

CONFIDENTIALTHE SECRETARY OF STATE
WASHINGTON

State Dept. review completed

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Consultations between the Department of State and your subcommittee in recent weeks have demonstrated that there exists broad agreement on the seriousness of the situation in Central America and on the need for us to maintain a comprehensive security, political and economic strategy to address this situation. These consultations have focussed on four specific areas of concern to both of us. I would like to set out our views on these concerns and the nature of the programs and policies we have implemented, or will be implementing, in each of those areas.

You have raised the issue of prison conditions and your view that all prisons and detention centers in El Salvador should be subject to inspection by an independent international organization such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). We share your concerns and have been working with the Government of El Salvador and the ICRC to achieve precisely this objective. Over the past year the number of ICRC visits to prisons has steadily increased and I am informed that President Magana has now ordered that the ICRC be given unrestricted access to all prisons and detention centers. This is a positive development which should go a long way toward meeting our shared concerns on this issue.

You have also expressed an interest in the status of political prisoners in El Salvador. There are approximately 800 prisoners in El Salvador who are being detained under Decree 507, the state of siege authority. While in prison these detainees have been generally well-treated, but they have not been formally charged with a crime. The prisoners incarcerated under this decree range from those accused vaguely of "support for the guerrillas" to those actually implicated in terrorist acts. President Magana has recognized the uneven effects of Decree 507 and has begun a review process with the intent of releasing those accused of less severe offenses. About 30 political prisoners have been released to date, with a larger number expected to be released in the near future.

The Honorable
Clarence Long,
House of Representatives.