

El Salvador

Response to Information Request Number:	SLV02001.
Date:	October 02, 2001
Subject:	El Salvador: Information on the Centro Técnico de Instrucción Policial (CETIPOL), Technical Center of Police Instruction
From:	INS Resource Information Center
Keywords:	El Salvador / Arbitrary detention / Torture / Military repression / Students / Police

Query:

What was the Centro Técnico de Instrucción Policial (CETIPOL), Technical Center of Police Instruction, and what was its record on human rights abuses?

Response:

The Centro Técnico de Instrucción Policial (CETIPOL), Technical Center of Police Instruction, was the training academy of the National Police. It was located about eight miles west of San Salvador in the city of Santa Tecla in the department of La Libertad. Santa Tecla was eventually renamed Nueva San Salvador, but many Salvadorans still refer to it as Santa Tecla (AP Apr. 1990).

The National Police, the Treasury Police and the National Guard were the three principal internal security forces in El Salvador prior to their being dismantled and replaced by the Policía Nacional Civil (PNC), National Civilian Police, under the United Nations-sponsored peace accord of January 1992 (JANE'S 1 Jan. 1993).

The National Police, like the other two security forces, came under the direct command of the Salvadoran military through the Ministry of Defense. During the 1970s through the early 1990s, the National Police operated as a paramilitary organization, combining both police and military functions. During the civil war in the 1980s, M-16 assault rifles were standard issue (JANE'S 1 January 1993; AI March 1982, 5).

During the early 1980s, the National Police director was the hard-line army officer, Col. Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila, who in 1983 publicly declared that the policy of abductions by security forces was a necessary counterinsurgency tactic (AW 1991, 7, 24).

According to Socorro Jurídico Cristiano, El Salvador's leading human rights group in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and Amnesty International, the Salvadoran military and the three security forces were directly responsible for gross human rights violations during the initial years of the civil war, killing 42,171 people during the six peak years of violence from 1978 through 1983 (Stanley 1996, 3).

Beginning in 1984, due to international pressure and changes instituted under the elected government of President José Napoleon Duarte, there was a decline in civilian killings and abductions by the security forces, according to Amnesty International, Americas Watch and the United Nations (AI 1985, 143; IPS 1984; IPS January 1985).

Still, the National Police and the other two security forces continued to practice forced

disappearances, illegal detentions and torture (Stanley 1996, 230-231; AI 1986, 152-153).

As evidenced by the El Rescate database Salvadoran rights monitors received numerous reports of human rights violations by trainers and cadets at the CETIPOL. Most of the reports involved abductions and torture, rather than extrajudicial killings. Some of the allegations were reported in the foreign media during the war, as was the case in 1980 when the leader of a left-leaning political party stated that he had been abducted near Santa Tecla by uniformed men who appeared to be CETIPOL cadets (AP Apr. 1980).

The El Rescate database, whose principal source is Tutela Legal, a Salvadoran rights monitoring group supported by the Catholic church, recorded somewhat less than a hundred instances of rights abuses from mid-1983 until early 1990. Most of the reported cases involved "captures," meaning abductions or illegal detentions, and a majority occurred in the years 1984-1986. About a dozen of these cases also involved torture, which occurred mostly at the CETIPOL installation in Nueva San Salvador.

According to the database, the great majority of the victims of CETIPOL were in their teens and twenties, underscoring the belief among Salvadoran rights groups at the time that the CETIPOL was involved in spying on universities and other academic institutions, utilizing its ready supply of young cadets to infiltrate student populations for the purpose of identifying suspected leftists (Payne 2001).

It appears that the CETIPOL was not among the more repressive units within the National Police, a number of which actually functioned as full-fledged death squads. However, the El Rescate database is by no means comprehensive and an association with the CETIPOL should still be cause for concern.

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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