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FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0423
USIA WASHDC 3831
INFO USMISSION GENEVA
AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
AMEMBASSY ROME
DIA WASHDC
USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS PN
COMJTF-B PALMEROLA AB HO

RELEASED IN FULL

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Oscar Olson, Senior Reviewer

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEGUCIGALPA 06145

ROME FOR EMBASSY VATICAN

E.O. 12356: DECL: 4/25/92

TAGS: PEF, SOPN, SCOM, UNHCR, HO, ES

SUBJECT: DISINFORMATION ON THE SALVADORAN REFUGEES

1. (C) SUMMARY. TWO RECENT EXAMPLES OF APPARENT DISINFORMATION OCCURRED WITH THE SALVADORAN REFUGEES. ON APRIL 23, RADIO VENCEREMOS CLAIMED THAT EITHER THE SALVADORAN OR HONDURAN ARMED FORCES ATTACKED COLOMONCAGUA REFUGEE CAMP, WHEN THE UNHCR SAID NOTHING OCCURRED OUT OF THE ORDINARY. ON APRIL 14, A HONDURAN NEWSPAPER REPORTED THAT REPATRIATING SALVADORAN REFUGEES WERE BEING MASSACRED IN ARCATAO BASED ON INFORMATION WHICH A PRIEST CLAIMED HE OBTAINED IN THE MESA GRANDE REFUGEE CAMP. HIS REPORT CAUSED A STIR IN MESA GRANDE, THE APPARENT INTENT OF THE STORY.

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2. (U) ON APRIL 23, REFOFF RECEIVED A TELEPHONE CALL FROM LOCAL AP CORRESPONDENT SAYING HIS COLLEAGUE IN SAN SALVADOR HAD JUST HEARD ON RADIO VENCEREMOS THAT SALVADORAN SOLDIERS HAD ATTACKED THE COLOMONCAGUA REFUGEE CAMP. ON APRIL 24, WIRE SERVICE REPORTS LAID THE BLAME FOR THE ALLEGED ATTACK ON THE HONDURAN ARMED FORCES. THE LOCAL UNHCR REPRESENTATIVE SAID ON APRIL 23 AND CONFIRMED ON APRIL 24 THAT HE HAD BEEN IN COMMUNICATIO WITH HIS STAFF IN COLOMONCAGUA AND NOTHING OUT OF THE ORDINARY OCCURRED DURING THIS TIME PERIOD. ONLY ONE

OF THE FOUR LOCAL NEWSPAPERS PRINTED AN INTERVIEW ON APRIL 25 WITH THE UNHCR REPRESENTATIVE CLARIFYING THAT THERE HAD BEEN NO ATTACK AS HAD BEEN REPORTED ON RADIO VENCEREMOS.

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3. (C) ON APRIL 14, LA TRIBUNA CARRIED A STORY ON AN INSIDE PAGE WITH THE HEADLINE "A PRIEST DENOUNCES: MASSACRE, RAPE, AND TORTURE OF REFUGEES FROM MESA GRANDE: INCOMMUNICADO, HUNGRY, AND SICK SALVADORAN REFUGEES IN HONDURAS: FOUR FOREIGN JOURNALISTS WERE KILLED." THE STORY BY JORGE TALAVERA BEGINS WITH A PARAGRAPH SAYING: "MEN, PREGNANT WOMEN, CHILDREN, AND OLD PEOPLE OF SALVADORAN NATIONALITY WHO STAYED IN THE REFUGEE CENTER IN MESA GRANDE WERE RECENTLY MASSACRED, RAPED, AND TORTURED AS THEY RETURNED TO THEIR COUNTRY OF ORIGIN. FATHER JUAN DONAHUE, THE PARISH PRIEST IN URRACO, YORO, AND THE DELEGADO DE LA PALABRA DE DIOS, JUAN RAMON RODRIGUEZ, DENOUNCED THE FACT THAT A CONSIDERABLE NUMBER OF REFUGEES IN HONDURAS WHO OPTED TO RETURN TO THEIR VILLAGES IN EL SALVADOR HAD BEEN INDISCRIMINATELY BOMBED, OTHERS HAD BEEN JAILED, TORTURED, AND WOMEN AND CHILDREN RAPED BY THE ARMY OF THAT COUNTRY."

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4. (U) THE STORY GOES ON TO MAKE THE SPECIFIC ALLEGATION THAT ARCATAO, CHALATENANGO, WAS BOMBED ON MARCH 6 AND THAT MANY SALVADORANS WHO HAD REPATRIATED UNDER THE PROTECTION OF BISHOP RIVERA Y DAMAS HAD BEEN VICTIMS. ON APRIL 8, THE STORY CLAIMS 220 PEOPLE WERE CAPTURED AND MANY WERE TORTURED AND THAT ANOTHER LARGE NUMBER OF INNOCENT PEOPLE WERE COLDLY MURDERED. ON THIS OCCASION, EITHER TWO OR FOUR INTERNATIONAL JOURNALISTS WHO JOINED THE EXODUS OF REFUGEES WERE GUNNED DOWN.

5. (U) THE STORY CLAIMS THAT FR. GERARDO POTTER WAS ARRESTED WHEN HE WENT TO THE REFUGEE CAMP WHERE HE FORMERLY LIVED FROM 1983-85. IT THEN CLAIMS "THE REFUGEES ARE PRACTICALLY WITHOUT FOOD OR MEDICINES. EACH ONE RECEIVES THREE EGGS PER WEEK. THEY LACK ELEMENTAL MEDICINES, CLOTHING, AND ARE INCOMMUNICADO."

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6. (C) EVEN BY THE VERY LOW HONDURAN STANDARDS, THIS STORY STANDS OUT AS YELLOW JOURNALISM. MALNUTRITION IN THE CAMPS IS UNDER ONE PERCENT WHILE 40-50 PERCENT OF THE CHILDREN IN THE SURROUNDING HONDURAN POPULATION IS MALNUTRISHED. DOCTORS WHO SUPERVISE THE MEDICAL PROGRAM ARE CONCERNED THAT MEDICINE IS OVERSUBSCRIBED, AND WE SUSPECT THE REFUGEES ARE COLLECTING IT FOR THE GUERRILLAS. CLOTHING IS MADE RIGHT IN THE CAMP, AND THE REFUGEES WHO HAVE RAGGED CLOTHES ARE BEING PUNISHED

FOR NOT BEING SUFFICIENTLY SUPPORTIVE OF THE FMLN.

7. (C) WHEN THE UNHCR MET WITH THE LOCAL DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY ON APRIL 16, THE SUB-OFFICE DIRECTOR FROM

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 TEGUCIGALPA 06145

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SUBJECT: DISINFORMATION ON THE SALVADORAN REFUGEES
SAN MARCOS SAID THE STORY WAS CREATING GREAT CONCERN IN
THE CAMP AND WAS WIDELY READ. THIS IS VERY UNUSUAL
BECAUSE LA TRIBUNA IS NOT SOLD IN THAT PART OF THE
COUNTRY, AND THE STORY WAS ALLEGEDLY BASED ON INFORMATION
THAT FR. DONAHUE LEARNED IN THE REFUGEE CAMP. THE UNHCR
SPECULATED, HOWEVER, THAT IT WOULD AFFECT FUTURE

REPATRIATIONS AS IT GAVE SUPPOSEDLY OFFICIAL PROOF OF THE THINGS PEOPLE FEARED MIGHT HAPPEN IF THEY REPATRIATE.

8. (C) UNHCR REPRESENTATIVE WALDO VILLALPANDO TOLD REFOFF ON APRIL 24 THAT HE HAD LEARNED THERE HAD BEEN THREE CAMPEBINOS KILLED DURING A RECENT MILITARY RAID ON ARCATAO AND THAT TWO OF THEM WERE REPATRIATED
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REFUGEES. UNHCR MADE NO MENTION OF FR. GERARDO POTTER, ALTHOUGH WE SUSPECT HE ACTUALLY WAS ARRESTED IN THE CAMP. HE WAS A TROUBLEMAKER WHILE HE WAS ASSIGNED THERE, INCITING THE REFUGEES TO MAKE UNREASONABLE DEMANDS, AND UNHCR WAS PLEASED THE CHURCH FOUND OTHER DUTIES FOR HIM.

9. (C) COMMENT. WE HAVE READ SAN SALVADOR'S REPORTING ON THE SWEEPS IN ARCATAO, AND WE WOULD WELCOME COMMENTS ON VILLALPANDO'S STORY THAT TWO REPATRIATED REFUGEES DIED THERE. WE CONCLUDE FROM SAN SALVADOR'S REPORTING THAT FR. JUAN DONAHUE, THE SOURCE FOR LA TRIBUNA, IS EITHER NAIVELY REPEATING INFORMATION HE RECEIVED FROM A BIASED SOURCE OR IS KNOWINGLY MOUTHING FMLN PROPAGANDA. THE STORY HE IS RELATING SOUNDS LIKE RADIO VENCEREMOS, AND IT APPEARS TO HAVE HAD THE DESIRED EFFECT OF SMEARING THE SALVADORAN ARMED FORCES AND PUTTING FEAR IN THE MINDS OF POTENTIAL REPATRIATES.
(DRAFTED BY POL: JGMCLEAN) FERCH

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