

## Romero's Letter to President Carter

February 17th, 2005 marked the 25th anniversary of Archbishop Oscar Romero's letter to President Jimmy Carter asking him not to send military aid to El Salvador. Five weeks later Romero was assassinated. Two days following Romero's funeral, the U.S. House Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations approved Carter's request for "non lethal" military aid to El Salvador. This letter still resonates today as the "Salvador Option" is considered as a strategy in Iraq.

San Salvador  
February 17, 1980

His Excellency  
The President of the United States  
Mr. Jimmy Carter

Dear Mr. President:

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 government junta.

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 in regard to this news and to make a specific request of you.

I am very concerned by the news that the government of the United States is planning to further El Salvador's arms race by sending military equipment and advisors to "train three Salvadoran battallions in logistics, communications, and intelligence." If this information from the papers is correct, instead of favoring greater justice and peace in El Salvador, your government's contribution will undoubtedly sharpen the injustice and the repression inflicted on the organized people, whose struggle has often been for respect for their most basic human rights.

The present government junta and, especially, the armed forces and security forces have unfortunately not demonstrated their capacity to resolve in practice the nation's serious political and structural problems. For the most part, they have resorted to repressive violence, producing a total of deaths and injuries much greater than under the previous military regime, whose systematic violation of huamn rights was reported by the Inter-American Commission on Huamn Rights.

The brutal form in which the security forces recently evicted and murdered the occupiers of the headquarters of the Christian Democratic Party, even though the junta and the party apparently did not authorize the operation, is an indication that the junta and the Christian Democrats do not govern the country, but that political power is in the hands of

unscrupulous military officers who know only how to repress the people and favor the interests of the Salvadoran oligarchy.

If it is true that last November a “group of six Americans was in El Salvador...providing \$200,000 in gas masks and flak jackets and teaching how to use them against demonstrators,” you ought to be informed that it is evident that since the security forces, with increased personal protection and efficiency, have even more violently repressed the people, using deadly weapons.

For this reason, given that as a Salvadoran and 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 forbid that military aid be given to the Salvadoran government;
- to guarantee that your government will not intervene directly or indirectly, with military, economic, diplomatic, or other pressures, in determining 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 increasingly the people are awakening and organizing and have begun to prepare themselves to manage and be responsible for the future of El Salvador, as the only ones capable of overcoming the crisis.

It would be unjust and deplorable for foreign powers to intervene and frustrate the Salvadoran people, to repress them and keep them from deciding autonomously the economic and political course that our nation should follow. It would be to violate a right that the Latin American bishops, meeting at Puebla, recognized publicly when we spoke of “the legitimate self-determination of our peoples, which allows them to organize according to their own spirit and the course of their history and to cooperate in a new international order” (Puebla, 505).

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

Sincerely,

Oscar A. Romero  
Archbishop