

LB
VZCZCTFI *
OC RUEHC RUESMG RUEHRO
DE RUEHTG #3924 355 **
ZNY CCCCC ZZH ZZ RUEHC
O 210304Z DEC 83 ZFF4
FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
TO RUEHC / SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 9239
INFO RUESMG / AMEMBASSY MANAGUA IMMEDIATE 5557
RUEHRO / AMEMBASSY ROME IMMEDIATE 0233
BT

STORAGE LOW
Christ 457
CLASS: CONFIDENTIAL
CHRG: PROG 12/21/83
APRV: AMB:JDNEGROPONT
DRFTD: AMB:JDNEGROPONT
CLEAR: NONE
DISTR: AMB2 DCM POL2
ECCN DAO MILG
AID USIS CONS
CML CHRON

TEGUCIGALPA 13924

EO 12356: DECL: OADR
TAGS: CASC NU PREL HC
SUBJ: WELFARE AND WHEREABOUTS OF BISHOP SALVADOR SCHLAEFER

1. ~~REDACTED~~ - ENTIRE TEXT
2. EVENING DECEMBER 27 PAPAL NUNCIO CALLED ON AMBASSADOR TO STATE THAT HIS CHARGE IN MANAGUA HAD INFORMED HIM THAT BISHOP SALVADOR SCHLAEFER OF BLUEFIELDS HAD BEEN CAPTURED EARLIER IN THE DAY AT FRANCA SIRTE ON ATLANTIC COAST OF NICARAGUA. ANOTHER AMERICAN PRIEST AND TWO NICARAGUAN DEACONS WERE ALSO ALLEGEDLY CAPTURED. ACCORDING TO NUNCIO, THERE WAS CONFRONTATION BETWEEN ANTI-SANDINISTAS AND GOVERNMENT FORCES DURING WHICH CLERICS WERE CAPTURED BY REBELS AND "TAKEN TOWARDS HONDURAN BORDER". NUNCIO SAID THAT FIRST OF ALL HE WAS CONCERNED ABOUT SCHLAEFER'S WELFARE. NEXT, HE FEARED THAT SANDINISTAS MIGHT USE INCIDENT TO DISTRACT ATTENTION FROM THEIR OWN MISTREATMENT OF THE CHURCH.
3. AMBASSADOR ASKED NUNCIO IF HE WERE CERTAIN THAT THIS STORY WERE TRUE AND NOT SOME TYPE OF SANDINISTA PROVOCATION. FOR EXAMPLE, COULD IT BE THAT SANDINISTAS HAD IN SOME WAY HARMED SCHLAEFER AND WERE NOW SEEKING TO LAY BLAME ON SOMEONE ELSE? NUNCIO SAID HE WAS INCLINED TO BELIEVE NICARAGUAN GOVERNMENT STORY WHICH HAD BEEN "CONFIRMED" BY FSLN. NUNCIO ASKED THAT EMBASSY LOOK INTO MATTER ESPECIALLY IF IT WERE TRUE THAT SCHLAEFER HAD BEEN TAKEN TO HONDURAS. AMBASSADOR RESPONDED THAT WE WOULD INQUIRE INTO SITUATION AND ALSO SUGGESTED THAT PAPAL CHARGE PURSUE MATTER WITH OUR EMBASSY IN MANAGUA.
4. COMMENT: AS OF THIS WRITING EMBASSY HAS NO RPT NO INDEPENDENT CONFIRMATION OF SCHLAEFER'S CAPTURE OR OF ALLEGATION THAT HE HAS BEEN TAKEN TO HONDURAS. WE WILL HAVE TO AWAIT FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS.
5. MEANWHILE, WE WOULD OFFER COMMENT THAT FROM THIS DISTANT VANTAGE POINT WE CAN SEE NO RPT NO OBVIOUS ADVANTAGE TO ANTI-SANDINISTAS IN HARMING OR CAPTURING A PROMINENT MEMBER OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH; NOR WOULD THERE BE ANY OBVIOUS BENEFIT IN TAKING CAPTIVES TO HONDURAS. CONVERSELY, ONE COULD SPECULATE THAT POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SANDINISTAS OF FABRICATING SUCH AN INCIDENT COULD BE SUBSTANTIAL. NEGROPONTE

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Dept. of State, RPS/IPS, Margaret P. Grafeld, Dir.

() Release () Excise () Deny () Declassify
Date 6/2/98 Exemption _____