

UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 01 SAN SA 06629 01 OF 02 171712Z  
ACTION ARA-00

INFO LOG-00 ADS-00 AID-00 INR-10 SS-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00  
MSC-01 NSCE-00 NSAE-00 SSO-00 HA-09 L-03 PM-10  
INRE-00 SP-02 C-01 SSE-01 DS-01 DSE-00 SCT-02  
P-02 /042 W

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O 171658Z MAY 88  
FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0133  
DOJ WASHDC IMMEDIATE

**RELEASED IN FULL**

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 SAN SALVADOR 06629

DEPT FOR ARA/CEN, L/LEI  
JUSTICE FOR O/OEA

**REVIEW AUTHORITY: Oscar Olson, Senior  
Reviewer**

E.O. 12356: N/A  
TAGS: PTER, PHUM, CASC, KJUS, PGOV, ES  
SUBJECT: AFTERMATH OF THE SERRANO ASSASSINATION

REF: SAN SALVADOR 6365

1. SUMMARY

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FOLLOWING THE MAY 11 ASSASSINATION OF FIRST MILITARY  
INSTANCE JUDGE JORGE SERRANO, THE TWO DEFENSE  
COUNSELS IN THE KIDNAPPING CASE RESIGNED MAY 12 AFTER  
CLAIMING THEY HAD RECEIVED THREATS FROM THE FMLN.  
THE SUPREME COURT PRESIDENT NAMED JUSTICE OF THE  
PEACE WILFREDO ESTRADA AS INTERIM JUDGE ON MAY 13.  
THE GOVERNMENT, ARMED FORCES, SUPREME COURT, CHURCH,  
TWO HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS AND THREE MAJOR POLITICAL  
PARTIES HAVE ALL CONDEMNED THE KILLING. END SUMMARY.

2. MORE DETAILS ON THE CRIME  
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PAGE 02 SAN SA 06629 01 OF 02 171712Z

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A FEW MORE DETAILS HAVE SURFACED ON THE CASE.  
ACCORDING TO NEIGHBORS, THE CRIME WAS CARRIED OUT BY  
FOUR ASSAILANTS TRAVELLING IN A WHITE PICK-UP TRUCK  
OR JEEP. AFTER FIRING AN INITIAL TWO SHOTS THROUGH  
THE WINDSHIELD OF SERRANO'S VAN, ONE OR MORE OF THE  
ASSAILANTS GOT OUT OF THE TRUCK AND FIRED MORE SHOTS  
AT CLOSE RANGE THROUGH THE VAN'S RIGHT SIDE DOOR  
GLASS. THE POLICE RECOVERED FOUR NINE MILLIMETER

CARTRIDGES FROM INSIDE SERRANO'S VAN. AN AUTOPSY FOUND FIVE 9MM BULLET WOUNDS IN SERRANO'S BODY; FOUR IN HIS CHEST AND ONE IN HIS FACE.

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3. LEGAL COUNSELS CITE THREATS AND QUIT  
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THE TWO DEFENSE COUNSELS IN THE KIDNAPPING CASE, LUIS GOMEZ GALLEGOS AND LUIS PENA ARGUETA, ANNOUNCED THEIR WITHDRAWAL FROM THE CASE ON MAY 13. GOMEZ CLAIMED THAT HIS DAUGHTERS HAD RECEIVED A THREAT BY TELEPHONE FROM FROM SOMEONE WHO IDENTIFIED HIMSELF AS A MEMBER OF THE FMLN URBAN COMMANDOS. THE CALLER SUPPOSEDLY GAVE GOMEZ AND PENA 48 HOURS TO ABANDON THE CASE. GOMEZ SAID HIS DAUGHTERS DESCRIBED THE CALLER AS SOMEONE WHO SOUNDED LIKE A FOREIGNER FROM NICARAGUA, VENEZUELA OR PANAMA AND THE CALL AS SOUNDING LONG DISTANCE. (NOTE: THIS IS OBVIOUSLY MEANT TO IMPLICATE THE VENEZUELAN ADVISORS TO THE NATIONAL POLICE.)

4. PUBLIC REACTION MODEST  
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PAGE 03 SAN SA 06629 01 OF 02 171712Z  
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THE GOES AND THE ARMED FORCES TOOK THE LEAD IN CONDEMNING SERRANO'S ASSASSINATION IN SEPARATE PRESS RELEASES ON MAY 11. THE GOVERNMENT STATEMENT REFERRED TO "THE IRRATIONAL TERRORISM WHICH HAS INCREASED IN THE LAST TWO MONTHS" AND AFFIRMED ITS INTENT TO USE ALL AVAILABLE MEANS TO INVESTIGATE THE CASE. PRESIDENT OF THE SUPREME COURT FRANCISCO JOSE GUERRERO TERMED THE CRIME AN ACT TO THREATEN OTHER JUDGES. AUXILIARY BISHOP OF SAN SALVADOR GREGORIO ROSA CHAVEZ LAMENTED THE MURDER AND EXPRESSED THE CHURCH'S SOLIDARITY WITH SERRANO'S FAMILY. BOTH THE GOVERNMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION (CDH) AND THE NON-GOVERNMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION (CDHES) MADE DECLARATIONS DEPLORING SERRANO'S MURDER.

5. PREDICTABLY, CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY PRESIDENTIAL HOPEFUL JULIO REY PRENDES, NATIONAL CONCILIATION PARTY LEADER HUGO CARRILLO AND NATIONALIST REPUBLICAN ALLIANCE LEGISLATIVE DEPUTY SIGIFREDO OCHOA PEREZ ALL FOLLOWED SUIT WITH PUBLIC CONDEMNATIONS OF THEIR OWN. OCHOA DECRIED THE LACK OF PERSONAL SECURITY FOR JUDGES TRYING DELICATE CASES. THE SERRANO ASSASSINATION DID NOT MERIT A SINGLE EDITORIAL COMMENT IN ANY OF SAN SALVADOR'S DAILY NEWSPAPERS.

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6. WAKE AND FUNERAL LIGHTLY ATTENDED  
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THE AMBASSADOR AND EMBASSY OFFICIALS ATTENDED THE MAY 11

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PAGE 01 SAN SA 06629 02 OF 02 171712Z  
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E.O. 12356: N/A  
TAGS: PTER, PHUM, CASC, KJUS, PGOV, ES  
SUBJECT: AFTERMATH OF THE SERRANO ASSASSINATION

EVENING WAKE AND THE MAY 12 FUNERAL FOR JUDGE  
SERRANO. BOTH EVENTS WERE SPARCELY ATTENDED BY  
SALVADORAN OFFICIALS. NONE OF THE SUPPOSEDLY  
OUTRAGED POLITICIANS MADE AN APPEARANCE. VICE  
MINISTER FOR PUBLIC SECURITY GEN. RINALDO GOLCHER WAS  
THE ONLY NOTABLE CIVILIAN OR MILITARY OFFICIAL AT THE  
WAKE. (NOTE: SERRANO WAS THE "PADRINO" AT THE  
WEDDING OF ONE OF GOLCHER'S DAUGHTERS. END NOTE.)  
ACCORDING TO AN ATTORNEY AT THE WAKE, ONLY TWO OTHER

MEMBERS OF THE LEGAL PROFESSION WERE PRESENT.  
SUPREME COURT PRESIDENT FRANCISCO JOSE GUERRERO AND  
CDH EXECUTIVE SECRETARY BENJAMIN CESTONI WERE THE  
TOTAL GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATION AT THE FUNERAL.

7. INTERIM JUDGE NAMED

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PAGE 02 SAN SA 06629 02 OF 02 171712Z

GUERRERO NAMED WILFREDO ESTRADA AS THE INTERIM JUDGE  
TO REPLACE SERRANO ON JAN. 13. ESTRADA HAD BEEN  
WORKING AS THE SIXTH JUSTICE OF THE PEACE OF SAN  
SALVADOR. THE PROCESS FOR PERMANENTLY REPLACING  
SERRANO REQUIRES THE MINISTER OF DEFENSE TO SUBMIT A  
SLATE OF THREE CANDIDATES TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE  
SUPREME COURT, WHO MAKES THE FINAL SELECTION.

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