



10 DOWNING STREET

19 July 1983

From the Private Secretary

Dear Sir,

El Salvador: Visit of Former President

Thank you for your two letters of 18 July. Mr. Duarte called on the Prime Minister for 20 minutes this morning.

The Prime Minister said that we had done everything possible to help the democratic process in El Salvador. The turnout in the last elections had been most impressive.

Mr. Duarte said that those elections were just the beginning of the development of a democratic process in El Salvador. The next Presidential election would be held in December. He hoped that a sufficient proportion of the population would participate so that the centre was strengthened and the extremes, who created all the problems, were isolated. His objective in visiting European countries was to try to seek support for the democratic process. He believed that he had a very strong possibility of winning the December election. He was taking the risk of travelling freely around the country in order to inspire popular faith in democracy.

The Prime Minister asked how, if elected, Mr. Duarte would seek to ensure that all the arms of Government behaved in a disciplined way. Mr. Duarte replied that the authorities must in future act within rather than above the law. But help was needed. A European presence was necessary. The Americans could not stand alone in the area.

In response to a question from the Prime Minister, Mr. Duarte said that he was not yet sure whether yesterday's appointment of Dr. Kissinger to head a bipartisan commission on Central American problems was a good idea. But it might help to dissolve domestic opposition to American policies.

If the December elections were successful they would be a turning point. The results would be an executive with sufficient power to deal with the problems confronting El Salvador. He believed in strong Government. During his last period in office he had operated a pact with the Army which had left the latter a good deal of free rein. His hope this time was that his Government would be sufficiently strong to control the Army. In the last

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SUBJECT

cc Mr. Peter Sel

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two years the guerrillas had grown in strength and now numbered some 8,000 to 12,000. But they had lost popular support.

He thought there would be three or four candidates in the elections - himself, a candidate from the PCN, a military candidate and a candidate of the Arenas Group. If elected, he would continue the structural changes, including land reform, on which he had embarked previously. But the most important task would be the reform of state institutions and the control of violence.

As regards the wider problems of Central America, he believed that Mexico's efforts were directed towards helping Nicaragua. They were certainly not helping El Salvador. The efforts of the Contadora Group were to some extent praiseworthy. But they tended to ignore the reality of the American and Cuban presence. The Contadora Group's appeal of 18 July, envisaging the removal of all American and Cuban advisers from Central America, was not practical. The declaration made by the Spanish Prime Minister to Nicaragua had gone unnoticed in Europe but it was very important. It called for free elections, respect for human rights, a free press and freedom of movement.

With regard to Guatemala, President Rios Montt was inconsistent. Sometimes he appeared to be a genius; at others his actions were close to lunatic. The Prime Minister of Belize was doing a first class job and Guatemala was at least listening to him. The President of Venezuela was trying hard to prod the Contadora Group to take positive action, largely because he was greatly concerned about the intentions of Nicaragua.

In conclusion Mr. Duarte reiterated that he had asked all his friends in Europe to work for a European presence in Central America.

*Your ever
John Colson.*

Brian Fall, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.