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ASSASSINATION OF GUATEMALAN SENATOR CONDEMNED

*Doubts expressed over Government's version
of who did the killing*

A spokesman for the Council on Hemispheric Affairs (COHA) today termed the assassination of former Guatemalan foreign minister Alberto Fuentes Mohr as a catastrophe for his nation, for Central America, and for all of Latin America. The COHA spokesman said that the assassination had taken place against a backdrop of a complete state of lawlessness that now exists in Guatemala. He blamed much of this condition on the hard-line tactics of the present foreign minister, Rafael Castillo Valdez, the government-sanctioned violence being conducted by the extreme rightwing group, the Ejercito Secreto Anti-Comunista (ESA), who along with elements of the MLN of former Vice President Mario Sandoval Alarcon, has been responsible for much of the violence now occurring in that nation.

The COHA spokesman said that his organization last November had hosted a visit by Senator Fuentes Mohr to Washington. While here, COHA staged a widely-attended press conference for him as well as arranged appointments with high officials of the Carter Administration and the Congress. He said that Fuentes Mohr had made a profound impression on the State Department for his keen insight into Guatemalan political and economic realities, and with evidence that he presented on the ineptitude of the government now ruling his nation, and further, with his denunciation of the rightwing which the Senator claimed was largely composed of members of the armed forces and police.

The COHA spokesman said that the Government has indicated that it was a leftwing group that had authored the assassination. According to the spokesman, "if this is true, this body roundly deserves to be denounced as terrorists and utterly irrelevant to the Guatemalan political process." But, he said, it is much more likely that it was the rightwing that had commissioned and carried out the assassination and that the government is now acting to cover up this fact. The spokesman stated, it is widely believed in Washington that Senator Fuentes Mohr's murder was actually ordered by large landholders as a symbolic retaliation for the recent murders of several prominent members of their group by leftwing guerrillas.

The COHA spokesman said that ultimately, it is the government of President Romeo Lucas Garcia who must take responsibility for the crime because it has turned its back on its campaign promises, and has done little to promote justice or control the reign of terror being fomented by the military and police and their civilian collaborators. He also expressed his organization's concern for the physical safety of Vice President Francisco Villagran Kramer who shares many of the political and social attitudes which were held by Fuentes Mohr.

The COHA spokesman also noted that Fuentes Mohr's death will have a profound effect throughout the world because of his strong links with the Socialist International. Late last year, the Senator attended a worldwide gathering of that body in Vancouver and made a deep impression on such leaders as Willy Brandt of Germany, Mario Soares of Portugal, and Felipe Gonzalez of Spain.