

Salvadoran sets up mobile health care

Hospital structures often targets

By Stephanie Mencimer
Emerald Reporter

Benito Vivar, a Salvadoran physician who has developed mobile medical units for the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front, spoke Thursday about his work to provide rural health care.

Vivar greeted an audience in the EMU Ben Linder Room on behalf of wounded FMLN veteran Pedro Ortiz, who had been scheduled to speak but was denied a travel visa by the U.S. Embassy in El Salvador.

Although not a member of the FMLN, Vivar said through a translator that "the vast majority of Salvadoran people are ideologically in solidarity with the FMLN but organically do not function as part of the revolutionary front."

In 1981, Vivar left his private medical practice in San Salvador to help the FMLN set up an infrastructure to provide health care to combatants in the civil

war and also to civilians. The medical services have been set up because the government does not provide any services in areas disputed between the army and the FMLN Vivar said.

"The right to health is one of the most basic fundamental human rights, the right precisely most violated by the government and the army," Vivar said.

Vivar said the conditions under which the doctors and

trained volunteers work are rough, not just because of the lack of technology and infrastructure, but also on an individual basis to survive in the middle of a war zone.

"We have passed days when we could not eat. We who were city dwellers have learned what it is like to travel through the mountains carrying on our backs the supplies to set up a hospital in the field," Vivar said.

"To us, a hospital has nothing to do with buildings. It is precisely the fact that we can not set up structures, because if we do it becomes a favorite government target. For us, hospital means personnel, the people who can carry out the services with the supplies they carry on their backs," he said.

In order to better respond to civilian needs, Vivar and other volunteers set up a mobile health clinic staffed by what are essentially paramedics to serve two or three villages.

off services during the war. "We took it upon ourselves, knowing that people of the world would support our efforts," Vivar said. International solidarity networks, he said, have provided the majority of funds for the medical services set up by the FMLN.

"One obvious thing I must say is the government owes people health care," Vivar said, because according to the Salvadoran constitution the government must protect the health of the people.

"But on the contrary, the government gives its people bombs, bullets and killing," Vivar said.

Early in the year, Vivar said, the government dropped bombs on every major city in the country, leaving 2,000 to 3,000 people dead in every city. He said photos were published of trac-

tors pushing bodies into mass graves after the offensive, and none of the bodies were ever identified for families.

Vivar said the government denied all humanitarian organizations access to the areas to identify the dead or to treat wounded soldiers.

But the U.S. Congress keeps renewing military aid, which has totaled over \$4 billion since 1981, he said.

"Only the people of the U.S. can say to their Congress 'No,'" Vivar said.

He quoted Ronald Reagan as saying, "Nothing can prevent us from intervening in other countries except the possibility that the U.S. people wouldn't support it."

Vivar's visit was sponsored by the U.S.- El Salvador Institute for Democratic Development.

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