

ment was reached.²¹ In addition, the leaders of four major countries—Spain, Colombia, Mexico, and Venezuela—approached the United Nations for assistance in reaching a negotiated settlement to the war.

Second, the Salvadoran civil war was at a stalemate. Neither side had achieved a military victory under the prevailing political conditions, and it was unclear whether either side *could* achieve a victory in the foreseeable future. After a few initial meetings between the FMLN and government representatives in mid-1989, the process ground to a halt, and, in a context of increasing political violence, the FMLN launched a major offensive in November 1989. Although the group did not hold any city for more than a few weeks, it brought the war home to the wealthy neighborhoods of San Salvador, underscoring the inability of the Salvadoran military to contain the war. The assassination of six Jesuits and their two female employees by the Atlacatl Battalion, an elite unit of the Salvadoran armed forces, during the rebel offensive made further U.S. congressional support untenable in the absence of peace negotiations.²²

Negotiating a Settlement

Negotiations were possible because the FMLN's goals were sufficiently narrow. Each step made some progress on the key elements of the negotiation—democratic transition, end of repression, and land reform. The bargaining process took place in five major stages.

The first was the Geneva Agreement of April 1990, which became the cornerstone on which the negotiating process developed. The FMLN and the Salvadoran government agreed to begin a peace process whose outcome would be marked by the end of arm conflict, promotion of democracy, guarantee of human rights, and integration of FMLN combatants into civilian life. The agreement also created

²¹ Torres-Rivas (1997).

²² Teresa Whitfield, *Paying the Price: Ignacio Ellacuría and the Murdered Jesuits of El Salvador*, Philadelphia, Pa.: Temple University Press, 1994; Mark O. Hatfield, James Leach, and George Miller, *Bankrolling Failure: United States Policy in El Salvador and the Urgent Need for Reform: A Report to the Arms Control and Foreign Policy Caucus*, Washington, D.C., 1987.