



cc MAP

HL

El Salvador

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

15 February 1982

El Salvador Elections: Observers

Thank you for your letter of 11 February.

The Prime Minister is content that Observers should be sent to the El Salvador elections on 28 March.

As we agreed on the telephone this morning, the timing of any Written Parliamentary Answer announcing this decision will need to take into account whatever may transpire on El Salvador during Prime Minister's Question time tomorrow. Perhaps we could be in touch thereafter.

A. J. COLES

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John Holmes, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office,

CONFIDENTIAL



Prime Minister

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

Contact that observers
should go?

A.S.C. $\frac{11}{2}$

11 February 1982

Yes not

Dear John,

El Salvador Elections: Observers

Lord Carrington would like the Prime Minister to know that he has decided in principle that we should accept the invitation from the Government of El Salvador to send observers to the elections due to take place there on 28 March.

The arguments for and against sending observers are finely balanced. You will be aware that the decision has been given a keen political edge by current public concern, both here and abroad, over events in El Salvador. Of our EC partners, France opposes the elections and most of the others are still making up their minds and possibly waiting for us to give a lead. Only a handful of other countries have so far announced that they are sending observers, although the Americans tell us that positive decisions have been taken by some others and we hope that one or two of the Commonwealth Caribbean countries may also do so.

Critics of the El Salvador Government say the elections will be unrepresentative. It is certainly the case that left wing opposition parties have refused to take part. It could also be argued that we should avoid further involvement in the area.

On the other hand, the US Government attach great importance to the elections and clearly see the sending of observers as a test of Western support for their position. We have just received a message from Secretary Haig urging us to send observers. This follows earlier representations by the US Ambassador. We have already had to decline to help the US in a number of respects in Central America. We therefore feel that there are powerful trans-Atlantic reasons for sending observers.

/We also



We also believe that refusal to send observers will be claimed by opponents of elections as a vindication of the position adopted by the Salvadorean guerillas, who would have effectively exercised a veto over the democratic process. Ministers can fairly say that it would be wrong to prejudge the issue in a part of the world where we are not well informed but which has clearly become an area of major public concern. Lord Carrington believes that a decision to send observers will be defensible in Parliament, therefore, despite the clamour that such a decision will arouse.

There is some hope that an early decision on our part to send observers will encourage other countries, possibly including Germany, Italy or Belgium, to follow our lead. It should also give us a rather stronger position from which to discuss events in El Salvador with the Americans, which we shall certainly wish to do. In telling them of our decision we shall have to warn them that we cannot guarantee that our observers will come up with findings that are to their liking and that indeed, given that the opposition parties have refused to take part, their report may well not be favourable.

We are giving further consideration to the choice of people to be sent (a team of two is most likely). Meanwhile, we propose that the announcement should be made to the House of Commons next week in a written reply. The US Government will be told slightly in advance and arrangements will be made for the Salvadorean Government and our EC partners to be informed.

Yours ever

John Holmes

(J E Holmes)
Private Secretary

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