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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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STUDY CRITICIZES U.S.-BACKED LAND REFORM IN EL SALVADOR

According to a report released today by Oxfam-America, the U.S.-backed land reform program in El Salvador excludes the majority of the country's impoverished peasants and has left an estimated 150,000 others with plots of land insufficient to support a single family. The report further charges that "the motivation for the hastily designed land reform program is political rather than developmental."

The report was co-authored by Laurence Simon, Director of Development Education at Oxfam-America, the Boston-based international development and aid agency and by James Stephens, Jr., an agrarian reform specialist and consultant to Oxfam and the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA). The six-month study included field research in El Salvador and examination of U.S. and El Salvadorean government documents.

The Land Reform Program began in March of 1980. It has been funded with more than \$50 million from the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID). AID is seeking an additional \$425 million for the program over the next five years.

Under the administration of AID and the Government of El Salvador, the program was allegedly designed to redistribute rural lands that have been controlled by a handful of plantation owners for the past several decades.

According to Simon, poor planning is a primary cause of the program's failure. "There were no studies to determine the needs of the rural poor, and program planning, such as it was, was done by a small group of government officials, excluding even the Salvadorean agencies charged with implementing the program." But, he adds, "The approach to the Land Reform is not really surprising when you consider that it is modelled after U.S.-backed 1970 land reform in Vietnam which critics now describe as a 'peasant-pacification program'."

According to the report, poor planning has resulted in a serious credit and supply squeeze that has, in turn, caused a major decrease in export crop production. Lack of preparation for the project has also led to resistance from land reform workers and peasants.

El Salvador has been plagued by increasing political violence since last spring and says Simon, "Attempting to carry out a land reform program in the midst of a state of siege has not only increased the likelihood that the program will fail, but has increased the number of refugees fleeing the countryside."

## OXFAM-AMERICA

Oxfam-America, headquartered in Boston, Massachusetts, is a non-profit agency that funds self-help development and relief assistance in Asia, Africa and Latin America. It makes grants to people in some of the poorest parts of the world--Bangladesh, Upper Volta, Nicaragua--who are seeking to develop their own food supply and other resources.

Through an educational program in the United States, Oxfam-America promotes appropriate relief and development assistance for developing countries. This program includes press tours to developing countries; a clearinghouse of educational materials focusing on development issues such as hunger, health, nutrition, causes of poverty, and appropriate technology; and an annual fundraising and education campaign at Thanksgiving time: "Fast for a World Harvest." Oxfam-America also actively supports enlightened US government policies and programs for the world's poorest and hungriest people.

Oxfam-America gained widespread recognition for its efforts to help the Cambodian people. As part of a 30-member Consortium, Oxfam-America continues to play a major role in providing assistance inside Kampuchea. Much of the Consortium aid has gone to the restoration of Kampuchea's agriculture and light industry. Recently Oxfam launched a major program to aid refugees in East Africa.

Central America is another of the agency's current top priorities. Oxfam-America is assisting the Nicaraguan people in their reconstruction programs with grants for a medical services program in Zelaya and for several agricultural projects. Grants to El Salvador are providing food and clothing for refugees displaced during recent political violence there.

Oxfam-America depends entirely upon private contributions and on voluntary action by several hundred thousand people in the United States. Last year Oxfam-America raised \$5.6 million in private contributions to support its programs.

Oxfam began in England in 1942 as the "Oxford Committee for Famine Relief." There are now Oxfams in Australia, Belgium, and Canada, as well as the United Kingdom and the United States. The six Oxfams are autonomous, but share a network of 50 field directors.

Oxfam-America welcomes contributions and inquiries at 302 Columbus Avenue, Boston, Massachusetts, 02116. Telephone (617) 247-3304.