

El Salvador's Archbishop Oscar Romero has been not only a critic of rightwing terrorists in his country, but of leftists who have occupied churches and buildings and taken hostages, as well. The archbishop has also been a critic of the armed forces and civilians in government positions who, he feels, yield to pressure from forces on both the right and the left and stall the implementation of needed reforms.

Violence in El Salvador threatens civil war which some fear will lead to an end of attempts at democratic changes by two successive juntas of young officers and civilian leaders. The current junta came to power after a coup last October.

On Jan. 30 this year, Archbishop Romero met with Pope John Paul. After their private audience, Romero said the pope supports efforts of the church to establish social justice by peaceful means. He said the pope told him: "I know well the conditions of your country, the difficulties of your pastoral task, and I pray every day for El Salvador. There must be a vigor-

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# Salvadoran Archbishop Asks Carter To End Military Aid

Archbishop Oscar Romero of San Salvador wrote a letter to President Jimmy Carter Feb. 17. The letter expressed great concern at news reports that the U.S. government is considering the possibility of giving military aid to El Salvador. Romero told the U.S. president that such a move would "without doubt sharpen the injustice and repression against the organizations of the people (of El Salvador) which repeatedly have been struggling to gain respect for their most fundamental human rights." It would be "unjust and deplorable," he said, if the intrusion by foreign powers were to frustrate the Salvadoran people by violating the right of "the legitimate self-determination of our people" proclaimed by the Latin American bishops during their 1979 general assembly in Puebla, Mexico. The text of Romero's letter follows.

In the last few days, news has appeared in the national press that worries me greatly. According to the reports your government is studying the possibility of economic and military support and assistance to the present junta government.

Because you are a Christian and because you have shown that you want to defend human rights, I venture to set forth for you my pastoral point of view concerning this news and to make a request.

I am very worried by the news that the government of the United States is studying a form of abetting the arming of El Salvador by sending military teams and advisors to "train three Salvadoran battalions in logistics, communications and intelligence." If this information from the newspapers is correct, the contribution of your government, instead of promoting greater justice and peace in El Salvador, will without doubt sharpen the injustice and repression against the organizations of the people who repeatedly have been struggling to gain respect for their most fundamental human rights.

The present junta government and above all the armed forces and security forces unfortunately have not demonstrated their capacity to resolve, in political and structural practice, the grave national problems. In general they have only reverted to repressive violence, producing a total of deaths and injuries much greater than in the recent military regimes whose systematic violation of

human rights was denounced by the Inter-American Committee on Human Rights.

The brutal form in which the security forces recently attacked and assassinated the occupiers of the headquarters of the Christian Democratic Party in spite of what appears to be the lack of authorization for this operation from the junta government and the party is an indication that the junta and the party do not govern the country, but that political power is in the hands of the unscrupulous military who only know how to repress the people and promote the interests of the Salvadoran oligarchy.

"As archbishop of the Archdiocese of San Salvador I have an obligation to see that faith and justice reign in my country, (so) I ask you, if you truly want to defend human rights, to prohibit the giving of this military aid to the Salvadoran government."

If it is true that last November "a group of six Americans were in El Salvador...providing \$200,000 in gas masks and flak jackets and instructing about their use against demonstrators," you yourself should be informed that it is evident since then that the security forces, with better personal protection and efficiency, have repressed the people even more violently using lethal weapons.

For this reason, given that as a Salvadoran and as archbishop of the Archdiocese of San Salvador I have an obligation to see that faith and justice reign in my country, I ask you, if you truly want to defend human rights, to prohibit the giving of this military aid to the Salvadoran government. Guarantee that your government will not intervene directly or indirectly with military, economic, diplomatic or other pressures to determine the destiny of the Salvadoran people.

In these moments we are living through a grave economic and political crisis in our country, but it is certain that it is increasingly



the people who are awakening and organizing and have begun to prepare themselves to manage and be responsible for the future of El Salvador. Only they are capable of overcoming the crisis.

It would be unjust and deplorable if the intrusion of foreign powers were to frustrate the Salvadoran people, were to repress them and block their autonomous decisions about the economic and political path that our country ought to follow. It would violate a right which

we Latin American bishops meeting in Puebla publicly recognized when we said: "The legitimate self-determination of our people that permits them to organize according to their own genius and the march of their history and to cooperate in a new international order."

I hope that your religious sentiments and your feelings for the defense of human rights will move you to accept my petition, avoiding by this action worse bloodshed in this suffering country. ☐