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05 March 1992

SUBJECT: HPSCI Request for Information on Background on
Jesuit Killings

1. Following a file review of information pertinent to the murders of the Jesuit priests and the two women at the University of Central America on 15 November 1989, we find no confirmed evidence that then Air Force Commander Juan Rafael Bustillo Toledo was directly involved in the planning and/or execution of these murders.

2. This said, there is unsubstantiated reporting which indicates that he may have been privy to the fact that a decision had been made to kill the priests at some time prior to the murders. The debate concerning General Bustillo's prior knowledge of the Jesuit murders centers around the timing of a meeting reported to have occurred sometime during the afternoon of 15 November 1989 at the Salvadoran Military School. Details concerning allegations made about this meeting have been previously published in the N.Y. Times, and include information passed to Staff Delegates of Congressman John Moakley (D) of Massachusetts during their visit to El Salvador in August of 1990. Individuals reported to have been in attendance at this meeting include the Chief of the Joint Staff Colonel Rene Ponce, General Bustillo, the Directors of the National Police and National Intelligence Directorate, and several other high-ranking military officers. Unfortunately, all records pertaining to the presence of any of these officers at the Military School were destroyed by one of the conspirators.

3. If, as some reporting indicates, this meeting took place prior to the time Colonel Guillermo Benavides, the Military School Commander, issued his orders to the lieutenants who carried out the murders, then General Bustillo's level of involvement in the murders might be greater than previously indicated. General Bustillo has been reliably linked to human rights abuses in the past, and his history lends some credence to reports of his involvement in the Jesuit case.

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4. There is other information, however, suggesting that General Bustillo's role may have been more passive; that is, he may have known of the plan and did nothing to prevent it; or he was only involved in the subsequent coverup. One report states that Colonel Benavides went to General Bustillo for advice after he received orders to kill the Jesuits. General Bustillo is purported to have responded that 'a good soldier follows orders and does not question them.' Another report states that General Bustillo offered a reward of some coveted training to one of the lieutenants implicated in the killings.

5. We hope the above information has been of some assistance. While we cannot confirm that General Bustillo had any role in the murders or the subsequent coverup, it is not outside the realm of possibility that he did either approve the action, or at least assist/support the initial coverup. As with all of the information surfacing about who in the Salvadoran military was involved in the Jesuit murders, reporting about General Bustillo is tainted by the political agendas of the reporting sources who have a tendency to want to settle old scores with their rivals in the military establishment.

