

TO: THE HONORABLE CHESTER ATKINS  
- HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
- WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515

RE: YOUR LETTER DATED DEC. 14; RECEIVED JAN. 15

DEAR MR. ATKINS:

- I AM RESPONDING TO THE DEC. 14 LETTER FROM 91 MEMBERS OF CONGRESS, INCLUDING YOURSELF, TO PRESIDENT DUARTE EXPRESSING CONCERN ABOUT ALLEGATIONS OF HARASSMENT OF SALVADORAN REFUGEES WHO RECENTLY RETURNED FROM THE MESA GRANDE REFUGEE CAMPS INSIDE HONDURAS. CONGRESSWOMAN BARBARA BOXER WAS KIND ENOUGH TO PROVIDE ME WITH A COPY OF THE LETTER IN JANUARY.

- AS YOU ARE AWARE, OVER 4300 REFUGEES REPATRIATED  
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OCT. 10-11, 1987 TO EL SALVADOR FROM MESA GRANDE. THIS REPATRIATION, THE LARGEST OF ITS KIND TO DATE IN CENTRAL AMERICA, WAS CARRIED OUT WITHOUT INCIDENT BY THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSION FOR REFUGEES (UNHCR) IN AGREEMENT WITH THE GOVERNMENTS OF HONDURAS AND EL SALVADOR. PRESIDENT DUARTE HAS ALWAYS RECOGNIZED THE RIGHT OF EXPATRIATE SALVADORANS TO RETURN TO THEIR COUNTRY ON A VOLUNTARY, ORDERLY AND INDIVIDUAL BASIS. THE SALVADORAN GOVERNMENT WELCOMED THE RETURN OF ALL REFUGEES WHO WISHED TO RETURN IN OCTOBER 1987 AND AGREED TO ALLOW THEM TO RESETTLE IN THEIR PLACES OF ORIGIN. THE REFUGEES WHO RETURNED IN OCTOBER 1987 CHOSE TO RETURN TO FOUR DESTINATIONS: GUARJILA/GUARJILITA, CHALATENANGO DEPT., LAS VUELTAS, CHALATENANGO DEPT., COPAPAYO, CUSCATLAN DEPT. AND SANTA MARTA, CABANAS DEPT. ALL FOUR OF THESE LOCATIONS ARE SITUATED IN WHAT ARE STILL VERY CONFLICTIVE AREAS IN THE NORTHERN PART OF THE COUNTRY.

- YOUR LETTER ALLEGES THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS PREVENTING INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN AID ORGANIZATIONS FROM DELIVERING FOOD AND SUPPLIES TO THE REPATRIATED COMMUNITIES. I DO NOT KNOW THE SOURCE OF YOUR INFORMATION, BUT THE EMBASSY IS UNAWARE OF ANY SUCH ATTEMPTS. THE CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF SAN SALVADOR HAS CONFIRMED THAT NOT A SINGLE SHIPMENT OF ITS HUMANITARIAN AID TO THE FOUR COMMUNITIES HAS BEEN PREVENTED FROM REACHING ITS FINAL DESTINATION BY THE GOVERNMENT OR ARMED FORCES. THERE HAVE BEEN TEMPORARY DELAYS IN THE ARCHDIOCESE'S DELIVERY OF GOODS BECAUSE OF ONGOING MILITARY OPERATIONS. IN ALL CASES, PERSONS WISHING TO TRAVEL TO CONFLICTIVE ZONES MUST HAVE PERMISSION FROM THE  
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ARMED FORCES HIGH COMMAND TO PROCEED. THE HIGH COMMAND'S SAFE CONDUCT PASS IS SUBJECT TO THE DISCRETION OF THE LOCAL MILITARY COMMANDER ON THE SCENE. IN PRACTICE, THIS MEANS THAT SOME OF THE ARCHDIOCESE'S TRUCKS CARRYING AID TO COMMUNITIES IN ESPECIALLY CONFLICTIVE AREAS, LIKE GUARJILA AND LAS VUELTAS, HAVE BEEN HALTED PENDING THE CONCLUSION OF ONGOING MILITARY OPERATIONS IN SOME CASES FOR SEVERAL HOURS AND OTHERS FOR SEVERAL DAYS.

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- YOUR LETTER ALLEGES THAT A HEAVY MILITARY PRESENCE IN THESE COMMUNITIES HAS RESULTED IN INCIDENTS OF MINING, BOMBING AND INDISCRIMINATE STRAFING WITH MACHINE GUNS. NO EVIDENCE OF ANY MINING, BOMBING OR MACHINE GUNNING BY THE SALVADORAN ARMED FORCES IN ANY OF THE FOUR COMMUNITIES SINCE OCTOBER 1987 HAS BEEN BROUGHT FORTH BY TUTELA LEGAL, THE ARCHDIOCESAN HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICE, OR ANY OTHER CREDIBLE SOURCE IN EL SALVADOR. IN FACT, THERE HAS BEEN ONLY ONE CASUALTY AMONG THE REPATRIATES WHO HAVE ARRIVED SINCE OCTOBER 1987: 22 YEAR-OLD NORBERTO VFLASQUEZ RIVAS WHO WAS MURDERED IN HIS HOME IN SANTA MARTA THE NIGHT OF JAN. 11. AUXILIARY BISHOP GREGORIO ROSA CHAVEZ, IN HIS JAN. 17 HOMILY, ATTRIBUTED THE KILLING TO THE GUERRILLAS.

- YOU ARE CORRECT IN IDENTIFYING THE DOCUMENTATION OF THE REPATRIATES AS A MAJOR PROBLEM AREA. THE MAJORITY OF ADULT REFUGEES RETURNING FROM MESA GRANDE POSSESSED NO OLD IDENTITY DOCUMENTS. CHILDREN, WHO MADE UP THE BULK OF THE RETURNEES, EITHER HAD NEVER BEEN DOCUMENTED BEFORE LEAVING EL SALVADOR OR WERE BORN UNDOCUMENTED INSIDE MESA GRANDE. THE PROBLEM IS COMPOUNDED BY THE GUERRILLAS' DESTRUCTION OF MUNICIPAL ARCHIVES IN TWO TOWNS AND FEAR BY SEVERAL MAYORS IN

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EXILE TO RETURN AND WORK IN THEIR COMMUNITIES (MAYORS HAVE BEEN TARGETED FOR KIDNAPPING BY THE GUERRILLAS). GOVERNMENT TEAMS HAVE BEEN WORKING SINCE NOVEMBER TO DOCUMENT THE RETURNEES, BUT TO DATE ONLY ABOUT TEN PERCENT HAVE RECEIVED PERMANENT IDENTITY CARDS. INCIDENTALLY, NONE OF THE RETURNEES WOULD BE ELIGIBLE TO VOTE ANYWAY SINCE THE CUTOFF APPLICATION DATE FOR VOTER IDENTIFICATION CARDS WAS IN SEPTEMBER.

- PLEASE BE ASSURED THAT I SHARE YOUR CONCERNS ABOUT THE RIGHT OF THE REPATRIATES TO LIVE IN PEACE FREE FROM HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS COMMITTED BY THE ARMED FORCES OR THE GUERRILLAS AND THE NEED FOR TIMELY DOCUMENTATION OF ALL RETURNEES. I WILL CONTINUE TO ENCOURAGE PRESIDENT DUARTE AND OTHER SALVADORAN CIVILIAN AND MILITARY OFFICIALS TO WORK TOWARD THESE ENDS. IF THERE IS ANY OTHER WAY IN WHICH I CAN BE OF SERVICE TO YOU OR YOUR CONSTITUENTS, PLEASE DO NOT HESITATE TO CONTACT ME AGAIN.

SINCERELY,

EDWIN G. CORR  
AMBASSADOR

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