the army which occurred more than two kilometers away from the settlement, soldiers turned their guns on the settlement itself and began shooting from nearby hills. Tutela Legal said it found no evidence of shooting from the community itself and ruled out the possibility that the attack had been carried out by the FMLN.