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FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR IMMEDIATE

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E.O. 12356: N/A
TAGS: PHUM, ES
SUBJECT: TESTIMONY-RELATED LETTERS ON EL SALVADOR

REF: CORR/PASSAGE TELCON 5/8

1. FOLLOWING ARE THE TEXTS OF THREE LETTERS RECENTLY RECEIVED FROM CONGRESS REGARDING CONDITIONS IN EL SALVADOR. THEY TEND TO DIFFER FROM THE USUAL IN EITHER THE ALLEGATIONS THEY MAKE OR THE SPECIFICITY OF THEIR ALLEGATIONS. IN VIEW OF ASSISTANT SECRETARY ABRAMS' WEDNESDAY TESTIMONY BEFORE THE BARNES SUBCOMMITTEE (ALTHOUGH NOT ALL INQUIRERS ARE ON THAT SUBCOMMITTEE), WE WOULD LIKE TO HAVE FULL ANSWERS ON THESE ISSUES AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AND NO LATER THAN COB TUESDAY. IF WE CAN RECEIVE EMBASSY RESPONSE EARLIER, WE MAY BE ABLE TO ARM FRIENDLIES ON THE SUBCOMMITTEE AND TILT THE ISSUE OUR WAY. WE ARE LOOKING FOR FACTS, NOT ARGUMENTATION.

2. LETTER FROM CONGRESSMAN BARNES:
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REVIEW AUTHORITY: Oscar Olson, Senior Reviewer

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DEAR ED:

I AM WRITING TO REQUEST YOUR ASSISTANCE ON A MATTER OF PERSONAL INTEREST TO ME.

I AM TOLD THAT A CASE OF AMERICAS WATCH REPORTS, SENT BY THE NATIONAL OFFICE TO THE AMERICAS WATCH REPRESENTATIVE IN SAN SALVADOR, IS BEING HELD BY SALVADORAN CUSTOMS OFFICIALS. I REGRET TO SAY THAT I AM ALSO TOLD THAT THE EMBASSY HAS NOT BEEN HELPFUL IN SECURING THE RELEASE OF THIS MATERIAL.

FRANKLY, I FIND IT SOMEWHAT INCONGRUOUS, TO SAY THE

LEAST, THAT A GOVERNMENT THAT CALLS ITSELF--AND IS BILLED BY US AS--A DEMOCRACY WOULD SEEK TO PREVENT THE DELIVERY OF THIS KIND OF LITERATURE THROUGH THE MAIL. IN MY VIEW, IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO CONSIDER THE HUMAN RIGHTS PERFORMANCE OF THE SALVADORAN GOVERNMENT TO BE ADEQUATE IF THAT GOVERNMENT IS FAILING TO COOPERATE WITH INTERNALLY RECOGNIZED HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS SUCH AS AMERICAS WATCH.

I AM CONFIDENT THAT A WORD FROM THE EMBASSY WOULD RESOLVE THIS PROBLEM AND WOULD VERY MUCH APPRECIATE YOUR TAKING THE NECESSARY ACTION TO SEE THAT THE SITUATION IS RECTIFIED.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE.

3. AMERICAS WATCH LETTER TO CONGRESSMAN STUDDS, WHICH AMERICAS WATCH PASSED TO DEPARTMENT:

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ON MARCH 3, 1986, YOU AND FOUR OF YOUR COLLEAGUES SIGNED A LETTER TO AMBASSADOR EDWARD CORR AT MY REQUEST CONCERNING THE SALVADORAN ARMED FORCES FEBRUARY 16TH ATTACK ON THE RESETTLEMENT PROJECT AT TENANCINGO. OUR STAFFPERSON IN SAN SALVADOR HAS INFORMED ME THAT CONGRESSIONAL CONCERN ABOUT THE ARMY'S VIOLENT BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS THE RESETTLED CIVILIANS HAS BEEN VERY HELPFUL TO THE STAFF AND RESIDENTS IN THE PROGRAM. WE THANK YOU.

I RECEIVED A COPY OF AMBASSADOR CORR'S CABLED RESPONSE TO YOU, AND WOULD LIKE TO POINT OUT SEVERAL SERIOUS ERRORS IN IT.

YOUR LETTER WAS CAREFUL TO CRITICIZE ONLY THE FACT THAT THE SALVADORAN ARMY OCCUPIED TENANCINGO AND BEHAVED ABUSIVELY TO THE CIVILIANS THERE, INCLUDING KILLING ONE AND DETAINING OTHERS FOR INTERROGATION, STEALING FOOD AND MEDICINES AND SHOOTING UP HOMES. YOUR LETTER DID NOT QUESTION THE ARMY'S RIGHT TO TRANSIT THROUGH THE TOWN OR RESPOND TO LEGITIMATE MILITARY THREATS. CURIOUSLY, THE EMBASSY CABLE STATES THAT THERE WAS AN AGREEMENT BY THE

ARMED FORCES AND THE FMLN NOT TO ENTER THE TOWN, WHICH THE ARMED FORCES HAD ADHERED TO BUT THE FMLN HAD BROKEN. THIS IS FALSE; THERE IS NO SUCH AGREEMENT NOT TO ENTER THE TOWN, AND INDEED, BOTH SIDES REGULARLY TRANSIT THROUGH TENANCINGO.

THE EMBASSY'S REPEATED CHARACTERIZATION OF "THE AGREEMENT" BETWEEN THE FMLN AND THE ARMED FORCES AS PROHIBITING THE ARMED FORCES FROM ENTERING THE TOWN IS INCREDIBLE, GIVEN THE FACT THAT PRESIDENT DUARTE AND THE

ARMED FORCES HAVE MADE IT CLEAR THAT THEY WILL NEVER PLACE A TOWN "OFF LIMITS" AS A MATTER OF PRINCIPLE. THEY MAINTAIN THAT THE ARMED FORCES HAVE THE RIGHT TO ENTER ALL PARTS OF THE NATIONAL TERRITORY AND THAT THEY DO IN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
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FACT ENTER ALL PARTS OF THE TERRITORY. IT APPEARS TO ME THAT AMBASSADOR CORR REPEATEDLY PRESENTS A FALSE VERSION OF THE FMLN/ARMY AGREEMENT FOR PURPOSES OF SHIFTING THE BLAME FOR THE ARMY'S ABUSES AGAINST CIVILIANS ONTO THE GUERRILLAS.

FURTHERMORE, THE EMBASSY MISTAKENLY STATES THAT TENANCINGO SERVES AS "A BASE" FOR THE GUERRILLAS, WHO RESIDE THERE. IN FACT, NO GUERRILLAS LIVE IN TENANCINGO NOR HAVE THEY ESTABLISHED A BASE THERE. THE ARMED FORCES HAVE NOT ACCUSED THE GUERRILLAS OF ESTABLISHING A BASE IN TENANCINGO. THE EMBASSY'S CLAIM THAT TENANCINGO IS A GUERRILLA BASE IS PARTICULARLY UNFORTUNATE BECAUSE THE CHURCH-NEGOTIATED AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE ARMED FORCES AND THE FMLN IS THAT NEITHER SIDE WILL ESTABLISH A BASE IN TENANCINGO, SO THAT THE REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT PROJECT CAN FUNCTION IN A CONFLICTED ZONE. THE EMBASSY'S FALSE ASSERTION THAT GUERRILLAS LIVE IN TENANCINGO IS ALSO SERIOUS BECAUSE IT IMPLIES THAT UNARMED CIVILIANS WHOM THE EMBASSY SUSPECTS MAY BE GUERRILLA SUPPORTERS ARE ACTUALLY GUERRILLAS, AND ACCORDINGLY, APPROPRIATE TARGETS FOR MILITARY ATTACKS.

THIS SUGGESTION IS REINFORCED BY THE EMBASSY'S CHARACTERIZATION OF THE CIVILIAN WHOM THE SOLDIERS KILLED AS "A CIVILIAN GUERRILLA SUPPORTER." WHETHER OR NOT THE VICTIM, A 50-YEAR OLD DRUNK NAMED GILBERTO CARTAGENA, WAS A GUERRILLA SUPPORTER IS, OF COURSE, IRRELEVANT, THOUGH NONE OF THE STAFF ASSOCIATED WITH THE PROGRAM CHARACTERIZED HIM AS A GUERRILLA SUPPORTER. WITNESSES TO HIS KILLING SAY THAT HE WAS LYING DRUNK ON THE SIDEWALK WHEN TROOPS ENTERED THE TOWN FIRING THEIR GUNS INTO THE AIR. HE WAS OBSERVED DUCKING INTO AN EMPTY HOUSE
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FOLLOWED BY SOLDIERS. RESIDENTS HEARD THE SOLDIERS CALL OUT "HERE'S ONE:" AND SHOTS WERE FIRED. CARTAGENA'S BODY

WAS FOUND IN A POOL OF BLOOD UNDER THE TABLE WHERE HE WAS APPARENTLY CROUCHING WHEN THE SOLDIERS ENTERED. HE WAS UNARMED AND NEVER KNOWN TO CARRY WEAPONS.

IN ADDITION TO THE EMBASSY'S FUNDAMENTAL MISUNDERSTANDING ABOUT THE NATURE OF THE AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE FMLN AND

THE ARMED FORCES, THE CABLE MISREPRESENTS OTHER FACTS. IT NOTES, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT "THE ARMY MAINTAINS THAT IT NEVER ENTERED THE CENTRAL PART OF TOWN." EYEWITNESSES INTERVIEWED BY OUR STAFF IN TENANCINGO DESCRIBED HOW TROOPS ADVANCED UP PRINCIPAL STREETS IN TOWN, AND POINTED OUT A HOUSE RIDDLED WITH FRESH BULLET HOLES. MOTER IVONNE DE GROTE, A BELGIUM NUN WHO LIVES IN TENANCINGO TOLD US THAT SOLDIERS ENTERED HER HOUSE, WHICH IS IN THE CENTER OF TOWN. ALSO UNTRUE IS THE ASSERTION THAT "ALL ACCOUNTS AGREE THAT SOLDIERS ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF TENANCINGO WERE FIRED UPON FROM WITHIN OR NEAR THE TOWN." IN FACT, EYEWITNESSES, INCLUDING THE STAFF OF THE RESETTLEMENT PROJECT STATE THAT THE EXCHANGE OF FIRE WITH THE GUERRILLAS TOOK PLACE AT THE LARGE CEIBA TREE, WHICH IS OUTSIDE OF AND AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE TOWN, NOT WITHIN THE TOWN. THE AMBASSADOR IS ALSO WRONG ABOUT THE MARCH 15TH KILLING OF A SOLDIER BY THE FMLN SNIPERS, ALLEGEDLY FIRING FROM TENANCINGO. THE INCIDENT ACTUALLY OCCURRED IN JINUICO, A CANTON ABOUT THREE KILOMETERS AWAY.

WHILE THE EMBASSY'S RESPONSE TO YOUR LETTER WAS RIDDLED WITH ERRORS AND UNRESPONSIVE TO YOUR CONCERNS, THE FACT THAT YOU SENT IT WAS VERY HELPFUL TO THE TENANCINGO PROJECT. AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE FOLLOWING THE FEBRUARY 16TH INCIDENT, GENERAL BLANDON AGREED IN A MEETING WITH THE ARCHBISHOP AND THE RESETTLEMENT PROGRAM'S DIRECTORS TO ALLOW THE TENANCINGO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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RESETTLEMENT TO CONTINUE, AND HAS INSTRUCTED ALL CHIEFS, OFFICERS, AND TROOP MEMBERS NOT TO TAKE MILITARY ACTION AGAINST THE CIVILIAN POPULATION THERE. BLANDON FURTHER STATED THAT IN THOSE CASES IN WHICH IT IS CONSIDERED NECESSARY TO CARRY OUT MILITARY OPERATIONS, THEY WILL BE CONDUCTED WITHOUT VIOLENCE OR PSYCHOLOGICAL PRESSURE AGAINST THE CIVILIANS, AND THAT BOMBING IN THE AREA WILL BE LIMITED TO THE PERIMETER OF THE PROJECT.

THANK YOU AGAIN FOR YOUR INTEREST IN THIS MATTER.

SINCERELY,

HOLLY BURKHALTER

4. LETTER TO AMBASSADOR CORR FROM CONGRESSMEN WEISS,

FAZIO, AUCOIN, DYMALLY, MACKAY, CONYERS, MOODY, BOXER, AND LOWRY, PASSED TO US BY AMERICAS WATCH:

IT IS OUR UNDERSTANDING THAT ON APRIL 8, 1986, THREE JOURNALISTS WERE DETAINED BY THE TREASURY POLICE IN ARCATAO, IN THE DEPARTMENT OF CHALATENANGO.

WE HAVE RECEIVED REPORTS THAT CATHERINE MATHESON OF THE BBC, AND TOD ROBBERSON AND JUANA ANDERSON OF REUTERS WERE HELD FOR 11 HOURS BY THE POLICE AND THAT THEIR NOTES WERE PHOTOCOPIED AND 35 ROLLS OF FILM AND CASSETTES OF INTERVIEWS WERE ALSO CONFISCATED. WE ARE PARTICULARLY CONCERNED AT THIS LATEST IMPEDIMENT TO JOURNALISTS' ACTIVITIES IN EL SALVADOR BECAUSE OF THE RISK IT MAY PRESENT TO INDIVIDUALS INTERVIEWED OR PHOTOGRAPHED BY TH JOURNALISTS IN A CONFLICTED ZONE.
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IT IS OUR UNDERSTANDING THAT THE U.S. EMBASSY WAS VERY HELPFUL IN A SIMILAR CASE LAS AUGUST WHEN JOURNALISTS WITH THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS AND THE ASSOCIATED PRESS AND A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE AMERICAS WATCH WERE DETAINED, AND THE AMERICAS WATCH'S FILM WAS TAKEN. WE RESPECTFULLY REQUEST THAT THE EMBASSY ONCE AGAIN MAKE REPRESENTATION ON THE ISSUE OF NEUTRALITY OF THE PRESS AND REQUEST THAT THE SALVADORAN AUTHORITIES RETURN FILM, CASSETTES, NOTES, AND COPIES OF NOTES BE RETURNED TO THE JOURNALISTS.

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