forgotten War

Greater Houston
AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION
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June, I need to check this

December 3, 1985

RECEIVED DEC 5 1985

Francis T. Farenthold
2100 Travis, Suite 2100
Houston, Texas 77002

Dear Sissy:

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Greater Houston Chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union I would like to take this opportunity to invite you to be the keynote speaker at our annual membership meeting, scheduled to take place the week of February 23, 1986. To date we have left the final evening undetermined in the hope that we could most easily accomodate your schedule. The meeting will take place at a central Houston location at approximately 7:00 p.m. We will hold elections for our local Board of Directors and would plan to have you speak immediately thereafter.

As Gertrude discussed with you, we feel it has been too long since our membership has heard from one of our local community leaders. We are sure that the membership would be interested in your insights on civil and human rights especially in light of all you have been doing both locally and internationally.

Please contact Helen Gros, our Executive Director, at 524-6021 to let her know if you will be able to accept and which day during that week would most easily fit your busy schedule. A prompt reply would be greatly appreciated as Helen is in the process of putting together the newsletter which will announce the membership meeting, and I hope name you as our keynote speaker.

With fondest regards,

Marilyn Guinn

Marilyn Guinn
Chair

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State Department objecting to military aid being

not followed the situation and had not concerned

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FILE

SPEECH FILE '86

Salvador

RODUCTION:

I was given my choice of subject matter this evening. I asked if I could speak of Salvador and the Salvadoreans in our midst. Upon reflection, I realized why I chose this subject . . .

(1) because for six years I have grown in awareness of the crushing misery we are inflicting upon the country and its refugees, and

(2) because I want to make a plea to each of you to make a little room for them in your pursuit of human rights – whether a letter on the De Corini bill to your Congress person, a telegram to Shultz at the next outrage perpetrated by the Salvadorean air force, ~~or whatever~~. And what would be the most

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FIRST time open funding of irregular forces

gnificant protest – opposition to the Contra

1) limitation on force
2) use of Salvador a base

funding.

Tonight, I choose to speak of the silent people in our midst and the forgotten war that has driven them here.

Silent, because of fear. They fled fear; but they found fear here.

In the last days of the Carter Administration, a cousin called and asked me to telephone the State Department to object to military aid being sent to Salvador. I had not followed the situation in that country and had not concerned myself with it.

Actually, it was on a local level that my awareness of the situation came about. I attended a

small gathering in Herman Park in 1981 when there was some discussion of negotiations – some speech of Enders. Of course, that was never to be. The estimated numbers of Salvadoreans in Houston range from 80,000 to 100,000. Who are the Salvadoreans? Why are they here? And what is happening to them here?

Salvador has been called the thumb of Central America, a country that would fit within the triangle of Houston, Austin, and Dallas, with a population of 4 million – 700,000 displaced within their own borders, with a death toll of 50,000 and with ~~500,000~~ 1 million refugees who have fled their country since the beginning of the six-year Civil War.

Between 1970 and 1980, the total expenditure in Salvador was $5 billion. Since 1980, the U. S. has allotted $1.5 billion to Salvador, with an average of $460 million per year, with 74% going to military or military-related expenditures.

I haven't been to Salvador since November 1984. Then, I visited, among other sites, refugee camps, political prisons, cooperatives, and Archbishop Romero's tomb. And I met with the Mothers of the Disappeared. Once there, there is no way to leave Salvador and its people behind. Since the time of my visit, we know that there has been a shift to an air war with high civilian casualties. It's called "L.I.C." by the Pentagon; but it is our war,

fought with our equipment, our intelligence, and our training. And at a time of crushing budget deficits, when everyday's headlines threaten cuts in human services and other vital programs, it is costing us over $1 million a day! And that is only the material cost.

Information on the bombing is restricted in part because the Salvadorean military bars reporters from the regions of the bombings. However, after a pastoral visit to the countryside recently, Archbishop Damas denounced the indiscriminatebombingofcivilians.

In September 1985, the U. S. sent 12 more helicopter gunships to Salvador - those same

gunships of Vietnam infamy. Now, the bombs are heavier and are dropped more frequently. For example, activity in the month of November equalled that of all the earlier months.

Where are our moral bearings, we Americans? In post-World War II, we were in the vanguard in establishing a body of international law based upon the terrible experiences of that war. In 1949, the Geneva Convention established the principle that persons fleeing from a well-founded fear of persectuion because of their political or religious beliefs or affiliations were entitled to asylum in the host country. The United States ratified this treaty in 1950.

In 1980, the U. S. passed the Refugee Act.

In 1986, 100,000 Salvadorean refugees are in Houston. What is their status? Asylum is denied them for lack of documentation. Countrywide, less than 2% have been granted asylum. Why are they – and the Haitians, for example – treated differently from the Vietnamese? This question, of course, takes us to the policies established in Washington.

Locally, the churches struggle on. The self-help groups try to organize, always so pitifully short of money, and yet believing that someday the North Americans will understand what we are doing to their country.

Conclusion:

In 1983, I was in Vienna walking with a friend in the beautiful open square in the center of the city. That day, there was an exhibit of large photographs from Amnesty International of tortured Salvadoreans, dead and alive. After studying the photographs, my friend – a professor, a civilized person – turned to me and said: "What are you going to do about this?"

I felt he spoke to me personally and to this country. Three years have passed, and I have no adequate answer. Tonight, I ask myself again – I ask you – I ask the larger community, this country:

"What are we going to do about this?

Frances T. Farenthold
February 28, 1986.