



The British Parliamentary Human Rights Group Delegation to El Salvador
Lord Chitnis, Peter Bottomley M.P., Dennis Canavan M.P.



PRESS RELEASE

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HUMAN RIGHTS IN EL SALVADOR

A Report of a British Parliamentary Delegation in December 1978

"Day by day individual human rights - not only those of foreign businessmen who have been kidnapped or even killed by terrorist groups - but on a much larger scale of those who voice their disapproval of its policies are being drastically and systematically violated by the government of El Salvador." This is the conclusion of a report by a delegation sponsored by the British Parliamentary Human Rights Group which visited that country last December.

The members of the delegation were Lord Chitnis, Peter Bottomley MP (Conservative, Woolwich West) and Dennis Canavan MP (Labour, Stirlingshire West). During their visit they discussed the human rights situation in El Salvador with government ministers, representatives of political parties and trades unions, relatives of those who have been imprisoned, killed or who have 'disappeared', and with Archbishop Romero of San Salvador (who has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by 118 British Parliamentarians).

The delegation also talked to former detainees and to political prisoners held in two civil prisons. The report contains graphic first hand accounts of obscene torture and gross brutality.

The British Parliamentarians were also allowed, extraordinarily, to visit the headquarters of the National Guard where, they had been told, some of the worst excesses had taken place. There they found considerable evidence that torture indeed took place

and, despite efforts at concealment by the General in charge, the delegation uncovered a block of four cells, bare, without ventilation or light, too small for anyone to lie down in, in which prisoners had clearly been recently confined.

Those political prisoners which the government admits to detaining were generally held under a draconian Law of Public Order introduced in 1977. Since the delegation's visit, the repeal of this law has been announced. The delegation welcome this gesture. They hope that it may do something to alleviate the human rights situation in the country although the removal of this law from the statute books will not by itself end the intimidation, harassment, arbitrary arrest, torture and 'disappearances' widespread in El Salvador today.

However, the delegation sincerely hope that this concession can be the cue for the release by the terrorist group FARN of the four kidnapped businessmen they hold, including two British bankers, Ian Massie and Michael Chatterton, who have now been held for over three months.

The report contains a number of specific recommendations. The delegation urge the maintenance of the current embargo on British arms sales to El Salvador; the adoption of a new aid strategy by the Overseas Development Ministry to the country; that British companies, banks etc. involved in trade and investment in El Salvador should reassess their operations to ensure that they are not contributing directly or indirectly to the deprivation of human rights there. On an international level, the British government should raise the question of human rights in El Salvador at the United Nations; should press for the creation of a special UN agency to supervise elections; should vote against all loan requests from the Salvadorean government to international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and that British MP's should organise hearings in the European Parliament on the question of human rights in El Salvador.

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