

partment "does not, at present, see the need for new regulations," he said.

A staff aide to Gore said after the hearing that the congressman did not have a specific piece of legislation in mind, but simply called the hearing to explore the issue.—MARJORIE SUN

## Health Plan for Salvador Draws Mixed Reaction

Administration plans to bolster the health care system in El Salvador are being met with reservations by the professional organizations and voluntary relief groups that first drew public attention to the breakdown of health services in the strife-torn country.

On 2 June, the Administration announced a double initiative. The Department of Defense will send a military medical team to train Salvadoran personnel and the Agency for International Development (AID) will administer a larger scale program to revitalize the health care system.

Details of the programs have not been made public. However, the general reaction from the U.S. health professionals and private organizations which advocated American assistance has been to applaud the U.S. government's recognition of the need for humanitarian aid, but to question whether dispatching a military team and operation of an AID program through the Salvadoran government will meet the needs of civilians.

The medical team of 25 personnel would include physicians, medical technicians, and other specialists. Such training teams are assigned for varying lengths of time and a Pentagon source states that a 6-month period of activity is being considered for the medical group. It is not clear whether the team would assist only the Salvadoran military or provide for civilian health needs as well.

Final plans for the AID program, dubbed Health System Vitalization, hinge on completion of a survey of health care needs carried out by a Westinghouse Health Systems team scheduled to return from El Salvador as this was written. AID officials say that a review of the team's report and drafting of final program requirements will take about a month.

About \$9 million has been earmarked for the AID program and AID officials say a larger amount, perhaps double that sum, will probably be sought. Congressional approval is required because the funds would have to be transferred from other AID programs.

U.S. scientific and medical organizations became involved in the issue after several delegations of health professionals visited El Salvador and reported a serious deterioration of health care services and widespread acts of violence against medical personnel (*Science*, 4 March, p. 1047). A common theme of the reports was that the Salvadoran government had failed to control its own security forces, widely believed to be responsible for a majority of the casualties among health workers.

A meeting was convened in Washington in mid-May at the behest of AID in part to explore the question of how U.S. private voluntary organizations might be involved in efforts to restore the health care system in El Salvador.

According to Betty Hutchinson who attended the meeting as an observer for the American Friends Service Committee, the consensus of those at the meeting was that "there isn't much that can be done until it's possible to guarantee the safety of medical personnel in the country."

One who found the meeting disappointing was member of a delegation that visited El Salvador early this year, John B. Stanbury, head of the International Nutrition Policy and Planning Program at MIT. Stanbury said he came away from the May meeting with the impression that "there will be little room for voluntary agencies" in the government program and that he is "feeling very frustrated at the moment."

The idea of a military medical team being sent in also seems to have been received coolly. In a letter that was part of an exchange with State Department deputy secretary Kenneth W. Dam, AAAS executive officer William D. Carey wrote, "With regard to the State Department's plans to address the humanitarian needs of the people of El Salvador, I question whether the program now being considered by the Department of Defense is the best way to provide medical care for the citizens other than the military."—JOHN WALSH

## Ruckelshaus Courts Scientists

New Environmental Protection Agency administrator William D. Ruckelshaus recently courted leaders of the scientific community, asking them to help the agency "recover its equilibrium" and also "dissolve the dissonance between science and the creation of public policy."

Speaking before a gathering of 150 scientists at the National Academy of Sciences on 22 June, Ruckelshaus repeatedly tried to reassure his audience that the agency's future actions would be founded on a strong scientific base. The agency's "scientific analysis must be rigorous and the quality of our data high," he said, in a clear effort to distance himself from his predecessor, Anne Burford, and her politically charged tenure in office.

"We are not going to be able to emerge from our current troubles without a much-improved level of public confidence. The polls show us that scientists have more credibility than lawyers or businessmen or politicians and I'm all three of those," he said, drawing a laugh from the crowd. "I need your help."

Ruckelshaus devoted most of his speech stressing the need to improve methods of assessing risks associated with exposure to toxic substances and ways to decide how to handle the risks. "We must assume that life now takes place in a minefield of risk from hundreds, perhaps thousands, of substances. No more can we tell the public: you are home free with an adequate margin of safety," he said.

Ruckelshaus remarked that federal regulatory agencies should have a common statutory formula for evaluating the hazards of pollutants, but he did not elaborate specifically how this would be achieved. Other administrators have tried to do the same over the years, but met with little success. Ruckelshaus acknowledged that legislative change "in the current climate is difficult." He noted that the agency's budget request for fiscal 1984 targets more money for research in risk assessment. Overall, Ruckelshaus pledged a different way of doing business than Burford but did not indicate any specific shifts in policy.

—MARJORIE SUN