

Nicaragua Executions Put at 500-1,000

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MANAGUA, Nicaragua—Illegal executions by Sandinista guerrillas and their allies since they took power under a junta here in July now number at least 500 and might be as high as 1,000, Jose Esteban Gonzales, president of the Nicaraguan Permanent Commission on Human Rights, said in an interview.

Most of the executions were carried out in the first few weeks after the Sandinista National Liberation Front-led civil war ousted President Anastasio Somoza and ended his family's four-decade rule here, informed sources said.

Ironically, the largest number of executions appears to have taken place in Granada, the only big city where no major fighting occurred.

"We now know that in the last two weeks of July between 300 and 400 people were executed in the Granada area," Gonzales said. "They were all people known to be prisoners (of the Sandinistas) and they were not killed in the heat of the fighting. They were killed by their captors days or weeks after they had been arrested.

"Many of them had been visited by their families after being detained, then when the families tried to visit them again they were told the prisoners had been taken to Managua, or handed over to the Red Cross, or sent to Panama."

Gonzales said he visited some of the mass graves where victims' bodies were found. He said he watched the exhumations and took part in the identification process. Other officials of the human rights commission accompanied him, he said, together with relatives of some of the victims. He has photographs of the graves and the victims.

The investigators found two mass graves on a small farm called El Dianatina, southwest of Granada, with 200 bodies buried in shallow soil. In another area, three miles northeast of Granada, three other graves were found with more than 60 bodies. Others have been found in the area and human rights commission officials are investigating reports of further burial sites.

Gonzales said that in Leon, north of Managua, between 100 and 200 people were executed in the six weeks be-

tween the time the Sandinistas took control of the city and the end of July.

In Masatepe, the commission has found and identified 20 bodies. In Nuvea Guinea, between 20 and 25 prisoners were executed July 26, despite appeals from local priests and other religious ministers. In Jinotepe, at least 20 were executed, and in Esteli, in the north of Nicaragua, there have been more executions, Gonzales said.

"Our experience is that this went on all over the country," he said.

(Two weeks ago, Interior Minister Tomas Borge, a Sandinista leader, told a press conference that the government was aware of widespread abuses of power, including some torture and a few executions. In a later interview he estimated that the number of illegal executions in the whole country totaled about 100).

The human rights commission president said he and his organization had been under considerable pressure from the revolutionary government not to disclose details of the executions.

"They have told us to close down the commission, they have tried to oblige me to resign, they have threatened other officials in other parts of the country and some of our people have resigned," he added.

But Gonzales, a theologian and philosopher educated by the Christian Brothers religious order here and in Europe, has refused to bow to the pressures.

"We are a permanent commission to defend human rights, no matter who is in power," he said. "We defended the victims of Somoza. Today, there is a tremendous fear in this country and a and a tremendous fear of admitting that this here exists. But we in the commission will not keep silent."