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Assassinations Continue in El Salvador

On 3 January two American advisors and the head of El Salvador's violence-plagued land reform program were assassinated by unknown gunmen at the Sheraton Hotel in San Salvador. The Americans, Mark D. Pearlman and Michael P. Hammer, were associates of the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD), an AFL-CIO affiliate based in Washington, D.C. Ironically, Mr. Hammer had arrived in El Salvador from the United States earlier on the day of the shooting. Mr. Pearlman had been assigned in the country since May 1980. The Salvadoran victim was Rodolfo Viera, the Director of the Salvadoran Institute for Agrarian Reform (ITSA) who had been the target of a previous assassination attempt. At the time of their deaths the three men were meeting together on behalf of the agrarian reform program and were seated in a dining area of the hotel around midnight when two unidentified gunmen approached and opened fire with automatic pistols at close range. Moments later the two gunmen plus a third man, believed to have been a lookout, escaped unmolested through the main lobby of the hotel.

The slaying of the two Americans brings to a total of seven the number of Americans killed in El Salvador during the last month. Four American churchwomen were abducted and murdered on 4 December. A private American security advisor was killed on 17 December. Some of these attacks have been linked to attempts by the extreme left and the extreme right to exacerbate the already serious problems being encountered by the centrist Salvadoran government in its efforts to bring reforms to the country. No group has yet claimed responsibility for the recent killing of any of the Americans.

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