

# EL SALVADOR Watch

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

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## CISPES Mission:

We are a grassroots organization dedicated to supporting the Salvadoran people's struggle for self-determination and social and economic justice. The alternative that they are building - an alternative based upon democratic and socialist ideals - is an example to all people who seek a world free of domination and exploitation.

We join with poor and working people, immigrants and refugees in the struggle against neoliberalism, the current manifestation of capitalism imposed by the United States government and its state, institutional and corporate allies.

We focus our work on El Salvador because of the U.S. government's continuing military, economic, and political intervention on behalf of U.S. corporate interests, and because the Salvadoran people's tenacious and inspiring struggle to build social justice.

## Salvadoran Foreign Minister Calls For More U.S. Intervention in 2009 Elections

### *U.S. urged to eschew neutrality as voting approaches in El Salvador*

In a September 18 event hosted by a right-wing think tank in Washington, D.C., El Salvador's Foreign Minister, Marisol Argueta, called on the U.S. government to pay more attention to the 2009 Salvadoran elections, lest Salvadoran voters elect the leftist FMLN (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front) party's presidential candidate. Argueta's comments before the American Enterprise Institute were part of a panel discussion titled "The Perils of Populism." The event was moderated by Roger Noriega who, while serving as Assistant Secretary of State, personally intervened in El Salvador's 2004 presidential campaign by threatening U.S. retribution in the case of an FMLN victory at the polls.

Elections for mayors, municipal councils, and Legislative Assembly deputies will take place on January 18, 2009, while El Salvador's next president will be elected on March 15. Mauricio Funes,

presidential candidate for the FMLN, enjoys a significant lead in the most recent polling. The right-wing ARENA party, one of the Bush Administration's few remaining allies in Latin America, has governed El Salvador since 1989. Their tenure that has been marked by continued deregulation of the Salvadoran economy, privatization of public services, a failure to implement the 1992 Peace Accords, and increasing repression of activists and opposition political figures.

Referring frequently to her country's upcoming elections, Minister Argueta sought to paint the FMLN as part of a dangerous cadre of "neo-socialist" political forces in Latin America. Argueta claimed, without providing evidence, that the FMLN is "closely linked to ETA or to FARC [terrorist organizations]" and is intent on "repressing political liberties including freedom of speech and freedom of press."

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## Leadership Development CISPES-style: Summer Camp 2008

*by Rebecca Mintz, CISPES National Organizer*

During the weekend of August 21-24, 30 CISPES members and staff from around the country gathered for our bi-annual Summer Camp. For four days, veterans and newer activists alike nestled into a cabin on cozy Blakely Island, off the coast of Washington State. The serene surroundings helped us focus on our task: reflect on the current state of CISPES, and learn as much as possible to strengthen our work.

CISPES considers Summer Camp a crucial piece of our national organizational development - we build skills, develop our political analysis, and learn from each other's experiences. We found that getting away from our home cities gave us the space and perspective to better understand the political context we are in, as well as what we can be doing differently to best take advantage of our opportunities. Getting together allows us to share our collective wisdom and support each other's growth.

One of the highlights of any Summer Camp is the honored guest that comes from El Salvador to share knowledge and analysis. This year we were blessed with the

*continued on pg. 4*



# Unidos para 2009: The Struggle for Democracy in El Salvador

## \*\*CISPES Fall Tours 2008\*\*

This fall, CISPES is organizing three regional tours of powerful Salvadoran voices. The East Coast committees are holding events featuring Claudia de Cuellar, a long-time political organizer who recently immigrated to the US from El Salvador. Our California committees will host Oscar Torres, screenwriter of the widely-acclaimed film "*Voces Inocentes*" (Innocent Voices) who grew up during the Salvadoran Civil War and fled as an adolescent to Los Angeles. The Northwest committees will be touring Francisco López, a Salvadoran immigrant who works with the Oregon Immigrant Rights Coalition.

Though each tour will feature different speakers, the events will address similar themes and issues. Speakers will focus on the upcoming elections in El Salvador and will discuss the incredible potential that the elections offer, considering the positive trends and readiness for change that polls consistently show. Speaking from their perspective as immigrants, our guests will address the realities that Salvadorans face in leaving their homes, resisting racism and xenophobia in the US, and attempts by US and Salvadoran political leaders to use them as pawns in power plays and elections.

Our fall tour is a chance to raise public awareness of the situation in El Salvador and the role that the solidarity movement here in the US can play in promoting free and

fair elections. Many allies in El Salvador are referring to a potential victory by the FMLN party in the March 2009 presidential election as the "realization of the democratic revolution." This phrase draws a picture of this election as an opportunity to bring the struggle of the past decades, through the war and since the Peace Accords, to fruition through a vibrant, democratic process.

Given such a potent moment, we see this tour as a critical way to gather the energy of our base here in the US to work for free and fair elections in El Salvador. We will be publicizing our work on the People's Pledge (go to [www.cispes.org/pledge2009](http://www.cispes.org/pledge2009) to sign), bringing in new members to our committees, and signing people up to go on an elections-observing delegation in March 2009.

At this political moment of increased pressure on immigrants in this country we are excited to host speakers that have migrated from El Salvador to the US. As the next round of Salvadoran elections approaches, it is critical for us to have an analysis of how the US government is currently manipulating immigrant communities in different but similarly exploitative ways.

CISPES is pleased to present the itinerary for our 2009 fall tour, and hope you will join us if you live in one of the following cities. ■

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### CISPES FALL TOUR DATES:

#### East Coast

Who: **Claudia de Cuellar, Salvadoran organizer and recent immigrant**

DC – Monday, Nov. 10

NYC – November 11-12

Boston – November 13-14

#### California

Who: **Oscar Torres, filmmaker, *Voces Inocentes***

San Francisco – November 18-20

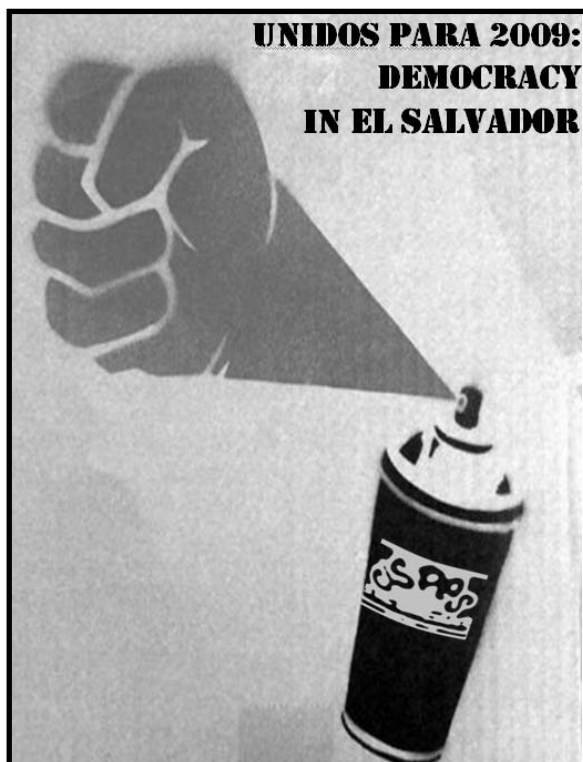
Los Angeles – November 20-23

#### Northwest

Who: **Francisco López, Salvadoran organizer with the Oregon Immigrant Rights Coalition**

Portland, Olympia, Seattle

November 18 - November 19



# Stop U.S. intervention in El Salvador!

*Sign the People's Pledge to Defend Free & Fair Elections in El Salvador*

Given that:

- ★ *The peoples of every nation have the right to political self-determination and autonomy.*
- ★ *The U.S. government has a long history of outright manipulation of political, social & economic conditions in El Salvador to its own financial and political gain AND without concern for the well-being of the Salvadoran people.*
- ★ *The U.S. government regularly channels funds—through United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED)—to destabilize popularly supported leftist governments across the globe, and particularly in Latin America, where countries are humanely rebuilding their nations to generate prosperity for all and to escape the stranglehold of US hegemony.*
- ★ *The U.S. government has consistently and systematically interfered in the Salvadoran electoral process since the end of the civil war in 1992, through a premeditated combination of lies, malicious manipulation and diplomatic threats. One example: before the 2004 Presidential election, members of the U.S. Congress threatened to deport Salvadoran immigrants and cut off money being sent home to families if the ruling right wing party were not re-elected.*
- ★ *The President of El Salvador openly called for U.S intervention in the upcoming elections during his November 2007 visit to Washington, DC, in a public event where he received the 2007 "Freedom Award" from the International Republican Institute.*
- ★ *The Bush Administration has already begun to intervene in the 2009 elections in El Salvador through federal harassment of CISPES—limiting the support that concerned people in the US can give for free and fair elections in El Salvador.*

*As such, it is our duty as conscientious people—imbued with our own political strength—to curtail this profound abuse of power and influence. We pledge to take decisive action in the event of any statement or action made by elected or appointed U.S. officials, including members of the United States Congress, State Department, foreign embassies, and the White House, that intend to control the outcome of the 2009 presidential, municipal or legislative elections in El Salvador.*

*By pledging, we place ourselves on "active alert," poised to hold protest actions and to call on U.S. government officials as part of a direct, national response to U.S. intervention in the 2009 Salvadoran elections.*

*In the name of true justice and true democracy we will raise our voices and take action in defense of the Salvadoran people's right to determine their own fate.*

***I pledge to (please check what you will commit to):***

- Join a coordinated, national protest action (marches, demonstration, vigils, etc.)*
- Call on the President and Congress (lobbying, letter-writing, phone calling)*
- Actively organize with CISPES in my area*
- Go on the March 2009 Observers Delegation to El Salvador*

NAME:

Address:

Phone number:

Email:

**Return to CISPES at 1525 Newton St. NW, Washington DC 20010**

**Foreign Minister cont. from pg. 1**

In 2004, several U.S. government officials – including Noriega, other high-ranking Bush Administration appointees, and Members of Congress – made statements to the Salvadoran press establishing that the United States would not approve of an FMLN government, and would thus reconsider the immigration status of Salvadorans living in the U.S. in the case of an FMLN presidential victory. With twenty percent of El Salvador’s economy comprised of remittances sent home by immigrants working in the U.S., such threats carried substantial weight with voters.

At the end of her remarks, Foreign Minister Argueta seemed to call for a repeat of such intervention in 2009, while rejecting the notion that the U.S. should remain neutral or agree to work with whichever party the Salvadoran voters select. After Noriega expressed confidence that Salvadoran voters will “exercise their characteristic wisdom and do the right thing,” Argueta concluded the discussion by stating, “That’s why it is very important that the U.S. message is not, ‘We will be able to work in the same way with whomever gets elected in El Salvador.’ It will not be such.”

Reviving 1980s Cold War rhetoric, Argueta labeled leftist governments in Latin America “threats” to U.S. national security and, referring to the FMLN’s chances in the 2009 election, stated, “If power goes to the wrong hands, El Salvador may very well be the next populist failure in the hemisphere.”

“Losing El Salvador will be a lose-lose situation for the security and national interest of both El Salvador and the United States,” the Foreign Minister added. “It will generate freedom-cutting measures. It will produce instability in the

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country and neighboring countries and it will have the potential of making El Salvador go back 30 years in history when Central America was in turmoil. As President Ronald Reagan said more than 25 years ago in a State of the Union Address, ‘Tonight, the security of the United States is at stake in El Salvador.’ These words remain in the minds of many of us that need to have more attention being paid to what is going in Central America.”

**Reaction in El Salvador**

Argueta’s speech created a controversy in El Salvador, where representatives of other parties condemned the Minister’s

statements as an abuse of her role as a public official. Such statements demonstrate that Argueta is “more a functionary of the ARENA party,” said Hugo Martínez, FMLN spokesman for international relations.

Even ARENA’s right-wing allies in the PCN (National Conciliation Party) were concerned by Argueta’s statements. Orlando Arévalo, a PCN legislative deputy who serves on the Foreign Relations Commission, stated, “This is negative for

the country, for democracy, because this paints ARENA as a dictatorial party that is not inclined to respect the popular will, but wants to maintain its own power at whatever cost.”

The FMLN went so far as to accuse the Foreign Minister of violating Article 218 of the Salvadoran Constitution, which states, “Officials and public employees are at the service of the State, and not of a particular political fraction. They cannot take advantage of their positions to carry out partisan political activity. Those who do so will be sanctioned in conformity with the law.” ■

**Summer Camp, cont. from pg. 1**

presence of our long-time friend and ally Roger Blandino Nerio, mayor of Mejicanos, one of the largest and most progressive municipalities in El Salvador. Blandino not only gave us invaluable advice on the future direction of our work; he also hung out with us, making time for personal relationships and conversation.

Our program was packed full of incredible workshops, which our own organizers created and facilitated. Workshops addressed topics such as history and theory, organizing skills, media skills, and fundraising skills. Two members of the Boston committee gave a rocking workshop on the CISPES “Organizational Development model,” of which we are really proud. We also took time to have a “Big Questions” conversation, in which we discussed some of the broader questions of how CISPES does the work that we do. Though these conversations are critical for a healthy organization, such questions never have a deadline and therefore often stay on the back-burner. Therefore, Summer Camp

was the perfect venue to taking time to have such weighty discussions. At the conclusion of our weekend, had a concluding conversation in which we thought about all that we had learned, and laid out specific plans for integrating our new knowledge into our upcoming work.

In addition to the hard work, we also took the opportunity to have a lot of fun together. One of our organizers taught a screen-printing workshop, so everyone walked away with a new CISPES t-shirt to add to her or his wardrobe. We also took time for an afternoon swim in the island’s lake, as well as the all-important dance party on the last night. All in all, it was wonderful to spend time together in the beauty of the San Juan Islands.

In the end, months of planning and logistical thinking paid off in a really successful weekend. We all left feeling closer to each other personally, closer to the organization, more equipped to do our work, and more committed to the movement for social justice here in the US and, of course, in El Salvador. ■

# 2009 CISPES International Observers/Solidarity Delegation

**Join CISPES on a delegation to observe El Salvador's presidential election from March 9-19, 2009! Travel to El Salvador with other committed activists to support democracy in action! Send an e-mail to [elizabeth@cispes.org](mailto:elizabeth@cispes.org) or call (202) 521-2510 for more information on joining the delegation.**

The Salvadoran people are set to follow the shift to people-centered politics and economic sovereignty that is sweeping Latin America. But already, shady electoral dealings by the right-wing ARENA party have begun, including the solicitation of US intervention by El Salvador's Minister of Foreign Affairs, and outright physical attacks on FMLN party members.

History has proven that US politicians will indeed abuse their power and intervene in the Salvadoran people's right to self-determination. In the 2004 election year, US Congressmen alluded to putting "special controls" on remittances sent to El Salvador or terminating the Temporary Protected Status of Salvadoran immigrants in the case of an FMLN win – hollow threats that nonetheless shift elections in El Salvador. Already this year, in a June 2008 visit to El Salvador, the US Deputy Secretary of State spoke of fabricated links between the FMLN party and the rebels of Colombia's FARC, proving that the administration here in the United States is again prepared to interfere in Salvadoran domestic politics.



Later in June 2008, CISPES sent a fact-finding delegation to El Salvador, during which the US Ambassador to El Salvador admitted to delegates that the US had intervened in the last Salvadoran election. He pledged non-intervention this election period.

CISPES will be following up on this pledge, and our historical pledge to the Salvadoran people to support their right to sovereignty, with a delegation to observe the historic presidential election in March.

Join us on the ground in El Salvador, and be a part of the movement for real democracy in all nations. Delegates will connect with Salvadoran activists and see firsthand what they are doing to change the course of their country's history. Be part of a people's movement, proving to right-wing politicians and wealthy corporate interests that we are watching, that we are standing up with those who struggle everywhere, and demanding that votes count to decide the future!

This is a greatly anticipated year for the people in El Salvador, and a progressive victory will be a watershed moment for all of us here in the Western Hemisphere.

Join us in the fight for real democracy in El Salvador from March 9-19! ■

## **Toward a New U.S.-Latin America Foreign Policy**

The Latin America Solidarity Coalition Coordinating Committee (of which CISPES is a member) has adopted the following talking points for use by local activists to educate their communities and influence opinion makers and elected officials. With a new administration installed in Washington, DC it is time for progressive activists to demand a new foreign policy toward Latin American and the Caribbean.

The LASC is an association of national and local US-based grassroots Latin America and Caribbean solidarity groups, many of which have long histories of working with grassroots organizations throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. LASC's mission is to define common goals and shared strategies for these groups. LASC's work circles around several hemisphere-wide issues as well as country-specific topics. We operate and structure our work from a solidarity model: we operate on the principle of self-determination; it is not up to us to determine what our partners in the Global South should or should not do. Nor is it up to us to determine the strategies and methodologies they use. We determine our strategies based on the needs of our partners in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Visit our web page at [www.lasolidarity.org](http://www.lasolidarity.org) to learn more.

1. Close the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation also known as the School of the Americas
2. Close the International Law Enforcement Academy in San Salvador
3. Stop funding Plan Colombia and cut off all military aid to that country
4. Stop funding the Merida Initiative and the militarization of the US/Mexico border
5. Close the National Endowment for Democracy and return USAID to its original foreign aid mission
6. Return President Aristide to Haiti, advocate freedom for all political prisoners and support the end of UN occupation
7. End belligerence toward Venezuela and other Latin American countries whose citizens have elected left leaning governments over the past decade
8. End the embargo against Cuba and normalize relations with our island neighbor
9. Stop initiating "Free Trade" agreements that benefit only corporations while destroying local agriculture and forcing Latin Americans to leave their homeland to work in the US
10. Publicly state support for the legitimate elected government of Bolivia, condemn the separatist violence and take no actions to further inflame the crisis there
11. Extradite the terrorist Luis Posada Carrilles to Venezuela.

# New York CISPES Committee Update

The New York CISPES chapter has made it to autumn electrified by the energy of the summer months. The summer of 2008 brought sweltering heat, opportunities to revel in annual traditions, and at its height, the arrival of a new coordinator.

With our statewide network, New York CISPES co-sponsored the Seventh Annual Jolie Rickman Spanish for Activists Camp. The camp was wildly successful in creating a space for critical reflection of our solidarity work. The three-day camp had an ambitious agenda of alternating workshops and Spanish classes. The camp wrapped up with an all-inclusive discussion, on "What we want, what we believe," that carried well beyond the time of our rental agreement.

The summer brought Max García to New York to be the new chapter coordinator. Originally from the Bay Area, he was most recently living in Tucson, Arizona, where he was working with minors and adults in immigration detention. Finding that line of work unsatisfying, he left his position at the Florence Immigrant and Refugee Rights Project to be a full time volunteer with No More Deaths. The opportunity to coordinate the New York chapter has been a humbling offer that he has taken and run with. One of his very first challenges was the reopening of the chapter's office. Housed at the Brecht Forum, the office is in the heart of the city's leftist culture and offers a great space for networking.

Throughout the summer, New York CISPES continued to play a large role in the work of the New York City People's Referendum on Free Trade. Recently, the coalition was renamed Trade Justice New York City Metro, but we will all affectionately keep referring to it as La Consulta. Through a weekly program of forums and film screenings, we have been building consciousness and raising awareness of the terrible effects of free trade across the world and what a people's critique in action can look like. The coalition made headlines when two activists disrupted a Council of the Americas-sponsored reception for Colombian



New York CISPES Coordinator Max García with San Salvador mayor Violeta Menjivar

President Alvaro Uribe Velez to denounce Uribe's support for the pending free trade agreement between the US and Colombia.

As summer came to an end we closed it out in style. Michael Lent

and Diane Greene-Lent hosted a fundraiser for New York CISPES in their beautiful Brooklyn home. The event was a good time. Members of the FMLN New York discussed the upcoming elections, NY CISPES member Andy Kefel reported back on the fact-finding delegation to El Salvador he participated in, and comida típica was enjoyed by all. While the fundraising aspect of the night was extremely fruitful, the best part of the event was that it offered new CISPES volunteers a chance to mingle with committed supporters as well as veterans of the New York/El Salvador solidarity movement.

As autumn settles in, so has our Fall 2008 Intern, Amanda Peters. Having lived and studied in El Salvador, this recent graduate of Bates College is an articulate and motivated contributor to the chapter. New York CISPES has been strengthened by her contributions in shaping our outreach approach and by the dedication to El Salvador her work shows. This January she will represent New York CISPES on our election observer delegation.

Finally we have various plans in the works to continue strengthening our relationships with local solidarity groups and representatives of El Salvador's social movements. We are currently working to develop exciting outreach tools targeting the city's youth to contribute to youth led international solidarity building. We are looking forward to hosting the fall tour in November and if you are in the New York City area we invite you to contact us at [newyorkcispes@mindspring.com](mailto:newyorkcispes@mindspring.com) to visit our office and get involved. ■

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**GET INVOLVED WITH CISPES NATIONALLY AND LOCALLY! SIGN THE PLEDGE FOR FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS IN EL SALVADOR! INTERN OR VOLUNTEER! DONATE! MORE AT [WWW.CISPES.ORG](http://WWW.CISPES.ORG)**