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Headline: Joint Chiefs Chairman Ponce Interviewed

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FULL TEXT OF ARTICLE:

1. [Text] The Armed Forces are "more united than ever" and are silently observing the proceedings against nine military men involved in the assassination of the Jesuits, to rule out any public doubts by those who might want to manipulate the enforcement of justice, Colonel Rene Emilio Ponce, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has said.
2. During his first interview this year, the high-ranking military officer said Marxist subversives have taken advantage of the killing of the Jesuits and their two maids in an attempt to divide and discredit the Army.
3. "The Armed Forces are aware of this and are more united than ever," the Colonel said, adding that he was "very impressed" last week when he confirmed this unity during a recent meeting with over 150 Army chiefs and officers.
4. A colonel, three other officers, two noncommissioned officers, and two soldiers were arrested following orders by a judge conducting an investigation on the assassination of the Jesuits perpetrated at daybreak on 16 November at the Central American University (UCA).
5. The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said the Armed Forces have maintained a silence in this regard so as not to interfere with the investigations, because any statements could be interpreted as pressure.
6. Ponce added that the Armed Forces have fulfilled their duty in sending the military men involved to the judicial authorities. However, he noted, "no one is guilty until it can be proven."
7. Reporters reminded the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff that, within the overall condemnation resulting from the killing of the Jesuits, and Dr. Hector Oqueli Colindres' assassination in Guatemala, groups have been organized and are demanding investigations and the enforcement of the law against those who turn out to be involved. However, these same groups have forgotten crimes

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such as the assassination of Dr. Francisco Peccorini, Dr. Roberto Garcia Alvarado, Dr. Antonio Rodriguez Porth, Edgar Chacon, Gabriel Payes, Dr. Jose Francisco Guerrero, and recently, the attack against engineer Jose Hernandez, who is about to die.

8. The reporters added that in these cases, there have been no socialist or religious groups demanding the execution of the criminals, no homilies on the occasion of their death, and neither the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Scotland Yard, nor the Spanish police have been called in to investigate the crimes.

9. Col. Ponce said he agrees with the reporters. He reminded them that hundreds of thousands of military men have been killed by the left wing, yet no one has said anything. However, when others are killed, be they from a religious or a political group, the first thing people do is blame the Armed Forces or the so-called "death squads," or try to intentionally link these groups with the Army, and forget the FMLN-FDR [Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front-Democratic Revolutionary Front] terrorist death squads trained in Cuba, Nicaragua, Vietnam, and Algeria.

10. In view of the reporters' comments, Ponce explained that the relations between Catholic leaders and the Armed Forces are "very cordial." He added that he has held several meetings with leaders from the Salvadoran Episcopal Conference in which the two parties have expressed their viewpoints regarding the crimes perpetrated by FMLN-FDR criminals.

11. Ponce disclosed that terrorist groups are planning to attack several sectors in southwest and northeast San Salvador between the last week of January and 10 February.

12. He added that Military Intelligence has learned that the FMLN intends to attack the zone of Finca El Espino, Santa Tecla, Zaragoza Huizucar, Ayutuxtepeque, Soyapango, and other sectors where coffee plantations are located.

13. During the criminal offensive unleashed by the FMLN-FDR on 11 November in 1989, bloody clashes occurred at the places mentioned.

14. According to Ponce, the FMLN leadership intends to carry out the attacks at the same time the Nicaraguan presidential elections are being held. "They want to be noticed and to show their sponsors abroad that they are still alive and have strength, but we are prepared," Ponce emphasized.

15. Ponce maintained that "aid from the Nicaraguan and Cuban regimes still continues arriving for the FMLN-FDR terrorists, but

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Military Intelligence is working to locate the places where the aid arrives."

16. Asked about the guilt of U.S. citizen Jennifer Casolo, who was released by a judge "because of lack of evidence," the high-ranking military officer said the Armed Forces simply follow orders issued by civilian authorities.

17. "During the investigations conducted to determine the guilt or innocence of Casolo, the National Police gathered all of the evidence and sent it to the court, which afterwards ordered the release of Casolo," Ponce added.

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