

# Biography of Breny Massiel Herrera

## *CISPES Victory Tour, Summer 2009*

Breny Herrera began her political life in 1981 when her family was exiled due to political repression in Nicaragua—where the Sandinista revolution had just triumphed. She began contributing to the Popular Sandinista Militias, the Sandinista Youth, and later joined the youth of the Communist Party of El Salvador.

After living in exile for six years, she returned to El Salvador and began working with the Federation of Secondary Students (FES). At 16 years of age, she joined the Communist Party of El Salvador—one of the five organizations that conformed the FMLN—where her mentor was Commander Shafick Handal. In addition to her work with the FES, she was also an urban guerrilla combatant.



When the Peace Accords were signed in 1992 Ms. Herrera became active in the FMLN Youth, working on their radio program and informative magazine. In 1994, when Handal ran for Mayor of San Salvador, she participated helped lead the campaign team and has since participated in all of the electoral processes.

In 2003, Ms. Herrera was elected as Handal's substitute in the Legislative Assembly. Again in 2006 she was elected as a substitute Legislative deputy—this time for Blanca Flor Bonilla. During her legislative work, she was part of the Women, Family, and Children Commissions and participated in the implementation of many legal projects that benefited women and children. In 2005, Ms Herrera worked in the area of communications for the San Salvador mayoral campaign of Dr. Violeta Menjívar. She was named Chief of Gender Policy in Dr. Menjívar's municipal government and served in this position from 2006-2009.

Breny Massiel Herrera became active in the FMLN's National Women's Secretariat in 2006 and is now part of the coordination. The Women's Secretariat has the primary objective of developing and strengthening female leadership within the party. The FMLN is the only political party in the country with a gender policy and the Women's Secretariat advises on the content and implementation of the policy. As part of the coordination, Ms. Herrera organizes and conducts workshops for women holding office and organizing for the FMLN.

The Women's Secretariat also played an instrumental role in the 2009 legislative, municipal, and presidential elections in El Salvador. Ms. Herrera organized Women's Brigades that went door to door and visited maquilas (sweatshop textile factories) to educate women on election issues and the 20 years of failed policy towards women that the right-wing ARENA party had carried out. Ms. Herrera was also the sub-Chief of a Voting Center in San Salvador, organizing all of the FMLN poll workers at the center.

She also founded a feminist organization named for her mother Norma Virginia Guirola de Herrera, who was murdered by the Salvadoran Army on November 11, 1989. Ms. Herrera is currently coordinating a project for the United Nation's UNIFEM to implement a program of prevention of violence against women and children in El Salvador.

Ms. Herrera will be touring the East Coast and Midwest of the United States from July 5-19 (visiting Minneapolis, Madison, Milwaukee, Chicago, Boston, New York and Washington DC,) to share the story of the FMLN's victory in the 2009 presidential elections. She will speak about the broad coalition of unions, feminists, and students that came together with the FMLN to oust 20 years of extreme right-wing rule in El Salvador. She will provide a first hand account of how the people mobilized and organized to overcome a dirty fear campaign backed up by the threats of US Republican Congressional Representatives and defend their votes against an institutionalized system of electoral fraud.