

Testimony of

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for the

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SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE

on

FOREIGN AID - LATIN AMERICA OVERSIGHT

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I testify today on behalf of the U.S. Catholic Conference (USCC), the public policy agency of the Catholic Bishops of the United States. The USCC is appreciative of the opportunity to appear again before a committee of the U.S. Congress to present its position on U.S. policy in Central America with special reference to El Salvador.

I. The U.S. Bishops and Central America Policy

The USCC has been a visible participant in the policy debate about Central America since the late 1970s. There are two complementary reasons which sustain the involvements of the Catholic Bishops in this complex question. First, precisely because the impact of U.S. policy is so significant to the life of nations and the lives of individuals in Central America, the bishops feel a specific pastoral responsibility to examine U.S. policy in light of human rights and issues of social justice. Second, the strong and specific bonds of faith, trust, friendship and communication which bind the Church in the United States to the Churches of Central America impel us to use our moral influence in the United States to shape U.S. policy in directions conducive to peace in Central America. Our bonds with the Central American Church are greatly enhanced by the presence of U.S. missionaries there; no fewer than eight of these priests, brothers and sisters have sealed our relationship with Central America with their own blood.

The scope of the USCC policy concern for the last seven years has encompassed the region of Central America. While this testimony focuses on El Salvador, our view is that the problem facing U.S. policy is regional in nature and must be addressed regionally.

II. The United States and Central America: The Present Moment

The present moment in Central America is both dangerous and delicate; it contains the potential of much greater suffering and destruction but it also holds out a slim possibility of rescuing the peace. The content of the present moment for U.S. policy is shaped by the character of the situation there and the nature of the policy debate going on here in these days.

The danger of the moment in Central America is the possibility of a regional war. Presently a series of specific conflicts fills the region (in El Salvador, on the Nicaraguan-Honduran border) but the danger of any of these conflicts spilling over borders to engulf the region is the great peril of the moment. Regional war would bring suffering and death, destruction and chaos of an entirely new dimension.

Paradoxically, intensifying danger has generated some possibility of a political breakthrough which could secure the peace. People recognize the peril of the moment and reconsider what they are willing to negotiate. Whether one examines the internal situation in El Salvador or the state

of U.S. - Nicaraguan relations, there are fragile but significant signs which a creative diplomatic initiative might use to transform the character of the conflict in Central America.

No single actor in the Central America drama has a greater capacity to shape its future direction than the United States. At the present time the dynamic of U.S. policy is not sensitive to the diplomatic potential of the moment. Indeed it is not difficult to make the case that the content of U.S. policy has contributed to the danger of regional war. The persistent theme of USCC congressional testimony over the past five years has been to stress the diplomatic potential the U.S. has in the Central American region if we are willing to work with other key actors. But realizing our diplomatic potential means placing the political resolution of the Central American conflict ahead of military objectives - it requires a diplomatic strategy in which the political perspective controls military measures. U.S. policy presently does not manifest this order of values; there is not a convincing daily demonstration of a primacy of concern for diplomatic initiatives aimed at a political resolution in the region. Too often U.S. policy, in its daily measures, seems fixated on military pressures, coercive moves and the role of threat and intimidation. Such a policy has little potential to grasp the

fragile possibilities for peace; it has great potential to reinforce the dangers of a regional war.

The Bipartisan Commission

The Congress is now evaluating the direction and content of U.S. policy in light of the recommendations of The Report of the President's National Bipartisan Commission on Central America ("The Kissinger Commission"). The Commission has served an important public function by focusing attention on Central America and the choices facing U.S. policy there. The Report's style of stressing the complexity of the region's multiple crises - political, economic, military - rather than reducing the problem immediately to its geopolitical element, is a welcome shift of official statement. From the beginning of our participation in the policy debate, the USCC has acknowledged a geopolitical dimension to Central America, while denying that a geopolitical definition of the question was adequate.

A full discussion of the Bipartisan Commission's Report is beyond the scope of our testimony. To evaluate The Report's short-term impact on policy, however, it is necessary to distinguish its inner logic from its separate elements. There are several distinct elements of The Report which can be judged on their own merits. The economic proposals are particularly interesting and, on the whole, deserve both

public support and congressional approval. These include the recommendations for an emergency stabilization program, the strengthening of the Central American Common Market, the proposals for increased U.S. bilateral economic assistance and the need for specific steps to address the debt problem and to provide new trade guarantees. While the economic package will have to be designed so that Central Americans control their own economic destiny, its elements are sound and in USCC's view should be supported.

One particular aspect of U.S. policy, not treated at length in The Report, which concerns the U.S. Bishops is the question of population policy. The Catholic Church recognizes that population issues are serious questions in many developing countries, not least in Central America. In 1967, Paul VI in his encyclical The Development of Peoples explicitly stated his conviction that governments needed to address population issues. It is imperative, however, that both governmental programs be carried out with respect for the well formed (and well informed) conscience of the individual and with respect-indeed reverence for - the religious and cultural values of a people and a nation. Any attempt - public or private - to impose undesired measures of population policy on a country any efforts to coerce individuals to participate in programs which they either do not understand or do not fully accept will be firmly opposed by the U.S. Bishops. Such

action is beyond the legitimate scope of governmental activity.

A crucial element in evaluating The Bipartisan Commission's Report is to distinguish its elements from its inner logic. While there are several specific elements which in the middle to long-term we find helpful, the inner logic of The Report reaffirms and intensifies the basic direction of a policy which stands in need of fundamental redirection. Redirection means the way in which the elements of U.S. policy are related in Central America. While the Report gives more weight to local and regional dimensions of the policy problem and does not starkly stress the geopolitical element, it still fails to set U.S. policy clearly in the direction of a diplomatic-political solution for the Central America region. Such a direction requires a primacy of the political in U.S. policy; such a direction would severely restrict and clearly subordinate military elements (including military assistance) to well defined political purposes; such a direction would acknowledge that even the valuable economic proposals in The Report cannot be implemented while civil war rages in El Salvador and a state of war marks the Nicaraguan-Honduran border. Redirection requires a U.S. option to pursue rapidly and principally a political-diplomatic role in Central America. The Kissinger Commission Report fails to set that direction. Its immediate impact is to reinforce and expand the present logic of U.S. policy. The USCC has found that logic

misdirected for four years; to reinforce it is to compound our mistakes.

The inescapable vehicle for redirecting our policy and bringing an end to the civil conflict in El Salvador is encompassed in the term "dialogue". Without a serious, sustained effort by the contending parties to engage in unconditioned talks, monitored and if necessary guaranteed by third parties, no truly political solution is possible.

I have indicated that the USCC takes with great seriousness the perspectives of the Central American Church. No other institutional voice in the region has a more authentic claim to reflect the true aspirations and views of those peoples.

The USCC has taken with particular seriousness the unanimity and clarity with which the Salvadoran and other Central American bishops have addressed the question of a non-military resolution of the present crisis. Since their views are inadequately understood and occasionally misrepresented in the U.S. public debate, it may be useful to highlight them here.

Salvadoran Bishops and the Dialogue

In July of 1982, after it had become evident that, as Archbishop Rivera put it, the March elections had changed nothing, the Salvadoran episcopal conference unanimously

called for a dialogue. Within weeks, Pope John Paul wrote to the bishops encouraging their efforts for peace and reconciliation and in his visit to El Salvador last March stressed the need for a sincere dialogue from which no one should be excluded.

In the CELAM meeting in Bogota last July bishops from episcopal conferences throughout all of Latin America issued "a call for mutual trust so that the way of dialogue and of the indispensable negotiations can be regained, and that they succeed in obtaining a solid and lasting peace, reconciliation among brothers, and the reconstruction of the social fabric of those countries".

The bishops went on to endorse, as has the Pope, "all the initiatives and efforts of neighboring and friendly countries, as well as of diplomatic groups working to help facilitate a worthy solution".

The following month, on August 17, the presidents of all the Central American episcopal conferences meeting in San Jose, Costa Rica deplored the frightening conditions in their countries, denounced the growing militarization and foreign interventions, and said: "We direct ourselves in the first place to those groups in contest in our countries to beg them in the name of God to end the violence and enter into an honorable and civilized dialogue".

The most recent expression of the bishops of El Salvador was their joint pastoral letter, "Called to Be Artisans of Peace", issued last month on February 2. It is a long and very rich document, important as a reflection not only of the hierarchy's thinking but that of a large sector of the Salvadorean people.

On the matter of the dialogue, the bishops have this to say: "With the Pope we have repeated our conviction that the true dialogue is not only the only possible solution but above all the only human and Christian one. We cannot accept an illusory peace built on the corpses of more Salvadorans... Once again we exhort those in armed combat to open themselves to the dialogue and stop the senseless shedding of Salvadoran blood".

These statements stand in ever sharper contrast with the present trend of U.S. policy.

III. U.S. Choices in Central America: The Future

The present moment in Central America and the policy debate in the United States converge to create a series of specific choices for U.S. policymakers. The deliberations and decisions of the U.S. Congress are a decisive element in making those choices. I will propose now USCC recommendations about specific policy choices.

EL SALVADOR: In 1980 the USCC came before the U.S. Congress to oppose the sending of \$5.4 million of "non-lethal" military assistance to the Government of El Salvador. Our position simply repeated the call of the late Archbishop Romero. In March of 1980 Archbishop Romero was assassinated for his vigorous defense of human rights; then in December four American women missionaries were brutally murdered because of their identification with the poor. Neither of these unspeakable crimes has been resolved, yet in 1984 the Congress is being asked to approve military assistance for Central America in the current and following fiscal years one hundred times greater than the 1980 request.

One year ago Archbishop James A. Hickey of Washington gave congressional testimony on Central America policy. He echoed the appeal of John Paul II and the Salvadoran Bishops in his recommendation for U.S. policy. Our policy, he said, should support three steps in El Salvador: dialogue, ceasefire and negotiations to end the war. The USCC reaffirms Archbishop Hickey's proposal today.

We are sure the political road is the only viable solution in El Salvador, because the basic problem is political with moral dimensions. It is the need for fundamental reforms in El Salvador to address the questions of justice long-denied and human rights long-abused for the vast majority of the population.

Because we are convinced of the need for a decisive political option, we cannot commend, indeed we must oppose, the substantial increases in military assistance being proposed to the Congress for FY 1984 and FY 1985. Such increases will not signal a policy in support of dialogue and negotiations, they will too easily communicate a conviction that the fighting need simply grind on in El Salvador or worse, escalate into a greater conflagration. Obviously the fighting is the product of two sides and both must be willing to negotiate. But the U.S. role can be crucial in catalyzing negotiations. How we decide to move can influence the decisions of others.

The USCC stands in support of human rights conditions for any military aid to El Salvador. To provide aid without conditions is to offer a blank check to the Salvadoran military precisely at the time when civilian control is a key issue in El Salvador. But human rights conditions are not a sufficient exercise of the congressional role at this critical moment. The USCC urges the Congress to take specific measures to prevent further militarization of U.S. policy. The Congress should prudently support economic aid, should contain explicitly the military dimension of U.S. policy

and should place all its weight on the side of redirecting the thrust of U.S. influence toward a rapid and thorough political resolution in El Salvador. U.S. policy should be vocally, visibly and single-mindedly directed toward bringing the fighting to an end and starting the political dialogue. Obviously much has happened since 1980 in El Salvador: human rights have been violated by the violent left and the murderous right; the fighting has escalated, fueled by outside support for all parties. Still it is necessary simply to specify how far down the military road U.S. policy has moved since 1980.

The USCC's purpose in 1980 was to argue against a U.S. military contribution to the conflict and to argue for a highly visible diplomatic engagement. We feared that even with the best of intentions, our military role would erode our political contribution. In 1984 we see our initial fears being fulfilled. The elements of U.S. policy are not being proportioned to enhance a diplomatic role. At this point in the conflict, some U.S. military assistance will undoubtedly be part of U.S. policy, but the question is how much, under what conditions and how the military and political dimensions of policy should be related. These are the choices before the Congress today.

NICARAGUA. The second most urgent policy issue to be addressed after a negotiated settlement of the Salvadoran conflict, and intimately linked to it, is the question of U.S. relations with Nicaragua. No regional diplomatic solution is possible without a change in the tenor and themes of U.S.-Nicaraguan relations.

The USCC is well aware of the many limitations of the present government and has on more than one occasion expressed strong opposition to policies or actions of that government. While acknowledging undeniable social advances in Nicaragua, particularly benefitting the poorest, we remain deeply concerned about admitted violations of human rights and excessive limitations on media, political and trade union freedoms. The Nicaraguan government's relations with the country's ethnic minorities, while not to be compared with the Guatemalan situation, remains gravely troubling. Nicaragua's foreign policy goals in the region are a source of concern to many. And, as Catholics, we have been especially offended by a series of events that constitute a pattern of harassment directed at bishops and other members of the clergy. That official policy is directly responsible in each of these cases can remain an open question; that the government has not taken sufficient steps to prevent or rectify certain actions cannot.

Nevertheless, while the U.S. can properly address itself to the policies of Nicaragua in the region and legitimately engage in the process of evaluating internal human rights performance, the present approach to doing so is seriously misguided and fundamentally flawed.

Instead of ameliorating tensions and seeking to influence through effective diplomacy, present U.S. policy is moving in a contrary, and increasingly dangerous, direction.

The USCC has made three specific policy recommendations regarding Nicaragua which we repeat today:

We oppose all covert aid to forces seeking by violence to overthrow the present government. Such aid corrupts our own standards of policy formulation and conduct and it provides convenient justification for further restrictions of freedoms within Nicaragua.

We favor resumption of significant bilateral economic assistance to Nicaragua conditioned, as in all such cases, to compliance with established human rights criteria.

And most importantly, we urge new efforts at political engagement, testing seriously the initiatives for negotiations offered by Nicaragua.

GUATEMALA. Changes in leadership in Guatemala last August, less than a year and a half after the previous military coup, have not evidenced significant improvements. Reports of major human rights abuses continue, hundreds of thousands of Guatemalans remain displaced from their homes or in exile, the negative side of such government programs as the creation of model villages and civil patrols continues dominant, and official harrassment, at times outright persecution, of the Catholic Church remains a feature of Guatemalan life. Another Catholic priest was murdered last November.

The USCC remains firmly opposed to any direct assistance to the military forces of that country, whether through military assistance programs (MAP), military education and training (IMET), foreign military sales credits (FMS) or encouragement of active Guatemalan participation in a revived Central American Defense Council (CONDECA).

HONDURAS. The constantly growing militarization of Honduras is one of the most tragic by-products of the regional crisis. We can only view with alarm the continued build-up of U.S. military assistance to and U.S. military presence in Honduras and the use of Honduran territory for armed incursions into Nicaragua. These provocative actions greatly threaten the precarious peace between these two nations.

The USCC repeats its often-stated concern for the well-being of the many persons who have sought refuge in Honduras. While commending the Honduran authorities and people for receiving these unfortunate victims of war and oppression in their own countries, we express renewed opposition to the forced re-location of many of them. As the Honduran Bishops said on January 20, they have already been uprooted, some more than once, and should not be forced against their will to move once again.

COSTA RICA. Still, fortunately, the democratic exception of Central America, Costa Rica is nevertheless saddled with an insupportable debt burden and experiences an economic crisis of major proportions. Combined international efforts to assist Costa Rica overcome this crisis are necessary. U.S. security assistance, however, does not seem appropriate at this time.

REFUGEES. The question of refugees cuts across all the country issues and requires renewed attention by our government. Contrary to an assumption that a negotiated settlement in El Salvador would increase the numbers of persons seeking unauthorized entry into the United States, we believe that peace and economic recovery in the region are the indispensable conditions for the U.S. to regain control over immigration flows.

Pastors and religious workers in this country have extensive contact with Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees here and are convinced of their desire to return home, conditions permitting.

The USCC remains opposed to the practice of forcibly repatriating undocumented persons from these countries seeking political refuge and strongly urges the provision of extended voluntary departure status for all such.

IV. Conclusion

The last few years have witnessed a new kind of bold assertiveness in the conduct of U.S. foreign policy, especially in this hemisphere. Some would describe it as aggressive, truculent,

even belligerent. It has obviously not been without its supporters among the American people, as we witnessed last Fall with the irvasion of Grenada.

But many aspects of the policy, especially with regard to Central America, continue to trouble, certainly to confuse large segments of our population. Our neighbors in the Americas, by all available accounts, appear to be even more concerned.

The United States has an essential role of leadership to play in the Americas but not an independently dominating one. We should demonstrate strength through forbearance and maturity in our relations with small countries whose policies we may well seek to influence. We should seek to influence through the politics of diplomacy rather than through intimidation, subversion or war. We should make real our essential partnership with the other American states, recognizing that they too have leadership roles to play in the hemisphere.

We believe that among the guiding principles that should inform future decisions regarding our policy in Central America are the following:

1. The overriding need of the moment is to prevent expansion of the present conflicts and to achieve peace in the region through the diplomatic process of dialogue and negotiations.

2. An active role for other American states, presently represented by the Group of Contadora, should be far more strongly encouraged and facilitated.

3. The international dimensions of the crisis should not be ignored but neither should they be exaggerated.

4. The human rights dimension of our policy should be brought constantly to the fore. Efforts to relate concern for human rights with the conduct of foreign policy reflect the finest principles of our society and are constantly to be encouraged.

5. Conversely, military aid to the countries of Central America should compose an exceptional, not routine and certainly not dominant element in our relationship with them. While some limited military aid may be a dimension of U.S. policy there, the amounts currently sought must be considered unacceptable.