

Salvadoran group seeks halt to deportation, military aid

By Teresa A. Parsons

Eight Salvadorans facing possible deportation after being arrested last week near Rochester are calling for legislation to protect other Salvadorans living illegally in the United States. The eight refugees also requested a halt to United States military aid for their country.

Yanira Chacon and Sergio Hurtado were traveling with the Comité El Salvador, a group touring upstate New York to draw attention to the plight of their countrymen who remain in El Salvador, as well as to the fate of those who have fled to neighboring countries.

Along with six other Salvadorans living illegally in the United States and traveling with the caravan, Chacon and Hurtado were detained last Thursday, March 19, by border-patrol officers.

After their release Friday, the eight Salvadorans appeared at a press conference sponsored by the Rochester Sanctuary Committee. The refugees urged support for the DeConcini-Moakley Bill, which would allow them and an estimated 700,000 other Salvadorans to remain legally in the United States pending government investigation of conditions in El Salvador.

"Someone has to say something in this country," said Chacon, a former church worker who fled El Salvador in 1983. "We decided to get together and explain why we can't go back."

Hurtado explained that all Salvadorans between the ages of 15 and 30 may be forced to serve in the army. "We're not refusing to join the army because we don't love our country," he said. "We don't want to kill our own people."

Chacon and others in the group added that, should they be forced to return to El Salvador, their lives would be endangered by forces on both sides of the civil war. The refugees estimate that more than 60,000 people — just over 1 percent of the country's population of nearly 5 million — have died during seven years of fighting.

All eight Salvadorans realized that they risked arrest by speaking publicly, according to Sarah Bransfield, one of the caravan's organizers. "But in this country, Salvadorans live with the possibility of being arrested any day, any time," she said. "It

was of greater concern to them to explain the situation in El Salvador."

Chacon and Hurtado said that their arrest is only one example of the harassment and fear with which Salvadorans must live every day in the United States.

Along with other members of the Comité El Salvador, they spoke last Monday, March 16, to several church groups in Rochester. On Thursday, they were en route from Buffalo to Ithaca when their three-car caravan was detained by a New York state police officer at a gas station on the New York State Thruway near Henrietta.

The trooper, who suspected that members of the group were illegal aliens, turned them over to border-patrol officers. The border patrol then transported the eight Salvadorans and their companions to a border-patrol station outside Buffalo.

The group remained in custody for almost 10 hours before its members were released on their own recognizance, Bransfield said.

"We came back to Rochester to talk to people about what had happened and to use the contacts we had made just a few days ago," she added.

According to a press release distributed Friday, the Salvadorans in the caravan who were not in the U.S. legally have applied for asylum. Yet less than 3 percent of all Salvadoran applicants are granted asylum by the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

"This is one of the only countries that is sending us back to where the war situation is going on," Chacon said.

The Comité El Salvador left Rochester Friday for New Jersey, where group members planned to continue their schedule of public appearances.

"We don't expect any more legal problems," Bransfield said. "At least, we hope not."

During the press conference, members of the Rochester Sanctuary Committee announced that they were accepting donations to help with the Salvadorans' legal expenses.

Also announced were a march and rally for justice and peace in Central America and South Africa on Saturday, April 25, in Washington, D.C. Local groups are planning to charter buses for those who wish to participate. For more information, contact the Peace and Justice Education Center, (716)244-7191 or MetroAct, 325-2560.



Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal
Sergio Hurtado and seven other Salvadorans detained by border police as illegal aliens held a press conference last Friday, March 20, to dramatize their own plight and that of more than 700,000 Salvadorans who came to the United States to escape the civil war in their country.

Investigators searching for clues to explosion on Aquinas Institute grounds

Arson investigators continued to search Monday for the source of a pipe bomb that exploded last week at the residence of the Basilian Fathers on Augustine St. in Rochester.

The device went off between 8:30 and 9:15 p.m. on Tuesday evening, March 17, according to fire investigator William Stacy. No one was injured in the blast, but siding and downspouts were damaged on a garage, located near the main residence building at 402 Augustine St. on the city's northwest side.

Father Thomas Miller, CSB, one of 15

men who live at the residence adjacent to Aquinas Institute, said he was sitting indoors when the bomb went off. "I heard a big explosion, and looked out, but I never suspected that it was something right close by," he said.

Investigators have yet to establish a motive for the incident. Father John Ward, CSB, who is acting superior of the community in the absence of Father George Beaune, said he "hadn't the foggiest idea" why someone would set off the explosion, but speculated that it was probably a prank. He estimated the damage at \$300 to \$400.

Members of the community are not taking any additional precautions while the investigation is in progress. But Father Miller and others are more alert to the presence of strangers in the area.

"I personally am going to try and note the

age and description of anyone I see hanging around here," he said.

The Basilian Fathers have operated Aquinas Institute, a coeducational high school located on Dewey Avenue, since 1925.

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