

El Salvador

Response to Information Request Number:	SLV00003.ZSF
Date:	22 June 2000
Subject:	El Salvador: Human Rights Violations by the National Police during the Initial Years of the Civil War
From:	INS Resource Information Center, Washington, DC
Keywords:	El Salvador, Police brutality, Disappearances, Extrajudicial executions, State terror, Torture

Query:

What is the likelihood that an individual who served with the National Police between 1977 and 1981 would have been involved in human rights violations?

Response:

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

In 1945, the various urban police agencies in El Salvador were reorganized into a single entity, the National Police which, like the Treasury Police and the National Guard, came under the direct command of the Salvadoran military through the Ministry of Defense. Within the defense ministry, the Public Security Branch oversaw the functioning of the National Police in each of the nation's fourteen departments. By the 1970s, the National Police combined both police and military functions (Jane's Intelligence Review 1 Jan. 1993; Al Mar. 1982). During the early 1980s, the National Police director was the hard-line army officer, Col. Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila, who in 1983 publicly defended the policy of abductions by security forces as a necessary counterinsurgency tactic (AW 1991).

According to Amnesty International and *Socorro Jurídico Cristiano* (Christian Legal Assistance, a legal aid office within the Archbishop's office and El Salvador's leading human rights group at the time), the Salvadoran military and the three security forces were directly responsible for gross human rights violations throughout the period in question, killing 42,171 people during the six peak years of violence from 1978 through 1983 (Stanley 1996, 3). The state violence began to escalate between 1977 and 1979, and continued to intensify through 1980 and 1981, with government killing rising to nearly 12,000 in 1980 and peaking at more than 16,000 in 1981, according to *Socorro Jurídico Cristiano* (Stanley 1996, 1-2, 222).

Professor William Stanley of the University of New Mexico, an authority on state violence in El Salvador, has described the killings between 1978 and 1983 as a "strategy of mass murder" designed to terrorize the civilian population as well as opponents of the government (Stanley 1996, 225). General Adolfo Blandón, the Salvadoran armed forces chief of staff during much of the 1980s, has stated, "Before 1983, we never took prisoners of war" (Danner 1994).

In its 1980 annual report, Amnesty International recounted numerous cases in 1979 of

arrest, torture and murder or disappearance of people by the National Police, and cited the report of a special commission (established by a short-lived reformist junta) which concluded that all the individuals who disappeared during the 1970s should be considered to have died in the custody of the National Police and the other two security forces (AI 1980).

In its 1981 annual report, Amnesty International concluded that the majority of the killings and disappearances in 1980 were carried out by the three security forces and against people who were not even involved in the then-escalating guerrilla conflict (AI 1981). Amnesty International noted that the killings and other violations were not carried out only by specialized groups or death squads. For example, in its 1982 report covering the year 1981, it identified "regular security and military units as responsible for widespread torture, mutilation and killings of noncombatant civilians from all sectors of Salvadoran society" (AI 1982).

Professor Stanley, the author of a noted scholarly work on the structures of government repression in El Salvador (Stanley 1996), believes that because human rights violations were being carried out systematically, massively, and as part of an overall policy in 1978-83, there is a very high probability that during that period any member of the National Police or one of the other two security forces would have been involved in the committing of serious abuses (Stanley 4 Feb. 2000). That would apply to new recruits as well as veterans, Stanley says, because security forces officers were known to order younger or lower-ranking members to commit abuses so as to ensure their complicity in the policy, and because even an agent only carrying out an arrest must have known that those detained almost certainly would have been tortured and killed (Stanley 4 Feb. 2000).

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.

References

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