

CIA Opposes Release of Secret Files

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The CIA urged Congress yesterday to reject legislation that would speed the release of secret U.S. files that could help identify human rights violators throughout Latin America.

Asserting it had already gone to "extraordinary lengths" in terms of disclosure, the spy agency said its ability to recruit foreigners, gather secrets and do business was on the line.

Under the proposed Human Rights Information Act, "sources will be imperiled and the mission of the CIA—to support the Congress and the president—will be disadvantaged," Lee Strickland, a senior agen-

cy official, told a panel of the House Committee on Government Reform and Oversight.

The bill, as introduced in the House and Senate, would immediately cover Honduras and Guatemala, two of the countries hardest hit by paramilitary repression during the Cold War. A provision in the bill would expand the expedited declassification of human rights material to official investigators from other Latin American and Caribbean nations.

The legislation would require the CIA, State Department, Justice Department, Pentagon and other federal bureaucracies to lean toward openness. Under the bill, they would have to apply the same standards that

have resulted in the recent declassification of hundreds of thousands of pages on the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

Leo Valladares, national commissioner for human rights in Honduras, told the House panel that timely access to files documenting close U.S. ties to the Honduran military during the 1980s was "critical" to his effort to obtain justice for the families of Hondurans who "disappeared" at that time.

"The cycle of impunity must be broken," he said in testimony praised by Democrats and Republicans on the subcommittee on government management, information and technology.