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call



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

*Prime Minister
Content to see
President Cristiani?*

7 August 1989

Jean Cardine,

*CMS
7/8 Not the first week
in October. We don't
have enough
to do because in
mid the speech
for the
conference
not*

Request for Call on the Prime Minister
by the President of El Salvador

President Cristiani of El Salvador, who took office in June this year, is planning a European tour starting on 22 September. He has asked for a meeting with the Prime Minister in the last week in September or the first week in October.

Cristiani's visit will be a private one. He hopes to spend two or three days in the UK, accompanied by a delegation of businessmen who would follow a separate but related programme. He has told our Chargé in San Salvador that he will arrange the rest of his European tour around a meeting with the Prime Minister. His intention is to visit also France, Germany, Spain and Italy but he will not propose dates until he knows if and when the Prime Minister will see him. The other countries to be visited are all aware of his interest but have taken no decision on the level at which he will be received. They may well be influenced by the Prime Minister's decision.

The Prime Minister received Cristiani's predecessor, President Duarte, at Chequers in 1984. The proposed visit by Cristiani is, however, potentially a good deal more controversial. His party (ARENA) is a favourite target of human rights groups and other activists, who point to its association with death squads in the early 1980s under the leadership of Roberto d'Aubuisson who remains an influential figure in the party (but is not a member of the government). Following a mischievous article in the Observer on 23 July, these groups have already got wind of a possible visit, and have begun a letter writing campaign in protest.

Nevertheless, there is a good case for the Prime Minister to offer President Cristiani a meeting. His visit will follow closely the pattern set by the visit of President Ortega in May (coming at his own request, making all his own arrangements). But whereas the Prime Minister saw Ortega to offset the warm and over-credulous reception we expected him to receive from some of our European

/Partners

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Partners, in Cristiani's case we may wish to show a friendlier face than he may see elsewhere on his travels.

Cristiani won the Presidential election in March this year with a convincing first round victory. Our official observer found the election to be reasonably free and fair, despite the best efforts of the FMLN guerrillas to disrupt polling by raising the level of fear and intimidation. He has an ARENA majority in the National Assembly following similarly clean elections in March 1988. Cristiani is a wealthy businessman from the moderate wing of ARENA, and the indications are that he is doing his best to get a grip on the party machine, and to ensure that important positions in Government are filled by like-minded moderates who wish to uphold legality and respect for human rights. It is clear that he faces a lot of pressure from the extremist wing of the party (of which Roberto d'Aubuisson remains the charismatic leader), who are pressing for a more vigorous approach to the civil war, and in particular for tough new anti-terrorist legislation. It is not yet clear which tendency will prevail. A fairly radical and potentially repressive toughening of the penal code may be the price Cristiani will have to pay to retain his party's support for legality and the repudiation of death squad operations. Meanwhile the FMLN guerrillas are pursuing a policy of assassinating ARENA politicians and sympathisers in a clearly deliberate attempt to heighten tension and provoke violent retaliation.

President Cristiani is under no illusions about the damage which new repressive legislation could do his government in international opinion, most importantly in the United States. But there is a danger that, under the influence of NGOs and human rights groups, some of our European partners may jump the gun in ostracising Cristiani, and thus play into the extremists' hands. We could balance this by taking the opportunity to show our support for Cristiani, making plain at the same time our concern that his government should continue to show proper respect for human rights. It would be helpful in press briefing following a call to make clear the emphasis put on this aspect.

If the Prime Minister were to see Cristiani, it would go down well in Washington, for whom it is an important priority to bolster the moderates in ARENA (following his election Cristiani was received by President Bush in Washington). It would also provide a useful opportunity to

/congratulate

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congratulate Cristiani on his economic policies, his determination to eradicate corruption, and his interest in privatisation.

Yours sincerely,
Richard Gozney

(R H T Gozney)
Private Secretary

Miss Caroline Slocock
10 Downing Street

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