

# Darrell G. Moen, Ph.D.

Promoting Social Justice, Human Rights, and Peace

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## The Stranger in Our Midst

(1991: 1 hr. 42 min., edited version: 52 min)

Transcribed and edited by Darrell G. Moen

**Narrator:** The second half of the 20th century marked the advent of a new form of war and the modern refugee. Between 1980 and 1990, unrecognized wars produced unrecognized refugees. But history has given us standards by which to recognize war and refugees. The measure of any civilization can be seen in how it treats the weak, the different, the other.

Refugees are among the most vulnerable in human society. These Salvadorans are crossing an international border. They are afraid for their lives. They have just become refugees. But even in flight, Salvadoran refugees have been targeted for persecution.

**Damian Cebrian (Salvadoran refugee) [subtitled]:** [We were crossing the river into Honduras when] 800 Salvadoran soldiers showed up. The children, the elderly, and the pregnant women - they all drowned. The Sumpul River was full of blood. You could see them sticking their bayonets in the children's stomachs. Children and pregnant women [were easy for the soldiers to kill]. About 600 people died there, at that river crossing.

**Narrator:** One in five Salvadorans live in exile.

**Rabbi Joseph Weizenbaum:** There is a Biblical admonition "to know the heart of the stranger for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" and strangers in other places. I frequently tell the story of my own family because I think it illustrates so very well. My father was a man who in 1913 fled from the Kaiser's army, jumped onto a ship with just a small amount of money he used to bribe some officials, disguised himself as a girl, was caught when he arrived here and was thrown into jail on Ellis Island [in New York}. He was an undocumented alien.

He was what today would be called an "illegal alien" - a terrible choice of words, for any human being to be called "illegal." Fortunately, some relative found him and got him out of there. Otherwise, he would have been [sent back to where he came from].

So, to me, it makes no difference whether you crossed the Atlantic Ocean in 1913 or the Rio Grande in 1986, you're the same people [refugees fleeing persecution].

**Juan Mendez (Salvadoran refugee) [subtitled]:** I was on this so-called "black list" of people who were listed to be killed by the security forces. So I dressed up like a woman, shaved my legs, put on make-up, wore a dress and escaped by bus. I knew that if I stayed in my country, it might be the next day or the following week or month, I didn't know when, but I knew I would be killed.

**Narrator:** These Guatemalans crossed an international border into Mexico. They were afraid for their lives. They have become refugees. They fled their homeland after the Guatemalan army massacred 352 people in a neighboring farm village called San Francisco. There were reports that women were killed with machetes. Children were smashed to death with heavy sticks.

**Unidentified Guatemalan refugee [subtitled]:** We heard they were killing people in the village of San Francisco. So we left; we were afraid. We didn't want to be killed, to see our family members killed before our eyes. We hadn't committed any crimes, but we were very scared and we decided to leave. Rather than being caught [by the soldiers], we decided to cross over to Mexico.

**Narrator:** One-sixth of the population of Guatemala lives in exile.

**\*Note:** 99% of Guatemalans and 97% of El Salvadorans who have applied for asylum in the United States as political refugees have been denied asylum because the United States has strongly supported these military regimes. Those denied asylum have been sent back to their countries. The FBI has released the names of all asylum applicants to the security forces in both Guatemala and El Salvador. Many of the people forcibly returned to these countries have been imprisoned, tortured, and killed.

### **U.S. State Department 1948**

"We have about 60% of the world's wealth but only 6.3% of its population. Our world task in this position is to devise a pattern of relationships which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity. We should cease to talk about such vague and unreal objectives such as human rights, the raising of living standards, and democratization."

### **Guatemala**

**Rigoberta Menchu (Guatemalan refugee) [subtitled]:** No Guatemalan who has ever gone abroad wants to be Mexican, Honduran, or North American. He is Guatemalan, and loves his homeland, his life, his culture, his children, and his future. He dreams of

going back. We must understand that Guatemalans have their dreams. Their dreams are real. Dreams of going back to their country. and living like human beings. It won't be easy to make these dreams come true. It will cost many more lives. But it is not fair for our people to continue to suffer.

**Narrator:** By 1990, the Guatemalan people had suffered under [one of] the longest, continuous conflict in the world.

**Rigoberta Menchu (Guatemalan refugee) [subtitled]:** Since 1954 until today, the Guatemalan military have become an intrinsic element of the political and economic power in Guatemala. The story of my parents has to do with this.

**Narrator:** Rigoberta's father was one of 38 people killed [on January 31, 1980] in an attack on the Spanish Embassy where a delegation of Guatemalans had sought international help in restraining their own government.

**Rigoberta Menchu (Guatemalan refugee) [subtitled]:** The blood of the Indians was mixed with that of the Mestizos.

**Narrator:** This mixing of blood marked an escalation in Guatemala's civil war.

**Rigoberta Menchu (Guatemalan refugee) [subtitled]:** The years 1982 and 1983 were very sad years for us. In two years, 227 massacres took place, and 28,000 people were killed as a result. Three ethnic indigenous groups were massacred.

**Narrator:** The Guatemalan army's counter-insurgency campaign has been rightly characterized as genocide. An estimated 150,000 people have been killed [over 200,000 by 1995], 40,000 children were orphaned, 1.2 million (1,200,000) Guatemalans fled their homeland.

**Rona Weitz (Amnesty International - USA):** In the mid-1980s, entire villages were destroyed. Not only were people massacred in those villages, but huts were burned down, livestock were killed, crops were burned in an attempt to simply uproot people from their communities.

**Narrator:** "Scorched earth" tactics were a part of the army's pacification program. As many as 75,000 peasants were relocated into strategic hamlets called "development poles." The Archbishop of Guatemala likened these settlements to concentration camps. Over 600,000 people were forced to join civil patrols, forcing civilians to act under the army's orders, and setting peasant against peasant.

**Nineth Garcia (Grupo Apaya Mutuo) [subtitled]:** Our country has been rightly named a "laboratory of terror." Torture techniques were tried on our people who were

used as guinea pigs. Very sophisticated torture techniques. Fascist-type techniques that were used [by the U.S.] in Vietnam.

**Narrator:** In 1984, Nineth's husband was taken away by the National Police. He never returned.

**Nineth Garcia (Grupo Apaya Mutuo [Group of Mutual Support]) [subtitled]:** I don't know whether he's dead or alive. My daughter knows he was taken away by the army.

**Rona Weitz (Amnesty International - USA):** In 1966, you saw "disappearances" come on the scene in Guatemala. It was a phenomenon that was developed in an effort to combat a growing insurgency in the country. It has since been exported to Chile, to Argentina, to El Salvador, but it had its roots in Guatemala. In Guatemala, there is virtually no case to our knowledge where a member of the security or military forces has ever been brought to account for human rights abuses.

**Narrator:** Nineth demanded accountability. More than 40,000 people have been "disappeared." She organized the families of the disappeared into the Group of Mutual Support or GAM. For most of the decade, GAM is the only human rights group operating in Guatemala. Not even the [International] Red Cross was allowed a permanent presence. After all, to defend human rights is to risk one's life in Guatemala.

**Rona Weitz (Amnesty International - USA):** Two of the leaders of that organization [GAM] were killed in circumstances in which the security forces were alleged to be involved. Death threats were received by many members. A number of people associated with the Group of Mutual Support fled the country and went into exile.

**Blanca Vargas (Guatemalan refugee) [subtitled]:** I wasn't one of the leaders, but I was very close to them [the two GAM leaders killed by the security forces]. I was very close to Rosario and Hector who were brutally murdered. Hector was assassinated on March 30, 1985. They smashed his whole body and cut off his tongue, and yet the forensic report [by the government] said that he died of a "ruptured spleen." Rosario was killed on April 13, 1985, together with her baby and her brother. They made it look as if they had been killed in a car crash, but [an independent autopsy revealed that] the three of them had been strangled, Rosario had been raped, and her baby's fingernails had been torn off.

**Rona Weitz (Amnesty International - USA):** Blanca received numerous death threats anonymously by both telephone and in writing to both her own life and her child's life, and as a result she felt that she had to flee the country.

**Blanca Vargas (Guatemalan refugee) [subtitled]:** After that, I began to get phone calls telling me where I'd been, who I'd been with, where I was going. I was devastated. Why? How did they know everything about me? What did they want of me?

**Narrator:** In 1986, the army allowed the civilian government to be elected, then legislated its own amnesty. This was called the "democratic opening," but anyone who crossed its threshold was subject to assassination. Guatemala remains one of the worst human rights offenders in the hemisphere.

**"Ovidio" (Mobile Military Police) [subtitled]:** Officially, the mobile military police specializes in counter-insurgency. But it's quite the opposite. It is directly involved in kidnappings, the repression of demonstrations, and disappearances.

**Blanca Rosa Quiroa (Mother of a "Disappeared") [subtitled]:** The morgues were a nightmare that cannot be described in words. Every time I went there, I'd be confronted with two, three, five mutilated bodies of young men and women. They'd been savagely tortured. Seeing all these mutilated bodies I used to wonder: Where is my son? In what condition is he in? Is he being tortured? When will I find him?

**"Ovidio" (Mobile Military Police) [subtitled]:** Their relatives keep looking for them, but they no longer exist. They are dead.

**Nineth Garcia (Grupo Apaya Mutuo [Group of Mutual Support]) [subtitled]:** Many of the officers had trained at the School of the Americas. It is a school specializing in psychological and conventional warfare against civilian populations, against unarmed and helpless people who can't defend themselves. This is absolutely true. Guatemala was the first country in Latin America to implement systematic torture. But not on their own. They were aided by the U.S. government of that time. That was in 1965-1966 and it continues today.

**Narrator:** Between 1980 and 1989, Guatemala received over \$200 million (\$200,000,000) in military and economic aid. The end of the decade saw an alarming escalation in human rights abuses, but it also saw a courageous effort to defend human rights, especially in the highlands or "altoplanos" where no human rights group had dared to operate. In 1986, Amilcar Mendes organized the Council of Ethnic Communities or CERJ. CERJ educated the Quiche Indians regarding their human and civil rights.

The army targeted this group for persecution. At least nine members were disappeared or killed over two years. Amilcar himself was under death threat. But by the end of the decade, he had been internationally recognized for his work in the defense of human rights.

## **Honduras**

**Narrator:** There was a saying that Honduras was so poor that it could not even afford an oligarchy.

**Unidentified Honduran man [subtitled]:** It's very sad. A ration of food costs two tempiros in the marketplace. How can I feed my children? I have eight children. With my wife, that makes ten of us. And I'm the only one working. When my wife stops breast-feeding, how will I feed them? Milk is so expensive, they'll never see it again until they can buy it themselves maybe.

**Narrator:** Generations have been poor hungry and have died hungry. Honduras has the highest infant mortality rate in Central America; 72% of the children are malnourished. Such poverty has left Honduras uniquely vulnerable to the geo-political interests that convulse the region. As the decade began, Honduras received over 60,000 refugees from neighboring El Salvador in 1980 alone. This, in one of the poorest nations in the hemisphere.

Salvadorans brought their history and their hope. The refugee population grew to over a quarter of a million (250,000) people in ten years. Life in the camps was hard and threatened to become permanent, but Salvadorans and Hondurans refused to become victims. They organized themselves and began to plan their own repatriation on their terms. At the end of the decade, all but about 3,000 have returned to El Salvador.

The camps afforded little safety. Even here, refugees and those who assisted them were subject to attack in cross-border raids by the Salvadoran army. Report filed by Jon Alpert (December 18, 1981): Soldiers from El Salvador continue to cross the border. They tried to hide from us, but we caught up with a heavily-armed group well inside Honduras.

**Jon Alpert (interviewing a Salvadoran soldier):** Who flies the helicopters for you?

**Unidentified Salvadoran soldier [subtitled]:** The pilots are American.

**Jon Alpert:** The U.S. State Department denies American pilots are being used. El Salvador denies their soldiers cross the border [into Honduras]. But we saw the soldiers - and we saw their work. We saw this man shot in the head. Still alive are his wife and four children.

**Rona Weitz (Amnesty International - USA):** In Honduras, the late-1970s to the early -1980s was a time of heightened focus in terms of human rights violations. Most of those violations seemed to be directed toward the refugee population. The situation is a

little different now. There has been a resurgence of abuses. However, the repression seems to be more selective. It's not directed at refugees simply because they're refugees. It's directed at people who are taking public positions in opposition to the government.

**Narrator:** In the 1980s, opposition to the government centered on the perceived militarization of Honduras. Its strategic location in heart of Central America made what was once a forgotten "banana republic" the epicenter for the United States counter-insurgent war in the region.

**Caspar Weinberger (Former U.S. Secretary of Defense):** It's quite clear that the government troops have had increasing success in the last few months. The leadership and the training and the morale has improved. I think that the training we're going to see in Honduras will be very helpful. And I think that they're bringing increasing amounts of the country under general control.

**Narrator:** Since 1980, over 90,000 U.S. troops have been rotated through Honduras. The United States has built at least 11 airstrips, three naval bases, two sophisticated base camps and training facilities, combat-ready refueling pads, a large-scale command and logistics center, and the largest CIA station in the world. The effect of this militarization on Honduran society has been tragic. U.S. military maneuvers have displaced an estimated 16,000 Hondurans within their own country.

**Mayor of Cabriela [subtitled]:** We had to leave our homes so the U.S. army could have the land for their maneuvers. We've been left to our fate. All because of the North Americans!

**Narrator:** War games became the real thing, with real victims. The military buildup provided an infrastructure for the U.S.-backed "Contra" army based in Honduras. Unable to gain a foothold in Nicaragua, much of the actual fighting took place in Honduras. Here, we see a child that is suffering the pain inflicted from stepping on a U.S.-made mine. Anti-personnel weapons such as Claymore mines cannot discriminate between civilians and combatants.

**Zenaida Valasquez (Honduran refugee) [subtitled]:** Let the world know that there is an opposition in Honduras. All these people should not disappear, be tortured and persecuted in vain. There is an internal opposition and the security forces trained by the United States are trying to shut it up.

**Narrator:** The United States appropriated more than land. It appropriated another country's army.

**"Pedro" (Special Operative, Army of Honduras) [subtitled]:** I was a member of a special squadron in the Honduran military under the orders of the American military. We were trained by the U.S. and sent on missions to other countries we had nothing to do with. We were trained in Panama, in the USA, and in other places we don't know because we'd be taken in and taken out again at night.

**Narrator:** By mid-decade, U.S. military aid jumped from \$4 million (\$4,000,000) to over \$88 million (\$88,000,000). Predictably, this windfall in military aid enriched and empowered the corrupt elements of the Honduran army. As early as 1983, Honduras had been included on the United Nations list of nations that arbitrarily execute people.

**Zenaida Valasquez (Honduran refugee) [subtitled]:** The first secret cemetery was found in February 1982 at Montannita, near Tegucigalpa. Many of those people had been murdered in Honduras.

**Unidentified Honduran woman [subtitled]:** I have hopes of finding my son alive. They [the soldiers] took him alive. I want him back alive. If they want to kill me, they can kill me right here. But I'll keep searching for my son as long as I live. I'm fifty years old, and I have never seen anything like it here in Honduras.

**Narrator:** Before 1980, there had never been a systematic policy of repression. By the middle of the decade, there had been 254 political assassinations, over 2,000 illegal detentions, and 110 disappearances. Zenaida's brother was one of the disappeared. She prosecuted his case in the Inter-American Court on Human Rights in Costa Rica.

**Zenaida Valasquez (Honduran refugee) [subtitled]:** So the lawsuit was filed for four cases which opened the door to more than 90,000 cases [of disappearances] in Latin America, with 140 of those cases in Honduras alone. This is the first trial of this nature to be held in Latin America and in the world. Thanks to the fact that Honduras has accepted the Court's jurisdiction, [our case was heard].

**Narrator:** By submitting to the jurisdiction of the Inter-American Court on Human Rights, Honduras, one of the poorest and most exploited countries in the hemisphere, provided a moral example of political leadership. Zenaida won the case in a landmark decision, then had to flee for her own life.

**Zenaida Valasquez (Honduran refugee) [subtitled]:** It was apparent from the beginning that the National Security Doctrine was an invention of the U.S. Pentagon. Its main purpose was to eliminate all existing political opposition. And to eliminate it as brutally as possible to inflict terror on the population. So that the villagers do not express their repudiation toward these acts, the killings are conducted in a brutal manner.



## Nicaragua

**Doris Tijerino-Hasian (Commandante) [subtitled]:** I've been a Sandinista for 20 years. The Somoza regime was very hard for Nicaragua. I was in the war from 1965. I was imprisoned four times by the Somozan dictatorship. The last time was in 1978, one year before the triumph of the revolution.

**Narrator:** General Somoza and his family enjoyed the longest and reputedly the most corrupt dictatorship in Central or Latin America. After 40 years in power, the brutality of the Somoza dictatorship was exposed to the world when Somoza's National Guard killed ABC correspondent Bill Stewart on May 28, 1979 with the television cameras rolling.

He was murdered three weeks before the Sandinistas won the revolution. Somoza had been regarded as a reliable ally to U.S. interests in the region. The new government however, promised to be nationalist and sovereign, that is, independent of the United States. It was characterized by the U.S. as communist.

**Doris Tijerino-Hasian (Commandante) [subtitled]:** With an army of practically all teenagers, how could the Nicaraguan revolution pose a threat to the national security of the United States? Was the literacy campaign communist? Was that a threat to the U.S.? It's a problem of interpretation. The truth is, the U.S. has never needed any excuses to intervene in our countries, especially in Nicaragua. Why did they invade Nicaragua in 1912 and again in 1926? The history of Nicaragua is one of successive U.S. military interventions against Nicaragua's internal affairs. And what is communism?

There is no way we could have developed a communist system and built a free Nicaragua while trying to defeat the Somoza military dictatorship. The revolution to us meant giving everyone the opportunity to learn to read and write, and not die of measles, polio, or diarrhea. Having access to basic health care and basic education, [that's we we wanted for our people].

**Rona Weitz (Amnesty International - USA):** We were initially encouraged by a number of steps taken by the [Sandinista] government. The National Guard was disbanded - a force that had been widely involved in repression in previous years; the death penalty was abolished, and as an abolitionist organization we find that an encouraging direction; the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights, and [the International Covenants] on Social, Economic, and Cultural Rights were promulgated, which lay out the basic principles and guidelines in terms of the guarantees which a government must provide to its citizens in terms of human rights.

**Narrator:** Among the international covenants that Nicaragua signed was the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees and its 1967 Protocol. Like every other country in Central America, Nicaragua was affected by the massive displacement of population. Nicaragua [under the Sandinistas] was host nation to over 17,000 refugees. While in Nicaragua, these refugees, mostly Salvadoran, were extended the full rights and obligations of a Nicaraguan citizen, including freedom of movement, the right to work, access to health care and education.

**Dominga Bonilla (Salvadoran refugee) [subtitled]:** I'm from El Salvador. We lived in San Vicente. I want to be able to write my own name at least, even if I don't learn much else. I want to continue with these classes. I wish they would teach us very slowly so we could follow the lessons better.

**Dr. Santiago Fuiz (United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees, Representative) [subtitled]:** Refugee integration in Nicaragua has been admired everywhere, even in the United States.

**Narrator:** But, over the decade, Nicaraguans themselves were internally displaced and began to feel the effects of [secret] war [being waged against them by the United States. Having won their revolution [overthrowing the Somoza military dictatorship], Nicaraguans had to fight again to defend it. It was a war characterized by gross human rights violations, and violations of laws of armed conflict. What begun in 1981, when former CIA Director William Casey secured \$19 million (\$19,000,000) from Congress for a minimal secret operation developed into a war that exacted a high price in human suffering.

An estimated 58,000 people were killed, 350,000 people were displaced, over 16,000 children were orphaned. Proportionately, the casualty rate for Nicaragua was higher than the sum of all casualties in all wars the U.S. had fought in the 20th Century.

**"Pedro" (Special Operative, Army of Honduras) [subtitled]:** The CIA was in control of everything. The cannon fodder came from Honduras, but the orders came from the "gringos." We were at their disposal. We carried out acts of sabotage in the ports of Corinto, Blue Fields, [and other places]. One important operation was to plant bombs in a meeting attended by the Nicaraguan high command.

**Narrator:** The government of Nicaragua held the government of the United States responsible for such acts of aggression.

**Doris Tijerino-Hasian (Commandante) [subtitled]:** We've always acted within the framework of international law. We even sued the U.S. in the World Court [at the International Court of Justice in the Hague, Netherlands]. We didn't send an army battalion to invade the U.S.; we resorted to international law - and we won.

**Narrator:** On June 27, 1986, the World Court ruled in Nicaragua's favor. But the United States refused to submit to the jurisdiction of the World Court. At the United Nations, the Security Council called for the full and immediate compliance with the World Court decision. Only the United States voted against the resolution, but the vote comprised a veto.

**Doris Tijerino-Hasian (Commandante) [subtitled]:** It was the World Court's resolution. Nicaragua [under the Sandinistas] has always acted within the law, and the U.S. outside the law.

## **El Salvador**

**Narrator:** El Salvador is the Tom Thumb of the Americas. For over 60 years, the spirit of the Salvadoran people has matched, measure for measure, the brutality of its succession of military dictatorships. In El Salvador, the decade began amid a national bloodbath. After a renewed cycle of repression in the late-1970s, human rights organization documented an alarming rise in deaths and disappearances. The people of El Salvador responded with non-violent movements such as Co-Madres, the Committee of the Mothers and Relatives of Political Prisoners, Disappeared, and the Assassinated.

**Maria Teresa Tula (Salvadoran refugee) [subtitled]:** This terror has been imposed on us by the government, the armed forces, and the security forces. That makes us stronger in our quest for the peace we so desire. I can tell you, personally, that we mothers have demonstrated and have cried for ten years searching for our disappeared relatives. But the tears we have shed in the streets have turned into a fortress [of strength] and a struggle for peace and justice in El Salvador. It's in the spirit of all Salvadoreans.

**Narrator:** Co-Madres characterized the popular organizations of El Salvador with the belief that an unarmed mass movement could bring down a military regime and an oligarchy-in-exile. In this spirit, seven human rights leaders could be killed and an eighth would step forward to carry on. The world watched in horror as peaceful demonstrators were attacked by government troops.

**Television reporter questioning a Salvadoran soldier at a demonstration [subtitled]:** These demonstrations are frequent in El Salvador. How do you disperse these demonstrations, and what do you think about the people who attend them.

**Unidentified soldier [subtitled]:** Well, mostly they are unemployed with nothing to do. They get drawn into this and their leaders get away while they get killed.

**Narrator:** By 1980, events moved quickly. The Salvadoran army, contemptuous of even the facade of respectability, escalated its repression. El Salvador was unique. It was not a small group of revolutionaries who demanded a change; it was the population at large, the people. And it was therefore the Salvadoran people that the army targeted as enemies of the state.

In 1977, a conservative priest, a scholar, was made Archbishop. It was assumed he would remain silent, but Oscar Romero was an honest man. He said what he saw. He used his position to denounce the army's violence, and became the political and spiritual leader of his people: the voice of the voiceless.

**Archbishop Oscar Romero [subtitled]:** In the name of God, and in the name of these suffering people whose laments cry out daily to Heaven in protest. I beg you, I implore you, I command you in the name of God, stop the repression!

**Narrator:** These words were part of a homily broadcast live on March 23, 1980. The following day while celebrating Mass, Monseigneur Romero was shot through the heart.

**Beria (Salvadoran refugee) [subtitled]:** When they kill someone so revered by the people, what will they do to us [common people]? We mean nothing to them. If they kill our bishop, why would they hesitate to kill us?

**Narrator:** 100,000 people attended the funeral. His assassination was a dramatic declaration that the army could kill with impunity, for no one was exempt. It was a declaration of war against the people. In response to repeated massacres that followed the assassination of Archbishop Romero, opposition groups formed a unified political and military command.

**Karen Parker (Attorney, International Human Rights and Humanitarian Law):** By the fall of 1980, the opposition had organized itself sufficiently into a political wing and a military wing, so that it became reasonable to be thinking about the application of armed conflict law, the Geneva Conventions. And enough became apparent, to me and others, that the situation will probably deteriorate into a civil war.

**Narrator:** There are international standards to distinguish war from terrorism or criminal violence. If, for example, a military group can hold a territory and enforce the Geneva Conventions, a state of war exists. In 1983, the General Assembly of the United Nations determined that a civil war existed in El Salvador.

**Galileo (Salvadoran refugee) [subtitled]:** The civil war in El Salvador is a horrible war, just like any other war in the world. The people have been forced to adopt a

position of war. They must defend themselves against the National Guard, the police, and the death squads.

**Narrator:** The army characterized the war as a counter-insurgent campaign against a Soviet-inspired revolution. With this argument, it turned to the United States. The U.S., already nervous about the success of Nicaragua's revolution and fearful of the loss of its dominance in the region, provided money and strategy [to the Salvadoran military]. The Salvadoran army became an efficient and well-oiled killing machine.

**Pedro Farullo (Salvadoran refugee) [subtitled]:** The army performed "clean-up operations" [where I lived]. First, they sent in airplanes and helicopters to bomb the hill, the village, and the other villages nearby. That went on for nearly two hours. Then, they sent in the army to finish off anyone left alive. Children were burned to death by phosphorus bombs, not just the adults.

**Narrator:** This is a bill of lading for phosphorus bombs shipped by the United States to the government of El Salvador. The United States had signed the United Nations Convention Banning Chemical Warfare, [but what it said and what it did were two different things]. In 1986 at the height of the bombing campaign, over 230 villages were attacked, displacing an estimated 400,000 people.

**Karen Parker (Attorney, International Human Rights and Humanitarian Law):** You cannot target the civilian population. If a civilian gets inadvertently hit when the bullets are flying and they're in the wrong place at the wrong time, it's not necessarily a war crime. But when you target the civilian population, it is. And we express serious concern about that as well as the air war because with the air war there was no attempt at all to target military targets. It was just wantonly and randomly carried out in areas where civilians were living.

In an interview I had more than a year ago with Mr. Ray Prendez, who was at that time the Minister of the President, he indicated that the people who were bombed weren't really civilians because they sympathized with the dissidents, as he calls them the guerrillas, the subversives. Because the government considers that they sympathize, the government makes them a target. Of course, that's a violation of the Geneva Convention. He said to me, "We can't win the war without killing the civilians."

**Unidentified Salvadoran soldiers [subtitled]:** Should we fire our 90mm artillery? Out there, where you are, there is a group of civilians. They're moving to the left. Yes, I understand. Go ahead and fire.

**Narrator:** In ten years' time, the United States pumped approximately \$4 billion into a country about the size and population of Connecticut. But the U.S. provided more than money. It offered political legitimacy. Early in the decade, U.S. advisors were attached

to Salvadoran military brigades. Elite special operations forces and mobile training teams were rotated into El Salvador. But psychological operations, controlled by fear, dominated El Salvador's civil war. Since 1980, over 75,000 people have been killed in this "low-intensity conflict," mostly non-combatants. About half of these, an estimated 35,000 people were murdered by government forces operating as "death squads."

**Rene Hurtado (Salvadoran refugee) [subtitled]:** I was asked to join the death squads. The only requirement was that I didn't have a "grandmother" which means I shouldn't feel repulsion at the idea of killing. The security forces, the National Guard, the police, all had torture chambers.

**Cesar Joya Martinez (Salvadoran refugee) [subtitled]:** No one from the army or from our joint chiefs of staff ever said to an officer, "Go and train these agents." Of course not. It was always a North American who would instruct me how to follow someone or how to persecute someone or torture someone and how to write a classified report. We captured a civilian once, I don't know who he was, but we tortured him with the "hood" to see how long he could go on breathing, how long his agony was. Then we analyzed this "experiment in torture" and said, "Good. That was pretty good. Now let's cut his throat."

**Juan Romagosa (Salvadoran refugee) [subtitled]:** The hood is a very cruel torture. They covered my head with a plastic bag. It's suffocating. You lose consciousness very quickly. Sometimes they covered the inside of the bag with lime. That makes it much worse. It's a caustic substance and it suffocates you within seconds.

**Cesar Joya Martinez (Salvadoran refugee) [subtitled]:** I can tell you exactly how we did it. I took part in these operations and I was instrumental in executing them for these people. We'd capture someone and, for example, inject sulphuric acid in their veins to see how painfully they died. Or we'd tear off their arteries to watch how they moved and help us decide what methods of torture to use in the future. It's easy to murder people in the security forces headquarters. But the department wasn't sloppy about it. They were organized. They had planning. They were the death squads.

**Narrator:** The Human Rights Commission, Non-Governmental, tried to document the scale and nature of the repression. They submitted stacks of photographs such as these to the international community. The Commission itself was targeted for imprisonment, torture, and assassination.

**Rona Weitz (Amnesty International - USA):** We have numerous testimonies. The repression appears to be more selective. It seems to be directed today at particular people who appear to be in positions where there is a fear that they may be able to mobilize popular support. This would include trade unionists, lawyers, human rights workers, these are the kinds of groups that have been under particular attack.

**Narrator:** The decade ended with a symmetry of assassinations. On October 31, 1989, a car bomb decimated the offices of FENASTRAS, the National Federation of Salvadoran Workers. Eleven union leaders were killed, 30 injured. On November 16, 1989, six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter were massacred at the Rectory of the University of Central America.

**Maria Teresa Tula (Salvadoran refugee, former leader of El Madres) [subtitled]:** How long have they been breaking the law in El Salvador? We are warning you so you don't cry afterwards and say, "Poor Salvadorans! Poor Nicaraguans!" We are not poor and to be pitied. We are humans, with dignity. We don't want war. We want peace and solidarity. The North Americans are going to have to stop this war so that one day, in the near future, El Salvador may have peace and justice.