War-displaced Salvadorans flock to cities, creating social upheaval

By SAM DILLON
Herald Staff Writer

SAN SALVADOR — Life, so serene and ordered when Maria Carmen Solez lived with her family on 28 gently sloping acres of corn and bananas, more or less fell apart when she fled the soldiers and the bombs for San Salvador three years ago.

A striking woman at 49, she is mother of four and matriarch to 19 others who huddle together in a three-room squatters' hut perched at the edge of a 60-foot precipice that drops to the new highway leading south out of San Salvador.

Solez and her family are penniless. City life lacks the grace she knew amid the planting and harvest cycle of northern Cuscatlan province. The fetching of water, gathering of firewood, washing of clothes, all have become, in city squalor, degrading and frustrating chores.

The eggs, beans and corn she sold to neighbors as a farmer's wife, she now begs as a ration from missionaries, waiting in line once a month with her tin pail and sacks.

The daily crises that Solez thinks of as personal trials are anything but personal; they have become a national phenomenon, life's common denominator for scores of thousands of Salvadorans.

Across town, in the glass-and-steel offices of U.S. and Salvadoran analysts, the arrival in the cities of thousands of former country dwellers is no longer viewed as a short-term aberration, but the violent, anarchic, wrenching and perhaps irreversible urbanization of what was until five years ago a society where 60 percent of the people lived in the country.

Grim future

Eighty-seven percent of the displaced were peasants before their forced flight, according to a recent Interior Ministry study. Nearly 90 percent have settled in or near urban areas, the study indicates.

The U.S. Embassy and the Planning and Interior ministries have drawn up plans to resettle thousands of those who have fled the countryside.

SAM DILLON / Miami Herald

Maria Carmen Solez stands outside squatters' huts where she and her family live.

The first step will be taken next year with a pilot project aimed at 800 families and financed with $3.2 million in U.S. funds, according to a U.S. Agency for International Development official.

Government officials and documents reveal deep concern with the problems. An Interior Ministry document lists the major "repercussions" of the war's forced migration: "dependency, vagrancy, crime, prostitution, frustration," and the appearance of what is termed "a marginally parasitic class."

The document recommends relocating an estimated 50,000 people to "those areas that constitute the outposts of the development and modernization of the country," which according to the document are areas in which irrigation, fishery, and reforestation projects can be developed.

The document recommends that emergency food rations, donated largely by the United States, and now distributed free to the displaced, be converted gradually into compensation for work on public projects.

Hinting at what could be a coercive cutoff of food rations to those who do not relocate, the plan estimates a 20 percent saving in rations [illegible] that percentage of the population "will decline" relocation and jobs.

Among other employment schemes, the plan recommends using the displaced as "a reserve labor force," available to private employers "at convenient terms" that could include partial payment with internationally donated food.

U.S. funds needed

U.S. officials said that AID's pilot project was planned before the Interior Ministry's efforts, but that the two projects would eventually be complementary.

Officials of the government of Jose Napoleon Duarte said they intend to invite Western European leaders to El Salvador early in 1985 to solicit non-U.S. funding for the resettlement plans.

But it appears that the United States remains the most likely donor of the estimated $53 million required for first two years of the plan.

An unwritten assumption in the official thinking about resettlement appears to be the gradual lessening of military hostilities, something by no means certain.

But in the squatters' camp that is home to Maria Solez, the arcane talk of resettlement and economic integration raises little hope.

Solez has watched two granddaughters die of dysentery in her cramped hovel; last week another boy lay feverish on a cot.

She rises at 4 a.m. to begin carrying water from a distant spigot and scrounging firewood 9 minutes' walk distant, past [illegible]

textile factory. Later comes the washing of clothes in the current of a river that wends its murky way through the city.

Her husband is gone, she doesn't know where. Her 25-year-old son has had two weeks of work this year. He he knows how to plant and harvest, but nothing of electronics, carpentry, bricklaying or the other jobs for which he continually applies.

Down a dirt track filled with the raw sewage that courses through the settlement, an 87-year-old man lies groaning in his hammock. Solez recalls four drunken men who have died on the highway below the settlement after careening over the precipice in a stupor.

The smell of marijuana wafts into the hut from a huddle of teen-age boys outside who idly shuffle and reshuffle a battered deck of cards.

Will Solez return to her home, one day? "That's what I want more than anything," she says. Oh dear Lord, let there be peace. Let them put this back together again."

U.S. triples refugee aid in Salvador

Some say assistance furthering war aims

By SAM DILLON
Herald Staff Writer

SAN SALVADOR — The United States has tripled its spending on refugees inside El Salvador in a new initiative that will send legions of U.S.-funded workers into the countryside to staff dozens of clinics and distribute hundreds of tons of emergency food each month.

The initiative, which will channel more than $120 million to private U.S. agencies through the U.S. Agency for International Development, will give the United States an unprecedented presence in humanitarian aid efforts that until now have largely fallen to Salvadoran government agencies.

AID officials say the program is a major policy shift aimed at attracting new expertise and diminishing the role of the Salvadoran agencies, which have been plagued by corruption and mismanagement.

But some relief workers have attacked the program as an effort to cloak the U.S.-backed anti-guerrilla campaign in a veil of neutral humanitarian assistance. One senior U.S. Catholic relief official, sent to El Salvador to assess the new program, called the AID effort "a highly political pacification program."

The top relief official for San Salvador's Catholic archdiocese, the Rev. Octavio Cruz, echoed that comment. "The U.S. aid always comes within the

Please turn to **AID**

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framework of their counterinsurgency policy," he said.

The new initiative, aimed at the estimated half-million Salvadorans driven from their homes by five years of war, will significantly boost the number of Americans working in the countryside, although the number of government AID employees is not expected to increase.

For months, AID officials have been actively recruiting numerous private U.S. agencies for new Salvadoran programs. One has already signed on, some have refused the U.S. funding and others say the political issues raised by the U.S. offers are making their decisions difficult.

Salvadoran relief work is risky. Rightists, who suspect many of the displaced of "subversive" ties, have kidnapped and assassinated relief workers, and guerrillas in the past have forced some aid workers to flee the country.

For protection, most private relief groups working here in the past have sought strict neutrality and have refused U.S. funding that would be considered normal in other parts of the world.

Some relief officials said they viewed the U.S. initiative as an effort to muscle in on humanitarian agencies already working here that have refused to accept U.S. funding or endorse U.S. objectives.

'Belligerents'

"Accepting money from AID is to accept money from one of the belligerents in the war," said Ana Eugenia Marin, San Salvador representative for Catholic Relief Services. "AID wants to be an octopus. They already manage the economy and the war. Now they want to control humanitarian work as well."

A senior U.S. AID official denied that the new effort has political motivations, saying that the new recruiting of private U.S. agencies partly stems from the Reagan administration's basic preference for private groups.

"You have to remember, this is a private sector administration," the official said. "We don't want to build big government bureaucracies."

The new program reflects many of the recommendations of a 228-page State Department study of internal refugees. One recommendation: "All humanitarian activities should be strictly separated from military and security actions, plans and programs."

But AID officials continue to cooperate closely with Salvadoran military officials in a Vietnam-style pacification project, dubbed the "National Plan." Involving resettlement of war refugees at the edge of rebel-held zones, it has foundered because of corruption and mismanagement by Salvadoran government officials.

Under the initiative, AID will spend $20 million a year for three years on programs to provide temporary jobs, health care, emergency food and limited resettlement to displaced Salvadorans, a senior AID official said. Since 1982, average annual expenditures for similar programs totalled just $6.2 million. An additional $60 million will come over three years in new food aid.

Selective aid?

Criticism of the initiative centers on what relief workers say are their suspicions that aid will be channeled only to government supporters in an effort to starve guerrilla zones while attracting peasants into government-controlled areas.

Project Hope, a Virginia-based agency, has already begun efforts to establish about 30 medical dispensaries in government-controlled rural zones, using an estimated $5 million in AID funds.

A senior AID official said Project Hope's ambitious health program had been aimed, "by design," at government supporters.

A nurse, interviewed for a senior job in El Salvador at Project Hope's high-security Ft. Royal, Va., headquarters, said her prospective employers described a "huge project" that would involve an estimated 900 health workers. All but a handful were to be Salvadorans, she said.

The Project Hope officials told the nurse that "they were definitely going in with the U.S. line, very much on the side of the U.S. government ... They said that we'd be going around in government helicopters for our safety."

AID officials said they knew of no arrangement to provide Project Hope with helicopter transport, although the private agency temporarily worked out of the U.S. Embassy upon arrival in El Salvador.

Project Hope's director, Croft Long, has refused to discuss his organization's activities since the project began Salvadoran work last summer.

300,000 people a month

AID officials said they also were negotiating with CARE, the largest private humanitarian aid agency in the world, to run a food distribution program AID officials hope will reach 300,000 people a month, the total population now reached by CONADES, the Salvadoran government food distribution agency.

CARE's assistant executive director, Beryl Levinger, said in a phone interview from the agency's New York offices that agreement with AID was still under discussion.

Levinger said a "major issue" in CARE's decision would be concern that "the politics of the situation would compromise the integrity of the program, so we end up servicing people who have less need rather than people who have more need but the wrong politics."

CONADES has been the target

Aid gives U.S. muscle in Salvador

of repeated corruption charges. Besides CARE, U.S. officials also hope to transfer some of the Salvadoran agency's food distribution responsibilities to Caritas, the humanitarian arm of the Salvadoran Catholic Church.

But a fact-finding trip to investigate an AID funding proposal earlier this year left Monsignor Roland Bordelon, the top Latin American relief official for the New York-based Catholic Relief Services, wary of the program's intent.

"No matter how much U.S. AID denies this, the plan is a highly political pacification program," Bordelon wrote in a memo after the visit. "The U.S. AID plan calls for CRS to become intimately involved" with CONADES and other Salvadoran government agencies which "have a very negative and questionable reputation," he wrote.

'Nothing but trouble'

"This can mean nothing but trouble," Bordelon wrote.

The Salvadoran bishops' conference refused another offer of U.S. funding for a church food distribution program in a September letter, saying it could bring "disastrous political implications" for the church.

The bishops said the church would, however, accept U.S. funding if it were channeled through Catholic Relief Services — a decision that set off bitter infighting within the latter organization's U.S. and Central American offices.

An AID official said last week that Caritas had accepted U.S. funding for a program to feed 30,000 displaced people. A Caritas official said no final decision had been made.

Two of the groups AID is courting, World Relief of Wheaton, Ill., and Socorro International of Costa Rica, would bring to El Salvador experience gained working with anti-Sandinista Nicaraguan refugees, the former in Honduras and Costa Rica.

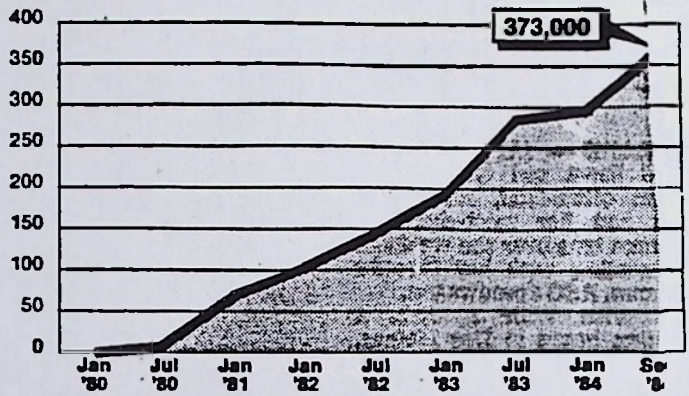
Dave Kornfield, World Relief's Latin American director, said in a phone interview that while he believed that AID officials were inviting new agencies for their expertise, he also saw a "cynical side" to the recruiting effort.

"That's to say they are looking for ways to use their funds, covered by humanitarian agencies, so that they can carry out their objectives under cover. That makes the humanitarian agencies a simple extension of their foreign policy," Kornfield said.

Two groups already active in El Salvador that are considering large-scale expansions of their programs with AID funding are Save the Children, a Connecticut-based group, and the Overseas Education Fund, a woman-owned agency founded by the League of Women Voters.

El Salvador's Displaced

(IN THOUSANDS)



Figures do not include 125,000 people fed by private organizations or 245,000 who have sought refuge in other Central American countries.

SOURCE: Salvadoran National Commission for Aid to the Displaced

Salvadorans began fleeing their homes in large numbers in early 1980 during the army's first sweeps against guerrillas in northern Chalatenango province. Doug Koessel, a U.S. priest, says that six to seven newly-displaced families arrive each week at his parish in the Pacific port of La Libertad.

They bring a change of clothes, perhaps, or a couple of battered pots and pans. Often, they get off the bus and just sit down in the street. Often, they are sick, Koessel said.

Since March, the number of displaced has grown by 70,000, according to official figures.

In Salvador, 'loving hand' has political strings attached

By SAM DILLON
Herald Staff Writer

SAN FRANCISCO GOTERA, El Salvador — Before July, the food distribution committees were nothing more than apolitical, locally elected councils that supervised the handing out of aid in the 12 teeming refugee settlements in this provincial capital at the edge of the civil war.

But within weeks of the Christian Democratic sweep of the national elections in May, the word had come down from the provincial governor's office — one by one, all over town, the councils were to be swept clean of all but the party faithful.

Most of the war-displaced peasants accepted the inevitable, but one camp, the San Jose camp, resisted, and for the next two months government deliveries of U.S.-donated food were halted. Not until the resistance collapsed and the governor swore in 12 Christian Democrats as the new camp council did the aid resume.

That is just one example of the intense struggle now being fought for the loyalties of El Salvador's 500,000 internal war refugees, nearly a quarter of whom have settled in this garrison town 104 miles east of San Salvador.

Hungry, depressed and desperate, the displaced throughout this country are being administered to — and, some sociologists contend, preyed upon — by a dizzying number of political and religious groups.

Foreign relief organizations, many of them with more political or religious fervor than food, have been showing up in Gotera's camps to pass out rice, discarded clothes — even deodorant — and to proselytize among the helpless.

The Christian Democrats want votes, sectarian missionaries want souls and U.S.-based rightist groups see a new battleground for an anti-Communist crusade.

"The loving hand, offering help, can be even more effective than bullets in deterring a Communist takeover," said Andrew Messing, the director of the National Defense Council, a private Virginia-based group recently active in Gotera.

Foreign relief workers with years among the tin-roofed shacks and the malnutrition say they are finding it increasingly difficult to mount politically neutral efforts among El Salvador's displaced. Segundo Montes, a sociologist at Catholic University now studying the displaced, told a San Salvador audience recently that the displaced had become "the object of political and ideological conquest."

Montes charged that groups ranging from the U.S. Agency for International Development to a series of religious sects now work to "soften the resistance" to their points of view through refugee work.

The displaced, mostly simple corn farmers who have been bombed, kidnapped, murdered and starved by the country's warring factions during the five-year civil conflict, often are cynical about politics in a country supposedly tasting the new wine of democracy.

The competition for the peasants' hearts and minds comes as army operations, bombings and guerrilla demands for collaboration have pushed the number of displaced to unprecedented levels. U.S. and Salvadoran officials estimate the total is at least 500,000 — more than 10 percent of the population.

Many displaced have fled rural villages attacked by the army for their guerrilla concentrations. Others have moved to government-controlled areas to avoid guerrilla conscription or labor projects.

Efforts to feed the displaced often have put aid workers at odds with both sides. One army commander here declared the entire north of Morazan province — an area of guerrilla control that is home to thousands of civilians — off limits to relief food deliveries. When Red Cross trucks got past the army roadblocks, hostile guerrillas often turned the food back, relief sources said.

Feeding the hungry without political discrimination has been a dangerous activity since four U.S. churchwomen involved in refugee work were murdered by National Guardsmen in 1980.

The Salvadoran Lutheran church, which distributes food and medicine throughout the country, has been especially hard hit. The church's top prelate, a church doctor, a church secretary and an accountant all have been seized by police, and, according to U.S. missionaries, tortured during interrogation about their relief activities.

Last month a Salvadoran Lutheran minister in eastern San Miguel province was seized; his ears and tongue were cut off and he was shot to death. Two soldiers have been arrested in connection with the killing.

"Anyone working with refugees is seen as suspect by the right," said a U.S. missionary.

Gotera, where Catholic missionaries pioneered the relief work, is one of the few cities where the displaced have willingly organized councils to direct food distribution in the five main camps and the seven neighborhood settlements.

In a warehouse in Gotera, a foreign missionary last week showed the remnants of several recent visits by foreign aid groups.

Stacked against a wall were 30 bags of rice from the National Defense Council. Next to the rice were boxes of shoes from the Massachusetts-based Milford Shoe Co., labeled as donations from Project Hope, a private group that recently began operating in El Salvador with about $5 million in U.S funding.

And stashed next to the shoes were 72 packages of Right Guard deodorant — solid stick. Donor unknown. "The people are starving, and they give them deodorant," the missionary muttered.