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to amaze us with her ardent and passionate ways of addressing the public and making solutions real. She is truly the personification of powerful women-led change. Rafael Coto has been a member of the militant ANDES National Teacher's Association of El Salvador since 1986 and was a youth



CISPES celebrated the tenure of outgoing Executive Director Manuel Villanueva at the 2005 National Convention

leader in the 1970's revolutionary student movement. Currently, he actively works with the BPS. At the convention he marveled us with his capacity to weave poetry into stories about every day struggle. Both of these strong and inspiring appearances reiterate the strong alliance CISPES has created and maintained with such vibrant and exemplary organizations as the BPS, in the struggle for justice, and the importance of women's leadership.

At the Friday night event we also raised over \$1,500 in material aid for the BPS. In a lot of ways this is the essence of our work, as it allows us to directly support alternatives to the abusive government in El Salvador. For that reason, we are really grateful to all of those who donated money to support our cause.

During the actual convention, CISPES renewed its commitment to continue supporting the struggle being lead by groups such as the BPS and the FMLN in El Salvador. We feel proud that for the first time ever, we held an all-in-Spanish mini plenary discussion group throughout the entire process. This was the result of both important Salvadoran presence and participation – including Coto and Erazo - and also the commitment of CISPES activists to be more effective in anti-oppression and immigrant outreach work by being bilingual. It was an important advancement in our discussion and decision-making process, and we are sure that its great turn will set a precedent for something that will continue to happen at every convention.

As to defining a strategy and program for the next two years, there was significant unity amongst members about what our overall direction should be. CISPES will continue to organize around economic

justice, which means our fight against CAFTA is far from over. Because the actual implementation of CAFTA is only beginning, CISPES has committed deeply to be a part of the struggle preventing the privatization of the people's resources in El Salvador. Furthermore, increased political repression, including the disappearance of key activists, expresses the need for solidarity and action around human right issues, a calling that CISPES will respond to.

But also, new initiatives were brought up and along with them, new commitments. Recognizing the increasing importance of alliances, CISPES will develop a labor solidarity program to strengthen links between the US-labor community and their counterparts in El Salvador. In addition, we approved a proposal for a youth-focused tour and agreed on the importance of making more resources available for immigrants in our committees. Finally, internal political education will take place in order to increase CISPES activists' understanding and identification with the Salvadoran resistance movement and struggle to construct an alternative. We strongly believe that the more we learn about the history and theories relevant to our work, the stronger our capacity of political analysis will be.

Clearly, we have a very busy two years ahead of us. But with all the motivation and inspiration we got at the convention, and with the help of our supporters all over the country, we have no doubt that our solidarity work will only grow and become stronger from our renewed commitments to the people of El Salvador. ■

**To contribute directly to the BPS and our material aid docket, go to [www.cispes.org/docket](http://www.cispes.org/docket)**



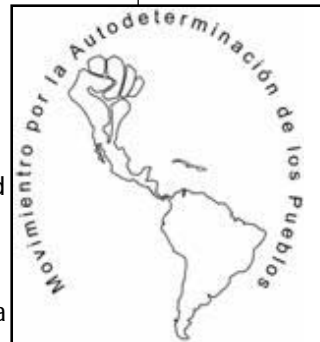
Produced by CISPES a national organization with chapters around the US.

National Office: 130 W. 29th Street, 9th floor New York, NY 10001 (212)465-8115 [www.cispes.org](http://www.cispes.org)

Sources this month include: CISPES El Salvador Office, SOA Watch, FMLN, PCASC/CBLOC

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date, the Movement for Peoples' Self-determination has not received a copy of the agreement, despite numerous requests. The *Movimiento* points to the lack of transparency with regards to the text, the conditions, and terms of the agreement with concern. Antonio Martinez, a member of the *Movimiento* and professor at the University of El Salvador, says of the process "I see it as undemocratic since these decisions are made violating due process, outside of the laws, and then imposed on the population." The ILEA is also seen as US approval of a repressive state apparatus, which is particularly alarming in light of the country's upcoming municipal and legislative elections in March of 2006.



The movimiento is fighting the ILEA in El Salvador

The Salvadoran social movement has been denouncing the police academy, and systematically mobilizing against its ultimate approval by the national assembly. One of the *Movimiento's* first actions was the distribution of anti-ILEA flyers at the official Independence Day parades in September. The following week, *Movimiento* youth groups did banner drops all around San Salvador. That Friday, a public forum was held at the University of El Salvador. The same day, the Popular Social Bloc (BPS) stopped traffic at a main intersection in San Salvador to protest the signing of the agreement.

In order for the ILEA to be built on Salvadoran soil, the agreement needs to be ratified by the national assembly. This is an important time to support the Salvadoran social movement demand to reject the ILEA. In the US, political pressure that challenges US police and military presence in El Salvador will be crucial in stopping continued intervention and respecting the Salvadoran peoples' right to self-determination. ■

# EL SALVADOR



Produced by the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES)

Number 112 Fall 2005

## 25th Anniversary Special Edition



November 2005 marks the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador. See insert for a history of CISPES's quarter century of struggle.

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## CISPES Activists Celebrate 11th National Convention "El Presente es de Lucha, El Futuro es Nuestro!"

by Christine Raine, CISPES Program Organizer

In August CISPES celebrated its 11th convention in Portland, Oregon. It took three whole days in the heat, a gathering of more than 40 CISPES members from our committees all over the country, and A LOT of organizing, but we did it! On August 14th, we closed the convention by having decided the route CISPES will take on our program, strategy and organizational development for the next two years.

The convention takes place every two years, and is the largest and most important decision-making body in CISPES. It brings together activists from all of our ten committees, the National Office, and our office in El Salvador for three packed days of strategizing, sharing, analyzing, making decisions, and of course, getting to know fellow activists involved in the amazing solidarity work that we do. Once decisions have been made, we go back to our communities, and get to work immediately on our new plan.

This year, our host was the vibrant Portland Central America Solidarity Committee (PCASC). PCASC and CISPES have worked together in the struggle for economic and social justice in Central America for 25 years now. One of PCASC's most distinctive impacts involves their work around labor, and the strong ties they have worked to built between labor movements in the US and Central America.

We kicked off the convention with an event Friday night that brought together over 100 people. Our guests reflected grassroots connections at their best, and included people from El Salvador, the Portland community, and of course, CISPES national leadership. After some hearty traditional Latin American food and some homemade brewed beer, we settled down to listen to Lolo Cutumay, a former member of Grupo Musical Cutumay Camones and co-founder of Los Jornaleros del Norte. Lolo is known for combining beautiful tunes with socially conscious lyrics.

One of the most moving moments in the evening was David Ayala's testimony. Ayala was persecuted, imprisoned and tortured in El Salvador for his political views and asserts that he would have never survived had it not been for the pressure resulting from international solidarity groups. His sincere and emotional words were both inspiring and haunting, and it definitely helped all of us understand the importance of the work that we do.

Our keynote speakers were two official guests from the Popular Social Bloc (BPS) who have been working closely with CISPES for years now and came all the way from El Salvador to be a part of the convention. Guadalupe Erazo is a national coordinator of the BPS and has worked with the National Association of Agricultural Workers for over 15 years. She has been on tour with CISPES before, and continues



BPS leaders share analysis at the 11th convention

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# After CAFTA Vote, The Movement Against "Free" Trade Fights On

When the US-Dominican Republic-Central America Free Trade Agreement (DR-CAFTA) passed in the House of Representatives in late July, the broad cross-border movement that opposed the agreement was dealt a major setback. CISPES and our allies in El Salvador mourned the tragic ratification of a trade pact that will have devastating consequences for farmers, workers, poor people, and the environment. For a moment, all the organizing, mobilizing, and political pressure that had been built up against CAFTA seemed wasted; for three and a half years we had fought together to accomplish one primary objective – to defeat CAFTA – and on July 28, our expectation of victory had been destroyed.

## A drawn out battle, with success despite the final vote

But that dark day did not last long: the morning after the midnight vote, CISPES and the Stop CAFTA Coalition sent a communiqué stating that "the struggle is far from over - the heightened awareness built by our campaign... will broaden our efforts to roll back CAFTA, NAFTA, and the destructive economic system from which they stem." Indeed, as the dust settled after the most intensely debated trade battle ever, the anti-CAFTA movement had much to be proud of. CAFTA passed by a mere 2 votes (217-215), and Republicans had to keep the roll call open until after midnight in order to twist enough arms and make enough back-room deals to win the vote. Worse still, during the debate they shamelessly evoked the names of "communists" and "terrorists" in Central America who supposedly would benefit from Congressional rejection of CAFTA.

Perhaps most amazing was the fact that the vote came more than a year after the deal was signed, as the pressure and awareness raised by our movement offset millions of dollars of pro-CAFTA corporate lobbying. During the debate over CAFTA on the floor of the House, it was moving to see many opponents refer to working conditions in Central America, to the horrible effects of "free" trade on the environment and the poor, and to the rejection of CAFTA by the region's people. This represented a genuine political shift, as some of those making the statements were previous "free" trade supporters. Such statements would have been never made were it not for our determined work over the passed 3 years.

When CAFTA was announced three years ago, few people had heard of it, while many of those who had claimed it wasn't a battle worth fighting. Certainly,



CISPES brought an anti-CAFTA bus caravan to Washington the week before the vote in the House

the odds were against us, with a Republican-dominated Congress and the fact that no free trade agreement has ever been defeated in the US Congress. But our allies in El Salvador called on us to build a campaign against CAFTA, and we took on the work as our primary focus. Eventually we helped build a broad coalition, and one by one, Representatives who had previously supported these trade agreements began to come out against CAFTA. As Bush continued to delay the vote, it looked as if we might actually win.

Ultimately, building a movement was our biggest accomplishment. CISPES and the Stop CAFTA Coalition spurred grassroots mobilization in the US, helping to organize protests at every site of the CAFTA negotiations in 2003, and then continued to hold press conferences and rallies in Washington throughout the year during which the signed legislation was on the table. We educated thousands of people in the US about the negative effects of so-called "free" trade, and made hundreds of grassroots Congressional pressure visits. We formed local coalitions in addition to the national one, thereby coaxing more organizations into the battle.

## What's next?

CAFTA was also ratified in the Dominican Republic a month after the vote in the US, but two countries remain standouts: Nicaragua and Costa Rica. Both have seen vibrant popular movements to oppose the deal; in Nicaragua, 30,000 people hit the streets on September 8 to denounce CAFTA, arriving at the gates of the National Assembly where the Sandinista party pledged to fight CAFTA; in Costa Rica, unions organized a mass march in mid-September as it appeared that a vote may be imminent. In both countries, there is a chance to stop the ratification, and the Stop CAFTA Coalition continues to send press releases and solidarity statements

supporting the anti-CAFTA mobilizing.

The Coalition is also preparing for the January 1st implementation date for CAFTA, when more protests are expected in the

Central American countries. We plan to continue monitoring and working to prevent full implementation of CAFTA in the countries where it has been approved. The issue of privatization of public services will be a huge one: CAFTA opens the way for more foreign investment in services like health care, education, and potable water, but by no means mandates such privatization. Popular struggles throughout the region will continue to demand that public services stay public. Finally, organizations from around the country will come together in Washington DC in October for a major trade conference to strategize about future battles related to the WTO, the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), and the Andean Free Trade Agreement (AFTA). The movement for alternative economic relations in Latin America has grown in strength due to the amazing work opposing CAFTA, and grassroots activists and organizations are better prepared than ever to bring down the entire US-imposed model of corporate globalization. ■

# New School of Assassins? Movimiento Opposes US-Sponsored ILEA Police Academy in El Salvador

Salvadoran and US government representatives signed an agreement to create a US-funded International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) in El Salvador this September. US plans for a Latin American ILEA in El Salvador were first announced by Condoleezza Rice three months earlier, at the General Assembly meeting of the Organization of American States (OAS). Although the right-wing ARENA government insists that hosting the US ILEA is an "honor", popular opposition to this latest form of US intervention is growing.

In 1995, Bill Clinton proposed the ILEA network as a way to protect US interests through international cooperation. Four ILEAs already operate worldwide, with the stated purpose of providing training and technical assistance to country's law enforcement agencies. So far, two US attempts to create its southern ILEA have been defeated. In Costa Rica, US refusal to bar military instruc-

tors and armed forces personnel at the academy, the extensive diplomatic immunity provided to US personnel, and the Costa Rican Director's lack of decision-making power ignited broad resistance to the project. Mobilization against the police academy finally forced the US to search for a host country elsewhere.

In El Salvador, the history of US police and military "international cooperation" is grim. During the civil war (1980 - 1992), the US government channeled billions of dollars in military aid to the Salvadoran death-squad regime. The US government also trained Salvadoran military and police at the School of the Americas (SOA), along with other officials from Latin America. US-trained personnel perpetrated the Salvadoran war's most notorious killings, massacres and cases of torture. In a recent forum against the ILEA in San Salvador, Jose Maria Mendez, member of the Roundtable for the Defense of the Constitution, said "The

background to this academy is the infamous SOA where thousands of torturers and assassins were trained to kill millions of their fellow countrymen and women in the name of a US-taught national security doctrine, that meant the elimination of any threat to US so-called economic freedom and democracy."

The ARENA government's more recent cooperation with US police and military presence is troublesome but not surprising. A US military base, an FBI office, and a DEA office already operate in the country. The ARENA government has also pushed the country towards US economic dependency, by dollarizing the economy and ratifying CAFTA. In turn, ARENA cooperation has guaranteed political support from the US government. In last year's Salvadoran presidential elections, ARENA's fear campaign was legitimized by US government representatives' declarations. The outcome of the elections, in which ARENA won the presidency, was based on a massive media campaign that accused the FMLN opposition party of terrorism, and that warned the electorate that an FMLN president would cause massive deportations of Salvadorans in the US and ban critical remittances being sent home.

US military and police presence is growing at a time in which political repression is on the rise. The most recent examples of this have been death threats against social movement leaders and a bomb threat against a non-profit organization. More and more of El Salvador's daily body count has produced bodies

with signs of torture, like thumbs tied together behind backs, blindfolded faces and single gunshots to the head. Several Human Rights groups have declared that there are death squads of "social cleansing", and denounced the government's lack of political will to investigate. The Human Rights Ombudswoman herself has been the target of constant public attacks by ARENA, in an attempt to delegitimize her work.

In this context, the Salvadoran social movement immediately criticized US plans for an ILEA. Opposition to the ILEA has organized into a network of about 30 student, human rights, women's rights, FMLN, youth, and non-profit organizations. To

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## CISPES Action Alert: US Embassy Denies Visa to Salvadoran Organizer \*\*Denounce Campaign to Silence Opposition Voices from El Salvador!\*\*

On Friday, September 23, Salvadoran community activist Gloria Rivas was denied her request for a visa by the United States Embassy in El Salvador. Rivas is scheduled to represent the Popular Social Bloc (BPS) in a CISPES-sponsored 10-city US tour at the end of October. She arrived at the Embassy meeting with some 15 invitation letters, six of them from US Congressional Representatives and Senators. Nevertheless, she was almost immediately denied her request, and the Consul General refused to tell her why, or to discuss the matter further.

Rivas's case is only the most recent example of the US Embassy attempting to prevent voices exposing the political and economic situation in El Salvador from coming to the US. As a leader in the working-class community of San Jacinto, Rivas has worked tirelessly to expose the negative effects of the US-Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), while denouncing the ongoing repression in El Salvador targeting organizers and activists. Meanwhile, numerous other Salvadorans coming on tour have been denied visas in recent months; perhaps most notably, former FMLN presidential candidate Schafik Handal had his visa revoked earlier in the year, while Popular Social Bloc leader Guadalupe Erazo was hassled and inconvenienced before finally being granted a visa in March.

On the day of her appointment with the Embassy, Rivas arrived prepared to present the letters of invitation and discuss her tour in the US. Instead, she underwent a brief but humiliating interview and was eventually given a letter saying she had been denied a visa based on lack of economic resources. However, this justification is clearly a superficial pretext, as past CISPES guests from similar economic backgrounds have been granted visas. Rather, it appears that the nature of Gloria's trip

– raising awareness about the negative effects of CAFTA and exposing the violent situation in El Salvador – led to the visa rejection.

The CISPES tour of Gloria Rivas seeks to expose the recent rash of repression and intimidation targeting activists and organizers in El Salvador, acts that the US-supported ARENA government has either complicity defended or refused to investigate. During the campaign against the CAFTA, Rivas was repeatedly harassed along with other BPS activists, many of whom were labeled "extremists" and "terrorists" because of their opposition to CAFTA. The United States Embassy has been aware of such tactics of intimidation and repression, but refuses to investigate, instead taking ARENA's side by denying visas for political reasons.

## TAKE ACTION!

1. Fax the US Embassy in San Salvador to demand that the Consul General in El Salvador immediately grant Gloria Rivas a visa. (see [www.cispes.org](http://www.cispes.org) for talking points and sample fax) - Virginia Hotchner, Consul General of the US Embassy in San Salvador -Fax: 011(503)2278-5522

**3-Day Convergence**

**Nov.18-20**

2005

**Vigil at the gates & Concert**

**Saturday Nov 19**

**Direct Action**

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Fort Benning, GA

The CISPES fall tour will target CAFTA implementation and recent cases of repression in El Salvador, and conclude at the SOA protest in Georgia. check out [www.cispes.org/tour](http://www.cispes.org/tour)