

CHRONOLOGY

1969-1989

The main purpose of this chronology is to help the reader by reconstructing MSF's actions and public statements in regional and international news reports of the period. It is intended as a tool for this specific document, and not as an academic reference.

	Central America	MSF And Salvadoran Refugee Camps In Honduras
1969	The '100 Hours' or 'Soccer' War (fighting broke out in sports stadiums) between El Salvador and Honduras; tens of thousands of Salvadoran immigrants return home; increasing pressure around land and heightened social tensions in El Salvador.	
1970	Armed struggle resumes in El Salvador.	
1975	Guerrilla forces organise and expand their presence in the Salvadoran countryside – increased repression, particularly by paramilitary groups.	
1976	Agrarian reform in El Salvador stalled	
1979	<p>19 JULY Victorious 'Sandinistas' arrive in Managua, Nicaragua's capital.</p> <p>15 OCTOBER Overthrow of Salvadoran government elected in 1977 – populist junta forms, tries to pursue reforms but is destabilised by guerrillas, the oligarchy, and the army.</p>	
1980	<p>Progressive elements withdraw from the junta because of repression – upsurge in number of death squads – cycle of violence accelerates – creation of FDR, bringing together left-wing organisations and popular movements.</p> <p>24 MARCH Archbishop Romero of San Salvador, a vocal critic of the government, social injustice, and human rights abuses is assassinated – state of siege declared in El Salvador.</p> <p>14 MAY Salvadoran army massacres Salvadoran refugees at the Sumpul River along the Honduras-El Salvador border.</p> <p>OCTOBER First wave of Salvadoran refugees in Honduras – the FMLN is formed, bringing together the five main guerrilla movements.</p>	<p>OCTOBER MSF begins providing medical assistance in La Virtud and Colomoncagua refugee camps for Salvadorans in Honduras.</p>
1981	<p>JANUARY Ronald Reagan, elected President of the USA, takes over from Jimmy Carter – US military aid to El Salvador increases from \$10 million to \$35 million.</p>	

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1981	<p>JANUARY FMLN's final offensive fails – civil war breaks out in El Salvador. Honduras accepts Salvadoran refugees, who are placed under army surveillance.</p> <p>MARCH Salvadoran army massacres Salvadoran refugees trying to cross the border at the Lempa River.</p>	
1982	<p>FIRST SIX MONTHS Wave of Miskito and Suma refugees from Nicaragua arrive in the Mosquitia region of Honduras.</p>	<p>FEBRUARY Forced closure of La Virtud border camp and relocation to Mesa Grande – 4,000 refugees choose to return to El Salvador. MSF accompanies them during relocation.</p>
1983	<p>Republicans win US congressional elections – reinforcement of US support for the Salvadoran government – start of US support for the 'Contras', anti-Sandinista movement in Nicaragua.</p>	
1984	<p>MAY Christian Democrat José Napoleón Duarte elected president of El Salvador.</p> <p>OCTOBER Opening of dialogue between President Duarte and the FMLN-FDR – talks break off three months later.</p>	<p>JANUARY-JULY Honduran military assassinates at least 20 Salvadoran refugees.</p> <p>JUNE Bodies of 14 Salvadorans found 25 km from the Mesa Grande camp.</p> <p>SEPTEMBER Transfer of refugees to Olanchito (Yore, central Honduras) is cancelled after committees' protest.</p>
1985	<p>US military aid to the Salvadoran government increases to \$200 million.</p>	<p>Refugee committees become more radical.</p> <p>AUGUST In Colomoncagua, committees try to create a martyr by killing a refugee wounded by Honduran soldiers – five refugees who disagree with committee leaders killed.</p>

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1986		MSF takes over medical care in all camps from Caritas – alternating periods of tension and calm between MSF and the committees.
1987	<p>OCTOBER Esquipulas Accords signed by the Contadora Group (Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia, Panama) propose a framework for peace agreements in the region, including a ceasefire, reconciliation commission, amnesty and elections for El Salvador.</p> <p>NOVEMBER The FDR pulls out of the FMLN and returns to El Salvador to take part in the political debate.</p>	<p>OCTOBER Refugees in Mesa Grande demonstrate against MSF's 'insensitivity' toward their problems. The first 4,500 Mesa Grande refugees repatriated to El Salvador.</p>
1988	<p>MARCH Far-right victory (ARENA) in the Salvadoran legislative elections.</p> <p>MARCH 1988-MARCH 1989 War of attrition between FMLN and Salvadoran armed forces – incidents on Honduras-Nicaragua border – arrival of 2,000 US soldiers in Honduras.</p> <p>END OF MAY Salvadoran military offensives in the border regions of Chalatenango and Morazán.</p>	<p>JUNE Hunger strike organised by Colomoncagua and then Mesa Grande committees begins.</p> <p>24 JUNE UNHCR press release: 'mortality rates in refugee camps lower than those of the Honduran population'.</p> <p>30 JUNE Demonstrations against MSF nurse in San Antonio – San Antonio medical warehouse attacked.</p> <p>30 JUNE-1 JULY Marathon negotiations between MSF and the refugee committee in Colomoncagua.</p>

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1988		<p>JULY ‘War of the press releases’ between the committees and MSF begins (continues until MSF’s departure).</p> <p>4 JULY A director of the Mesa Grande committee is assassinated by refugees who no longer want to work with the guerrillas – the killer and two family members are lynched.</p> <p>7 JULY MSF receives a copy of a letter from the committees to UNHCR demanding that MSF withdraw from providing refugee assistance</p> <p>8 JULY Rony Brauman, President of MSF France, announces MSF’s withdrawal from Colomoncagua and San Antonio refugee camps.</p> <p>22 JULY MSF’s Board decides to pull out of the camps on 31 December 1988 and not to undertake a press campaign.</p> <p>13 AUGUST MSF assists with repatriation of 1,200 Mesa Grande refugees – committees distribute a leaflet criticising MSF.</p> <p>14 AUGUST MSF team expelled from Colomoncagua camp – outside group takes over emergency care.</p> <p>2 SEPTEMBER MSF warns UNHCR that its teams can no longer meet refugee health needs because teams are being threatened.</p> <p>6 SEPTEMBER UNHCR sends representatives to talk with the committees about ‘the problem with MSF’.</p>

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1988	<p>MID-OCTOBER René Backmann's article in the French magazine, <i>Le Nouvel Observateur</i>, compares Salvadoran guerrillas to the Khmer Rouge.</p>	<p>23 SEPTEMBER MSF Board confirms its decision not to publicise its withdrawal from the Salvadoran refugee camps in Honduras.</p> <p>30 SEPTEMBER Three MSF workers who have gone to pick up the on-duty nurse in San Antonio are ambushed – MSF decides not to answer emergency calls any longer.</p> <p>18 OCTOBER Committees announce in the Salvadoran press that they have decided to expel MSF from the camps.</p> <p>21 OCTOBER MSF Board announces departure from the Salvadoran camps on 15 November.</p> <p>16 NOVEMBER Bertrand de la Grange's article in the French daily <i>Le Monde</i>: 'To prevent backing the guerrilla grip on the camp population, MSF gives up assisting Salvadoran refugees in Honduras.'</p> <p>26 NOVEMBER Rony Brauman's response in <i>Le Monde</i>: "I do not know if there are guerrillas in the camps."</p> <p>26 DECEMBER Alain Hertoghe's article in the French daily <i>La Croix</i>: Rony Brauman accuses the committees of wielding totalitarian control over the refugees.</p>
1989	<p>MARCH Alfredo Cristiani (ARENA = far right) elected as president of El Salvador.</p> <p>12 SEPTEMBER An article by a UN official in the Belgian daily, <i>Le Soir</i>, denounces the committees' grip on the camps and UNHCR's powerlessness.</p>	<p>JANUARY MSF withdraws from Nicaraguan refugee camps in Honduras.</p> <p>LAST QUARTER MSF takes over medical care of massive numbers of Salvadoran refugees returning to Honduras.</p>