

We Are Not Terrorists! Organizing IS Democracy!

2007 CISPES Fall Tour

Speaking Biography of Josefina Lazo Molina

Josefina “Fina” Lazo Molina was born and raised in San Salvador and has spent the past twenty years in the nearby Mejicanos, an FMLN stronghold. She has been a vendor her entire life and for the past 7 years she has devoted her business entirely to the sale of CDs and DVDs.

She, like many people in El Salvador, had been living in what she describes as the country’s “bad economic life” and sees the sale of CDs and DVDs as “a good source of employment.” The Salvadoran government, with the support of the United States, disagrees. They see Fina’s economic livelihood, and that of all CD and DVD vendors, as a threat to the intellectual property rights of large companies, since most of the CDs and DVDs vendors in the informal market sell are copied.



Fina became involved in the National Vendors’ Movement at its inception two years ago. This movement is a highly organized group of CD, DVD and other products vendors who count their active membership at 3,000 people, and collectively represent over 60,000 vendor families. Fina asserts that they began organizing themselves to defend their human rights and means of income “as soon as the National Police began their surveillance of us, due to the laws that were passed regarding intellectual property rights,” referring to the Dominican Republic and Central American Free Trade Agreement (DR-CAFTA), which stringently protects the rights of large corporations. As Fina notes, the Vendors’ Movement is here “because of the bad policies of the government. They want to stay on good terms with the transnational corporations while their people are dying.”

The repression against the Vendors’ Movement increased significantly after May 12, when the National Police violently confiscated the vendors’ goods in downtown San Salvador and arrested 14 people – 9 of whom were charged with terrorism. According to Fina, “the police captains arrived without authorization, seized our goods, and threw them on the ground. We gathered on First Avenue and there were people burning cars and taking things. We do not know who they were or where they came from. Afterwards, police captured working vendors and beat them, and later they began a psychological war by issuing arrest warrants for people, including the leaders of the movement.”

The police returned on May 30th and “captured vendors, taking them from their homes with the objective of silencing them.” Between these two incidents, 24 people were jailed— organized vendors and other unaffiliated individuals—and charged with acts of terrorism in the first application of the Anti-Terrorism Law against the social movement.

Between May 12 and May 30, Security Minister Rene Figueroa released a “black list” of 90 names, reminiscent of those announced during the Armed Conflict, which was published in the Salvadoran press. “My name was in the papers, because I was captured in 2006 and so they investigated me,” Fina recalls. She had been released without any official charges being pressed.

It is important for the vendors’ voices to be heard as repression increases in El Salvador, with the arrests in Suchitoto in July and those of SIGEESAL union leaders in September, recent reforms to the Penal Code that further criminalize protest, and the heightening militarization of the National Police as a result of the International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA).

“Solidarity is very important for us because it is the channel for the rest of the world to know the reality of our country. It is very important to have alliances because the country is not the way that [President] Saca paints it to be.” She notes that the police have decreased the number of seizures of vendors’ goods, and says that “now that they’ve seen that we’re organized, they’ve stopped doing this a little.” Fina concludes that they have become involved in “a war of leaders, a war of powers,” but that through organization and solidarity, they can pressure these powers to respect their human rights and ability to earn their living.