

Report

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Vieques: Nonviolent Struggle Ends in Victory

By Marc Becker, Professor of Latin American Studies

I've just returned from Vieques, Puerto Rico where last week the inhabitants celebrated the end of sixty years of the U.S. Navy's occupation of their small island. For those who are interested, here is a brief report on these incredible events.

Vieques is about 50 square miles in size and is home to about 10,000 people. It lies just off the east side of the main island of Puerto Rico. In the nineteenth century it had a booming sugar cane economy, but this production went bust in the early part of the twentieth century when it was replaced by beet sugar from the northern part of the United States. In 1941 with World War II on the horizon, the U.S. Navy expropriated land on the island to use as a bombing range. Rich landholders were happy to sell out, but the poor inhabitants and sharecroppers were left with the short end of the deal as the Navy came to control most of the island.

In the late 1970s in a first round of large-scale protests against the Naval occupation, Vieques fishermen blocked military exercises. Dozens were arrested, one of these being Ángel Rodríguez Cristóbal who was killed in his prison cell on November 11, 1979 under conditions that have never been explained. On April 19, 1999, two off-target bombs destroyed an observation post killing David Sanes Rodríguez, a civilian employee, leading to a second round of intensive protests with thousands of people being arrested in civil disobedience actions.

Under pressure from these nonviolent protests, the Navy agreed to leave Vieques on May 1, 2003. Thousands of people celebrated this victory in a series of events from May 1-4. Beginning on the evening of April 30, people gathered at the main gate of Camp García. The mood

was jubilant. A sign counted down the hours until the Navy was to leave Vieques. There was singing and speeches from a stage in front of the gate.

Just before midnight, Navy security

García, now rebaptized Zona Libre Primero de Mayo (May First Free Zone). There was a commemoration at the gate, and then people continued into the base that had previously been closed to civil-



"We stopped the bombing, Vieques Triumphed, the struggle goes on."

Photo: Marc Becker

left the gate that they had been guarding all evening. People broke through the gate and climbed on top of the Navy checkpoint waving the flags of Vieques, Puerto Rico, and the Puerto Rican Independence Party. While on the stage on one side of the fence the municipal government held an official celebration, people began to tear down the fence surrounding the base and hammering at the concrete checkpoint building with a sledgehammer as if it were the Berlin Wall. Someone broke into the Navy compound inside the base and drove several vehicles to the front gate where they were destroyed and burned.

The next morning (May 1), thousands of people marched 4 kilometers from the town of Isabel II to the gates of Camp

ians. Most of Vieques' best beaches are on this part of the island, and many people took advantage of the opportunity to visit them.

Similar events took place over the next several days — a car caravan through

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Vieques, concerts during the evenings, recognition for those who committed civil disobedience to gain victory for Vieques, a special mass of thanksgiving for the peace, and a commemoration of the martyrs of the struggle. Activists traveled to Bahía Salina del Sur where, in view of the Observation Post where David Sanes had been killed four years earlier, they erected a cross.

Several important observations come out of these events. There is danger that now that the Navy has left Camp García international activists will move on to other issues and ignore Vieques. Inhabitants of the island emphasized that this was an important step in the struggle, but not a final victory. Three years ago, the Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques laid out four demands that they called the four Ds: demilitarization, decontamination, devolution, and development. None of these have been fully achieved, and the most important struggles lie ahead to achieve these goals.

In terms of demilitarization, the Navy has stopped the bombing of the island but a military presence persists. Most notable is a Radar Over The Horizon (ROTHR) installation on the western part of the island, as well as a communications post on Mount Pirata, the island's highest point. In addition, sixty years of bombing including the use of napalm and depleted uranium has left the island heavily polluted and it will take years and extensive resources to decontaminate it.

May 1 appears to represent victory for

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the third goal (devolution, or return of the land), but rather than returning the land to the people the Navy gave it to the Department of Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service to form what is now the Caribbean's largest wildlife refuge. Many activists advocate returning the land to the sharecroppers from whom it was taken in the 1940s, or placing the land in a community trust. This relates to the last demand which emphasizes the need for cooperative and sustainable development on what is a very poor island in an impoverished colony of the United States.

Finally, local activists repeatedly emphasized that this was a nonviolent struggle for peace in Vieques. It is important to recognize, celebrate, and embrace the end of the Navy's bombing as an example of the possibilities for nonviolent direct action. In contrast to this largely peaceful struggle, the press focused on the burning of vehicles in the early hours

of May 1, and the Puerto Rican governor Sila Calderón proclaimed her intent to prosecute those guilty of these actions. Most activists denounced the burning of the vehicles as an anomaly at odds with the movement's nonviolent four-year struggle.

At midnight, the military vehicles became property of the Fish and Wildlife Service, which led some to conclude that they were not legitimate targets, yet they symbolically represent, continued U.S. control and domination over the island. Many activists agreed that it was hypocritical to prosecute these relatively insignificant actions while doing nothing about the much more abusive actions of the U.S. Navy over the past 60 years that resulted in the killing of several people and the deaths of many more from cancer and other diseases resulting from the bombing.

Source: www.yachana.org/reports/vieques/

Mexico: Maquiladora Workers Win Settlement

By George Friemoth, MITF

After two and a half years of struggle, fired Duro workers overcame seemingly insurmountable odds and won full severance pay and back wages from the Duro Bag Company, one of the largest bag manufacturers in the US.

On March 17, the Kentucky-based company agreed to pay 19 union organizers \$185,000 for illegally firing them during a strike against appalling working conditions and for attempting to organize an independent union in June 2000. For two years, Duro management refused to honor ruling after ruling by the Mexican Labor Conciliation and Arbitration Board in favor of reinstating the workers with payment of back wages, restoring their independent union and improving conditions in their factory in Rio Bravo, Mexico.

A breakthrough came when members of the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras (CJM) sent letters to Duro's clients, like the Gap, Banana Republic, J Jill Group and others. Perhaps, most significant was the meeting that MITF board member Maria Robinson and David Schilling of the Interfaith

Committee for Corporate Responsibility arranged between executive officers and CJM director, Martha Ojeda and union organizer, Carmen Julia Silva.

In the meeting, executives of Gap acknowledged that Duro was not in compliance with the Gap's labor compliance standards and suggested that, since the Gap accounts for only 15% of Duro's production, CJM should contact the other clients and get them to pressure Duro. Shortly thereafter, the company made its settlement in accordance with Mexican Labor Law.

Martha Ojeda (CJM) said, "This is a real victory for maquiladora workers. The Duro workers' resistance and tenacity in this struggle will be an inspiration to others. While justice for maquila workers is still a long way off because the Mexican government and the multinational corporations still systematically violate workers rights, and promote to extend NAFTA to the whole hemisphere through the FTAA, putting at risk the workers rights. This victory at least forces the company to pay for its illegal acts."

Source: cjm@igc.org, (210) 732-8957

Latin America: April Mobilization Against US Intervention

By Dale Sorensen, MITF

MITF members George Friemoth, Carolina Dutton and I attended the Latin American Solidarity Coalition's third conference in Washington DC. The conference focused on mobilizing people of conscience against US military and economic intervention in Latin America and the Caribbean. As one of the LASC's organizers, I was pleasantly surprised that over 400 activists signed up for the conference when the world is still so preoccupied with the US military action in Iraq. In fact, the conference had to be interrupted for a few hours so that participants could join a massive peace march against the war, Saturday, April 12. The promise of light dinner with Salvadoran *Papusas* lured the marchers back to the conference on time.

The next day, LASC, a national coalition of solidarity, religious, economic justice and environmental organizations held its own rally in Malcolm X park and later went on the "tour of shame" through the streets of DC beginning in the largely lower income and Latino neighborhood. By the time the march was underway 2-3000 had joined the "tour." Chants, songs and "spoken word" at each stop along the protest route enriched the spirit of the rally.

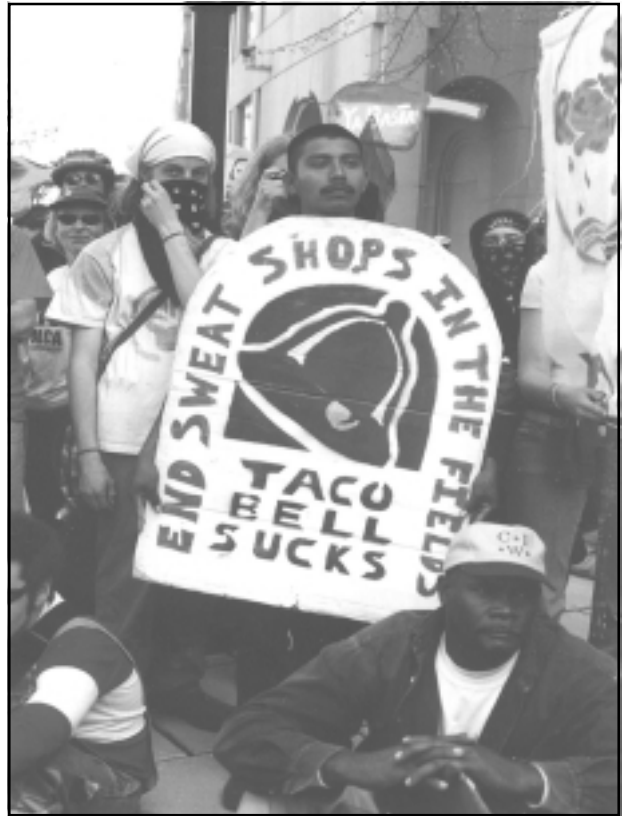
Our first stop was in front of a Taco Bell where the Coalition of Immokalee Workers led chants such as, "Yo no quiero Taco Bell" and "Boycott Taco Bell." Then, a Florida-based hip-hop

group calling themselves "Counterintelligence" performed on the back of a flatbed truck denouncing Taco Bell's exploitation of Florida farm workers who pick their tomatoes.

The second stop at the Interamerican Development Bank (IDB) stressed how the IDB is accelerating corporate globalization in the Americas by imposing pro-corporate, anti-people policies. Gustavo Castro (CIEPAC, Chiapas, Mexico) denounced the IDB's ruthless promotion and financing of "free trade" projects like Plan Puebla Panama that expand the social and economic inequality that has taken hold in Mexico since the 1994 passage of NAFTA to the region of Mesoamerica, including the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). Castro accused the IDB of

hiding behind the skirts or coat tails of the World Bank and IMF to avoid being exposed. This was the first time that the annual World Bank/IMF protests had targeted the IDB.

The third stop was at the US Department of Commerce where Atossa Soltani of Amazon Watch explained how US Occidental Oil profited from socially and ecologically devastating US-led "free" trade and military plans in Colombia, citing the case of the U'Wa indigenous peoples' struggle against Occidental Petroleum. Activists noted that the Commerce Department, as a symbol of "free trade", is promoting the passage of CAFTA by the end of this year and continues to sup-



Immokalee workers rally in front of Taco Bell.
Photo: Caroline Dutton

port the use of US taxpayer dollars to pay for the security of Occidental's pipeline.

Last stop was the World Bank and the IMF. (Authorities in DC denied organizer's request to stop in front of the heavily barricaded White House.) Njoki Njehu, Director of the 50 Years is Enough Network told the on-looking crowd; "Our demands to the World Bank and IMF are simple: Cancel the debt to free up resources for health, education, safe water and credit to farmers. Stop policies that harm the environment and communities around the world!" On their way home that night, we met some employees of the World Bank. They told us to keep up the pressure. "Pressure is the only thing that changes the bank policies," said one and another gave an affirmative nod.

On Monday, April 14, we spent the day visiting 21 Congressional offices. (On the previous Friday George and I joined the SOA Watch lobby effort.) We thanked legislators for voting for an amendment to limit further military spending in Colombia; the amendment

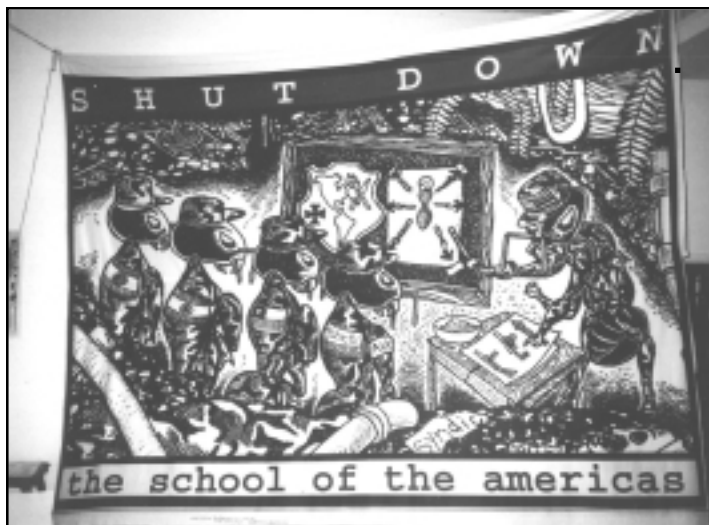


Photo: George Friemoth

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May Day Speech to the Cuban People

By Rev. Lucius Walker, Jr. Director IFCO/Pastors for Peace

[Ed. Note: The following speech was delivered by the author in the Plaza of the Revolution, Havana, Cuba, May 1, 2003]

**Dear Commander Fidel Castro,
Dear religious leaders here present,
Dear people of Cuba:**

I come to you today as a pastor; I come representing Pastors for Peace. I come to stand with our sisters and brothers in Cuba, in the midst of the worst provocation by any US administration in history. But I come to declare that you are loved, respected, appreciated, and supported by millions of US citizens who oppose our government's hostility, provocation, and breaches of diplomatic norms.

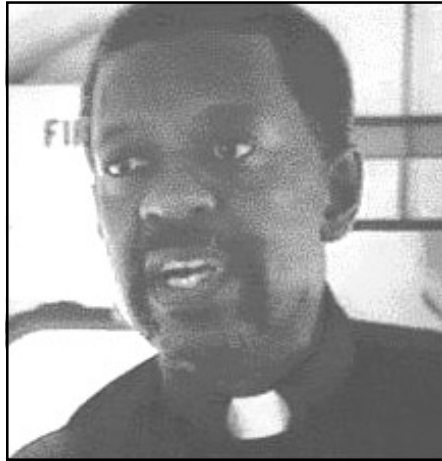
Your US friends for whom I am privileged to speak today are true friends, not fair-weather friends. We have stood with you in the past; we are standing with you now in this present moment of crisis and attack by the US; and we will stand with you in the future, no matter what the cost. We have full confidence in your integrity. We affirm the beautiful values and principles the Cuban people adhere to. We join your nation in your struggle against US terrorism, because the people of Cuba represent hope and help and healing for the people of the world. We join you now because you deserve our friendship. But we also join you because the world needs Cuba.

Now, speaking also as a pastor and a friend of Cuba, I sincerely plead with Cuba to abolish the death penalty. Of course other nations have the death penalty —137 others, including the United States itself. But Cuba is different from other nations. Cuba has taken a path, which distinguishes it for its outstanding concern for the welfare of human life. No other nation is the provider of free health care to the world. No other nation is the provider of free education to lift the minds of the citizens of the world. Cuba, you are a world leader in human rights and respect for life. And the death penalty demeans Cuba. You are better than

that. So I call on Cuba to, by example, lead a world campaign to end the death penalty.

As a pastor, and as a citizen of the United States, I sincerely plead with my own government to cease its hypocritical lies and distortions about Cuba's human rights record — for in fact the United States itself is the worst violator of human rights in this hemisphere.

As a pastor for peace, I plead with my own government to stop labeling Cuba as a terrorist state — when in fact the US harbors and finances terrorists, criminals, indeed murderers of Cuban



citizens, allowing them to openly operate terrorist training camps and freely walk the streets of South Florida with the stated purpose of being terrorists to overthrow the Cuban government.

As a pastor for peace, I call on my government to stop encouraging illegal migration, and to abide by the 1995 immigration accords.

I call on my government to release the five heroic Cubans jailed in the US for the "crime" of detecting and reporting the plans of US-based terrorism against Cuba.

In the face of all these wrongs, you, beloved, beautiful Cuban people, have maintained a high moral position; you have remained disciplined and vigilant. You must continue to take the high moral ground.

The pastor in me inspires me to believe that Jesus was describing Cuba 2003, even when he spoke from the mountain in Galilee, saying:

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and order all kinds of evils against you falsely. Rejoice and be glad, for great will be your reward.

Cuba, you are a blessed people. Cuba, you, out of your love and humanity, bless the world. You are the light of the world. So hold on!

*Hold on to your vision;
Hold on to your dreams;
Hold on to your values;
Hold on to your revolution.*

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lost by only a handful of votes. We urged them to vote "no" on CAFTA, release funds to Haiti (H.R.78 and H.R.1108), lift the travel and trade bans on Cuba (S.403), close the SOA (H.R.1258), cancel the debt on the poorest countries (H.R.643) and grant amnesty for immigrants who live and work in the US (H.R.440 and H.R.1300).

We drew inspiration from a wide range of speakers from Central America, Mexico and the Caribbean (Haiti, Cuba, Puerto Rico), as well as South America (Venezuela, Brazil, Colombia and Argentina). All of them stood in strong opposition to pro-corporate, anti-people free trade agreements like NAFTA, CAFTA, FTAA and the WTO. They propose alternatives that include community led development, fair economics and self-determination. We left Washington with the renewed commitment that we must stand with our brothers and sisters who are at the forefront of the opposition and creating alternatives that place human and ecological values above corporate profit and greed.

Haiti: Enslaved by Debt

By Marie Clarke, Jubilee USA Network

[Ed. note: Author participated in a recent delegation to Haiti.]

"Debt costs lives." Nowhere is this more evident than in Haiti, where people are literally paying for the debt with their lives and livelihood. As an "indebted" nation, Haiti is not only required to pay down its debt, but also forced to adhere to economic policy prescriptions of the creditor nations and institutions that have crippled Haiti's health, education and water systems and eroded their food security. In short, the debt in Haiti has brought a proud nation, the first nation built out of a successful slave rebellion, to its knees. In a country where in 1804 the people threw off their bonds of oppression, they have been captured and enslaved by debt.

Haiti's first "debt" was 150 million francs owed to France as the price of their freedom. After winning their freedom, slaves were required to pay for that freedom in order to be eligible participants in the world market. That payment was considered "debt." Haiti is currently paying down a \$1.2 billion debt at \$50-80 million each year, twice the public health budget, three times the education budget and four times the agriculture budget. Debt makes up 35% of Haiti's GDP.

Creditors are denying Haiti new loans and desperately needed humanitarian aid. They claim that this is because the current government cannot service its debt. Because debt payments must be made in the form of foreign capital and Haiti has only two weeks' reserve in their central bank, it cannot service its debt. Jubilee USA and Jubilee Haiti argue that the debt is illegitimate and should not be serviced at all. Forty percent of Haiti's current debt was accrued by the dictator Duvalier. According to international law, this debt is odious as it was a debt incurred in the name of the people but has not served the interest of the people. The people of Haiti have been handed a bill for their oppression.

The real impact of the debt is felt more deeply than the red numbers on a budget line. It is felt in the daily lives of the Haitian people, 40% of whom have no access to clean and potable water in the best of times. During the dry season, even those with intermittent access to potable water have days, weeks or months with no water or water only for a few hours during the day.



Woman being treated for drug resistant TB.
Photo: Marie Clarke

In some urban areas the only running water is the sewer. We saw pictures of children standing in the sewer trying to collect clean water from a broken spot in the pipe. These children are forced to steal the water because their families cannot pay the fees. The loans that are being held up, allegedly because Haiti is unable to service its debt, would fund water systems.

Debt is felt at breakfast time, as most of the population is not able to feed their

families more than once a day. Food security has been eroded as Haiti has been forced to depend on food imports. Rice production provides a good example. In 1985, Haiti produced 125,000 metric tons of rice annually and imported only 7,000 tons from the U.S. After almost two decades of commercial liberalization imposed by creditors, today Haiti imports 225,000 metric tons from the U.S. Haitian farmers cannot compete with foreign rice as Haiti has been forced to take away agricultural subsidies as a part of their agreements with creditors. The U.S. in their leadership role at the IMF has been one of the primary agents in forcing developing nations to strip away subsidies, while granting huge subsidies to the agricultural industries.

Debt is felt in the sorrow of being unable to send your children to school as a result of user fees for primary education. Families that can pull together only enough resources to send one child are forced to choose which child to send to school. The Ministry of Education is so under funded that while President Aristide prioritized building schools, tripling the number of schools in Haiti, the Ministry is now unable to pay teachers, resulting in a teacher's strike. Now even the Haitian children who can afford to pay the fees for their education have no one to teach them. These new school buildings should be teeming with life and the sounds of children learning and playing, yet they sit empty and silent. The loans in question would provide money for education.

Adults felt the debt strongly when suddenly the transportation prices skyrocketed as the government finally buckled under international pressure and removed the gas subsidies. Suddenly the cost for the average worker to get to his or her job climbed to 40 Haitian gourdes. These same workers make only 36 gourdes, or less than one dollar per day. This launched the country into turmoil and resulted in a transportation strike.

Debt is felt sometimes most strongly
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when Haitians get sick. Like the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health is unable to provide adequate services to patients or pay salaries to the doctors and nurses. In a visit to the primary hospital in Port au Prince, we spent twenty minutes at a fancy x-ray machine only to find out that it does not work and there is no money to fix it. The nurses and doctors were on strike, as they had not been paid in over a month. Even when the doctors are being paid, the hospitals and clinics are often empty or only partially filled. This is not because Haiti is an extraordinarily healthy country. The people of Haiti cannot afford to pay the user fees on health to get into the door of the clinic, much less the fees for x-rays, prescriptions, blood tests etcetera. The conditions of the hospital and the clinics are horrifying.

AIDS and TB are the largest killers in Haiti. Haiti has a 10% HIV infection rate in the city and 4% in rural areas. There is only one facility in Haiti that can treat people who are living with AIDS so the vast majority of the population doesn't bother being tested, as there is little hope for treatment. Fees also deter testing. The one spark of hope for health care in Haiti is found in Cange, in the Central Plateau, where a magnificent facility has a strong partnership with the Ministry of Health and provides free healthcare and treatment for HIV/AIDS and drug-resistant TB.

In Cange excellent health care is being provided to the poorest of the poor. How is this possible? They have won money from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria. How could this be replicated elsewhere in Haiti, we asked? The response: cancel the debt and fund the Ministry of Health, so that the Ministry will have the resources to replicate this model throughout the country. The loans held up would provide funding for health.

Currently, Haiti is not considered eligible for debt relief under the IMF and World Bank program, HIPC (Heavily Indebted Poor Country Initiative). Originally this was because Haiti was not indebted enough to meet the eligibility criteria of 150% debt to ex-

port ratio. Once Haiti met that threshold, Haiti was not eligible because President Preval was not willing to privatize all national industries at the rate the institutions desired. Currently, Haiti is not eligible because they are not currently in an IMF program, nor able to borrow from the IMF.

The external debt of Haiti is more than a question of the bottom line of a national budget; it is a matter of life and death, of health, education, food security and livelihood for the people of Haiti. Not only should the illegitimate debt be annulled, and reparations paid for the "debt" that resulted from Haiti buying freedom, but also any remaining

debt should be cancelled because of the moral imperative to preserve life.

Source: www.jubileeusa.org

URGENT ACTION: Please send the enclosed postcard to Rep. Nancy Pelosi. MITF feels this action is very important because she is Minority Leader in the Democratic Party. Also, contact your representative and urge him or her to co-sponsor H.R.643, "Debt Cancellation for the New Millennium Act" introduced by Reps. Maxine Waters and Barbara Lee. The bill seeks full debt cancellation for the poorest countries (HIPC), prohibits structural adjustment programs and adds Haiti to the list of HIPC countries.

Guatemala: International Community Warned

By George Friemoth, MITF

On May 11, Amnesty International (AI) warned the International Consultative Group of the grave deterioration in Guatemala's human rights situation over the past year. The Consultative Group (CG) consists of 18 major donor countries, mostly European but also the US, Mexico, Japan and Argentina that agreed in 1996 to support Guatemala's Peace Accords. Representatives of the UN, OAS, Interamerican Development Bank (IDB), World Bank and IMF also participate in the annual CG meetings.

At the last meeting in February 2002, the CG called for real progress in implementing the Peace Accords, specifically in the areas of respect for human rights and an end to impunity. AI's warning noted not only little or no progress but also suggested actual regression in these areas. The recent overturning of the conviction of the military officer in the murder of Myrna Mack can only cast further doubt on Guatemala's claim of fighting impunity. Proceeding with the genocide trials of Rios Montt and Lucas Garcia in an election year is very risky but could prove to be a true test of the government's commitment to end impunity.

On May 9, the Guatemalan Council of Bishops sent a statement to the CG expressing serious concern about increasing violence and insecurity in the country. The bishops pointed out that the year 2003 is an election year and that based on

past election year experiences, corrupt politicians will intensify their manipulations of the poor majority for political gain.

Last year, the Collective of Social Organizations, more than 20 respected Guatemalan groups requested that the CG not release any funding during this coming election year. While some northern European countries supported the request, the IDB, which convokes and sets the agenda for the CG meetings rejected the proposal. In fact, loans through CG members over the past year actually increased over previous years.

Human rights organizations believe that, conducting "business as usual" when repression and impunity are peaking, sends the wrong message to the Guatemalan government and can only contribute to further human rights abuses.

Sources: www.amnesty.org and www.rightsaction.org

URGENT ACTION: Please join MITF in saying no to impunity! Support the international Postcard Campaign by signing the enclosed card to the Guatemalan Attorney General or the Supreme Court President of Guatemala urging them to proceed with the genocide trials of Rios Montt and Lucas Garcia this election year. NISGUA is collecting the cards, adding them to the tens of thousands being collected around the world. Include your name, city and state (street address is not necessary).

El Salvador: FMLN Gains in Election

By Dale Sorensen, MITF

On March 16, MITF's Sue Severin and I joined 140 observers from 15 countries to monitor the 2003 legislative and municipal elections in El Salvador. We were part of an observer mission organized by the Center for Exchange and Solidarity (CIS), an NGO based in El Salvador. We divided into small teams and traveled to 30 municipalities in 10 departments, which enabled us to observe 75 voting centers.

In the five days preceding the election, we went through the normal briefings, training sessions, and processing for accreditation by the Supreme Electoral Council (TSE). Getting accredited, however proved difficult; in fact, a special delegation of 30 of us had to go to the US Embassy to request assistance in expediting the process in time for the elections. In the end, all were accredited.

Since early January, CIS staff was actively engaged in pre-election monitoring and reported that many municipalities and local community groups had made requests for international observers for different reasons: Some cited the lack of implementation of the electoral reforms agreed upon in 1994; others spoke of increasing violence, threats and tensions leading up to the election in their municipalities; still others reported anomalies and violations of the electoral code, including

vote-buying, "floating votes" and inconsistencies with the *Electoral Padron* (voting register).

Beatrice de Carillo, Human Right Ombudswoman, confirmed the peoples' concerns stating that the electoral reforms agreed to by the major parties 10 years ago have never been approved by the ARENA controlled assembly. She attributed the expected low voter turnout (40%) to a climate of fear resulting from the lack of reform and high level of violence and intimidations.

The 140 observers divided into groups; some had to travel several hours to their observation destinations. Sue headed up the group that went to San Miguel. Our group of eight traveled four hours to the Department of Usulután, divided into two small groups and observed in two municipalities: Mercedes Emaña and Estanzuelas.

The voting process went well in Mercedes; all levels of electoral institutions worked and even the voting tables functioned despite evidence of inexperience and poor training. There were some minor irregularities, like complaints about too much FMLN presence in the voting area (the central plaza). The police kept order by roping off the streets adjacent to the plaza and the chief of police was there to handle a couple of minor disputes.

Estanzuelas was another story. There the FMLN lost the election to ARENA by

two votes (1178 to 1176). According to the Electoral Code, if the difference is less than the number of impugned (disputed) votes, the loser can request a review of the impugned votes. There were nine impugned votes so the current FMLN mayor requested a review. A determination was made to open six ballot boxes containing the nine votes being questioned. But one box was

missing. A box from another municipality, Ozatlan was later produced which mysteriously contained the missing ballots! In the end the FMLN representatives walked out so as not to legitimize the fraud. ARENA was declared the winner without ever explaining how or why the box from another municipality was substituted for the missing box from Estanzuelas.

The Estanzuelas case is just one of many reported by our observer teams. One of the main problems stemmed from the issue of "floating votes" where eligible voters who reside in one municipality are allowed to register to vote in a different municipality, often several hours away. According to the TSE, 68,440 Salvadorans registered outside of their residential area, presumably for the purpose of influencing election outcomes.

The overall election results show the FMLN won 31 out of 84 seats—winning back the six seats lost when the party split last year. ARENA lost two and now has 27 seats; the right-wing PCN gained two and has 16 seats; the two centrist parties have five seats each. For the first time in history, the opposition together has enough votes to override a presidential veto.

On the municipal level, the FMLN controls 74 municipalities, down from 80, but the number of cities with high populations increased their support. The FMLN also won the popular raw vote by two percentage points. Since 1994 the FMLN has steadily increased its electoral power and ARENA's power has gradually decreased.

The 2003 elections came at a very important time, as the struggle for privatizing health care and the free trade agreement (CAFTA) with El Salvador is at stake. The FMLN can now block trade agreements, international loans and constitutional amendments that require a two-thirds majority, but still needs support from the minor parties to override vetoes. Electoral reform before the March 2004 presidential elections would benefit the opposition and could lead to a ruling party defeat.

Sources: CIS 2003 Election Report, www.cis-elsalvador.org; CISPES, www.cispes.org



Guarding ballot boxes in Mercedes Emana.
Photo: Dale Sorensen

C A L E N D A R

June 19, 7:00 PM. Monthly board meeting. Home of Faye Hinze, 18 Seminole Ave., Corte Madera. Info. 415-924-7690.

June 21-25. Sacramento Pre-WTO Ministerial. Resistance to US government sponsored summit for transnational agribusiness and biotechnology corporations and government ministers from around the world. Teach-ins, sustainable alternatives and legal rally on June 23. 415-981-6205 ext.383 or www.sacmobilization.org

July 3, 7:00 PM. "Miel Para Oshun," an odyssey of discovery and identity; about the coming together of Cubans (from the US and Cuba)." Film by famed Cuban director, Humberto Solas.

La Pena, 3105 Shattuck Ave. Berkeley CA. A benefit for the Pastors for Peace Caravan to Cuba.

July 5, 6:30 PM. Bay Area Send off for Pastors for Cuba Caravan: St. John's Presbyterian church, 2727 College Ave., Berkeley. Info: 510-869-

2577, caravan22@hotmail.com.

August 30, 6:30 PM. Black August International-Benefit for Haiti. Many noted performers and speakers. Berkeley Community Theater, 1930 Allston Way, Haiti Action Committee, Kiiilu: 415-391-3844.

September 3-9. Free Trade Reality Tour to Cancun, MX, Global Exchange, Xiomara: 415-575-5541. Global Solidarity Anti-WTO Events in Cancun Sept.9-14, Deborah 575-5537.



IFCO/Pastors for Peace invites supporters and friends to join with those of the Venceremos Brigade in exercising our right to travel to Cuba in July 2003. We will honor the Cuban elders and celebrate the 50th anniversary of the beginning of the Revolution in Santiago de Cuba!

Join Caravanistas and Brigadistas:
July 3-13: Routes in US and Canada
July 14-17: Orientation and Border Crossing
July 19-28: Program in Cuba
July 29: Reverse Challenge

Information: Pastors for Peace
Phone: 212-926-5757
cucaravan@igc.org
www.ifconews.org

Marin Interfaith Task Force on Central America
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