

# El Salvador

<b>Response to Information Request Number:</b>	SLV01007.ZAR
<b>Date:</b>	August 29, 2001
<b>Subject:</b>	El Salvador: Information on the Presidential Guard
<b>From:</b>	INS Resource Information Center
<b>Keywords:</b>	El Salvador / Security forces

## Query:

What was the Presidential Guard, how was it distinct from the National Guard, and to what degree was it involved in human rights violations?

## Response:

The Presidential Guard and the National Guard were two separate branches of the Salvadoran armed forces. Until 1992, the National Guard, the Treasury Police and the National Police were the three principal internal security forces in El Salvador. All were dismantled and replaced by the new National Civilian Police under the United Nations-sponsored peace agreement of January 1992. The National Guard, from its founding in 1912, was a principally rural force and was organized into fourteen companies, one in each of the country's fourteen departments. It combined both police and military functions and, like the other two internal security branches, was under the direct control of the military (Bosch 1999, p. 24; Hemisphere Initiatives 1997, p. 16-17).

The Presidential Guard was part of the Estado Mayor Presidencial, or Presidential General Staff. The Estado Mayor Presidencial can best be understood within the context of the overall structure of the military High Command. The High Command consisted of four individuals: the President; the Minister of Defense; the Vice Minister of Defense; and the chief of the Estado Mayor General de la Fuerza Armada, or Armed Forces General Staff. Each of the four members of the High Command had control over distinct units within the armed forces. The Vice Minister of Defense, for instance, oversaw the National Guard and the other two internal security branches discussed above. The President, in turn, oversaw the Estado Mayor Presidencial, what one analyst has described as the "presidential military household." Within the Estado Mayor Presidencial, the Presidential Guard's primary responsibility was to coordinate personal security for the President and the Vice President (Bosch 1999, p. 18-19).

The Presidential Guard and the National Guard also had decidedly different human rights records. The National Guard was notorious as a systematic violator of human rights throughout its eighty-year existence. The Presidential Guard, however, was not known as a major source of rights violations (Americas Watch 1991, p. 28-21; Stanley 1996, p. 192-196).

One of the few notable cases involving the Presidential Guard was the shootout outside the offices of President José Napoleón Duarte in October 1985 which left seven civilians wounded. Gunfire broke out apparently when police fired on suspected thieves. Members of the Presidential Guard, who later said that they thought the presidential office was under attack, opened fire on a nearby bus carrying children from a school for the deaf. Witnesses said that two suspected thieves were shot and one killed, while seven people escorting the children on the bus were wounded (Associated Press 25 & 26 Oct 1985).

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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