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CENTRAL AMERICA
Conditions of Refugees
and Displaced Persons





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**National Security and
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Chairman, Subcommittee on Immigration
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Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate

The Honorable Romano L. Mazzoli
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Committee on Rules
House of Representatives

This report provides information on the conditions of Salvadoran and Nicaraguan refugees and displaced persons in Honduras, El Salvador, and Costa Rica. We obtained this information because of the interest expressed by your Committees regarding Central American refugees and displaced persons.

Copies of this report are being sent to the Secretary of State, the Administrator of AID, the U.S. Coordinator for Refugee Affairs, the Commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, and other interested parties.

This report was prepared under the direction of Nancy Kingsbury, Director for Foreign Economic Assistance Issues. Other major contributors are listed in appendix I.

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Executive Summary

Purpose

There are an estimated 600,000 to 800,000 Salvadorans and between 150,000 and 200,000 Nicaraguans in the United States illegally. The debate about the status of these illegal immigrants is influenced by concern about the status of refugees and displaced persons in the affected countries of Central America. The purpose of this report is to provide the Congress information to assist in its consideration of U.S. immigration laws and foreign policy for Central America. The information includes: (1) the number of refugees and displaced persons and their current location in Central America; (2) their places of origin and how long they have been displaced; (3) their living conditions, personal safety, and access to food and medical assistance; (4) a description of programs administered by U.N. agencies, private voluntary organizations, and host countries to provide basic human services to the displaced; and (5) the number of repatriations and prospects for future repatriations.

Background

The Congress has been asked to consider whether specific dispensation from deportation should be provided to Salvadoran and Nicaraguan illegal aliens because of alleged human rights abuses in their countries of origin. Legislation has been proposed during the last three sessions of Congress, asking GAO to examine refugee conditions in the region. Resolving the issue of refugees and their treatment is included in the Esquipulas II agreements of the Central American presidents as a part of their effort to end the conflict in Central America.

Results in Brief

There are about 28,000 refugees from El Salvador and 48,000 from Nicaragua who are living in neighboring Central American countries and over 200,000 Salvadorans who have been displaced within their own country. These numbers are about half what they were in 1986 because some refugees and displaced persons have resettled and repatriated. Living conditions varied among different groups of refugees and displaced persons. For example, Nicaraguan refugees in Costa Rica had much better living conditions than Salvadorans displaced within their own country.

Principal Findings

GAO found that refugees registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees have access to food, education, and health care. There are large numbers of refugees not registered with the United Nations who are not taking advantage of or receiving services. Complaints regarding United Nations services dealt with health and security

issues. International observers believe that treatment of refugees has improved over prior years.

Living conditions at the refugee camps varied. The camps in Costa Rica have running water and electricity and most buildings in the camps have cement floors. Refugee camps in Honduras and displaced persons sites in El Salvador do not have electricity or running water and the building floors are hard-packed dirt. Overcrowding was evident at the sites in El Salvador. These conditions are exemplified in a video briefing which GAO provided to congressional staff and other interested parties in October 1988.

The majority of registered Nicaraguan refugees are in Honduras and Costa Rica. This does not include those affiliated with the "Contras." Except for the refugees of Indian origin, the refugees interviewed by GAO stated that they would not return to Nicaragua unless there was a change in government.

United Nations registered refugees from El Salvador are primarily located in Honduras. Individuals who fled the conflict in El Salvador are considered to be sympathetic to the insurgency. Refugees are repatriating from one of the major camps in Honduras but not from the other. The reasons for this are uncertain. Mass repatriations began in October 1987 and were directly initiated by the refugees. The concerns expressed by refugees and those repatriating have dealt with security and health matters. United Nations officials told GAO that, because of disagreements between the Salvadoran refugees in Honduras and the international organization providing medical services, the latter will withdraw its assistance by 1989.

Repatriations of some Salvadorans and Nicaraguan Indians are occurring; however, the conditions in the home countries that caused them to leave still persist. Because many refugees have fled conflict situations or political persecution, they are reluctant to return to their homes until the strife has ended and their civil rights and personal safety can be assured. Repatriations will be more likely if economic situations in the refugees' home countries improve, land for resettlement is available, and unrest and hostilities subside.

In addition to creating refugees, the conflict in El Salvador has resulted in a large number of Salvadorans being displaced from their homes. Many of these people do not receive government assistance and do not have full access to basic education and health programs.

Recommendations

GAO's report provides information on the living conditions of Central American refugees and displaced persons. It makes no recommendations.

Agency Comments

GAO did not seek formal comments on its report but did receive informal comments from officials in Washington, Honduras, and Costa Rica in order to verify the accuracy of the data contained in the report.

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Abbreviations

| | |
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| AID | U.S. Agency for International Development |
| FMLN | Farabundo Marti Front for National Liberation |
| GAO | U.S. General Accounting Office |
| PVO | Private Voluntary Organization |
| UNHCR | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees |

Introduction

Civil strife and related economic hardships in Central America have generated substantial flows of displaced persons and refugees. Military actions to depopulate hostile areas, to keep civilians out of danger, and/or deprive guerrilla forces of local resident support have also displaced some Central Americans.

Many persons have relocated to less turbulent areas within their country (displaced persons) and many have fled to neighboring countries (refugees). About 120,000 refugees have registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and are receiving assistance.¹ The number of refugees not registered with the UNHCR and thus not receiving assistance is thought by international observers to be several times greater than the number of registered refugees.

The countries of El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala are the primary countries that have generated displaced and refugee populations. Refugee groups in Central America include Indian and non-Indian Nicaraguans (known as Ladinos) who have sought refuge primarily in Honduras and Costa Rica, Salvadoran refugees living in Honduras, and Guatemalan refugees living in Mexico. Table 1.1 shows the number of UNHCR-assisted refugees from El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala, and the host countries in Central America and Mexico that provide them with temporary homes.

Table 1.1: Number of Refugees Receiving UNHCR Assistance, as of August 1988

| Host country | Country of origin | | |
|--------------|---------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| | Nicaragua | El Salvador | Guatemala |
| Honduras | 22,933 | 14,025 | 427 |
| Costa Rica | 22,171 ^a | 3,926 ^a | |
| Mexico | 110 | 3,610 | 41,986 |
| Belize | 21 | 3,995 | 1,112 |
| Nicaragua | | 1,140 | 60 |
| Panama | 210 | 759 | |
| Guatemala | 2,172 | 604 | |
| El Salvador | 300 | | |
| Total | 47,917 | 28,059 | 43,585 |

^aFigures for Costa Rica are as of September 1988.

¹The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was created in 1951 to protect refugees against forcible return to the countries from which they fled; to ensure their human rights; and to provide emergency relief. UNHCR provides refugees with basic food rations, health services, shelter, sanitation and water facilities, as well as primary and adult education.

Except for recent movements of families and supporters of the Nicaraguan resistance or "Contras" into Honduras, the number of refugees in Central America has stabilized in recent years. However, changes in the political, social, or economic climates in Central American countries could result in future refugee movements. Recently, for example, at least 300 refugees moved from Nicaragua to Costa Rica when they lost their homes during the hurricane which struck Nicaragua in October 1988.

Countries in the region have a tradition of assisting refugees, but there is a consensus among the host countries that they cannot support additional refugees. Costa Rica and Honduras, major asylum countries in Central America, cite refugees as health, economic, and potential political and security threats. Because of these concerns, emphasis is being placed on voluntary repatriation of refugees. Repatriations will be more likely if economic situations in the refugees' home countries improve, land for resettlement is available, and unrest and hostilities subside. Because many refugees have fled conflict situations or political persecution, they cannot be induced to return to their homes until strife has ended and their civil rights and personal safety can be assured.

Proposed Legislation

Legislation to suspend deportation of Salvadorans from the United States has been introduced in the last three sessions of the Congress. In 1983, bills were introduced in both the House (H.R. 4447) and the Senate (S. 2131), but neither reached the floor. In 1985, two bills (H.R. 822 and S. 377) were introduced to suspend detention and deportation for certain Salvadorans until we had studied and congressional committees had reported on the conditions of displaced Salvadorans. Neither reached the floor. Similar legislation (H.R. 618 and S. 332) introduced in 1987 was amended by the Senate Judiciary Committee to, among other things, require us to study conditions of displaced Nicaraguans as well as Salvadorans. This legislation was passed by the House, but did not reach a Senate vote.

Prior GAO Reports

We have issued two related reports: Central American Refugees: Regional Conditions and Prospects and Potential Impact on the United States, (GAO/NSIAD-84-106, July 20, 1984), which discusses (1) the policies and extent of assistance given to Central American refugees by the UNHCR, (2) refugees' living conditions and prospects in asylum countries, (3) U.S. and asylum government policies toward refugees, and (4) future migration of Central American refugees to the United States and the

potential impact; and, Illegal Aliens: Extent of Problems Experienced by Returned Salvadorans Not Determinable, (GAO/NSIAD-87-158BR, May 1987), which discusses (1) the extent to which deported Salvadorans have experienced violations of fundamental human rights, or were targeted for violence or persecution upon their return, and (2) the reliability and use made of reports by the Inter-governmental Committee for Migration on its reception program for returning Salvadorans. We concluded that human rights abuses in El Salvador were occurring but with less frequency and intensity than in prior years. Because of limitations in data collected by organizations monitoring human rights abuses, we could not determine whether Salvadoran returnees, as a group, have experienced more violence than the general population.

Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

Because of congressional interest in refugees and displaced Central Americans, we obtained information on: (1) the number of refugees and displaced persons and their current location; (2) their places of origin and how long they have been displaced; (3) their living conditions, personal safety, and access to food and medical assistance; and (4) programs administered by United Nations agencies, private voluntary organizations and the host countries to provide basic human services to the displaced. We also gathered information on the numbers of individuals who have repatriated and prospects for future repatriations. Our objective was to obtain and summarize information on refugees and displaced persons. We did not attempt to evaluate assistance programs or to develop solutions to the complex underlying social, economic, and political problems, nor to assess the accuracy of allegations concerning the conditions that were described to us.

To obtain field perspectives, we asked each U.S. embassy in the region to describe the conditions of refugees and other displaced persons. In addition, we conducted field work in El Salvador, a refugee generating country, and Honduras and Costa Rica, two of the primary countries of asylum for Salvadoran and Nicaraguan refugees, where we interviewed U.S. embassy officials responsible for refugee and displaced persons matters, and reviewed trip reports and other documentation. We also interviewed host country officials responsible for establishing refugee policies and/or monitoring and coordinating refugee activities.

We visited nine refugee camps² and eight displaced persons sites³ to observe the living conditions first hand. During those visits we interviewed personnel from U.S., international, and private assistance agencies. Where practicable, we also interviewed refugees and displaced Central Americans, either individually or by meeting with camp representatives. The camps were chosen based on population, accessibility, and the degree of controversy reflected in the Department of State reports; for example, concerning access to food and medical assistance and security issues.

We interviewed officials and obtained data from the Department of State, AID, UNHCR, and the Organization of American States. We also interviewed representatives of private organizations that provide assistance or have studied Central American refugee conditions, including Catholic Relief Services, the Catholic Conference of the United States, the Intergovernmental Committee for Migration, the International Committee of the Red Cross, Amnesty International, America's Watch, the Refugee Policy Group, and the International Rescue Committee.

Because many Guatemalans, as well as Salvadorans and Nicaraguans, have been displaced or have become refugees, we also obtained information on their situations. However, we did not perform fieldwork in Guatemala or in Mexico where many Guatemalan refugees live. Information on Guatemalan refugees and displaced persons will be included in a separate report. We did not do field work in Nicaragua. As a result, we obtained limited data on displaced persons within Nicaragua and government attitudes and programs for those Nicaraguans who have repatriated. We did not visit sites in Belize or Panama because relatively few refugees have temporarily located there.

We conducted this review from March to October 1988 and performed fieldwork in Central America during June and July, 1988. Our work was conducted in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

²Seven refugee camps visited were in Honduras: Colomoncaqua, Mesa Grande, El Tesoro, Las Vegas, Las Hortalizas, Guasimos - La Pollera, and Mocoron. Two camps, Tilaran and Achiote, were in Costa Rica.

³The eight displaced persons sites visited in El Salvador were: Zacatecoluca, Suchitoto, Inchanqueso, Guarjila/Guarjilita, Moncagua, Havial, La Esperanza, and Chalatenango.

The following chapters provide information on Nicaraguan refugees in Honduras and Costa Rica, El Salvadoran refugees in Honduras, and displaced persons within El Salvador. Visual records of our visits to refugee camps and displaced persons settlements in Costa Rica, Honduras, and El Salvador are summarized in a video briefing, Central American Refugees, which was provided to congressional staff and other interested parties in October 1988.

Refugees From Nicaragua

About 45,000 Nicaraguan refugees registered with UNHCR were living in Honduras and Costa Rica, as of August 1988; however, estimates of the number of undocumented Nicaraguans in these countries varies. The State Department 1988 Refugee Report presents estimates from three sources, ranging from 75,000 to 200,000 unregistered Nicaraguans in Honduras; of these, 7,000 to 10,000 are Indians from the Atlantic Coast. State and UNHCR officials estimate that between 60,000 and 75,000 undocumented Nicaraguans live in Costa Rica; Costa Rican government sources, however, suggest numbers as high as 250,000. Small populations of Nicaraguan refugees, totaling less than 3,000, also live in El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Belize, and Panama.

About half of the registered Nicaraguan refugees in Honduras are tribal Indians from the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua. The other half, called Ladinos, are of mixed race, with Hispanic cultural orientation. Most Nicaraguan refugees in Costa Rica are Ladinos.

Numbers and Locations of Refugees

About 22,000 registered Nicaraguan refugees in Costa Rica receive assistance from UNHCR. (See table 2.1.) The majority of these refugees are dispersed among Costa Rican urban populations, but some live in rural camps.

Table 2.1: Registered Nicaraguan Refugees in Costa Rica, as of September 1988

| Camp | Population |
|--|---------------|
| Tilaran | 2,622 |
| Achiote | 1,650 |
| Alvaperal | 2,003 |
| Limon | 740 |
| Boca Arenal | 642 |
| Playa Blanca | 287 |
| Refugees in Camps | 7,944 |
| Refugees living among local population | 14,227 |
| Total | 22,171 |

The UNHCR camps for Nicaraguan refugees in Costa Rica are located in four provinces. The largest camp, Tilaran, is in Guanacaste Province bordering Nicaragua. Alvaperal and Boca Arenal are in Alajuela Province. Achiote and Playa Blanca are located in Punta Arenas Province. Limon, a camp primarily for Indian refugees from Nicaragua's Atlantic coast, is located in the Province of Limon. (See fig. 2.1.)

Figure 2.1: Map of Costa Rica



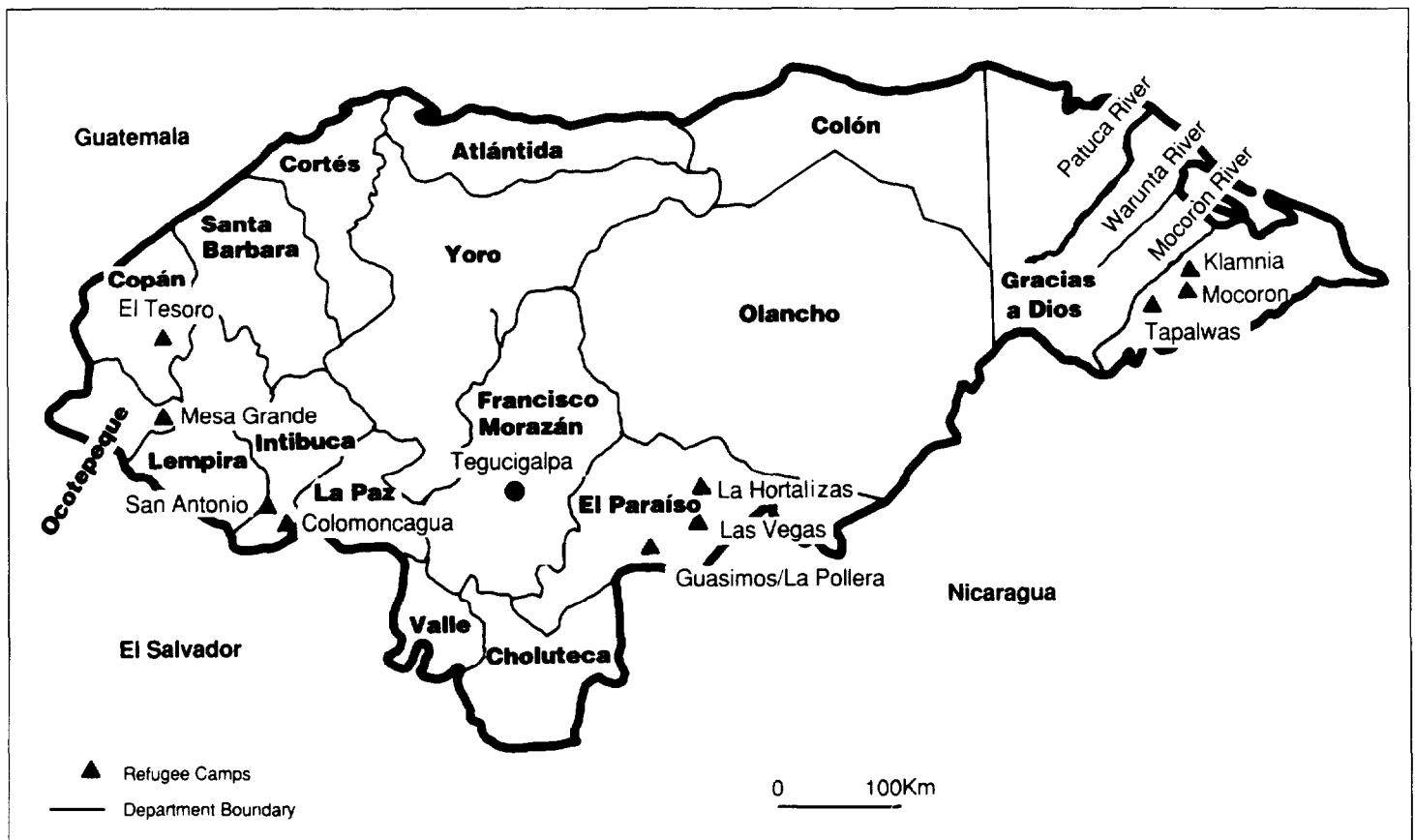
The three camps for Nicaraguan Ladino refugees in Honduras are located in the Honduran Department of El Paraiso. (See fig. 2.2.) Guasimos/La Pollera is located about 25 miles north of the Nicaraguan border. The two other camps are over 40 miles from the border. Table 2.2 shows the Nicaraguan Ladino refugee camp populations in Honduras.

Table 2.2: Registered Nicaraguan Ladino Refugees in Honduras, as of October 1988

| Camp | Population |
|---------------------|---------------|
| Guasimos/La Pollera | 5,971 |
| Las Hortalizas | 4,290 |
| Las Vegas | 3,147 |
| Total | 13,408 |

Approximately 9,500 UNHCR-assisted Nicaraguan Indian refugees live in over 22 settlements in the Mosquitia region of Northeast Honduras. Another 7,000 to 10,000 Indian refugees live along the river border with Nicaragua but do not receive UNHCR assistance; UNHCR only assists those refugees who have moved well away from the border. Most of the UNHCR-assisted Indian refugees live in three zones along the Patuca, Warunta, and Mocerón Rivers. The largest settlement is called Mocerón. (See fig. 2.2.)

Figure 2.2: Map of Honduras



Origin of the Refugees

During the war against the Somoza regime in 1979, migrant Nicaraguans working in Costa Rica chose to remain there. Nicaraguan urban professionals opposing the Sandinista government also sought refuge in Costa Rica after the revolution. The government of Costa Rica provided assistance to most of these refugees, with UNHCR support. As political and economic problems in Nicaragua intensified, growing numbers of rural Nicaraguans crossed the border into Costa Rica. In March 1983, the Costa Rican government established a transit center in Tilaran to process arriving Nicaraguans. Subsequently, the government, with UNHCR support, established a system of reception and transit centers and rural camps to aid these refugees.

The first group of Nicaraguan Ladinos to receive UNHCR assistance in Honduras arrived in March 1982. Most were peasant farmers from the northern provinces of Nicaragua, forced off their lands by Sandinista authorities for their alleged anti-Sandinista sentiments. Beginning in 1985, a more diverse group of urban semiprofessionals and young men seeking to avoid Sandinista military service began arriving in UNHCR camps in Honduras. Increasing numbers of relatives and supporters of Nicaraguan Resistance forces living along the border between Honduras and Nicaragua have also entered UNHCR camps, particularly in 1988 as border conditions deteriorated.

About 1,500 Indian refugees fled their homes on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua in 1981 in response to Sandinista-forced relocation to distant areas within Nicaragua, religious persecution, alteration of traditional land and social administration, and/or armed attack. Larger numbers of refugees arrived during early 1982, when the Indian refugee population grew to 10,000. The peak Indian refugee population was over 20,000 in 1986.

Ladino Refugee Living Conditions, Safety, Access to Food and Health Care

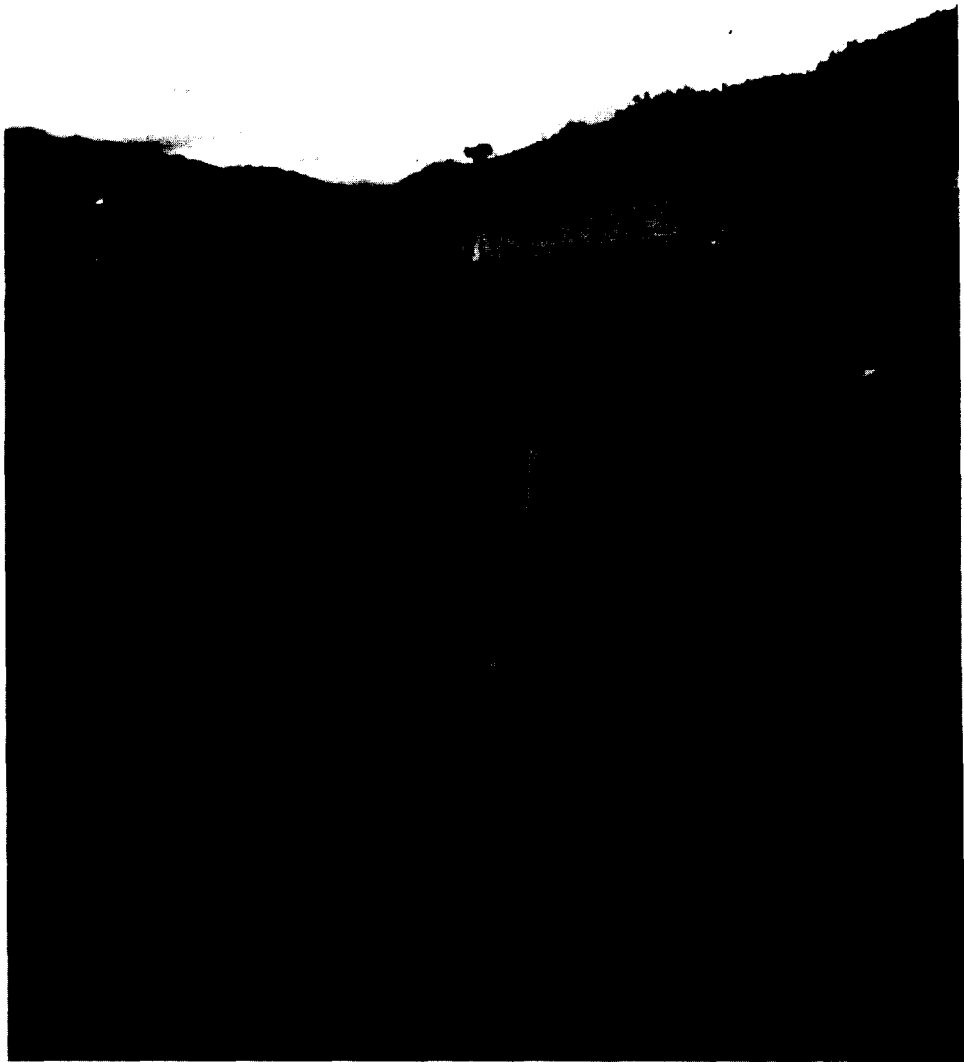
Living standards in the Ladino refugee camps in Honduras and Costa Rica are prescribed by UNHCR to be comparable to conditions of the local rural population near the camps. The Nicaraguan Ladino camps consist of large, single sites surrounded by barbed wire fences about four feet high. Refugee families live in wood structures built close together. Some-what larger and better structures, located near the main living areas of each camp, house community centers, churches, schools, and clinics. (See fig. 2.3.)

Figure 2.3: Nicaraguan Ladino Refugee Camp in Honduras, Called Guasimos-La Pollera



Figure 2.4 shows Nicaraguan refugees' living quarters which are built of wood planks with corrugated tin roofs. These structures are set in rows or blocks of various sizes, and subdivided into single rooms for individual families. Up to 10 family members may share a single room of about 100 square feet. Individual families are provided wood-burning stoves for cooking; the latrines are about 20 yards from the living areas. Most buildings in the camps in Costa Rica have cement floors; in Honduras, the floors are hard-packed dirt.

Figure 2.4: Nicaraguan Refugee Housing
at the Las Hortalizas Camp in Honduras



The camps in Costa Rica have running water and electricity. The camps in Honduras do not have electricity and camp water comes from wells and stored rainwater. Due to drought conditions, the UNHCR has recently begun to ration water brought to the camps by truck. Some refugees at these camps obtain additional water from nearby towns.

Each camp maintains common facilities to raise livestock, such as chickens and pigs, to provide some of the basic protein requirements. Camps in Costa Rica have a greater variety of livestock. Many families privately raise animals, and UNHCR also provides them plots of land for growing vegetables.

Private voluntary organizations (PVOs), under contract with UNHCR, operate workshops in each camp, such as tinsmith, cobbler, and carpentry. Refugees work in these shops without pay, thereby decreasing camp costs by providing for some of their own basic needs. The workshops also provide specialized skill training. In Honduras, the workshop system has faced labor shortages because refugees can earn wages by working part-time outside the camps. To retain workers, the PVOs have given combs, toothpaste, or other incentives to the unpaid refugee workshop staff.

The social organization within the Nicaraguan Ladino camps is not regimented. A committee of coordinators, elected from neighboring blocks or rows in each camp, serves as a conduit for information between the refugees and the outside. Elections for the coordinator positions are held periodically. According to UNHCR officials, these positions have little authority and are not coveted by the refugees.

Access to Food

Refugees in Costa Rica did not mention any problems with access to food. The refugees in Honduras, however, complained about limited food rations and camp food distribution systems. Some refugees said that the rations were insufficient to maintain a proper diet. UNHCR officials stated that the rations provided to refugees were consistent with World Health Organization standards. Some refugees complained that friends or relatives of distribution coordinators receive better rations than other refugees. The distribution coordinators acknowledged that abuses in food distribution had occurred, but were isolated cases. They explained that they are elected by the community, and that if the community is dissatisfied with their work they can be replaced. They also noted that any refugee can volunteer to work on the distribution committees and participate in allocating food supplies.

Access to Medical Care

Nicaraguan refugees in Costa Rica have access to the public health care system used by Costa Rican citizens. The Ministry of Health also operates health clinics in the camps staffed by government medical personnel. At least one physician is available at each camp to administer preventive and curative medical services to the refugees.

Health services for the Nicaraguan refugee camps in Honduras are administered by *Medicins Sans Frontieres*, an international private voluntary organization. Many of the refugees told us that they were dissatisfied with these medical services, stating that medicines were insufficient and that treatment was inadequate. *Medicins Sans Frontieres* representatives told us that their medical services are in accordance with World Health Organization standards, and that their practices are based on years of experience working with refugees worldwide. They also noted that health indices of the refugees, such as the infant mortality rate, compare favorably with those of the Honduran population. We observed that some children in two of the Nicaraguan Ladino camps suffered from an eye disease which, according to the PVO's staff, is endemic to the area during the rainy season.

Access to Education and Training

Education at the elementary school level is available to refugee children in Honduras and up to the high school level in Costa Rica. Figure 2.5 shows an elementary school classroom for Nicaraguan Ladino refugee children in Honduras. In both countries, classes are taught by Ministry of Education teachers and the school curriculum is set by education authorities. Adult refugees are offered literacy education in both countries, as well as vocational training in carpentry, needlework, shoe repair, tailoring, and animal husbandry.

Figure 2.5: Elementary School Classroom for Nicaraguan Refugees in Honduras



Personal Safety and Security

All of the Nicaraguan refugees we interviewed said that they felt safe in their camps and host countries, where they generally have unimpeded access to neighboring Honduran communities. Although the Honduran army has patrolled outside the camps in recent months, the refugees enjoy relative freedom of movement. There are no patrols conducted in or around the refugee camps in Costa Rica. In both countries, Nicaraguan refugees are allowed to work outside their camps during harvest season.

According to UNHCR officials in Honduras, refugees occasionally report that the Nicaraguan resistance has recruited adolescents from the camps. Working through Honduran authorities and resistance representatives, UNHCR officials have generally been able to retrieve boys whose families have complained about their recruitment. UNHCR provides funds so that relatives can visit and speak privately with the recruit. In some cases, these adolescents have returned to the camp, but some are committed to the resistance and refuse to return.

Indian Refugee Living Conditions, Safety, Access to Food and Health Care

Nicaraguan Indian refugees in Costa Rica live in conditions similar to the those of the Ladino refugees. Indian refugees in the Mosquitia region of Honduras, however, generally live as they have for centuries. The refugees, mostly Miskito Indians with small numbers of Sumo and Rama Indians, have tribal roots on both sides of the Coco River border between Honduras and Nicaragua.

The Miskitos have historically exploited the smaller Sumo and Rama tribes, who in turn, distrust the Miskitos. UNHCR maintains over 22 Indian settlements. Separate camps are maintained for each Indian group to prevent violence between the rival tribes. As in the Ladino camps, living standards are established by UNHCR to approximate conditions of the general rural population.

The refugee governing structure reflects the indigenous hierarchy of the Indian tribes in eastern Honduras and Nicaragua. The governing body within the settlements is the Council of Elders elected by the refugees. Each elder or his designee serves as neighborhood coordinator to implement council directives, respond to neighborhood needs, and receive and distribute UNHCR food rations.

The Indians live in village-like settlements in individual thatched-roof houses, built on stilt supports, with wooden or bamboo siding. Most communities have wells for drinking water. An abandoned potable water project is being reactivated by the Honduran Red Cross in the main settlement at Mocoron.

Access to Food

According to UNHCR officials, food supplies are provided in conformance with UNHCR standards. In addition, refugee families raise chickens and pigs, and grow beans and rice to supplement their diet. Food production is insufficient, however, and the Indians remain dependent on food aid.

Food deliveries are frequently delayed because of weather, the region's rugged terrain, and lack of roads. Commodities arriving by ship to Puerto Lempira must be transported by truck to Mocoron or another regional warehouse facility. During the rainy season, many of the settlements are accessible only by canoe. During the dry season, more camps can be reached by vehicle, but shallow water hinders canoe travel to other refugee settlements.

Access to Medical Care

Health care and nutrition are provided by Medicins Sans Frontieres, which has two doctors and eight nurses in the Mosquitia. A small hospital in the largest settlement at Mocoron is available to the Honduran and refugee populations. Neighborhoods within each settlement have a health coordinator who acts as liaison between the refugees and the health provider. Each settlement also has at least one health worker trained in first aid. In addition, a nurse visits each camp about twice each month, when weather permits. Serious cases are referred to the hospital at Mocoron or to a government hospital in the Honduran capital city of Tegucigalpa.

Access to Education and Training

Primary education is available to all Indian refugees in Honduras and up to high school level in Costa Rica. Children attend special refugee schools, which are comparable to those for rural Honduran or Costa Rican children. In both countries, the schools are staffed and accredited by the Ministry of Education. Adult literacy education and vocational training are also available in both countries. Vocational training for Indian refugees in Honduras is only available in the larger settlements and is generally limited to agriculture. UNHCR officials told us that the Indians are not interested in nonagricultural training.

Personal Safety and Security

According to UNHCR and State Department officials, senior Honduran Army officers have become more sensitive to the need for proper treatment of refugees, and the role of UNHCR. Military officers at the regional and local levels, however, sometimes set their own policies for dealing with refugees, without seeking authority from their superiors. Honduran military patrols are present in the largest Indian camp at Mocoron, and often patrol the other camps as well. Charges of rape, incarceration without cause, and harassment continue to be made against the Honduran military in the Mosquitia, but officials we contacted indicated that the frequency of such charges has decreased from prior years.

Assistance Programs

UNHCR assists Nicaraguan refugees with the help of PVOS. In Costa Rica, three PVOS administer and provide assistance to two camps each. The Costa Rican Red Cross provides multipurpose assistance to reception centers in Alvaperal and Boca Arenal. The International Rescue Committee administers the camp at Achiote and the settlement at Playa Blanca, provides technical agricultural assistance and operates workshops. The Centro de Analisis Socio-politico administers camps at Limon

and Tilaran and, along with the Instituto Mixto de Ayuda Social, provides multipurpose assistance to refugees in urban areas.

In Honduras, participating PVOs provide certain types of assistance to all three Nicaraguan camps. Caritas delivers food to the camps and operates workshops. The Honduran Red Cross performs administrative oversight, provides for nutrition, environmental health, housing, and water supplies, and operates some workshops. Medicins Sans Frontieres is responsible for health and nutrition. Alas del Socorro provides air transportation to refugees for medical care, or for repatriation.

Prospects for Repatriation

Nicaraguan Ladino refugees in Honduras and Costa Rica generally oppose repatriation unless there are major changes in the government of Nicaragua. Nicaraguans in both countries told us they could not trust Sandinista authorities to meet commitments regarding repatriation. According to an international observer, the Nicaraguan refugees in Costa Rica are probably reluctant to repatriate because they now enjoy higher living standards than they could expect in Nicaragua, even if its economy were to improve.

In contrast to the Ladinos, Indian refugees have been more willing to repatriate to Nicaragua. During our field work, Indian refugee repatriations were minimal; however, once the rainy season ended and the rice crop was harvested, the UNHCR expected more repatriations. As shown in table 2.3, Indian refugee repatriations to Nicaragua have increased in the last 2 years. The single most important factor influencing the Indians' willingness to repatriate, according to a State Department official, was the opening of a land bridge in 1987 that enabled refugees to return to Nicaragua with their belongings and livestock. The UNHCR and the State Department lacked information on living conditions of Indians who had returned to Nicaragua.

Table 2.3: Indian Refugee Repatriations to Nicaragua, as of May 1988

| Year | Number of repatriations |
|--------------|-------------------------|
| 1986 | 1,714 |
| 1987 | 3,726 |
| 1988 | 5,254 |
| Total | 10,694 |

Despite over 10,000 repatriations, the registered Indian refugee population has not decreased accordingly, because new Indian refugees have

continued to register at UNHCR settlements. UNHCR believes the Indians join its program to have political protection and repatriation benefits once they return to Nicaragua. Citing economic problems, about 300 repatriates returned to Honduran settlements in November 1988. At the end of 1986, the refugee population in the Mosquitia was about 16,000; by the end of 1987, it had declined to 13,115; and as of October 1988, 9,525 refugees were being assisted by UNHCR in the Mosquitia. UNHCR and State Department officials told us that about 5,000 refugees will probably never return to Nicaragua, and that about 10,000 more Indians living along the river that borders Nicaragua could migrate to Honduras at any time.

Refugees From El Salvador

Since armed conflict between leftist guerrillas and the government of El Salvador began in 1979, thousands of Salvadoran citizens have left their country to seek refuge. At the time of our review, there were over 28,000 Salvadoran refugees registered with UNHCR in Honduras, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Mexico, Belize, and Panama. As of August 1988, almost half were living in Honduras.

According to Department of State officials, Honduran attitudes towards Salvadoran refugees reflect historical national rivalry and distrust of Salvadoran refugee motives. The movement of Salvadoran migrants into Honduras during the 1950s and 1960s strained relations, culminating in the expulsion of thousands of Salvadoran settlers from Honduras and the resulting "Soccer War" of 1969.¹ Relations between the governments of El Salvador and Honduras improved in the 1980s, but tensions and border disputes persist. The government of Honduras is suspicious of Salvadoran refugee insistence on remaining in camps close to the Honduras-Salvador border. Because of these suspicions, Honduran authorities have attempted to restrict movements of Salvadoran refugees in and out of the camps, in order to limit their support for Salvadoran guerrillas based near the camps.

Numbers and Locations of Refugees

UNHCR administers four Salvadoran refugee camps in Honduras. Three camps—Colomoncagua, San Antonio, and Buenos Aires—are all within 3 miles of the Salvadoran border in the Department of Intibuca. (A department is equivalent to a state or province.) The fourth camp, Mesa Grande, is in the Department of Ocotepeque about 15 miles from the border. The State Department estimates that another 8,000 Salvadorans live in Honduras near El Salvador's border, but are not registered with UNHCR.

Table 3.1: Salvadoran Refugees Registered With UNHCR in Honduras, as of October 1988

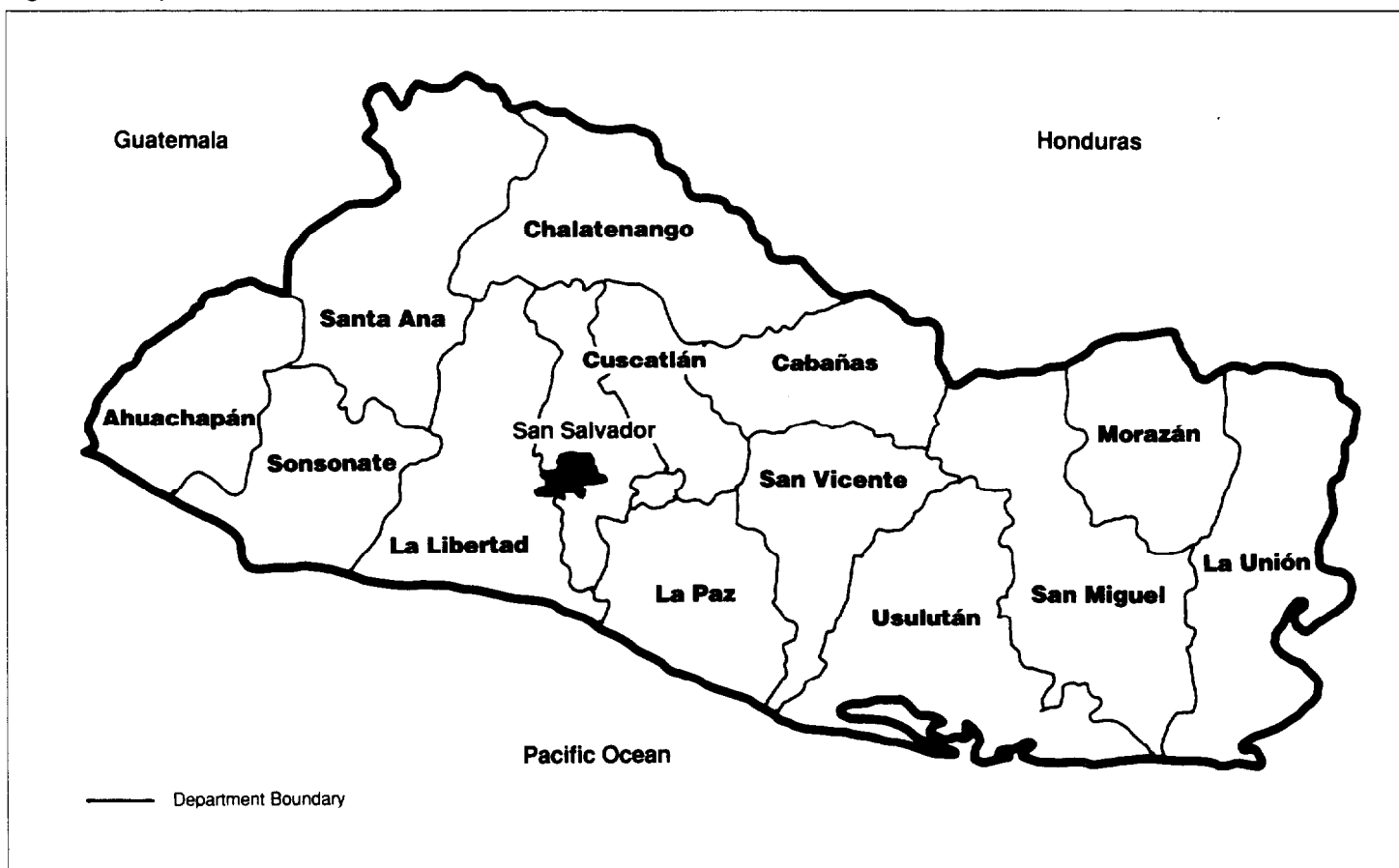
| Camp | Population |
|--------------|---------------|
| Colomoncagua | 8,338 |
| Mesa Grande | 4,485 |
| San Antonio | 1,171 |
| Buenos Aires | 31 |
| Total | 14,025 |

¹ El Salvador retaliated against the mass expulsion of its citizens by invading Honduras during a World Cup soccer championship playoff game between the two countries. The resultant war lasted 4 days until a cease-fire was arranged by the Organization of American States.

Origin of Refugees

Most Salvadoran refugees in UNHCR camps came to Honduras in 1980-1981 to avoid the fighting between guerilla forces of the Farabundo Marti Front for National Liberation (FMLN) and the Salvadoran military. According to the State Department, many came from the Salvadoran Departments that border Honduras—Chalatenango in the west, and La Union and Morazan in the east. (See fig. 3.1.)

Figure 3.1: Map of El Salvador



The majority of these refugees were small farmers who reportedly were persecuted by Salvadoran military authorities because of their alleged ties to guerrilla forces. Limited numbers of refugees continue to arrive at the camps, but since 1984, the camp populations have stabilized.

Living Conditions, Safety, Access to Food and Health Care

Refugee living conditions are prescribed by UNHCR to maintain living standards comparable to the Honduran rural population. The two refugee camps for Salvadorans we visited—Colomoncagua and Mesa Grande—consisted of several subcamps surrounded by 4-foot high barbed wire fences spread over a large area and connected by a network of dirt roads. Each subcamp has land for grazing and growing corn and vegetables. The refugees live in simple structures built of wooden planks with dirt floors. Figure 3.2 shows a typical dwelling. Each family has one or two rooms as living space; neither camp has running water or electricity. Water is provided by wells and stored rainwater or, in some cases, refugees use nearby rivers for washing. Due to recent drought conditions, UNHCR has rationed water brought to the camps by truck. Both camps have communal latrines.

Figure 3.2: Salvadoran Refugee Housing



Colomoncagua and Mesa Grande refugee camps have facilities to raise livestock for food. The Colomoncagua camp has a variety of animals, including chickens, rabbits, sheep, goats, pigs, and oxen. Goats' milk is available to children through communal nutrition centers. Residents of both camps grow vegetables in private plots and some raise chickens. The Colomoncagua camp has communal kitchen facilities and nutrition centers to prepare food, which is then distributed to individual homes.

In Mesa Grande, most families have wood-burning stoves in their living quarters for cooking.

Honduran authorities do not permit Salvadoran refugees to work outside the camps. Consequently, many of their needs are provided by an extensive network of workshops operated by PVOS. For example, the camps have barber, tailor, hammock, tinsmith, and automechanic shops. Most of the refugees wear shoes and clothes made in the workshops. Because refugees work without pay, the workshops lower UNHCR camp maintenance costs. The workshops also provide specialized skill training.

The two Salvadoran camps we visited appeared to have slightly different structures of social organization. Members of the Coordinating Committee in Colomocagua told us that the Committee designates coordinators to represent communities of neighboring blocks within each subcamp. They said that if a given community objects to the Committee's choice for coordinator, a different individual can be nominated and elected. According to the Committee, coordinators are elected periodically. However, the purpose of the elections was unclear, since candidates are selected by the Committee. The coordinators in Mesa Grande said that they were directly elected by their neighbors to represent their communities and that elections are held periodically.

The coordinators at both camps insist that they serve primarily as community spokespersons. However, the degree of coordination involved in certain actions undertaken by the refugee camps suggests that these coordinators may have considerably more power. For example, the refugees in Colomoncagua organized a mass hunger-strike to protest hunger and repression, accompanied by paid articles in the Honduran press, letters to church organizations in the United States and Europe, and leaflets, banners, and posters to encourage support within the refugee community. Throughout the strike, the Coordinating Committee served to organize and mobilize the refugee community. Figure 3.3 shows a demonstration organized during our visit to the camp to protest U.S. policies in Central America.

Figure 3.3: Refugee Organized
Demonstration in Salvadoran Refugee
Camp



Banner reads: "No to R. Reagan's warlike plans in Central America."

Furthermore, repatriations of thousands from Mesa Grande were organized internally by the refugees, with the coordinators negotiating logistical details with UNHCR. U.S. Embassy, UNHCR, and PVO officials agreed that there is a high degree of organization within the camps as demonstrated by such actions, but did not know how decisions are reached within the refugee community. They also agreed that the refugee coordinating committees have substantial power over camp residents.

Access to Food

The refugee community in Colomocagua and the camp at San Antonio recently staged a hunger strike to protest, among other things, that food rations provided by UNHCR were insufficient to maintain a proper diet. UNHCR officials insisted that rations provided to the refugees were consistent with World Health Organization standards. Because of the complaints, UNHCR contracted for a study, which recommended that the refugees' caloric intake be increased by about 50 calories. UNHCR subsequently decided to improve the Salvadoran refugees diet to somewhat above World Health Organization standards and diets of refugees under UNHCR care in other areas of the world.

State Department officials stated that the communal kitchens in Colomoncagua allow the refugee community to withhold food to influence or discipline dissidents. They believe that some persons may be afraid to express interest in repatriation for fear that their food rations may be cut by the internal camp refugee authorities.

Access to Medical Care

Medical services for the Salvadoran refugee camps in Honduras are provided by *Medicins Sans Frontieres*. However, according to UNHCR officials, this organization will withdraw its services by 1989 because of disagreements with the refugees. The refugee coordinators were very critical of this PVO, alleging insufficient medicine and inadequate medical treatment. The coordinators also criticized its medical teams because they, unlike other PVO workers, do not live in the camps. *Medicins Sans Frontieres* representatives told us that their medical practices are in accordance with World Health Organization standards and are based on many years of experience working with refugees, worldwide. Spokespersons believe that medical services they provide to refugees are better than services available in most rural communities in El Salvador or Honduras. They also noted that health indices for refugee populations, such as infant mortality rate, compare favorably with those of the Honduran population. PVO representatives also insist that there are no compelling reasons to live within the refugee camps because a doctor or nurse is at the camp clinic at all times, with a doctor on call about 20 minutes away. Further, they also station a vehicle near the camp for ambulance service.

To compile data on health and nutrition, the medical staff believes it should have direct access to the community. *Medicins Sans Frontieres* officials told us that their medical staff is denied free access to the community by the refugee coordinators. Furthermore, refugee coordinators have insisted on observing patients visiting the clinic. PVO medical staffers told us that refugee coordinators have also obstructed medical surveys by attempting to bias results. For example, one nurse noted that some sickly children were brought for nutrition testing more than once, while healthy children never arrived to the clinic for scheduled tests.

Access to Education and Training

Children in the Salvadoran refugee camps in Honduras attend schools up to grade 5. The camps also offer literacy classes and vocational training for adults. Figure 3.4 shows a vocational training course in tailoring. The curriculum for elementary education is set by the refugee community in coordination with Caritas—a PVO. Its representatives said that

their curriculum is compatible with that of Honduran schools. But the director of the Honduran National Committee on Refugees expressed concern that the coordinating committees have not allowed trained Hondurans to teach in the camps, insisting instead on teachers from the refugee community, who are not qualified or accredited to teach in Honduras. This official believes that their insistence challenges Honduran sovereignty.

Figure 3.4: Vocational Training Course in Tailoring



Personal Safety and Security

In the Salvadoran camps in Honduras, we were only able to speak with members of the coordinating committees, since spontaneous contacts with individual refugees were prevented by organized demonstrations during our camp visits. The coordinating committees told us that personal safety was a major concern. Refugee coordinators and international observers claim that Honduran army patrols have abused, raped, and sometimes killed refugees both inside and outside the camp's perimeters. They stated, for example, that in April 1988 a 63-year-old refugee was shot by Honduran soldiers about 10 yards within the camp perimeter. Refugees and an international volunteer who carried the victim from the spot where he was shot to a clinic where he later died, stated that the killing had occurred inside the camp. In another case, UNHCR

officials reported finding a refugee's flesh and bone fragments well inside a camp after the Honduran military claimed to have shot the refugee outside the camp.

All Salvadoran camps are designated as "closed camps" by Honduran authorities, and armed forces are assigned to maintain surveillance of each camp. Persons entering and leaving the camps must first obtain permission from the Honduran military. Departures from the camp are denied except in special circumstances, such as medical emergencies. Even in such cases, the refugees must be accompanied by UNHCR officials when leaving. Honduran army units have also periodically patrolled inside camp perimeters. Under agreement with UNHCR, these patrols must be accompanied by UNHCR personnel while inside the camps. The coordinating committees in each camp intensely oppose these patrols and, in Colomoncagua, opposition has been so violent that Honduran authorities have discontinued patrols inside the camp.

There are also reports that Salvadoran guerrilla forces recruit adolescents in the camps. UNHCR generally hears about these incidents only if the boys are captured by Honduran military patrols. In some cases, the boys, claiming to have escaped from the guerrillas, have turned themselves in to Honduran authorities. Honduran patrols also claim to have captured boys wandering without permission outside the camps. In both situations, UNHCR usually succeeds in retrieving the boys from Honduran authorities and provides them temporary housing outside the camps until they can be returned to their families.

At times, disciplinary measures imposed by the camp refugee authorities also threaten the personal security of some refugees. Particularly in Colomoncagua, persons expressing interest in repatriation have been subject to intimidation. International observers reported some cases where women who asked to repatriate had their children taken away until they changed their minds. These observers also reported that refugee coordinators have interfered with contacts between some refugees and their friends and relatives in El Salvador by monitoring meetings between the refugees and their visitors, or intercepting personal mail.

Assistance Programs

UNHCR assistance to Salvadoran refugees in Honduras is implemented in coordination with several private voluntary organizations. Caritas delivers food to the camps and administers educational programs. The Menonite Church maintains camp access roads, housing, and animal

pens. Catholic Relief Services operates camp workshops. The Evangelical Committee for Development and National Emergencies maintains radio communications and water supplies in the camps. Medicins Sans Frontieres provides health, nutrition, and environmental services. Alas del Socorro provides air transportation for refugees in need of medical care and repatriation.

Prospects for Repatriation

Since 1984, about 12,000 Salvadoran refugees have repatriated from UNHCR camps in Honduras. Most of these repatriations involved small groups of related individuals. In 1987, there was a large repatriation of over 4,000 refugees from the camp at Mesa Grande. Over 300 Salvadoran refugees repatriated from Honduras in the first 5 months of 1988. Since then, two other mass repatriations occurred from Mesa Grande—1,200 in August and 765 in November 1988. (See table 3.2.)

Table 3.2: Refugee Repatriations From UNHCR Camps to El Salvador During 1984-88

| CAMP | 1984 | 1985 | 1986 | 1987 | 1988 ^a |
|--------------|-------|------|------|-------|-------------------|
| Colomoncagua | N/A | N/A | 33 | 27 | 35 |
| Mesa Grande | N/A | N/A | 807 | 5,338 | 2,137 |
| San Antonio | N/A | N/A | 104 | 205 | 74 |
| Buenos Aires | N/A | N/A | 19 | 25 | 23 |
| All Camps | 2,110 | 827 | 963 | 5,595 | 2,269 |

^aFigures reflect activity through November 1988.

N/A: Numbers for specific camps were not available.

Even though Salvadorans continue to repatriate from all camps, proportionally fewer in Colomoncagua have repatriated than from the other camps. The camp refugee coordinators insist that the population will not repatriate until there is peace in El Salvador, with a different form of government and a guarantee of justice for those who return. According to international observers, refugees in Colomoncagua are afraid to express interest in repatriation, because they could be threatened, intimidated, and abused by the camp's internal refugee organization.

Despite continuing repatriations, Department of State, human rights organizations, and PVOs working in El Salvador indicate that conditions which caused refugees to flee that country persist. The PVOs noted that increased "death squad" activities, and growing political strength of the right-wing ARENA political party in El Salvador could cause more Salvadorans to seek refuge in Honduras or elsewhere. Data from the Intergovernmental Committee for Migration show that during the first 5

months of 1987, 6,110 persons applied for emigration, but during the same period in 1988, 16,425 applied.

Displaced Persons in El Salvador

The rural population of El Salvador has been historically migratory. Because of unequal land distribution and the high population density on available agricultural land, agricultural workers have traditionally followed the export crops, earning a living harvesting cotton, coffee, and sugar cane. The worldwide recession of the 1970s curtailed the demand for El Salvador's agricultural exports, creating large numbers of unemployed migrant workers, many of whom migrated to urban areas. The civil conflict added to this problem with the involuntary migration of displaced families. Caught between the army and the insurgents, campesinos or peasants fleeing conflict zones joined the ranks of migrants and economically displaced.

Numbers and Locations of Displaced Persons

Over 200,000 persons, 4 percent of the Salvadoran population, are currently displaced. CONADES, the Salvadoran agency which provides emergency assistance to displaced persons, reports registration of 125,000 displaced individuals and the U.S. Embassy estimates that up to 100,000 remain unregistered. The total displaced population has declined from its peak of 405,000 in 1986, because many displaced persons have returned to their homes, resettled in new locations, or emigrated.

Most displaced persons are dispersed throughout the country, living in urban areas such as the cities of San Salvador, San Vicente, San Miguel, and Chalatenango. About 25,000 live in 75 areas of concentration scattered across 12 of El Salvador's 14 departments. CONADES defines an area of concentration as a place where 18 or more displaced families are living in provisional quarters and the displaced comprise 95 percent of the residents. Most of these areas are actually settlements or neighborhoods, rather than formally designated camps, located within the Departments of San Salvador, Morazan and San Vicente. Twelve of the 75 areas of concentration are government-sponsored camps. In addition, church groups operate three camps in or near San Salvador for about 1,000 displaced persons.

Origin of Displaced Population

The majority of the displaced persons come from departments most affected by war—Morazan, San Vicente, Usulután, Chalatenango, San Miguel, as well as outlying areas in the Department of San Salvador. When the war began in 1979, the number of displaced persons grew rapidly as peasants, caught between the Salvadoran armed forces and the guerrillas, fled areas of conflict. According to a State Department official, however, the displaced situation in El Salvador predates the war. Economic problems, triggered by the world recession during the 1970s,

resulted in the migration of unemployed peasants toward urban areas. The economic downturn accompanying the war—a 25-percent drop in the gross national product and a 40-percent unemployment rate—has further exacerbated the situation.

Living Conditions, Safety, Access to Food and Health Care

We visited several displaced persons sites where overcrowding was evident. Families of up to 12 individuals lived in one small room, with no running water or electricity. The floors were usually packed dirt, often with standing water and mud inside the homes. Permanent resettlements had better conditions, with wells and latrines under construction, small but permanent housing, and roughly 5 acres for each family. The amount of land provided depends on land quality and suitability for farming.

Access to Food

CONADES supplies daily food rations of 1,600 calories to 125,000 registered displaced persons through food-for-work projects, or in some cases, emergency nutritional feeding. The Salvadoran Evangelical Committee helps to feed about 25,000 nonregistered families through food-for-work programs and 2,000 more through a supplementary feeding program. Under the food-for-work programs, the displaced are paid about \$1.25 per day, primarily to build roads. Designed to cover basic needs such as food and shelter, this wage is deliberately kept low so that wages of nondisplaced persons are not exceeded. Basic food supplies such as beans, rice, and corn are also provided. To discourage dependence on government support and encourage return to their original communities, food is not provided on a regular basis. Figure 4.1 shows a stairway leading from one part of a community to another built by displaced persons under the food-for-work program.

Figure 4.1: Stairway Built by Displaced Persons Under the Food-For-Work Program



Before



After

Some individuals, particularly among the 4,300 returnees from Honduras, refuse to accept help from the government or AID, but are provided food by churches and PVOs. These individuals have chosen to settle in five locations: Las Vueltas, Guarjila, and Guarjilita in the Chalatenango Department; Santa Maria in the Cabanas Department; and Copapayo in the Department of Cuscatlan. (See fig. 3.1.) These communities have received humanitarian aid such as food, medical supplies, housing construction materials, and latrines from the Catholic Archdiocese and the Lutheran Church. The repatriates qualify for government programs available to other displaced persons but community leaders have refused government assistance. The community leaders told us that they would not accept assistance from the government of El Salvador because they do not want to be "indebted." Other displaced persons are not receiving any assistance at all.

The displaced individuals we interviewed complained primarily that wages paid by the government, under food-for-work programs, were insufficient to purchase basic food supplies. Except for the Salvadorans who recently returned from Honduras, the displaced persons did not complain about government withholding of food supplies. But State

Department and AID officials acknowledged that the Salvadoran military has held up food shipments to the returnee communities, fearing that the food would be transferred to the guerrillas. Shipments have allegedly been withheld for hours to weeks and, when delivered, have sometimes been incomplete. Displaced recipients also alleged that most medical supplies are not permitted to reach the settlement.

Access to Medical Care

The majority of displaced persons do not have access to medical services unless they live in settlements serviced by Project Hope or live near a town with medical facilities. Project Hope and the Ministry of Health provide preventive and curative health services to over 45,000 displaced persons in provisional settlements. The preventive aspects focus on environmental sanitation, immunizations, and health education. The curative aspects channel treatment and primary care through 34 dispensaries, serving 61 settlements and host communities. AID is trying to phase out Project Hope in order to encourage the Salvadoran Ministry of Health to take over this responsibility, which, according to AID officials, is rightfully theirs.

Access to Education and Training

Children of the displaced generally have access to education up to grade 6, but may have to travel long distances to get to the school. Resettled displaced persons communities did not have operating schools, although plans were underway to build schools in some communities. Children from these communities have to attend schools in nearby towns or not at all. The Federation of Credit Unions offers 3-month vocational training to about 300 displaced persons each month. Training recipients are paid about \$1.20 per day and receive training in carpentry, metal, masonry, baking, and other skills needed to provide self-support. For example, displaced persons are taught how to lay cinder blocks so that they can build their own homes upon return to their places of origin. Figure 4.2 shows an example of a project in masonry training.

Figure 4.2: Structures Built in Masonry Classes



Personal Safety and Security

Individuals receiving assistance through government sponsored programs generally did not have security problems. Officials from international and private voluntary organizations believe that those refusing government aid are suspected of being guerrilla sympathizers and are more apt to be watched and harassed by the military.

According to State Department officials, the majority of individuals who repatriate, or otherwise return, to El Salvador from the U.S. or another asylum country are not targeted for persecution upon return. Repatriates returning to major urban areas are able to blend in with the populace; however, those returning to rural areas are more visible and vulnerable because their identity and reasons for leaving are known. The director of a major human rights monitoring group in El Salvador told us that the majority of returnees are not targeted for persecution, nor are individuals returning from the United States singled out. However, returnees may suffer due to the general violence which affects all Salvadorans.

Repatriates and displaced individuals must obtain permission from the military to return to certain areas. The military denies permission if it believes the area is unsafe or wishes to keep it clear for military purposes. Individuals returning without military permission are viewed as guerrilla sympathizers, as was the case when the 4,300 returned from Honduras in October 1987. For example, in the largest settlement of returnees (Guarjila/Guarjilita), which we visited, church-provided food supplies are often delayed by the military for several hours to as much as weeks, and most medical supplies are withheld. The military will occasionally enter the settlement and detain individuals for a few days. These individuals allege mistreatment by the military. The residents and the American nun who runs the clinic claim that the military has entered the camp at night, firing weapons randomly. The nun told us that three such incidents had occurred since she arrived in May 1988. According to camp residents, the military also left a live grenade in the play area where a child found it, and hit it with a rock. The subsequent explosion killed the child and injured three other children.

Assistance Programs

The government of El Salvador assists the displaced population by (1) providing basic needs such as food, shelter, health care, and temporary employment; (2) administering food-for-work, training, and community improvement programs for those choosing to remain in their current settlements; and (3) helping displaced persons who wish to return home or relocate. According to State Department officials, AID and other donors assisted El Salvador to develop its three-part approach for aiding the displaced.

Government assistance to the displaced is coordinated by CONADES. Its key programs include food assistance, agricultural starter packages, and minimum shelter construction. Other activities include vocational skills training and literacy education. CONADES coordinates its activities with the quasi-governmental Federation of Credit Unions and four private voluntary organizations—Project Hope, the International Rescue Committee, World Relief, and the Salvadoran Evangelical Committee for Assistance and Development. The coordinated efforts of the government agencies and four PVOS represent the government's assistance, available to 200,000 qualified displaced persons. Funding amounts to about \$10 to \$15 million annually, roughly 75 percent of which comes from AID and the United Nations World Food Program, with the remainder funded by PVOS.

The second part of El Salvador's displaced persons strategy deals with families that choose to remain in the communities or settlements where they currently reside. The intent of this assistance is to help the displaced become self-sufficient, permanent members of their communities. Food-for-work programs are gradually replacing feeding programs. Training programs are being designed to teach skills to displaced persons and/or to purchase small machinery and equipment to generate income—for example, raising animals, farming, or producing handicrafts. This year, CONADES plans to distribute farming starter packages of seeds, fertilizer, and tools to over 7,000 displaced families.

The third aspect of El Salvador's strategy focuses on returning the displaced to their places of origin. In 1986, the government of El Salvador redesigned its assistance programs to emphasize aid to growing numbers of displaced persons returning to their home areas. According to El Salvador officials, the impetus for the returnee movement comes from personal decisions by the displaced, rather than governmental or nongovernmental programs. El Salvador and State Department officials believe that less armed conflict and better treatment of civilians by Salvadoran forces have influenced some displaced persons to return home. The Government of El Salvador has also encouraged the movement by aiding returnee communities.

Since 1986, nearly 25,000 displaced persons have returned home or permanently relocated with government and private assistance. Assistance to the returnees is a joint effort involving CONADES, which coordinates efforts of multiple government of El Salvador agencies, and three PVOS—World Relief, the International Rescue Committee, and the Salvadoran Evangelical Committee. Government sources believe that over 80 percent of the returnees received resettlement assistance from CONADES and the PVOS. Almost all of this assistance is funded by AID and the United Nations World Food Program.

The following lists the major agencies and the type of assistance they provide to displaced persons. In addition, at least 12 other national and international organizations also assist the displaced.

Chapter 4
Displaced Persons in El Salvador

| Agency | Type of assistance |
|---|---|
| Federation of Credit Unions | Funds temporary employment and vocational training. |
| Project Hope | Runs preventive and primary curative health care clinics in areas with large numbers of displaced. |
| International Rescue Committee | Runs mobile clinics, conducts health and sanitation training, and helps restore damaged health clinics in 65 communities. |
| World Relief | Assists displaced persons returning home or relocating by providing building materials, agricultural starter packages, and by funding agricultural cultivation, small animal husbandry, and other projects. |
| Salvadoran Committee for Assistance and Development | Aids the resettlement of about 20,000 persons. |
| Catholic Archdiocese of San Salvador | Administers the San Jose, Calle Real camp near San Salvador and oversees church aid to repatriates from Honduras. |
| Catholic Relief Services | Provides food, medicines, and other relief supplies, and socioeconomic development projects. Food aid is targeted at residents of conflict areas. Residents of church-sponsored camps are also provided education, shelter, and sanitation assistance. |
| United Nations Development Program | Funds a \$6-million world food program and a \$4-million food-for-work program in El Salvador. It also helps about 1,500 displaced persons through housing, farming, and animal husbandry projects. |
| Intergovernment Committee on Migration | Determines if Salvadoran applicants qualify for emigration. The Committee also offered monitoring and counseling services to Salvadorans returning voluntarily or under deportation from the United States until December 1987, when U.S. funding ceased. |
| International Committee the Red Cross | Assists displaced persons of and communities in conflict zones. Its program includes farming inputs for about 10,000 persons, community sanitation projects, and medical training. |
| Lutheran Church | Provides preventive medicine, health, education and literacy, vocational agricultural training and food aid for the displaced. The Church serves both displaced persons and other poor Salvadorans; assists former camp residents to relocate by providing housing construction materials, latrines, and productive projects for the community. |

(continued)

| Agency | Type of assistance |
|--|---|
| Christian Committee for the Displaced in El Salvador and the National Repopulation Committee | Work on behalf of the displaced and returnees. State Department officials believe that these groups are controlled by guerilla forces, and that they have organized demonstrations in San Salvador. |
| Salvadoran Development and Minimal Housing Foundation | Assists displaced persons to resettle. |

According to El Salvador officials, displaced individuals are a financial burden on the country, because they require assistance to survive and do not contribute to the economy. El Salvador is in the process of returning the displaced to their home areas. Those who are unable to return due to ongoing conflicts are being resettled on underutilized land in connection with land reform efforts.

El Salvador officials told us that if Salvadorans, in the United States illegally, were deported, it would drastically reduce remittance income for many displaced persons in El Salvador and place a tremendous burden on the fragile economy. One local official working with the displaced told us he knows of entire communities that are totally supported by relatives residing in the United States, and another official estimated that up to 80 percent of some communities' support comes from U.S. residents, who are relatives of the displaced.

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