

Central America reels from invasion, killings

By Bill Pritchard
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Central America continued to boil in the wake of the U.S. invasion of Panama, the killings of two nuns in Nicaragua, and the incrimination of the Salvadoran military in the murder of six Jesuits.

In a broadcast statement Jan. 7, Salvadoran President Alfredo Cristiani implicated Salvadoran soldiers in the Nov. 16 killing of the Jesuits, their cook and her teenage daughter at Central American University. Less than a week later, it was announced that the former head of Salvadoran military intelligence and seven other military men had been arrested in connection with the case.

In his broadcast statement, Cristiani said a special commission of military officers and civilian lawyers had been established "with the aim of determining the exact circumstances and clarifying the truth in all its magnitude" regarding the killings.

He said the government was "pledged to uncover the very last suspect in such a detestable crime."

In Rome Jan. 8, the Jesuit order welcomed Cristiani's statement.

"Yes, it does confirm our suspicions. Our people in El Salvador are pleased with the unexpected seriousness of the investigations," Father Johannes Gerhardt, spokesman at the Society of Jesus headquarters, told the British news agency Reuters.

On Jan. 12, various news reports said Col. Guillermo Alfredo Benavides, former head of military intelligence and director of the Salvadoran version of West Point, had

been confined to base pending the outcome of the investigations.

Although the head of the armed forces high command, Col. Rene-Emilio Ponce, denied the report, Cristiani announced Jan. 13 that Benavides, two lieutenants, a sub-lieutenant and four enlisted men had been arrested.

An arrest warrant also was issued for an army deserter who was still at large at the time.

While the probe of the Jesuit murders continued, a Salvadoran Lutheran cleric, who himself had been the subject of death threats, returned briefly to El Salvador following a self-imposed exile of nearly two months in Guatemala.

Bishop Medardo Gomez went home Jan. 6-7 to test the waters for his eventual return.

An outspoken critic of human-rights abuses by the government and right-wing organizations, Bishop Gomez fled El Salvador during a crackdown by authorities on several parishes and church workers during the mid-November rebel offensive in San Salvador and other towns.

Bishop Gomez, who was raised Catholic, has been compared with Archbishop Oscar Romero, who was assassinated in 1980 as he celebrated Mass in a hospital chapel. Archbishop Romero had been the bishop's boyhood parish priest and spoke against rights abuses.

In an interview with Catholic News Service earlier in the year, Bishop Gomez said he was honored by the comparison to Archbishop Romero, but added that "it also fills me with fear at the thought of the kind of death he had."

As Salvadorans sought to solve the Jesuit murders, Catholics in the United States and Nicaragua mourned the killing of two nuns — one American and one Nicaraguan — in an ambush blamed on U.S.-backed rebels.

Sisters Maureen Courtney, 45, and Teresa Rosales, 24, died Jan. 1 after unidentified gunmen fired on their two-car caravan with rocket-propelled grenades and automatic rifles.

Wisconsin-born Auxiliary Bishop Paul Schmitz, 46, of the Apostolic Vicariate of Bluefields, Nicaragua, was wounded in the attack.

Sister Courtney was buried Jan. 6 in Fond du Lac, Wis., the home of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Agnes — the order to which she and Sister Rosales belonged.

Archbishop Rembert G. Weakland of Milwaukee, main celebrant of the Jan. 5 funeral Mass, said of the nuns, "As we admire their zeal, we must now imitate it in our own lives."

Sister Rosales was buried Jan. 3 in her hometown of Puerto Cabazas, Nicaragua.

The Nicaraguan government blamed the



AP/Wide World

Following a Mass in Managua, nuns remove the coffin of Sister Maureen Courtney of Milwaukee, killed in a Jan. 1 attack by unidentified gunmen.

rebels for the killings. It was generally believed the attack was a case of mistaken identity.

In Washington Jan. 8, some 64 protesters, including nuns and priests, demonstrated in front of the White House against the killing of religious in Central American and demanded an end to U.S. military aid to El Salvador. Twenty-nine protesters were arrested after two priests poured what they said was human blood on a White House entrance.

No such outcry was raised by Panamanians living in the United States. They praised U.S. and Catholic Church roles,

and expressed relief that dictator Manuel Noriega surrendered to U.S. authorities.

Noriega's surrender came after a 10-day refuge in the Vatican nunciature in Panama City.

"The nightmare is over," Gabriel Lewis told Catholic News Service in a telephone interview Jan. 5. "We thank God and the church, which played a vital role in getting him to leave the nunciature. We now have to concentrate on the reconstruction of our country."

Lewis was Panama's ambassador to the United States in 1977-78.



Archbishop Arturo Rivera Damas prays over one of the eight people killed in San Salvador Nov. 16.

WINTER SALE
30% OFF

ALL SEASONAL MERCHANDISE
at
Rochester's Finest
Traditional Men's Store

Whillock Bros.
TRADITIONAL CLOTHIERS

235 Park Avenue
(Corner of Goodman)
461-2220
Mon.-Fri. 10-7; Sat. 10-6

CLIP & SAVE

**NOTRE DAME
RETREAT HOUSE**

Days of Prayer
1990 Schedule

January 23,	July 17,
February 19,	September 18,
March 22,	October 15,
April 9,	November 14,
May 14,	December 11,
June 12,	

For More Information
Call or Write:
(716) 394-5700
P.O. Box 342, Foster Rd.,
Canandaigua, NY 14424

Witness
one of the
most remarkable
events of the
20th century.

People's Stadium.
July 29, 1989.
Budapest, Hungary.
The Eastern bloc.
110,000 people.

Historic.
Unprecedented.
Be there.

**Billy Graham
in Hungary.**

A One-Hour Television Special.

SUNDAY 8:00P.M. CH 13