

El Salvador Rights Progress Certified Despite Protests

Washington (NC) — To a chorus of protests from church groups and others, the Reagan administration certified July 27 that El Salvador is making human rights progress and deserves continued U.S. military aid.

Even before the announcement of the certification, required every six months, organizations opposed to the administration's Central America policies objected to the decision.

The certification "flies in the face of evidence from the most reputable sources" about the situation in El Salvador,

said Franciscan Father Alan McCoy, president of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men.

And at a Washington news conference only hours before the certification was sent to Congress, the director of the Office of Social Concerns of the Maryknoll Sisters said the administration could not honestly certify progress in the investigations of the death of four American churchwomen because no progress is taking place.

"We believe that a reasonable assessment of the

investigation suggests that the responsibility for the crime may go beyond the enlisted men that have been arrested," said the director, Maryknoll Sister Helene O'Sullivan.

The certification also came the same day as the Senate, following the lead of the House, voted 95-2 to require the administration to show continued progress in the investigation of the churchwomen's deaths as well as the deaths of two American land reform workers and the disappearance of an American freelance journalist.

A show of progress was required in the first cer-

tification submitted to Congress by President Reagan last January, but had been dropped from the second because of the belief that trials for the deaths in late 1980 and early 1981 would be completed by now.

The 46-page report, signed by Secretary of State George P. Shultz, admits that strife in El Salvador "continues to produce serious and frequent violations of basic human rights" from both left and right as well as from government security forces.

But the report also notes a continued "downward trend" in political violence and said there has been a "demon-

strable attempt" by the government to control its forces.

As for the investigations into the deaths of four churchwomen, the report says there has been "substantial progress" since the last certification, including formal charges filed in February against five former National Guardsmen accused of the murders.

Sister O'Sullivan denied that the prediction of the upcoming trial showed progress in the investigations. The involvement of military or government officials higher than the five ex-soldiers has

not been adequately investigated, she said.

Some members of Congress also called the certification a "sham," and said they would attempt to have it declared "null and void."

"I think the certification is a sham," said Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.). "I don't think there is any other way to describe it."

Dodd, prior to the certification announcement, had said that "blatant examples of human rights abuses" in El Salvador would make it nearly impossible for the administration to certify progress there honestly.

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