

EL SALVADOR Watch

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Obama's Latin America Policy Short on "Change"

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Since his inauguration, President Obama has been talking about seeking equal relationships with governments in Latin America. During the Summit of the



President Obama has lunch with Colombian President Uribe at at Summit of the Americas (AFP)

continuation of policies in place since the Clinton Administration.

Last year, Ecuador decided not to renew the lease for a U.S. military base on its soil. This could have been a perfect opportunity to display the beginning of a new relationship with the region. However, the United States quickly moved to sign a deal with Colombian President Álvaro Uribe for the U.S. military to begin operations at seven military bases in Colombia. Far from demonstrating a new direction based

Americas last April, Obama talked about respecting democratically elected leaders and the sovereignty of individual nations. In his opening remarks, he stated, "There is no senior partner and junior partner in our relations; there is simply engagement based on mutual respect and common interests and shared values."

However, despite this change in rhetoric, the reality that is unfolding throughout the region looks much like the aggression, antagonism and unilateral decision-making of the past, a

on equal partnerships and mutual respect, this Pentagon-directed policy reiterates U.S. hegemony and military control. As countries like Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador continue to lead a movement toward Latin American integration and sovereignty, the United States is trying to consolidate its own bloc of military and economic power reaching from Mexico to Colombia.

Colombia has been at the crux of the U.S. geopolitical strategy for over a decade and remains the highest recipient U.S. military spending in Latin America, primarily *continued on pg 3*

Eighteen years later, President Funes moves forward with implementation of Peace Accords

by David Grosser, Boston CISPES

Eighteen years after their original signing, the Peace Accords that ended the civil war between the FMLN and the Salvadoran government (then headed by ARENA) are once again in the news. The new FMLN government of President Mauricio Funes and Vice President Salvador Sánchez Cerén, has, since taking office in June 2009, resurrected and implemented parts of that historic agreement that successive ARENA administrations blocked and tried to bury.

Most dramatically, at a January 16 ceremony marking the eighteenth anniversary of the signing of the Accords, Funes became the first President of El Salvador to make a public apology on behalf of the government for the crimes committed by the State during the war. President Funes acknowledged that government agents committed "massacres, arbitrary executions, forced

disappearances, torture, sexual abuse, arbitrary detentions and different acts of repression" against Salvadoran civil society. Funes asserted that this public apology was a necessary first step in alleviating pain and healing the emotional and social wounds left by the war.

His government had already taken initial steps in confronting government impunity surrounding the Civil War on November 7, when El Salvador's Ministry of Foreign Relations announced it would make reparations for the 1980 murder of Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero. This followed an August 31 announcement by Minister of Foreign Affairs Hugo Martínez that the government of El Salvador would create a Commission for the Disappeared to investigate cases of children forcibly disappeared and separated from their families during the Civil War.

In acknowledging these basic truths *continued on pg. 5*

“They tried to defeat us but we intend to fight for life”

El Salvador Watch Interviews Hector Berríos, member of MUFRAS-32 and the National Coalition against Metallic Mining

The anti-mining movement in the department of Cabañas surged in 2005 in response to Canadian mining company Pacific Rim’s proposal to reopen the El Dorado gold mine in San Isidro as well as explore and extract gold at several other sites in the department. The organized communities effectively stopped the company’s activities and achieved a commitment from President Mauricio Funes to not allow metallic mining in the country. In response, Pacific Rim — through a Nevada-based subsidiary — filed a lawsuit under the provisions of the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), seeking hundreds of millions of dollars in compensation from the Salvadoran government. The company argues that the government violated the investor protections in the trade deal by refusing to issue gold extraction permits. The local resistance continues to organize and educate the community about the dangers of the proposed mine and the lawsuit. In 2009, Cabañas experienced a wave of murders, attempted kidnappings, and death threats against anti-mining activists.

El Salvador Watch sat down with Hector Berríos of the Francisco Sánchez Unified Movement-1932 (MUFRAS-32), one of the Cabañas organizations involved in the anti-mining resistance, to get his take on the cause of the violence and what it means for the environmental movement. The following is an excerpt of that interview.

El Salvador Watch: *What was Cabañas like before the mining company arrived? Has Pacific Rim generated this social conflict?*

Hector Berríos: According to statistics from the National Civil Police, the Department of Cabañas was the third least violent department [of 14 departments in the country]. The majority of the residents of Cabañas work in agriculture, raising livestock, and dairy production. It is also one of the poorest departments and the majority of local families’ income comes from cash remittances sent home from relatives living in other countries, primarily the United States.

Pacific Rim arrived in this context of poverty and began offering jobs and generating the idea that they would bring an economic transformation. They found a handful of youth to work for them, they gave them microwave ovens, bicycles, blenders, and in many cases these workers didn’t even have electricity in their communities but they felt good

with these gifts. Pacific Rim turned the mayors into their promoters and the mayors’ offices stopped working for the community and focused all their municipal efforts on promoting the company.

All of this awoke individual ambitions and generated conflict between communities, between those that supported the company and those of us that oppose its negative impacts on nature and our rivers. The company began telling its workers they would be left without jobs and that we were to blame, those of us that oppose Pacific Rim and defend the lives of ourselves and future generations.

ESW: *The anti-mining resistance has said that impunity in the cases of the three murdered activists leaves the door open for future assassinations. Could you explain the impunity in more detail? What are the failures in the State institutions that leave these cases without justice?*

HB: One must understand the concept of impunity as the

sensation that some people or transnational companies are currently experiencing, the feeling of being above the State, above the institutions, above the laws, breaking the principle of the rule of law. They use economic and political pressure to keep the cases from being investigated. On the contrary, the crimes get covered up. Pacific Rim has hired promoters and advisors that are Mayors, Legislative Deputies, ex-advisors from State ministries, and ex-military officers. This gives you an idea of the power that they can exercise to make sure the cases aren’t investigated by the Attorney General.

It is the duty of the State, through the institutions of the Attorney General’s Office and National Civil Police, to protect people and for this reason the acts of violence in Cabañas must be investigated. The violence is highly planned and if the causes and promoters of this violence are not investigated, the murders will continue as the intellectual authors continue in total impunity.

ESW: *What has been the reaction of Pacific Rim in response to the violence in the zone they hope to mine?*

HB: They will never accept that they are responsible for generating violence in the department. But it is certainly a coincidence that those of us who have been victims of the violence, of the

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Salvadorans from across the country gathered in the small community of Trinidad to honor the lives of Ramiro Rivera and Dora Alicia Sorto Recinos

Obama and Latin America cont. from pg. 1

through the disastrous Plan Colombia. While the U.S. readies to add more of its own military in the country, death squad-style paramilitaries continue to terrorize farmers and union workers in Colombia. According to a 2008 report from US-LEAP, more trade unionists have been killed in Colombia since President Uribe took office in 2003 than in the rest of the world combined.

Even more unsettling is the possibility of the U.S. leading Colombia into war with Venezuela. During the Bush administration, there were multiple incidents of Colombia invading Venezuelan and Ecuadoran territory under the guise of fighting terrorism, namely the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), which is in the middle of almost 50 years of civil war. The U.S. continues to use the FARC and the “war on drugs” as an excuse to pump millions of dollars into increased militarization in Colombia. Despite the utter failures of Plan Colombia to achieve even its stated aim of reduce drug trafficking, the Obama administration does not look like it will be changing its stance on Colombia any time soon.

On June 28th, 2009, there was a military coup in Honduras that ousted democratically-elected President Manuel Zelaya. Though President Obama did call for President Zelaya’s reinstatement, the overall U.S. position on the coup and support for the subsequent illegitimate elections in Honduras are likely indicative of how the Obama Administration will continue to act in Latin America.

The response of the State Department and Hilary Clinton, completely at odds with every other government in the Americas, was embarrassing at best when it comes to the Honduran coup. When the Honduran people mobilized in the millions to call for the return of their president, not only did the U.S. not honor the wishes of the people of Honduras, but it also

ignored the rampant violations of human rights carried out by the military and police when repressing the protest of the people. When President Zelaya tried to return to his country, Secretary of State Clinton called it a “reckless” move. By insisting on and facilitating “negotiations” between President Zelaya and the golpistas as if they were two equal parties with equal rights to govern in Honduras, the U.S. State Department gave the coup plotters the legitimacy they needed to wrest the Presidency in Honduras and then rubber stamp it with elections.

Why would the U.S. tacitly prop up a military coup in Honduras? Didn’t President Obama state, only two days after the coup, that “It would be a terrible precedent if we start moving backwards into the era in which we are seeing military coups as a means of political transition, rather than democratic elections”?

An examination of the trend that Zelaya was following shows why the U.S. supported the Honduran elite in neutralizing his presidency. First of all, Zelaya raised the minimum wage in Honduras by 60% for most workers. Secondly, he signed on to the ALBA, the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas, a co-operative Latin American trade agreement that was providing Honduras with almost interest-free loans and very few strings attached for social investment, a stark contrast to loans from the World Bank and the IMF. Thirdly (and perhaps worst in the eyes of the U.S., certainly of the Honduran elite), Zelaya was beginning a transition to include popular participation in reshaping the constitution of Honduras, a demand that came from the popular movement. On the morning that the military removed Zelaya from the country, a non-binding poll was scheduled to have taken place to consider the question of whether or not to hold a future popular ref-

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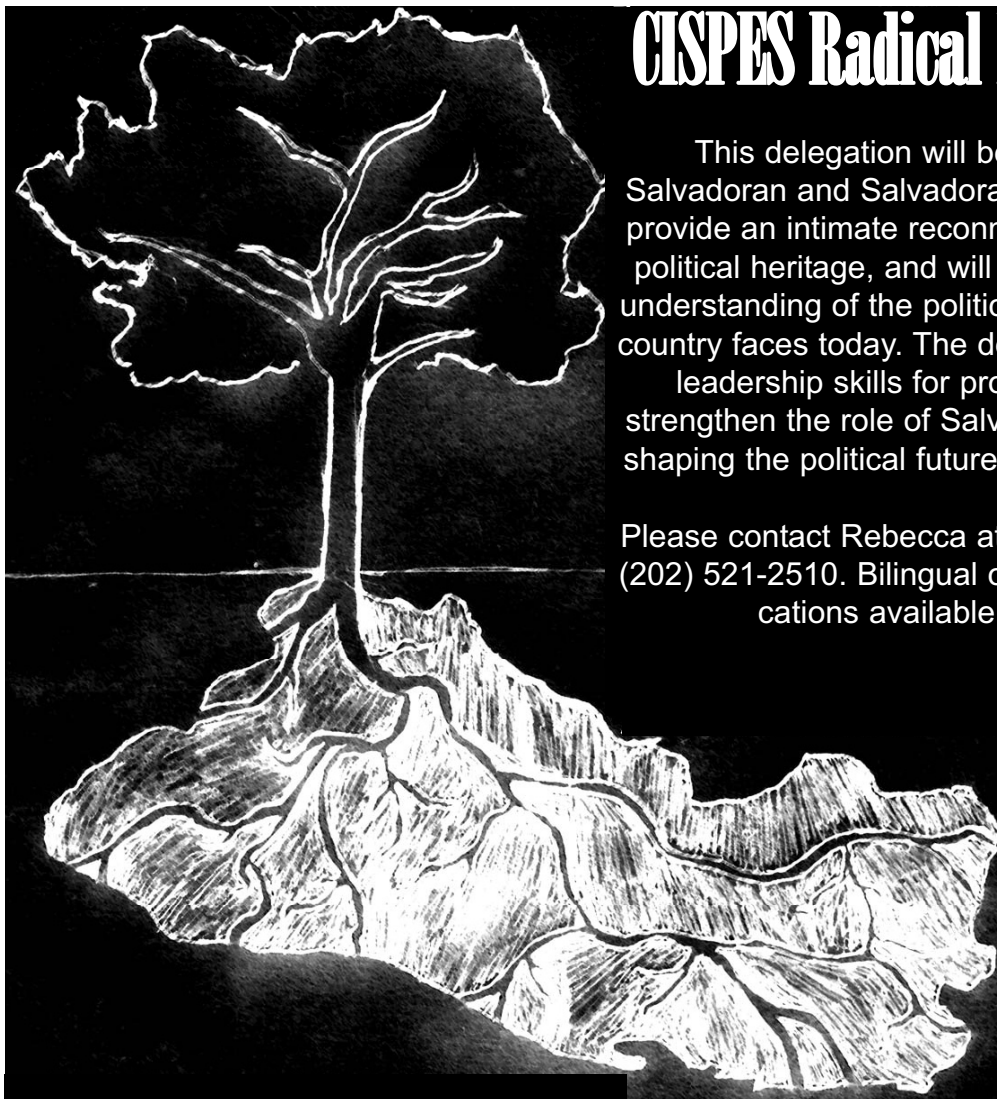
**Join CISPES and the Latin America Solidarity Coalition (LASC)
at the United States Social Forum II
June 22-26, 2010 in Detroit, MI**



The United States Social Forum II (USSF) is an on-going process to “to come up with the peoples’ solutions to the economic and ecological crisis. The USSF is the next most important step in our struggle to build a powerful multi-racial, multi-sectoral, inter-generational, diverse, inclusive, internationalist movement that transforms this country and changes history.”

CISPES will be participating in the USSF as part of the LASC, the Latin America Solidarity Coalition, and we hope you will too! We are hoping to offer international and interdisciplinary workshops that will address such topics as: effective grassroots organizing models, cross-border struggles to resist criminalization and militarization, and how alternative economic and social models being developed in Latin America can strengthen demands for economic justice within the U.S.

If you or an organization that you are a part of would like to collaborate on a workshop or help ensure a strong Latin America solidarity presence to the USSF, please visit www.lasolidarity.org or contact Alexis (alexis@cispes.org). If you are interested in attending the USSF or joining local mobilizations in your area, please visit ussf2010.org



CISPES Radical Roots Delegation

This delegation will be specifically tailored to Salvadoran and Salvadoran-American young adults to provide an intimate reconnection to their personal and political heritage, and will tie these experiences to an understanding of the political and social issues that the country faces today. The delegation is intended to build leadership skills for progressive organizing and strengthen the role of Salvadorans living in the U.S. in shaping the political future of El Salvador and the U.S.

Please contact Rebecca at rebecca@cispes.org or call (202) 521-2510. Bilingual outreach materials and applications available at www.cispes.org

NEW DATES!
June 19-27, 2010

Estimated cost:
\$1300-\$1750
including travel;
partial scholarships
available

Interview with Hector Berríos continued from page 2

terror campaign in Cabañas, are all environmentalists and opposed to the project Pacific Rim wants to develop. It must be investigated. Who is committing these murders? What relationship do they have with right-wing structures in the department? Why are the bank accounts and the money transfers of this company, its advisors, and its promoters not being investigated? Where did the combat rifles come from? Who is facilitating this and who is paying for these murders if this is a community too poor to pay for the logistics of the assassinations?

ESW: *Have the threats and murders caused fear within the organized movement in Cabañas? Have they affected your educational and organizing work?*

HB: Our communities have never seen this type of violence, not even during the war. People are shocked and fearful. That is the desired result — to disarticulate and carry out a psychological blow to the communities in resistance. But the fear brought us together to share solidarity, bringing us strength and fortitude to continue denouncing the crimes nationally and internationally. They tried to defeat us and we intend to fight for life. This brought us to look for new ways of bringing our message to the people. The vigils began, the community search team that finally found Marcelo Rivera's body, the prayers, the painting of murals celebrating our fallen *compañeros* and *compañeras* and educating the community against mining. Our struggle has been a pacifist one, but very energetic. It permits us to continue educating ourselves through accompanying the community that taught us the meaning of the Earth and its relation with life.

Peace Accords cont. from pg. 1

about the war years, Funes directly attacked ARENA's decades-long "politics of amnesia." The 1992 accord created a "Truth Commission" that investigated high profile human rights cases – including those of Romero and the six murdered Jesuit priests – but immediately after the war ended, then-President (and current head of ARENA) Alfredo Cristiani rammed an amnesty law through the Legislative Assembly.

As a result, ARENA not only shielded its leaders (and the armed forces high command) from prosecution, but also used the amnesty to deny its overwhelming responsibility for human rights abuses during the war. In the post-war years, ARENA aggressively promoted death squad leader and party founder Roberto D'Aubisson as a national hero, erecting a statue of him in San Salvador and dedicating numerous public meetings to his memory.

While repeal of the amnesty law is not possible without an FMLN majority in the legislature (the party currently has only 35 out of 84 seats), Funes' actions pave the way for an end to the public silence about the crimes committed by ARENA and the U.S.-backed armed forces during the war. Funes' actions also lay the foundation for a reform of the education curriculum so that Salvadoran youth can at last learn the truth about the war years. (Hundreds of teacher activists were murdered and "disappeared" during the conflict).



Mothers and partners of the disappeared embrace after President Funes' speech. Photo: Mauro Arias, El Faro

Though the Peace Accords were signed in 1992, negotiations began much earlier, as a result of the 1989 military stalemate. Through the Accords, the FMLN won several key reforms:

- Replacement of the military dictatorship with a functioning, albeit seriously flawed, electoral system – and the opportunity to compete in elections. The FMLN has steadily increased the number of municipalities governed and the number of seats held in the Legislative Assembly, culmi-

nating in Funes' 2009 presidential victory

- Shrinking of the military and its withdrawal from a prominent role in Salvadoran national politics
- Disbanding of many of the internal security agencies strongly involved in the death squads, and the creation of a National Civilian Police

Despite these important reforms, many of the agreement's other key provisions were never implemented. However, the concrete steps taken thus far by President Funes' administration seem to demonstrate a commitment to finally following through on the promise of the Peace Accords that so many fought for during El Salvador's civil war. ■

Obama in Latin America cont. from page 3

erendum regarding the formation of a constituent assembly to re-write the constitution. These three things combined represented a serious threat to business interests in Honduras, Latin America and in the U.S.

For almost two decades now, the main impetus of foreign policy in Latin America has been to ensure access to raw materials and to cheap labor to produce goods for export, as well as to serve as a market in which to dump subsidized U.S. agriculture. Needless to say, social movements, women's organizations and labor unions have organized effectively throughout Latin America to resist this exploitation and to demand truly democratic governments and just economies, as was beginning to happen in Honduras.

This level of resistance has prompted new strategies of U.S. police and military control. In 1995, then-President Clinton called for the establishment of a network of International Law Enforcement Academies (ILEA) throughout the world to link police agencies throughout the region with training from U.S. experts under U.S. State Department oversight. In 2005, the newest branch of the ILEA opened in San Salvador. The purpose of the ILEAs is explicitly to "protect American citizens and businesses through strengthened international cooperation against crime." The ILEA and the U.S. military base in El Salvador, like the military bases in Colombia, are intended to serve as "lily pads" for the U.S. military should it need to mobilize throughout Latin America.

The status quo that the Obama administration inherited from the Clinton and Bush administrations has largely determined the path of its own foreign policy. What we have seen from the Obama administration, thus far, is a continued insistence on free trade and U.S. dominance through militarization, albeit with a more "democratic" presentation. There have been many opportunities missed already to change the relationship between the U.S. and the region, none of which have been utilized. Despite his campaign promises, Obama has yet to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which, like CAFTA, are 'agreements' that subjugate Mexico and Central America to the whim of international capital. Until this administration addresses the trade agreements and economic policies that impede true change in the region, there will be no hope for Obama's foreign policy in Latin America. *by Josh Elliot, Olympia CISPES*

East Coast CISPES Chapters Share Skills at Regional Training

by Eli Latto, Boston CISPES

On a Saturday morning in early December, in a basement room of the Borough of Manhattan Community College, twenty-five people in socks sit in a circle of desks. A girl holds up a pair of Doc Martens shoes, examining them for clues as to who their owner might be.

It's the first day of the CISPES East Coast Regional Training, and I've only been the Chapter Coordinator of Boston CISPES for two months. Last night, the other committee members and I drove four hours to convene with New York CISPES, National Office staff members and the newly-formed D.C. CISPES, for our first annual East Coast regional training. The goal of the weekend is to educate ourselves about our anti-mining campaign: the ins and outs of the Pacific Rim lawsuit, strategy, and analysis. But first, we've got to get to know each other – which is where the opening *dinámica* with the shoes comes in.



Eli and Francisco of Boston CISPES lead a workshop on effective presentations and pitches

After a breakfast of New York bagels and coffee, Julia Kaminsky from New York speaks about her experience living in Cabañas, El Salvador, working with community organizations opposed to mining. I am struck by the hardships and resistance she bore witness to, as well as the clarity of her analysis. Marcelo Rivera, the activist who was assassinated in June of 2009, was her boss. In that moment Marcelo becomes not another name to me but a real person: a man with a family, who was killed for trying to protect his community. Our campaign starts to take on new urgency in my eyes.

Now that the why of our anti-mining campaign is clear, it's time to talk about how. Mackenzie Baris and Sara Wallace-Keeshen from D.C. facilitate a hands-on campaign strategy session, going over different types of targets, tactics, and objectives. It's obvious that these skills are translatable to many different types of activism, and in true CISPES fashion, everyone has a role to play.

On Saturday night we host a public panel, "We Say No To Mining!," with Aviva Chomsky, Sakura Saunders, anti-mining activist and editor of protestbarrick.net, Leandra Requena from Peruvians in Action, and Julia Kaminsky. Although everyone is exhausted after such a long day, it's great to hear about anti-mining struggles from Canada to Colombia – one CISPista even tells me it's one of the best panels she's been to.

The next day, we reconvene for workshops on anti-oppression organizing, media tactics, and how to use social media to promote a campaign. While eating homemade pupusas for lunch after a jam-packed morning, I talk with others about how and why they got involved with CISPES. The diversity of backgrounds is striking: there are labor organizers, college students, youth workers, computer programmers. Many people talk about their experiences in El Salvador – whether it was a delegation that solidified their commitment or whether they found CISPES after returning to the States from Central America, it's clear that this one country is a special place for many. Andrew Kessel from Boston and I look at each other and both know: "We've gotta go to El Salvador."

Francisco Rodriguez and I co-facilitate the last workshop of the day: "Making Motivating Mining Presentations." Francisco, Alana Epstein, and I planned the workshop together, and although I was nervous initially, I feel a lot more comfortable with this crowd after spending the whole weekend together. Everyone is loosened up and more than ready to participate in our "mining bingo" game, which explains how to talk about the campaign in a brief conversation.

Carpooling back to Boston that night I am exhausted, but also inspired by all the positive, productive energy of the weekend. With our shoes back on our feet, it's time to hit the ground running. ■

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