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R 121452Z MAY 86
FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2763
INFO USIA WASHDC 0762
AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS PN
USAFSO HOWARD AFB PN//LAI//
24COMPW HOWARD AFB//DOI//

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SAN SALVADOR 06511

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR
TAGS: PHUM, PINS, ES
SUBJECT: HEADS UP: SEVEN MURDERED BY ESAF IN ARCATAO,
- SAYS TUTELA LEGAL

REFS: A) SAN SALVADOR 5637; B) SAN SALVADOR 4906;
- C) FBIS CHIVA CHIVA PA112026

1. (C - ENTIRE TEXT.)

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Oscar Olson, Senior
Reviewer

1. CONFIDENTIAL - ENTIRE TEXT.

2. SUMMARY

MARIA JULIA HERNANDEZ, DIRECTOR OF THE SAN SALVADOR
ARCHDIOCESAN OFFICE OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND LEGAL AID
(TUTELA LEGAL), TOLD POLOFF ON MAY 8 THAT A DELEGATION
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FROM THE ARCHBISHOPRIC HAD RETURNED FROM ARCATAO,
CHALATENANGO DEPARTMENT, WHERE IT HAD INVESTIGATED THE
MILITARY OPERATION WHICH TOOK PLACE THERE ON APRIL 8,
1986 (REF A). SHE SAID THE RESIDENTS OF ARCATAO TOLD
THE DELEGATION THAT THE ESAF BEAT A NUMBER OF THE
CIVILIAN MEN IN THE TOWN, TORTURED SEVEN OF THEM,
MURDERED SIX OF THE SEVEN AND TOOK THE SEVENTH AWAY.
SHE SAID SHE WILL WRITE A FULL REPORT WHEN SHE HAS
FINISHED READING ALL THE TESTIMONIES BROUGHT BACK BY THE
DELEGATION. THE REPORT IS CERTAIN TO GENERATE AN OUTCRY

WHEN MADE PUBLIC. MILGP OBSERVERS REPORT THAT THE FORCES THAT TOOK PART IN THE OPERATION RECEIVED CLEAR INSTRUCTIONS TO AVOID ALL CIVILIAN CASUALTIES, AND THAT DEBRIEFINGS AFTER THE OPERATION INDICATED THAT NO CIVILIAN CASUALTIES HAD OCCURRED. END SUMMARY.

3. THE INVESTIGATION
- -----

HERNANDEZ SAID THAT ARCHBISHOP ARTURO RIVERA DAMAS ORDERED AN ON-SITE INVESTIGATION OF THE MILITARY OPERATION IN ARCATAO BECAUSE THE ARCHBISHOPRIC HAD RECEIVED CONFLICTING REPORTS OF WHAT HAD HAPPENED. REPRESENTATIVES FROM TUTELA LEGAL AND OTHERS FROM THE ARCHBISHOPRIC TRAVELLED TO ARCATAO AND SPOKE WITH THE PEOPLE THERE; HERNANDEZ DID NOT ACCOMPANY THEM.

4. TL VERSION: "RESIDENTS ROUNDED UP"
- -----

HERNANDEZ SAID THAT ACCORDING TO THE RESIDENTS, THE SALVADORAN AIR FORCE ROCKETED THE AREA AROUND THE TOWN AND THE TROOPS LANDED FROM HELICOPTERS. THE GUERRILLAS
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WHO WERE "AROUND" (BUT NOT IN, ACCORDING TO HERNANDEZ) THE TOWN, FLED. THE SOLDIERS IMMEDIATELY TOOK AWAY BY HELICOPTER THREE FOREIGN JOURNALISTS WHO WERE IN THE TOWN (REF B). THE SOLDIERS ORDERED ALL THE PEOPLE OUT OF THEIR HOUSES, MACHINEGUNNING THE INTERIORS OF THE HOUSES AFTER THE PEOPLE CAME OUT TO ENSURE NO ONE WAS HIDING INSIDE. THEY MARCHED ALL THE RESIDENTS TO THE CHURCH, THEN PUT THE MEN INTO ONE GROUP, THE WOMEN INTO ANOTHER, AND THE CHILDREN INTO A THIRD, SAID HERNANDEZ.

5. "IT WAS TERRIBLE"
- -----

THEN, ACCORDING TO THE TESTIMONIES GIVEN THE DELEGATION, THE SOLDIERS SEPARATED SOME OF THE MEN FROM THE LARGER GROUP, TOOK THEM TO SOME HOUSES ACROSS THE STREET FROM THE CHURCH, AND BEAT AND KICKED THEM. THEY THEN TOOK SEVEN OF THESE MEN AND TORTURED THEM BY INFLECTING BURNS ON VARIOUS PARTS OF THEIR BODIES AND CUTS ON THEIR CHESTS, AND FINALLY MURDERED SIX OF THEM, SOME BY CUTTING THEIR THROATS. THE SEVENTH THEY TOOK AWAY WITH THEM, AND THE TOWNSPEOPLE DID NOT KNOW WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO HIM. THEY WERE CONFUSED BY THE ARMY'S ACTIONS BECAUSE THE ARMY HAD RECENTLY PERFORMED A CIVIC ACTION PROGRAM NOT FAR FROM ARCATAO, AND HAD GIVEN THEM FOOD, THEY SAID.

6. NO FURTHER DETAILS
- -----

HERNANDEZ DECLINED TO GIVE POLOFF THE NAMES OF ANY OF THE MEN REPORTED TORTURED AND KILLED. SHE SAID THE FINAL REPORT WOULD INCLUDE THE NAMES AND PROMISED TO

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PROVIDE A COPY OF THE REPORT WHEN SHE HAS WRITTEN IT. IN RESPONSE TO A SPECIFIC QUESTION, SHE SAID SHE DID NOT KNOW WHETHER ANY OF THE DEAD WERE FORMER REFUGEES WHO HAD RETURNED TO EL SALVADOR FROM CAMPS IN HONDURAS.

7. AND THE GUERRILLAS?
- -----

THE PEOPLE IN ARCATAO TOLD THE DELEGATION THAT THE GUERRILLAS HAD GATHERED THE RESIDENTS OF TWO NEARBY VILLAGES, TEOSINTE AND SICAHUITES, AND HAD KILLED TWO

MEN IN THE FIRST VILLAGE AND ONE IN THE SECOND, TELLING THE RESIDENTS THAT THESE MEN WERE SPIES FOR THE GOVERNMENT AND HAD GONE TO THE DEPARTMENTAL CAPITAL OF CHALATENANGO TO TELL THE ESAF WHERE THE GUERRILLAS WERE. HERNANDEZ WAS NOT SURE WHETHER THESE KILLINGS OCCURRED BEFORE OR AFTER THE MILITARY OPERATION IN ARCATAO. NOTE: TEOSINTE IS A LITTLE OVER A MILE
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NORTHWEST OF ARCATAO; SICAHUITES IS ABOUT 2 MILES WEST OF ARCATAO. END NOTE.

8. ARCHBISHOP ON BOARD
- -----

ARCHBISHOP RIVERA DAMAS RELATED A LESS DETAILED ACCOUNT OF THE REPORTED MURDERS IN ARCATAO TO POLCOUNS ON MAY 6. IT IS CLEAR THAT THE ARCHBISHOP IS CONVINCED THAT THIS INCIDENT OCCURRED, AND HE IS DISTURBED.

9. THE RADIO VENCEREMOS VERSION
- -----

ON APRIL 11 RADIO VENCEREMOS, THE FMLN'S CLANDESTINE RADIO STATION, GAVE ITS ACCOUNT OF THE OPERATION (REF C). ACCORDING TO RADIO VENCEREMOS, THE SALVADORAN AIR FORCE HEAVILY BOMBED AND STRAFED ARCATAO AND ITS SURROUNDINGS. THEN SOLDIERS LANDED, HERDED THE PEOPLE INTO THE CHURCH, AND RANSACKED AND DESTROYED THE HOUSES. COL CACERES THEN ARRIVED AND "ORDERED HIS TROOPS TO SAVAGELY TORTURE CHILDREN, OLD PEOPLE, AND WOMEN." THE SOLDIERS CUT THE PEOPLES' CHESTS WITH A KNIFE, AND CUT THE THROATS OF FOUR OLD MEN; COL CACERES THEN TOLD THE PEOPLE TO GET OUT OF TOWN WITHIN 48 HOURS OR THE TOWN WOULD BE BOMBED INTO OBLIVION, SAID THE BROADCAST.

10. COMMENT
- -----

THE APRIL 8 OPERATION IN ARCATAO WAS CONDUCTED BY ELITE UNITS FROM THE AIRBORNE BATTALION AND PRAL (LONG RANGE
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RECON UNIT). MILGP REPS PRESENT DURING THE PREDEPLOYMENT BRIEFING STATED THAT THE GROUND UNITS AND THE AIR FORCE RECEIVED CLEAR INSTRUCTIONS TO AVOID ALL CIVILIAN CASUALTIES AND THAT NO BOMBS OR ROCKETS WERE TO

BE FIRED INTO THE TOWN. DEBRIEFS AFTER THE OPERATION INDICATED THAT NO CIVILIANS WERE KILLED DURING THE 9-HOUR OPERATION THAT COMMENCED AT 5:45 A.M., APRIL 8. (ESAF DID REPORT 4 GUERRILLAS KILLED IN ACTION AND THE CAPTURE OF ONE RIFLE.) IT APPEARS THE THREE JOURNALISTS REMOVED FROM ARCATAO WERE LED THERE BY THE GUERRILLAS AND HAD CONDUCTED INTERVIEWS WITH THE GUERRILLAS IN THE TOWN. THE POPULAR LIBERATION FORCES (FPL) HAS ORGANIZED THE POPULATION OF ARCATAO INTO POPULAR COMMITTEES AND HAS ENCOURAGED SOME INHABITANTS TO RETURN FROM THE MESA GRANDE REFUGEE CAMP IN HONDURAS. TUTELA LEGAL'S VISIT OCCURRED WHEN NO GOVERNMENT FORCES WERE PRESENT, AND THE GUERRILLAS WERE IN CONTROL OF THE AREA. THE LIKELIHOOD OF MISREPRESENTATION AND FALSE TESTIMONY IS SELF-EVIDENT.

11. DURING MEETING WITH POLOFF, HERNANDEZ WOULD NOT BUDGE FROM HER CUSTOMARY POSITION THAT "THE PEOPLE DO NOT LIE TO THE CHURCH," AND SHE PLANS TO REPORT THE TESTIMONY AS GIVEN. SHE DID NOT KNOW WHETHER AUXILIARY BISHOP GREGORIO ROSA CHAVEZ WOULD PUBLICIZE THE DELEGATION'S FINDINGS IN THIS SUNDAY'S HOMILY IN THE METROPOLITAN CATHEDRAL, BUT POST HAS NO DOUBT THAT HE OR THE ARCHBISHOP WILL DO SO EVENTUALLY, EITHER THIS SUNDAY OR WHEN HERNANDEZ FINISHES HER REPORT. DEPARTMENT AND POST CAN EXPECT A FLOOD OF CONDEMNATORY INQUIRIES. UNFORTUNATELY, ABOUT THE ONLY WAY TO REFUTE SUCH A STORY

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WOULD BE TO OBTAIN AN EXHUMATION ORDER, GO TO ARCATAO
WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS AND
MEMBERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL PRESS (AFTER THE ESAF HAD
MOVED BACK INTO THE AREA TO PROVIDE SECURITY), AND DIG
UP THE PRESUMED GRAVES TO CHECK THE BODIES FOR INJURIES
-- A HIGHLY UNLIKELY SCENARIO. END COMMENT.

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