

AMNESTY LAW STRAINS U.S.-SALVADOR RELATIONS

By ANNIE CABRERA
Associated Press

SAN SALVADOR — An amnesty law aimed at complying with the Central American peace plan has highlighted deep divisions in El Salvador and has strained the government's relations with the United States.

At home, the centrist government of President Jose Napoleon Duarte has been criticized by groups who object to freeing leftist guerrillas and by those who do not want to see anyone linked to rightist death squads go free.

In Washington, the State Department said that it was "appalled and outraged" by the release last month of two former National Guardsmen convicted of the 1981 slayings of two American labor advisers and the head of the Salvadoran land reform agency.

The amnesty took effect Nov. 5, and prisoners had 15 days to apply. Its stated objective was to benefit those still imprisoned for political crimes linked to the 8-year-old civil war, without any measure of ideology, affiliations or degree of militancy.

The amnesty also was intended to allow guerrillas fighting the U.S.-backed government to lay down their arms without risk of reprisals.

More than 400 prisoners were freed during the period, but only about one-third of them were on lists of the Committee of Political Prisoners, an organization with links to the leftist rebels fighting the government.

Some of the rest, according to a review of the cases by The Associated Press, were Salvadorans suspected of belonging to guerrilla ranks. Most, however, were soldiers or civil defense men in prison for common crimes, including charges related to hu-



President Duarte: His government is criticized.

man rights abuses.

No guerrilla of the leftist Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front turned himself in under the amnesty program.

60,000-plus dead

More than 60,000 people, mostly civilians, have been killed in the civil war.

Analysis

The presidents of El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica signed the peace plan Aug. 7. In addition to amnesties, the plan calls for cease-fires in the Nicaraguan, Guatemalan and Salvadoran conflicts and an end to any outside aid to insurgent forces.

The Reagan administration has criticized the extent of El Salvador's amnesty law, saying that people who committed terrorist crimes against American citizens should be punished.

On Friday, a judge rejected a petition for amnesty from three of

the five former guardsmen convicted of murdering four American churchwomen in December 1980. The judge decided that there was no political motivation for the crime.

But a different judge ruled that there were political reasons for the murder of the two American labor advisers, whom the AFL-CIO had sent to help the government in its controversial land reform program. The two former guardsmen convicted in that case were released in December.

The release had been delayed past the 15-day amnesty period because of appeals.

AFL-CIO angry

The AFL-CIO on Thursday asked the U.S. government to suspend military aid to El Salvador in response.

The United States provided \$116.5 million in military aid and \$300 million in nonmilitary assistance to the Salvadoran government last year.

State Department officials said last week that they will review a \$9 million aid program designed to improve El Salvador's judiciary, but they said they were not considering reducing military aid.

Duarte responded to critics by saying at a recent news conference: "Political prisoners no longer exist in the country. That ended because we released all of them and, although we have had negative reactions against it, we have had to pay the political price."

Armando Calderon Sol, chief of the ultra-rightist Republican Nationalist Alliance's delegation to the national assembly, described the law as "illogical and dangerous." He said it frustrates government troops and puts national security at risk.



Agence France-Presse

Costa Rican President Oscar Arias Sanchez, right, and Lt. Gen. Colin Powell, a U.S. national security adviser, discuss the Central American peace plan in San Jose last week.