

# U.S. Documents Confirm Skepticism on Nun's Rape

## *Embassy Had Cited Gaps, Inconsistencies In 1989 Account of Torture in Guatemala*

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Sister Dianna Ortiz, the Ursuline nun whose account of kidnaping, torture and rape in Guatemala has galvanized repeated protest demonstrations against U.S. actions in that country, was greeted by disbelief when she first demanded U.S. help in finding her assailants, according to classified State Department documents released yesterday.

The U.S. Embassy in Guatemala City cited what it called a series of gaps, inconsistencies and "embellishments" in her story, as well as a lack of independent corroboration, as it suggested to Washington in confidential cables that she might be trying to perpetrate a politically motivated hoax.

Ortiz, who spent last weekend reviewing the documents for the first time, said they proved the U.S. government was biased against her from the outset and had never seriously investigated her claims of heinous mistreatment in 1989 at the hands of personnel from the Guatemalan military, with whom the United States was then closely allied.

"The U.S. Embassy was . . . deceptive, paying lip service to the need to find the truth in my case, and secretly undercutting me, slandering me, and trying to prevent the truth from emerging," Ortiz said at a news conference.

She went on to demand anew that all U.S. government documents pertaining to her case be released under her year-old Freedom of Information Act request, including those at the CIA and Defense Department. She said she was ending a five-week vigil and two-week fast in Lafayette Square near the White House because of a letter to President Clinton last week by more than 100 federal lawmakers, who called for "maximum possible disclosure" of material relating to her case.

None of the hundreds of State Department documents released yesterday provides information supporting Ortiz's most sensational, and controversial, claim: that near the end of her day-long torture session in a clandestine Guatemalan prison, an American suddenly intervened to take her away from the torture site.

Ortiz has long cited the presence of

the American at the prison as proof that the embassy was actively collaborating with the torturers, a claim she reiterated and sought to bolster by releasing a sketch of the man drawn from her memory. "This is Alejandro," the name the man used, Ortiz said. "He is not a figment of my imagination; he is real."

Ortiz and her attorneys, Michele Arrington and Jose Pertierra, said they suspected that blacked-out paragraphs in several of the released State Department documents contained information about "Alejandro." But an independent source who reviewed the documents at the request of The Washington Post said the withheld material includes "nothing that refers to or describes Alejandro."

Thomas F. Stroock, the U.S. ambassador when Ortiz complained about the torture, denied Ortiz's claim that the embassy did not take her seriously. "I haven't got a clue what happened," but it is not for lack of interest, Stroock said in a telephone interview from Caspar, Wyo. He said Ortiz had clearly been "traumatized" but blamed her for "rebuffing us at every turn" when the embassy attempted to obtain details.

"I would have given half my salary to have had the sketch [released yesterday] then and there," Stroock said.

Ortiz's supporters explain that she initially kept distant from the embassy partly because of her suspicion that it was operating in league with the Guatemalan military. They said that she was unable to provide a full account of the episode at first because some details—such as being raped and forced to stab another prisoner—were simply too traumatic to be recalled.

A November 1989 cable to Washington sent in Stroock's name says that Ortiz's shifting accounts of her treatment led "us to question the motives and timing behind the story. Apparently a debate is scheduled in Congress this week on aid to Guatemala." It accused her of a "devious filling in of gaps in the original" version of her tale after embassy officials began asking questions, and remarked that her escape from Alejandro seemed remarkable given the physical abuse she had received.