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## Voice for the Voiceless

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# University of Dayton, Ohio (url: <http://www.udayton.edu/index.php>)



## Voice for the Voiceless

03.08.2012 | International, Catholic

To better understand human rights injustices in South America, Ensalaco taught himself Spanish. How else can you go face to face in interviews with Nicaraguan president Daniel Ortega and the henchmen of former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet responsible for the deaths and disappearances of thousands of Chileans?

Ensalaco set out to be a Biblical scholar, studying Biblical languages. That changed March 24, 1980, the day Salvadoran archbishop Oscar Romero was assassinated while he celebrated

Mass.

"I wondered what would possess anyone to be so inspired by a cause that they'd be willing to kill a priest while he celebrated Mass," Ensalaco said.

Ensalaco dived into the fledgling field of human rights. In 1988, he went to Colombia on a Fulbright-Hays Fellowship to conduct doctoral research at the Universidad de Los Andes. Two years later, he was an international observer to the Nicaraguan elections. A year after that, he taught, researched and drafted a set of recommendations aimed at re-instituting the social science program eliminated by the Pinochet dictatorship at the Universidad de Concepcion School of Law in Chile. Ensalaco went a step further and received advanced training in human rights at the Inter-American Institute for Human Rights in San Jose, Costa Rica, in 1993 and 1994.

By 1998, he was armed with enough knowledge to create the human rights program at the University of Dayton. A decade later, the University began offering one of the nation's first bachelor degrees in human rights studies.

He challenges himself and his students to ask "why?" and uncover the truth about human rights tragedies.

His first book, *Chile under Pinochet: Recovering the Truth*, examined repression under the Pinochet dictatorship and early efforts to uncover the truth about the systematic human rights violations in the country.

He currently is working on a sequel, *The Mark of Cain: The Prosecution of Pinochet and the Search for the Disappeared*. The book is a behind-the-scenes account of the investigation, impeachment and indictment of the dictator. Ensalaco culled much of the information for both books from his relationship with families of the disappeared and Chilean Judge Juan Guzman who prosecuted Pinochet.

"Judge Guzman demonstrated tremendous personal courage, the highest standards of judicial integrity and deep compassion for the victims of the Pinochet regime, especially the families of the disappeared," Ensalaco said. "Guzman had a difficult decision to make. He proved himself to be a courageous jurist who is committed to the rule of law. He was not swayed by political pressure. He ruled as his conscience guided him."

Ensalaco's other area of expertise is terrorism, a field of study that ties closely to human rights. "Terrorism robs a group of people of their liberties the same way human rights violations do," he said. "There are nations where people cannot hold a job, have access to good health care, vote or feel generally safe because of extremist groups using the threat of violence."

Ensalaco also has written a book about terrorism, *Middle Eastern Terrorism From Black September to September 11*, in response to a student's question about the 9/11 attacks — "Where did that come from?" When Ensalaco realized there was no single, narrative account of the entire history of Middle East terrorism, he set out to write it. The book chronicles Middle East terrorism from the first plane hijackings in 1968 to the 9/11 attacks.

Ensalaco sits on the peace and social justice committee for the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities. He also has worked with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops on human trafficking issues and was part of a group that recently helped pass a state law that made human trafficking a felony.

Yet more than 30 years later, Ensalaco still continues to be inspired by Romero's legacy.

In 2000, he urged the University of Dayton to establish the Oscar Romero Human Rights Award, awarded to an individual or organization that promotes the dignity of all people and alleviates suffering. Honorees have included the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Migration and Refugee Services; Guzman, the Chilean judge who prosecuted Pinochet; and Bernard Kouchner, co-founder of Doctors Without Borders.

"We are trying to honor Romero's ministry and martyrdom by addressing the very serious human rights issues we confront here and now," Ensalaco said.

***For more information, contact Shawn Robinson, associate director of media relations, at 937-229-3391 or [srobinson@udayton.edu](mailto:srobinson@udayton.edu).***