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O 231620Z FEB 83
FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3426
INFO AMEMBASSY BELIZE
AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
AMEMBASSY MEXICO
AMEMBASSY PANAMA
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
USCINCSO QUARRY HTS PN.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE IM/DF/CS/IR Date: 1/20/98
 RELEASE DECLASSIFY
 EXCISE DEMOCRACY EO Citations
 DENY IN PART

FOIA Exemptions _____ TS authority to
PA Exemptions _____ CLASSIFY as S or C Sec. _____
 DOWNGRADE TS to S or C

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 GUATEMALA 01417

E.O. 12356: N/A
TAGS: PINS, GT, SHUM
SUBJECT: EMBASSY REPORT, ON VILLAGES IN EL QUICHE

1. SUMMARY: ON FEBRUARY 15, EMBASSY OFFICER VISITED THE DEPARTMENT OF EL QUICHE IN THE COMPANY OF A "TELEPRENSA" FILM CREW, AN AFP REPORTER, AND THE COMMANDER OF THE PLAYA GRANDE ARMY BASE. THE FOLLOWING VILLAGES AND HAMLETS WERE VISITED: PLAYA GRANDE, SAN ALFONSO, SANTO TOMAS, SANTA MARIA DOLORES, SANTIAGO IXCAN, PUEBLO NUEVO AND SANTA MARIA TEJA. END SUMMARY.

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2. THE FIRST STOP WAS PLAYA GRANDE, SITE OF A GUATEMALAN ARMY BASE. THE COMMANDER BRIEFED US ON THE MILITARY SITUATION IN THE AREA,

NOTING WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS THE PROBLEM OF CONTINUING GUERRILLA RAIDS FROM MEXICO. WE WERE SHOWN CAPTURED GUERRILLA DOCUMENTS, MEDICINE AND MINES. ALL THE MEDICINE WAS MANUFACTURED IN MEXICO. THE MINES WERE OF THE CLAYMORE ANTI-PERSONNEL VARIETY. THE COMMANDER STATED THAT THE GUERRILLAS WERE STILL VERY ACTIVE IN NORTHERN EL QUICHE, AND THAT THEY HAD FORCED THE INHABITANTS OF MANY SMALL HAMLETS AND CO-OPERATIVES TO CROSS THE BORDER TO MEXICO. NEVERTHELESS, HE THOUGHT THE ARMY HAD THINGS "UNDER CONTROL."

3. SAN ALFONSO WAS THE ONLY TOWN ACCESSIBLE BY ROAD FROM PLAYA GRANDE. WE DROVE THERE. THE TOWN ITSELF IS ONLY THREE KILOMETERS FROM THE MEXICO BORDER. UPON OUR ARRIVAL THE MAJORITY OF THE VILLAGE FLOCKED TO THE CAMERA CREW. WISHING TO AVOID THE CARNIVAL-TYPE ATMOSPHERE THAT SUCH VISITS INVARIABLELY PRODUCE, EMBOFF SET OFF ON HIS OWN TO SPEAK PRIVATELY WITH SOME OF THE OTHER VILLAGERS.

4. IN CONVERSATIONS WITH FOUR OF THE VILLAGE MEN, EMBOFF DISCOVERED THE FOLLOWING. THE MAJORITY OF THE VILLAGERS WERE FROM MATZATENANGO, A TOWN IN SOUTHWEST GUATEMALA. THE GOVERNMENT HAD GIVEN THEM THE LAND IN EL QUICHE SOME FIVE YEARS AGO. EMBOFF WAS TOLD THAT THE VILLAGE LIVED IN FEAR OF BOTH THE GUERRILLAS AND THE UNCLASSIFIED

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ARMY DURING THE ADMINISTRATION OF GENERAL LUCAS GARCIA. AFTER THE COUP OF MARCH 1982, THE ARMY BEGAN TO MODERATE ITS POLICIES. IT SEEMS THAT SHORTLY AFTER THE COUP, A MAN WITH SUPPOSED CLOSE TIES TO THE MILITARY TOLD THE VILLAGERS THAT THE ARMY WAS GOING TO COME TO SAN ALFONSO AND DESTROY THE VILLAGE, USING HELICOPTERS TO STRAFE FROM THE AIR AND INFANTRY TO BUTCHER ON THE GROUND. MANY VILLAGERS FLED TO MEXICO UPON HEARING THIS; OTHERS, HOWEVER, WERE PREPARED TO WAIT AND SEE, NOT WISHING TO GIVE UP THEIR LAND AND HOMES. THE ARMY CAME. THEY DID NOT BURN, KILL OR RAPE. THEY TOLD THE VILLAGERS

THAT THEY WOULD TRY TO PROTECT THEM, AND THEY HAVE BEEN TRYING TO PROTECT THEM EVER SINCE. WORD OF THIS EVENTUALLY SPREAD AND SEVERAL FAMILIES RETURNED FROM MEXICO. (EMBOFF SPOKE WITH ONE OF THESE FAMILIES ON FEBRUARY 21). THERE ARE NOT ENOUGH RIFLES TO GO AROUND AND SAN ALFONSO DOES NOT HAVE AN EFFECTIVE CIVIL DEFENSE PATROL. PATROLS FROM OTHER VILLAGES INCLUDE SAN ALFONSO IN THEIR ROUNDS. THERE ARE CURRENTLY SOME 20 FAMILIES LIVING IN SAN ALFONSO; THE VILLAGERS SAID THERE WERE PROBABLY 20 MORE FAMILIES STILL IN MEXICO. THE LATTER ARE EXPECTED TO RETURN.

5. FROM SAN ALFONSO, WE FLEW TO SANTO TOMAS. THIS WAS AN EXTREMELY SMALL HAMLET IN AN ISOLATED AREA OF NORTH-CENTRAL EL QUICHE. THE ARMY COMMANDER STATED THAT ITS INHABITANTS WERE BURNED OUT BY GUERRILLAS AND FORCED INTO MEXICO. ALL THAT REMAINED WAS THE FOUNDATIONS

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OF THREE BUILDINGS AND SOME TIN ROOFING MATERIAL. THERE WERE 49 SOLDIERS ENCAMPED THERE, HOLDING THE AREA AND SCOUTING FOR GUERRILLAS. THEY HAD ERECTED LEAN-TOS FROM THE TIN ROOFING. THE SOLDIERS THERE WERE NOT GIVEN TO CASUAL CONVERSATIONS, IN FACT, THEY WERE TIGHT-LIPPED, NERVOUS AND FRIGHTENED. THEY HAVE SINCE MOVED ON. (WHEN EMBOFF RETURNED TO THE AREA ON FEBRUARY 21 WITH CODEL LAGOMARSINO, SANTO TOMAS WAS DEEMED "UNSAFE," THE ARMY DID NOT WISH TO JEOPARDIZE THE CODEL'S SAFETY.)

6. WE THEN FLEW ON TO SANTA MARIA TEJA. A SQUAD OF SOLDIERS WAS THERE, PROTECTING UNCLASSIFIED

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THE VILLAGERS FROM GUERRILLA INCURSIONS. THE ARMY HAD RECENTLY DISCOVERED A GUERRILLA CAMP IN THE AREA, DESTROYED IT, AND TURNED OVER ALL THE CAPTURED FOODSTUFFS TO THE VILLAGERS. EMBOFF WAS TOLD THAT THE ARMY'S ATTITUDE HAD CHANGED GREATLY AFTER THE COUP; THE PEOPLE COULD NOW COUNT ON THE PROTECTION OF GOVERNMENT FORCES. PRIOR TO THE COUP, THEY WERE EXTREMELY FRIGHTENED OF BOTH SIDES. TWO MEN TOLD EMBOFF THEY HAD BEEN WITH THE GUERRILLAS FOR ALMOST TWO YEARS. THEY HAD BEEN FORCED TO JOIN THE INSURGENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES FORCED TO PROVIDE SUPPORT. THEY HAD SET UP ROADBLOCKS, STOLEN FOOD AND EVEN AMBUSHED AN ARMY

PATROL. AFTER THE COUP, THEY THOUGHT THEY HAD A CHANCE TO TURN THEMSELVES IN AND NOT BE KILLED. THEY DID AND THEY WEREN'T; BOTH NOW LIVE IN THE VILLAGE WITH THEIR FAMILIES.

7. THE STOP IN SANTIAGO IXCAN WAS BRIEF. THE PEOPLE THERE HAVE BEEN ARMED BY THE GOVERNMENT ALTHOUGH, AGAIN, THERE ARE NOT ENOUGH RIFLES TO GO AROUND. THE GUERRILLAS USED TO COME AND STEAL THEIR FOOD, BUT DO SO NO LONGER BECAUSE OF AN INCREASED MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE AREA AND THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CIVIL DEFENSE PATROLS.

8. IN SANTA MARIA DOLORES, THE PEOPLE HAVE JUST RETURNED FROM COBAN. IN LATE SEPTEMBER OF 1982 THE ARMY WAS FORCED TO PULL OUT OF THIS VILLAGE AS ITS TROOPS WERE NEEDED ELSEWHERE. THE VILLAGERS WOULD NOT REMAIN THERE WITHOUT
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PROTECTION FOR FEAR OF THE GUERRILLAS; THEY MOVED TO COBAN. ON JANUARY 9, 1983, THE ARMY MOVED BACK INTO THE VILLAGE AND ITS INHABITANTS RETURNED. THE VILLAGERS ARE CURRENTLY REBUILDING THEIR HOUSES AND GETTING READY TO PLANT THEIR CROPS. THE FEW BUILDINGS THAT REMAIN STANDING ARE COVERED WITH GUERRILLA SLOGANS AND PROPAGANDA.

9. NOT ALL OF THE VILLAGERS FLED TO COBAN. IN THE SUMMER AND EARLY FALL OF 1982 SOME 20 FAMILIES FLED THE AREA, EITHER TO MEXICO OR INTO THE MOUNTAINS WITH THE GUERRILLAS. EMBOFF DOES NOT KNOW IF THESE FAMILIES FLED THE GENERAL VIOLENCE IN THE AREA OR IF THEY ACTUALLY JOINED THE INSURGENTS. THERE IS NO WAY TO KNOW.

10. WE ALSO FLEW OVER PUEBLO NUEVO, ANOTHER VERY SMALL AND DESERTED HAMLET. EMBOFF WAS TOLD BY THE AREA MILITARY COMMANDER THAT THIS AREA HAD ALSO BEEN SUBJECT TO GUERRILLA ATTACKS, AND THAT THE PEOPLE HAD BEEN FORCED ACROSS THE BORDER. FROM PUEBLO NUEVO, WE RETURNED TO PLAYA GRANDE AND SOON AFTER TO THE CAPITAL.

11. WE NOTE THAT CONGRESSMAN LONG EXPRESSED AN INTEREST IN THE VILLAGES OF SAN ALFONSO, SANTA MARIA DOLORES, SANTO TOMAS AND PUEBLO NUEVO. DEPARTMENT SHOULD FEEL FREE TO PASS THIS REPORT ON TO STAFFERS POWERS AND SCHUERCH, FOREIGN OPERATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE, HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES. SEPTEL WILL REPORT FEBRUARY 21 VISIT OF CODEL

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LAGOMARSINO TO SAME AREA. CHAPIN

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*** Current Handling Restrictions *** n/a
*** Current Classification *** UNCLASSIFIED