THE ARCHBISHOP OF SAN SALVADOR CLOSES OFFICE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

San Francisco, CA. The Center for Justice and Accountability (CJA) and The Human Rights Association of Spain (APDHE) express alarm and concern over the unexpected closure of the Human Rights Office of the Archbishop. The Human Rights Office was established in 1982 to provide legal assistance to the thousands of victims of the civil war in El Salvador. The office was founded by Monsignor Arturo Rivera y Damas who was Monsignor Romero’s successor. We are particularly concerned about preserving and maintaining the integrity of the extensive archives of this historic institution.

For more than 30 years the Human Rights Office has collected complaints from victims of the Salvadoran civil war and has established itself as one of the main institutions which documented abuses committed during the war. Yesterday, in a surprise announcement, the Archbishop of San Salvador, Monsignor José Luis Escobar Alas, laid off all the employees of the Human Rights Office stating inexplicably that “it no longer has any reason to exist.”

Today, more than ever, it is important to have access to the Human Rights Office and the important records they have gathered over the years. The Attorney General of El Salvador recently opened an investigation into the notorious massacre at El Mozote where it is estimated that over 800 citizens were killed in December 1981. And, just two weeks ago, the Salvadoran Supreme Court accepted an appeal to contest the constitutionality of the Amnesty Law.

The closure of the Human Rights Office could signify the loss of a historical archive of more than 50,000 testimonials of the people of El Salvador.

David Morales, the Human Rights Ombudsman and former Human Rights Director of the Foreign Ministry of the Republic of El Salvador, has expressed his disappointment with the decision to close the Human Right Office in light of the ongoing need to assist the victims in their search for justice.

CJA and APDHE urge the Archbishop of El Salvador, to reconsider this decision and consider the legacy of Monsignor Oscar Romero, Maria Julia Hernández, Segundo Montes S.J. and their commitment to justice for the people of El Salvador. The archives and records of this historic institution rightfully belong to the victims and to national and international justice efforts.

CJA, APDHE and the Human Rights Institute at the University of Central America (IDHUCA) are exploring options with educational institutions in the U.S. to house, digitalize and preserve the archives to ensure that they will remain available to the people of El Salvador and the thousands of victims who are still seeking justice.

CJA is a San Francisco-based human rights organization dedicated to deterring torture and other severe human rights abuses around the world and advancing the rights of survivors to seek truth, justice and redress. CJA uses litigation to hold perpetrators individually accountable for human rights abuses, develop human rights law, and advance the rule of law in countries in transition from periods of abuse.

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