

# ✓ Santa Cruz declared a sanctuary

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By JOAN RAYMOND

Sentinel Staff Writer

SANTA CRUZ — Following the lead of cities like Los Angeles, Berkeley, San Francisco and Seattle, City Council members here voted 5-2 Tuesday to declare Santa Cruz a sanctuary for Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees.

Although sanctuary supporters had pushed for a unanimous vote as a symbolic gesture towards refugee support, council members Katy Sears-Williams and Joe Ghio cast dissenting votes.

Council members passed a resolution declaring Santa Cruz a sanctuary for the refugees until they "can safely return to their homelands" or until they are granted federally recognized residency status.

The resolution also requests Congress to establish a policy granting "extended voluntary departure" status to refugees who have escaped persecution in their native countries.

The sanctuary proposal was endorsed by several churches and by 1,500 residents who had signed petitions.

At a public hearing, sanctuary advocate William Crane said an estimated 200-250 of the refugees are living in the Santa Cruz area.

Sanctuary supporters said the Guatemalans and Salvadorans are

being persecuted in the same way the Jews were persecuted during the Holocaust.

The friends and families of the refugees have been the target of death squads in their counties, said the church and humanitarian leaders of the sanctuary movement.

"Do not stand idly by. Don't oppress the stranger in our midst," Rabbi Richard Litvak told council members.

But Ghio and Sears-Williams said they had reservations about passing a declaration that they said had more to do with politics than humanitarianism.

Mayor Michael Rotkin responded that there comes a time when politics cannot be separated from humanitarianism.

Councilwoman Jane Weed commented, "What's tragic is that it is our government's policy (in Latin America) that is creating the reasons why people have to flee."

Councilman Arnold Levine broke from his usual political tradition of staying out of foreign-policy issues and voted with the majority in support of the declaration.

Levine did offer an amendment to delete sections calling for what he called "civil disobedience," but the amendment failed on a 3-4 vote, with Sears-Williams and Ghio voting with Levine.

Those sections state the city police will not relay information to the Immigration and Naturalization service about the detention of Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees.

But the statement is largely symbolic, since Santa Cruz police have no jurisdiction over immigration or other federal matters.

The declaration acknowledges that the United Nations High Commission on Refugees recognizes "the fact that persons fleeing El Salvador and Guatemala are bona fide political refugees, yet fewer than 2 percent of those applications whose cases have been considered have been granted political asylum" by the U.S. Immigration service over the past three years.