

[REDACTED]

1 The investigation of the Jesuit killings is proceeding slowly, while  
2 charges of government abuses are undercutting Salvadoran President  
3 Cristiani's efforts to improve his country's human rights image. [REDACTED]

4 The government launched an immediate investigation following the 16  
5 November murder of the six Jesuit priests, but technical, bureaucratic,  
6 manpower problems have impeded progress. Despite technical assistance from  
7 Spain and the US, government agencies, including the US-trained Special  
8 Investigations Unit and the Attorney General's office, are having  
9 difficulty coordinating their efforts and are overwhelmed with the  
10 magnitude of the task. [REDACTED]

11 Little hard evidence has emerged in the investigation of military  
12 units and potential witnesses. The government is bogged down following  
13 hundreds of mostly false leads offered in response to a \$250,000 reward.  
14 Key witnesses have changed their testimony several times, while others the  
15 government believes may have real information refuse to come forward,  
16 probably fearing retribution. [REDACTED] The process was  
17 further complicated recently when the Church's human rights group, Tutel  
18 Legal, admitted that some of its members initially removed evidence from

[REDACTED]

19 the scene including shell casings and a placard reading "death to traitor  
20 of the FMLN." [REDACTED]

21 Adding to the government's woes are charges by local and international  
22 churches that the government is systematically persecuting them. Although  
23 the vast majority of churches were not subjected to government action, 24  
24 incidents of searches and arrests occurred during the first two weeks of t  
25 FMLN offensive. The government claims that security forces targeted the  
26 churches based on intelligence that they were helping the FMLN, but, exce  
27 for the discovery of a large arms cache at the home of a US church worker  
28 the searches produced only pro-FMLN propaganda. [REDACTED]

29 COMMENT: The government and military realize their credibility and  
30 prospects for continued US aid probably are contingent on a quick  
31 resolution of the Jesuit case, and they hope foreign assistance will lend  
32 legitimacy to the investigation. Most observers believe that prospects fo  
33 a successful prosecution are poor even if solid evidence or suspects are  
34 established, because of the inherent weaknesses of the judicial system.  
35 Although the military continues to believe some church groups support the  
36 FMLN, Cristiani probably will seek to reassure local church leaders that  
37 his government is not against them. He already has ordered a halt to such  
38 searches unless cleared by the Army High Command. [REDACTED]

39 [REDACTED]