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RELEASE IN FULL

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SAN SALVADOR 14606

E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR
TAGS: PREL, PHUM, PGOV, ELAB, ES
SUBJECT: A/S ARONSON'S MEETING WITH REPRESENTATIVES
OF OPPOSITION POLITICAL PARTIES, DEMOCRATIC LABOR
UNIONS

REF: SAN SALVADOR 13831

1. CONFIDENTIAL - ENTIRE TEXT

2. SUMMARY: IN AN HOUR LONG MEETING WITH
REPRESENTATIVES FROM SEVEN DEMOCRATIC POLITICAL AND
LABOR GROUPS, A/S ARONSON EXPRESSED HIS EXTREME
CONCERN OVER THE RECENT INCREASE IN URBAN VIOLENCE,
AND ASKED THE SALVADORAN PARTICIPANTS FOR THEIR VIEWS
ON THE SITUATION. FACTORS RAISED INCLUDED RIGHT-WING
FRUSTRATION AT THE GOVERNMENT'S FAILURE TO REPRESS
MORE FORCIBLY THE GUERRILLA MOVEMENT; CONTRADICTIONARY
SIGNALS SENT BY THE MILITARY, THE GOES AND THE USG;
AND THE CONVICTION PREVALENT AMONGST MANY,
PARTICULARLY THE MILITARY, THAT HUMAN RIGHTS
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VIOLATIONS WOULD BE CONDONED. MEMBERS OF THE LABOR
SECTOR NOTED THEIR CONCERN THAT THE GOVERNMENT WAS
UNDERMINING THE AGRARIAN REFORM, AND URGED THE US TO
ENFORCE STRONGER CONDITIONALITY ON ASSISTANCE TO
PROTECT SOCIAL REFORMS AND HUMAN RIGHTS. ARONSON
CLOSED THE SESSION BY STATING THAT HUMAN RIGHTS
REMAINED A MAJOR CONCERN OF THE US, A FACT HE HAD
STRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT AND MEMBERS OF THE MILITARY
COMMAND DURING HIS EARLIER MEETINGS. HE ENCOURAGED
THOSE REPRESENTED TO CONTINUE TO PRESS FOR MEANINGFUL

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Janina Slattery, Senior Reviewer

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DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE FMLN AND THE GOES, NOTING THAT THE PROCESS OF DIALOGUE MIGHT BE BETTER SERVED IF SMALLER ISSUES WERE RESOLVED FIRST, BUILDING INTO LARGER ISSUES. END SUMMARY.

3. ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE ARONSON, ACCOMPANIED BY THE AMBASSADOR, DCM DIETERICH, POLCOUNS MCFARLAND AND ARA/CEN DEPUTY DIRECTOR ROMERO, MET 11/6 WITH REPRESENTATIVES FROM SEVEN DEMOCRATIC OPPOSITION POLITICAL AND LABOR ORGANIZATIONS. ARONSON TOLD THE ASSEMBLED REPRESENTATIVES THAT HE HAD COME TO EL SALVADOR ON RELATIVELY SHORT NOTICE BECAUSE OF THE U.S. GOVERNMENT'S CONCERN OVER THE RECENT, ABRUPT INCREASE IN URBAN VIOLENCE, FOLLOWED BY THE FMLN'S DECISION TO SUSPEND TALKS WITH THE GOES. ARONSON NOTED THAT MOST OR ALL OF THE SALVADORANS ATTENDING THE MEETING HAD BEEN OR KNEW VICTIMS OF PAST WAVES OF VIOLENCE, AND UNDERSTOOD HOW EASY IT WOULD BE TO RENEW THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE. HE ASKED THOSE PRESENT TO DESCRIBE IN CONCRETE TERMS WHAT THEY FELT WERE THE REASONS FOR THE CURRENT DETERIORATION IN THE SITUATION -- AND WHAT IT WOULD TAKE TO STOP THE DECLINE.

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4. FITO REY PRENDES, HEAD OF THE AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT (MAC) PARTY, GAVE THE FIRST SUBSTANTIVE ANSWER BY NOTING THAT SOME OF THOSE WHO VOTED FOR THE ARENA PARTY IN THE LAST ELECTION HAD DONE SO IN THE BELIEF THAT ARENA WOULD BE PREPARED TO USE GREATER FORCE IN ORDER TO QUICKLY END THE WAR. WITH THE ADVENT OF THE FMLN-GOES DIALOGUE, MANY OF THESE SUPPORTERS BECAME DISILLUSIONED, AND BEGAN TO TAKE VIOLENT MEASURES AGAINST THOSE THEY PERCEIVED AS ENEMIES. A CONTRIBUTING FACTOR TO THIS REACTION WAS THE PERCEPTION THAT ARENA WOULD NOT PUNISH THOSE WHO VIOLATED HUMAN RIGHTS, A PERCEPTION REINFORCED BY THE MILITARY'S ATTITUDE OF OMNIPOTENCE. AT TIMES, REY PRENDES NOTED, WITH OTHERS NODDING IN AGREEMENT, THE MILITARY WOULD PREEMPT EVEN THE PRESIDENT BY DECLARING OPINIONS AND MAKING WHAT APPEARED TO BE POLICY PRONOUNCEMENTS.

5. ON THE SAME THEME, MPSC LEADER RUBEN ZAMORA NOTED THAT REPRESSION OF IDEAS AND CONTRADICTIONARY SIGNALS FROM RESPECTED SOURCES OF INFLUENCE CONTRIBUTED TO AN ATMOSPHERE OF CHAOS THAT ENCOURAGED VIOLENCE. SEVEN YEARS AGO, HE NOTED, TO MENTION DIALOGUE AT ALL WAS SIMPLY OUT OF THE QUESTION. THREE YEARS AGO, HE CONTINUED, YOU COULD MENTION IT, BUT ONLY TO CRITICIZE THE IDEA. NOW, HE ADDED, YOU COULD MENTION

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IT, BUT ONLY TO PRAISE IT. INSTEAD OF SPEAKING OUT AGAINST DIALOGUE, ZAMORA STATED, OPPONENTS WERE CARRYING OUT ACTS OF VIOLENCE TO BOTH PROTEST AND SUBVERT THE PROCESS.

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6. ANOTHER FACTOR, ZAMORA STATED, WERE THE CONTRADICTIONARY SIGNALS BEING SENT BY INFLUENTIAL PLAYERS. THE USG, FOR EXAMPLE, WAS ENCOURAGING DIALOGUE BUT AT THE SAME TIME INCREASING MILITARY AID. ON ONE HAND, HE CONTINUED, THE UNITED STATES WAS PUSHING HUMAN RIGHTS, ON THE OTHER HAND PRESIDENT BUSH WAS CITING (IN THE RECENT SAN JOSE SUMMIT) THE "SPECTACULAR" ADVANCES OF SALVADORAN DEMOCRACY. CRISTIANI AND HIS MILITARY ALSO SENT CONTRADICTIONARY SIGNALS, ZAMORA ADDED.

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7. MNR REPRESENTATIVE GUILLERMO UNGO ADDED TWO OBSERVATIONS TO THE DISCUSSION. FIRST, HE STATED, A SERIES OF ERRATIC ACTIONS AND MISTAKEN BEHAVIOR BY THE FMLN HAD COST THE ORGANIZATION ITS CREDIBILITY WHEN IT DENIED RESPONSIBILITY FOR CERTAIN ATTACKS. THESE ERRATIC ACTIONS, AND THE ASSUMPTION THAT THE

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FMLN WAS GUILTY, PROMPTED AN INCREASE IN VIOLENCE BY AGENTS LINKED TO THE STATE, EITHER IN REVENGE FOR ACTS ATTRIBUTED TO THE FMLN, OR IN THE KNOWLEDGE THAT THE FMLN WOULD BE BLAMED AND THE REAL PERPETRATORS NEVER APPREHENDED. UNGO CRITICIZED THE US GOVERNMENT, AND PARTICULARLY THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, FOR ASSIGNING RESPONSIBILITY FOR CERTAIN ATTACKS -- SPECIFICALLY THE CASANOVA MURDER -- TO THE FMLN WHEN THERE HAD BEEN NO INVESTIGATION UPON WHICH TO BASE THE ACCUSATION.

8. UNGO ALSO NOTED THAT THREE KEY AND SOMETIMES CONTRADICTIONARY FUNCTIONS -- FIGHTING THE WAR, DEVELOPING POLICIES AGAINST SUBVERSIVE, AND ENSURING LAW AND ORDER -- WERE CARRIED OUT BY ALL THE SECURITY FORCES TO ONE DEGREE OR ANOTHER. THE LACK OF CHECKS ON THEIR POWER ENCOURAGED THE MILITARY TO ACT AT WILL IN DETAINING, SEARCHING OR OTHERWISE HARASSING CITIZENS. FOR EXAMPLE, UNGO SAID, FOR A LONG TIME HIS PICTURE, AS WELL AS RUBEN ZAMORA'S, HUNG IN THE OFFICES OF A BRANCH OF THE SECURITY FORCES AS "VIP TERRORISTS." THROUGH A PROCESS OF CONFRONTATION AND DIALOGUE, HE ADDED WRYLY, THE PICTURES WERE FINALLY REMOVED.

9. UNOC REPRESENTATIVE AMANDA VILLATORO NOTED THAT HER ORGANIZATION, LIKE MANY OF THOSE PRESENT, HAD UNDERSTOOD THE CRISTIANI GOVERNMENT WOULD NEED TIME TO ORGANIZE, AND HAD MADE ALLOWANCE FOR THE GOVERNMENT'S INEXPERIENCE AND THE DIFFICULTIES FACING THE COUNTRY. HOWEVER, IT WAS CLEAR THAT ECONOMIC REFORM WAS TARGETTED AGAINST THE POOR, THAT THE AGRARIAN REFORM WAS THREATENED WITH REVERSAL, AND

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THAT HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS WERE AGAIN INCREASING. SHE REFERRED TO THE PROBLEM OF THE COMMITTEE OF CAMPESINO ORGANIZATIONS (COC) (REFTEL), THE VISITS BY D'AUBUISSON TO SEVERAL COOPERATIVES, AND ALLEGED THAT

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RESIDENTS WERE BEING DAILY REMOVED FROM PHASE THREE LANDS. THE GOVERNMENT, SHE CONTINUED, CONDUCTED A POLICY OF "EITHER YOU'RE WITH US OR AGAINST US," AND IN A DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM SUCH A POLICY WAS NOT WORKABLE. US AID SHOULD BE CONDITIONED TO ENFORCE BASIC PROTECTIONS TO HUMAN RIGHTS AND TO THE AGRARIAN REFORM. CGT PRESIDENT JOSE LUIS GRANDE PRESA CHIMED IN, NOTING THAT DURING HIS RECENT TOUR OF EUROPE HE HAD REPORTED THAT THE "DEATH SQUADS" WERE BACK IN EL SALVADOR.

10. CONVERSATION THEN TURNED TO THE OCTOBER 31 BOMBING OF THE PRO-FMLN LABOR ORGANIZATION FENASTRAS, AND THE GOVERNMENT'S OFFER TO FORM A COMMISSION OF INVESTIGATION INCLUDING REPRESENTATIVES OF FENASTRAS, POLITICAL PARTIES, AND INTERNATIONAL BODIES. RUBEN ZAMORA NOTED THAT THE COMMISSION, TO BE EFFECTIVE, WOULD HAVE TO HAVE REAL AUTHORITY, AND SEVERAL CONDITIONS, INCLUDING HOW ITS FINDINGS WOULD BE USED, HAD TO BE CLEAR FROM THE BEGINNING. THE POLITICAL PARTY REPRESENTATIVES WERE CLEARLY INTERESTED IN HAVING SUCH A COMMISSION, HOWEVER, AND A/S ARONSON URGED THEM TO ENCOURAGE FENASTRAS TO COOPERATE IN AN EFFORT THAT WOULD LEAD TO A FULL AND COMPLETE INVESTIGATION. HE ALSO AGREED THAT SOME OF THE OBSERVATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF THE COMMISSION WERE

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VALID.

11. CONCLUDING THE SESSION, ARONSON NOTED THAT HE HAD STRESSED TO BOTH PRESIDENT CRISTIANI AND THE MILITARY LEADERSHIP THAT HUMAN RIGHTS REMAINED A PRIORITY OF US POLICY IN EL SALVADOR. HE HAD ALSO BEEN HEARTENED TO LEARN THAT THE GOES WAS PLANNING TO GO FORWARD WITH THE DIALOGUE, AND URGED THOSE PRESENT TO APPLY WHAT PRESSURE THEY COULD TO THE FMLN TO RETURN TO THE BARGAINING TABLE. ARONSON SUGGESTED THAT RATHER THAN DEALING WITH FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES IN SALVADORAN LAW AND SOCIETY, THE DIALOGUE ENGAGE SMALLER, MORE EASILY RESOLVED ISSUES AT THE BEGINNING, AND BUILD A FOUNDATION OF TRUST AND EXPERIENCE THAT WOULD ALLOW FRUITFUL DISCUSSION OF THE LARGER ISSUES.

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