

OAS Takes a Stand On Human Rights

Grand Anse, Grenada

The United States yesterday mustered a majority for a human rights resolution declaring that members of the Organization of American States will preserve human dignity and freedom.

Fourteen countries voted in favor of the U.S.-sponsored resolution, eight abstained, and three were absent in voting that followed eight days of debate by the OAS General Assembly's political committee.

No country voted against the declaration.

The last sentence in the four-part document reads: "In particular each member state affirms its belief that there are no circumstances which justify torture, summary convictions or prolonged detention without trial contrary to law."

Gale McGee, the U.S. ambassador to the organization, said the resolution set only "minimum standards" for human rights adherence.

The resolution went to the final plenary session of the Assembly, where it was assured of getting the 13 votes necessary for passage because of positions previously taken during the debate.

The OAS meeting, which began in Grenada June 14, had been split from the beginning over whether suppressing terrorism or observing human rights is more important.

But when the final roll was called, the military-ruled countries of the southern zone of South America, which wanted to place the emphasis on terrorism, were isolated and managed to get only four votes for an amendment that would have made special allowances in observing human rights for countries threatened by Marxist subversion.

The four were Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and the amendment's sponsor, Chile.

Voting in favor of the American resolution were the United States, Panama, Jamaica, Barbados, Surinam, Grenada, Costa Rica, Trinidad, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Haiti, Venezuela and Peru.

The eight countries that abstained were Chile, Paraguay, Guatemala, Argentina, Colombia, Brazil, Uruguay and El Salvador, while Honduras, Nicaragua and Bolivia were absent.

The resolution also commended the Inter-American Human Rights Commission for its investigations of human rights violations, principally in Chile, Uruguay and Paraguay, and asked all member states to cooperate with the commission by providing it with information and to protect individuals from retaliation for helping with the investigations.