

EL SALVADOR Watch

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Concerns Arise in First Month of New US Ambassador's Term

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On September 22nd, Mari Carmen Aponte, President Obama appointee, was sworn in as the new US Ambassador to El Salvador, filling the post evacuated last January after President Obama's inauguration. Many in the US and El Salvador have high expectations for the new US Ambassador to demonstrate a new attitude of "mutual respect" for the sovereignty of Latin America, as promised by the President. However, in El Salvador - historic grounds of extreme and devastating US intervention - there has been growing concern that Aponte will continue the interventionist US agenda of her predecessors.

In some respects, Ambassador Aponte represents a marked departure from past ambassadors, as a bilingual Puerto Rican woman. Ambassador Aponte is a lawyer and former director of the Puerto Rican Federal Affairs Administration (2001-2004). She has also served on the boards of the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund and the University of the District of Columbia. Her experience, in advo-

cating for the rights of Latinos/as, particularly with NCLR, provides her with greater degree of familiarity with the serious social and economic issues that Salvadorans confront.

Regardless of Aponte's background or personal views, US State Department policy in Latin America itself has thus far failed to demonstrate "mutual respect" in the region. Perhaps the most glaring example is the continued US support for the murderous regime of Pepe Lobo in Honduras, who came into power after the overthrow of democratically-elected President Manuel Zelaya in a *coup d'état* in June of 2009. In El Salvador today, Aponte appears to be fulfilling her role to the letter as the premier representative of the US State Department.



US Ambassador (right) welcomes Carlos Montaner (left), who knew of the plans to murder 6 Jesuit priests in San Salvador, 1989

In late October, Ambassador Aponte, US Embassy staff, Salvadoran business elite and right-wing political leaders attended a conference hosted by Cuban national, Carlos Alberto Montaner, invited to speak by a Salvadoran

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30 Years Strong, CISPES Model Stands the Test of Time

by Edy Rees, Boston CISPES

I first became involved with CISPES in the mid-1980s while living in Brooklyn, New York. There was some coverage of CISPES activities on WBAI, listener-sponsored radio, and then I met some folks from CISPES at a city-wide conference sponsored by WBAI and *The Guardian*, a progressive weekly newspaper then published in NY. I had always been aghast at US involvement in Central America, and back in the 1960s, while living in Boston I had been marginally involved with NACLA (North American Congress on Latin America), mostly clipping articles about Latin America from Boston papers and sending them to the NACLA Washington office. Although El Salvador is such a tiny country, it did then and still seems pivotal in terms of demonstrating how people can push back against US domination and develop a progressive political awareness. The folks

in CISPES described the urgency of El Salvador's fight for liberation and invited people like me to join them in activities that were accessible on various levels, and held out a credible hope for victory.

I was soon attending meetings and demonstrations, doing "stand-outs" and tabling with CISPES. That was the first time I saw people use ironing boards as tables - they were lightweight enough to carry on the subway, plus they could be set up and taken down in minutes. Within a few months of getting involved in CISPES, I began working at a new job as a tenant organizer. Although I'd been doing tenant and other community organizing off and on for several years by then, it was exciting to learn some of the CISPES method, which still works really well for any type of organizing. The careful analysis, planning and prioritizing encouraged by the CISPES *continued on pg. 5*

Meet the Leaders of the Mining Resistance Denied US Visas

by Hilary Goodfriend, *El Salvador Intern*

The US Consulate in San Salvador summarily denied travel visas to the two intended guests for the CISPES Stop the Suits! Fall Tour on the mining resistance in El Salvador and US trade policy. For more on the political motives behind the visa denials, visit www.cispes.org. Here we offer the words and profiles of these two courageous anti-mining activists that the US government sought to silence.

Fr. Santos Neftalí Ruíz Martínez

Father Ruiz was born in the small town of Guacotecti,



Cabañas in 1984 and has dedicated himself to his community as a priest, journalist and community organizer.

Before his ordination in 2009, he worked two years as an environmental reporter for the community radio station Radio Victoria. As communities in the department of Cabañas

began to recognize the environmental and social impacts of Canadian mining company Pacific Rim's explorations for gold in the area, he became increasingly active in the resistance against the mine. Today, while pursuing a degree in Theology at El Salvador's Lutheran University, Fr. Ruíz serves as secretary of the grassroots community organization Cabañas Environmental Committee (CAC). The CAC is an integral part of the struggle against Pacific Rim's mining projects in Cabañas; members have even blocked roads to keep the company's equipment from entering the proposed mining site. In December 2009, the organization suffered the loss of two of its members, Dora Alicia Sorto Recinos and Ramiro Rivera, whose murderers remain unidentified. Fr. Ruíz and other members of the CAC board have also received death threats for their opposition to the mine.

Fr. Ruíz leads the youth organizing program within the CAC, bringing together local rural youth for forums, marches, discussions and festivals concerning environmental and social issues. "Young people comprise the majority of our population," he says. "Our future depends on their involvement." In the church, "I always bring a message of current social and environmental themes together with a spiritual message." In addition to this local work, Fr. Ruíz serves as the CAC representative to the broad-based National Roundtable Against Metallic Mining in El Salvador (known as the Mesa). In this capacity, Fr. Ruíz is currently involved in the Mesa's energetic campaign to pass

a national ban on all metallic mining in El Salvador, which would be the first of its kind in the world.

Fr. Ruíz hopes that the fall tour will strengthen ties with the US solidarity movement. "Above all, we need accompaniment. We need [US communities] to become conscious of the environmental and social situation in our country."

Mrs. Teresa Zenayda Serrano Iraheta

Mrs. Serrano was born in the rural town of San Isidro, Cabañas, in 1982, where she currently lives with her husband and 2-year-old daughter. A certified lawyer, Mrs. Serrano studied law at San Salvador's Technological University with the intention of examining the "humane side" of the profession. "The judicial path would allow me to serve my community," she explains.

Mrs. Serrano is an active member of the Francisco Sánchez Unified Movement-1932 (MUFRA-32), which she co-founded in 2001 as "the first and only social movement born of a private university," she says proudly. The grassroots organization now has bases in San Salvador and San Isidro, and has been instrumental in the local and national struggles against mining. As the MUFRA-32 representative to the Mesa, Mrs. Serrano calls for a thorough and impartial investigation into the material and intellectual authorship of the political violence that has been afflicting Cabañas since the arrival of Pacific Rim.

Mrs. Serrano herself experienced political repression in 2009 while organizing against the corrupt electoral practices of the mayor of San Isidro, an open promoter of Pacific Rim. While her family slept, their home was broken into and documentation of electoral fraud and mining damages were stolen.

Undeterred by these acts, Mrs. Serrano works with MUFRA-32 to promote "more creative forms of resistance" and popular education in her community, organizing educational murals, cultural and environmental festivals and ecological marches. Mrs. Serrano hopes that the tour will bring greater understanding of the disastrous effects of free trade agreements like CAFTA-DR to the people of the United States and that they will join in the battle to repeal CAFTA-DR in favor of just and equal international trade relationships. She emphasizes that the people of the United States "must understand the impact of their nation on poor nations" like El Salvador. ■



Now Serving the *Pueblo*: President Funes Leads Delegation to Cuba

On Monday, October 4, accompanied by a delegation of one hundred ministers, party and business leaders, President Mauricio Funes began a three-day official state visit to Cuba. The historic visit marks the first time a Salvadoran head of state has been to the country since diplomatic relations were severed in March of 1961, following the 1959 victory of the Cuban revolution led by Fidel Castro. Until Funes re-opened relations after his inauguration on June 1, 2009, El Salvador was the only country in the Americas other than the United States without diplomatic ties to Cuba. The visit, which has been scheduled for some time, was planned to sign important cooperation agreements and to stimulate trade between the countries.



Cuban President Raúl Castro accompanies Salvadoran President Funes on El Salvador's first diplomatic visit to Cuba in 50 years

On the first day of the visit, President Funes and his Cabinet members signed cooperation agreements with Raúl Castro and Cuban counterparts in health, education, sports, economy and culture. Following the new bilateral agreements, Cuban medical specialists will advise Salvadoran officials in the implementation of the new health care reform, which is sending mobile medics to rural areas. Cuban experts will also advise the Ministry of Education in the implementation of a nationwide literacy program. Cuban athletes and trainers will also visit El Salvador to share their expertise. Trade and cultural changes will also start up between the two nations.

This important cooperation from Cuba, enjoyed by many other Latin American countries, has never existed on this scale with El Salvador. For many years, the leftist Farabundo Martí Front for National Liberation (FMLN) party has directly coordinated resourceful, cooperative agreements with Cuba that demonstrate the

vision of people-centered governance, held by both cooperants. A shining example of FMLN-Cuba cooperation is “Operation Miracle”, a program that provides free air transport to Cuba and eye operations for low-income Salvadorans with vision problems, thereby preventing blindness. Cuba also offers scholarships for Salvadoran students to attend Cuba’s Latin American School of Medicine, where over 400 Salvadoran doctors have graduated.

Funes visited the Latin American School of Medicine, using the opportunity to thank the Cuban government and the institution for the solidarity it has offered to Salvadoran students. He also laid flowers at the national monument to José Martí, the revered hero of the Cuban struggle for independence from Spain and the US. Upon arriving, he applauded Cuba’s impressive social programs, noting that El Salvador has much to learn from them. Funes also criticized the US embargo on Cuba, calling it, “anachronistic.” Previously, US Ambassador Aponte suggested that Funes use the trip to, “share with the Cubans the benefits of the democracy you have here in El Salvador.”

The trip to Cuba sparked harsh criticisms from the right-wing Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) party as well as the leaders of private business organizations like the National Association of Private Business (ANEP) and the Chamber of Commerce. ARENA refused to give their votes in the Legislative Assembly to approve the essential bilateral cooperation agreement, previously signed by the Salvadoran and Cuban Ministers of Foreign Relations to create the framework for the specific agreements to be signed on the trip. In a legislative session full of anti-communist rhetoric, ARENA deputies were unable to convince other right-wing parties to withhold their votes and the agreement was approved. In the end, ARENA was the only party without a delegate on the visit.

Despite strong denunciations by the leadership of the Chamber of Commerce and ANEP, many members of these organizations accepted Funes’ invitation to join the Cuba delegation. The one hundred-person committee traveling with Funes included more than thirty-five representatives of the private business sector. Representatives of the Cuban government met with Salvadoran business leaders to explain possibilities for foreign investment. Salvadoran representatives of industries including tourism, air travel, hotel and pharmaceuticals returned home excited about the potential for a new market.

El Salvador’s state visit to Cuba marks a change in El Salvador’s foreign policy, begun with the March 2009 presidential victory of FMLN candidate, Mauricio Funes. Under Funes, the new Minister of Foreign Relations Hugo Martínez has re-opened diplomatic relations with Cuba and Vietnam, expanded Venezuelan relations and initiated dialogue to open rela-

Under Funes, the new Minister of Foreign Relations Hugo Martínez has re-opened diplomatic relations with Cuba and Vietnam, expanded Venezuelan relations and initiated dialogue to open relations with China.

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CISPES is proud to announce a new website to commemorate our 30th anniversary! Check it out and add your comments today - <http://cispes30years.org/>

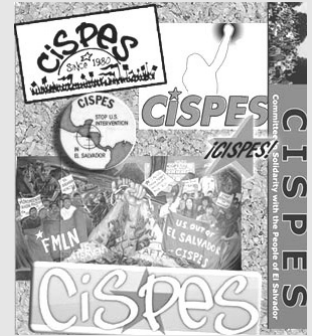
This website is for the thousands of people out there who have organized with CISPES over the past 30 years! We hope it will be a vehicle to share your stories, connect with old friends and compañer@s and pass down important lessons learned over decades of successful organizing against US intervention to the next generation of solidarity organizers. Your stories and voices are very important now right now, with US militarism on the rise in Latin America and the struggle for a just economy as urgent as ever. We invite you to visit the new website today and we hope that you will make it your own and share it as a resource with others. Some of the highlights are:

***Interactive Timeline* - Chock full of high points in CISPES activism (1988 Pentagon blockade) and critical turning points in the Salvadoran struggle for justice. Chart the solidarity movement through different periods, from “the Early Years” to “the Rise of Neoliberalism.”**

***Multimedia* - Photos, videos and revolutionary music to educate and inspire! Contact burke@cispes.org if you have more to share.**

***Saludos* - Shout outs from leaders in the Salvadoran social movement, long-time CISPES activists and allies from the US social movement. Check back often for new saludos and add your own!**

Special thanks to Burke Stansbury and Max Toth for designing the website. ¡La lucha continua! The struggle continues!



Ambassador cont. from pg. 1

business association.

Inside the conference center, Ambassador Aponte greeted Montaner, shook his hand and welcomed him to the country; outside, members of El Salvador's social movement—including unionists, students and FMLN members protested Montaner's presence, calling it a clear sign of plans to destabilize the Funes government.

No average business leader, Montaner has been named in US intelligence reports as one of the individuals aware of the Salvadoran right-wing plans to massacre six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter at El Salvador's Central American University (UCA) in 1989. More recently, Montaner was reportedly present in Honduras in the months before the coup, as well as in Venezuela in 2002, Bolivia in 2008 and Ecuador this year in the months prior to coup attempts in these countries. Montaner also has close ties to Alejandro Pena Esclusa, who financed much of the fear campaign against then-FMLN presidential candidate Mauricio Funes in 2009. The Salvadoran social movement and FMLN members are pointing to such meetings organized by Salvadoran elites - including the recent visit by Honduran coup leader Roberto Micheletti - as alarming indicators of right-wing plans to undermine El Salvador's first left government.

The Ambassador's sheer willingness to dialogue with Montaner, a shadowy ally of the Salvadoran hard right, directly counters important steps made by President Funes towards addressing the deep historical wounds and legacy of State impunity that endure from El Salvador's 12-year, US-backed Civil War. Funes has repeatedly denounced the Salvadoran government's role in the massacre of Archbishop Romero, as well as the assassinations, torture and forced disappearance of tens of thousands of Salvadorans.

The Montaner meeting is not the only alarming signal of a continuation of interventionist policies from the Embassy. Robert Blau, a high-ranking official under former-Ambassador Charles Glazer, will stay on in the Embassy as Aponte's top

political advisor. Glazer plainly admitted to a CISPES Fact-Finding Delegation in July of 2008, in advance of El Salvador's 2009 presidential elections, that the US had intervened in El Salvador's 2004 presidential elections, referring to threats made by Members of Congress and Bush Administration officials that all remittances sent by Salvadorans in the US to their families back home would be eliminated if the leftist FMLN presidential candidate won. Although Glazer is gone, Blau who was the former Ambassador's second-in-command remains to counsel Aponte.

Since Aponte's arrival in the US Embassy, no less than four anti-mining movement leaders have been denied visas to the US. Two leaders invited for a CISPES speaking tour, a lawyer invited by the Organization of American States to testify on threats faced by the movement and a member of the community radio collective, Radio Victoria, were all refused visas, supposedly failing to prove adequate economic ties to their home country (profiles of the CISPES invited guests, pg. 2). As a consequence, US audiences have lost the opportunity to hear the testimony of their struggle against the North American mining industry and the \$200 million in lawsuits the country now faces, under the US-Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR). The visa denials appear to be part of a wider State Department trend of silencing dissenting voices from Latin America. Visas were recently denied to Honduran and Costa Rican activists slated to speak at the annual vigil in Fort Benning, GA - site of the infamous US training academy for Latin American military, the School of the Americas.

Ambassador Aponte has certainly made a splash in her first weeks as US Ambassador; associating with a shadowy figure from El Salvador's bloody past, maintaining influential staff from the former Ambassador and overseeing an alarming rash of visa denials. Should the new Ambassador intend to carry out the US State Department's regional agenda over her two-year term, it does not bode well for open and honest diplomatic relations with El Salvador, despite high expectations for change. ■

method made me a much better tenant organizer; and today there are hundreds of tenants in Brooklyn who wrested their buildings from the clutches of slumlords. These tenants, mostly Latino, now own their buildings collectively and probably don't



The author after renewing her CISPES activism in Boston

realize they owe some of their success to the CISPES method (in addition to their own bravery, brilliance and creativity).

NY CISPES in the 80s was large, creative and lots of fun. At one of our demonstrations in front of the Salvadoran Consulate, some of our folks managed to enter the building and hang a large CISPES banner from the second floor windows, declaring that the Salvadoran people wanted to be free. It was up there for several minutes before the Consulate staff removed it, but not before lots of people got pictures.

One year we entered the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade with our own huge, helium balloon bomb labeled, "No more bombs for El Salvador!" Although that was shorter-lived than the sign at the Consulate, it was aired on national television. Yet another success from the CISPES model!

I attended some great regional meetings/trainings, one in Philadelphia and another in New Brunswick, NJ, which were like mini-courses on what was happening in El Salvador, and how we could best support the movement there. It was always so empowering to us as activists to meet with CISPES folks from other cities, and to build on each others' energies and ideas. It's exciting to know that these national and local gatherings are still happening today.

In November 1988, hundreds of us blockaded the Pentagon and got arrested (see <http://cispes30years.org>), protesting US military aid to the right-wing Salvadoran government. After that, I went on a delegation to El Salvador, where we met with farmers, labor leaders, students, women's groups and members of the FMLN. They were excited to hear about US protests and other CISPES activities, and we were deeply moved and inspired by their stories, their courage and their ingenuity. Being in FMLN-held Chalatenango felt like the first time I'd ever really been in a democracy, and returning to New York felt like going back to enemy territory.

Although I continued to be active with CISPES into the 1990s, I stopped when I took on a new job working with homeless people with AIDS that took over my life for several years. In 1997 I returned to Boston to work as a social worker - another job that left no time or energy for much else. But I rediscovered CISPES in April 2009, when I attended a speaker's panel on the incredible presidential victory in El Salvador. After that, I became quite active again, helping to

organize the 2009 Victory Tour through Boston, participating in CISPES Ed nights and the 2009 Convention decision-making process. Although, family commitments have slowed down my involvement, I'm still active and committed to the struggle.

Since I first got involved in the 1980s, CISPES has grown smaller - but CISPES remains a vital, effective organization. And the CISPES method of grassroots organizing is still the most effective way to support peoples' liberation struggles. I thank CISPES for those invaluable organizing lessons, which I see developing in today's CISPES members and organizers, more than 20 years later. ■

FMLN Celebrates 30 Years of Resistance

On October 10th, the FMLN celebrated its 30th anniversary with a massive mobilization and rally in San Salvador. More than 250,000 people came from across the country, forming a sea of red that stretched for dozens of blocks. In a rousing speech to the massive crowd, FMLN General Coordinator Medardo González made clear that the mobilization was also a message that any attempt at a coup in El Salvador - like the successful coup in neighboring Honduras - would be met with organized and tenacious resistance. "The coup-plotters of the region do not rest in inventing new methods for coups, for destabilizing," González explained. Upon querying the crowd, "Will we be ready to defend this government against whatever tricks those coup-plotting minds try to invent?" - they responded with 250,000 energetic yeses. He also thanked international solidarity for making the party's 30-year history possible, from its start as the armed resistance to its present as the leading political force in El Salvador.



CISPES celebrates this historic occasion alongside the FMLN and the people El Salvador. **We are very proud to have accompanied the FMLN during these 30 years, as partners in struggle, working for an El Salvador and a world free of exploitation, free of US dominance; where all can live in peace, justice and dignity. ¡Que viva el FMLN!**

CISPES Chapter Update: New York City

by David Castillo, NY CISPES

New York CISPES has been busy, going full force in solidarity with the people of El Salvador! We began the summer with the CISPES National Day of Action against Mining and Free Trade in El Salvador, organizing a lively demonstration at the Canadian Consulate in mid-town Manhattan. The likeness of CEO Thomas Shrake from Pacific Rim - the Canadian mining company looking to extract gold from Cabañas, El Salvador using tons of cyanide - handed out "tainted mineral water" to passersby.

Another major highlight of our summer activities was our annual Spanish for Activists Camp, organized in collaboration with the Committee on US-Latin American Relations (CUSLAR) in Ithaca, NY. Over 50 attendees learned about the extraction of natural resources in the Marcellus shale in upstate New York, and participated in other engaging workshops, including solidarity with Haiti and farmworker issues. Spanish for Activists Camp also marked the first opportunity for delegates who participated in the CISPES Radical Roots Delegation - which brought Salvadorans raised in the US to El Salvador last June - to



NY CISPES demonstrates deadly effects of Pacific Rim's "mineral water" from Cabañas in downtown Manhattan (photo Gary Rissman)

eign mining companies in both countries.

As part of the Radical Roots Delegation report backs, the congregation of the San Romero de las Americas Church in Washington Heights, New York City hosted us for a presentation on this formulative experience. We were able to close the summer by participating in this year's Rally for Unity and Solidarity with the Muslim people, which was held on September 11th outside City Hall.

Filled with new energy after the August CISPES National Summer Camp for Activists in Virginia, our committee welcomes fall in NYC, and we're excited to host an official Radical Roots report back for NY's delegates at our office in the Brecht Forum in November. We're also proud to be supporting School of the Americas Watch and David Rovics' concert on October 15th, which benefits the annual trip to protest the School of the Americas at Fort Benning, Georgia in November. Finally, we look forward to celebrating the end of the year with New York CISPES' 30th Anniversary Party! We're hoping to have a great gathering of old and new Cispistas to celebrate and reflect on all the solidarity work this great organization has accomplished over the past 30 years! ■



NY CISPES and CUSLAR members enjoy an outdoor workshop at the 9th annual Spanish for Activists Camp

give a formal report on their trip. Delegates spoke at a panel discussion with activists from the Dominican Republic to discuss the Dominican Republic-Central America-US Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR). The panel focused on the similar effects the agreement is having in the Dominican Republic and El Salvador, with relation to the influx of for-

Cuba Visit cont. from pg. 1

tions with China. This new trend reflects a paradigm shift by the Funes Administration, and a clear departure from their predecessors. The new administration is choosing to build the country's diplomacy on the international relationships that will most benefit the Salvadoran people, rather than on strict ideology. ■

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