

Human Rights Violations in El Salvador Since the Installment of the International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA)

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Since the implementation and opening of the International Law Enforcement Academy in San Salvador in the Fall of 2005, the National Civilian Police (PNC) of El Salvador have shown themselves to be perpetuating more violence and exposing themselves as more corrupt, possibly being connected to resurging death squad-like structures. The Salvadoran social movement has pointed to the increased police violence against protesters, harsher laws against youth from marginalized communities, increased militarization of police, and the illegal approval of a US-sponsored International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) as indicators of the set-backs to the 1992 Peace Accords.

Below is a list of a broad range of human rights violations within the last 2 years.

.Attack on Cutamay Camones Protest. On October 12, 2007 riot police, accompanied by Salvadoran soldiers, barged in the rural community of Cutamay Camones in the western department of Santa Ana, attacking community members including children and elders. Community members had for months protested against the garbage dump as it will contaminate their water source and create a series of health problems for the community. According to authorities at least 15 people were injured; many of those affected by the the police and military repression were children and elderly who were targets of tear gas and rubber bullets. ARENA deputies in the legislative assembly dismissed statements that excessive force was used, assuring that the riot police “were simply doing their job”. President Saca, however, admitted that the attack against a journalist on the scene was a mistake, but said nothing of the injured community members.

.Illegal Arrest of SIGEESAL Organizers. Eight members of the Salvadoran General Hospitals Union (SIGEESAL) were illegally arrested on September 4, 2007, for participating in a demonstration against the privatization of the national health system back on July 6. All being charged with public disorder and damage to private property. These arrests have reminded the social movement of the extent to which Saca and his government are willing to go to fulfill their plans of water and health care privatization.

.“Social cleansing” groups inside Salvadoran Police. Almost a year after both the governmental Human Rights Defense Office and the Catholic Church’s Human Rights Commission reported the existence of social cleansing groups inside the National Civilian Police (PNC), lawyers have found enough evidence to prosecute Sergeant Nelson Arriaza and police officer Carlos Chevez Hidalgo for the assassination of eight people in the departments of San Miguel and La Union. In total there are six PNC officers under investigation for having participated in the execution of the victims and for having aided and concealed evidence about the murders.

.Water Privatization Protest Attacked in Suchitoto. On July 2, 2007, various organizations and communities in the municipality of Suchitoto gathered for a protest against the official announcement of the “National Policy of Water Decentralization” by President Antonio Saca. The peaceful protest was brutally repressed by the riot police (UMO) along with specialized forces of the National Civil Police (PNC). In the end, 13 people were arrested by the police and accused of “public disorder”, including four leaders of the rural development organization CRIPDES. The riot police eventually opened fire on the protest with rubber bullets, tear gas, and pepper spray, injuring around 75 people. Throughout the day helicopters circled Suchitoto and San Salvador, and the riot police didn’t withdraw from the scene until well into the afternoon.

.Vendors Targeted and Provoked in San Salvador. On May 12, 2007, the Salvadoran National Civilian Police (PNC) provoked violence and chaos in downtown San Salvador, targeting the organized CD/DVD Vendors Movement. Early in the afternoon, the Finance Unit of the police carried out a massive, aggressive confiscation operation targeting the organized vendors working downtown. A number of people unaffiliated with the organized vendors’ movement responded by ransacking businesses and setting fire to a police car and a truck from the right-wing media. Two hours after the chaos began, 150 anti-riot police showed up and responded by throwing tear gas and shooting rubber bullets at protesters, and arresting 28.

.Murder and Assault of Social Movement Family. On February 12, 2007, a family of FMLN (leftist political party in El Salvador) supporters were attacked in the municipality of San Martin. Rosendo Alas Quintanilla, 68 years old, was murdered, and his wife and two children were physically assaulted. People believe the attack may be politically motivated, since he and his family had received threats months earlier. Quintanilla was beheaded and his partner and two children had wounds on their necks, fingers and arms. The Salvadoran right-wing media presented the case as one of common crime, while various social organizations made the denouncement public and have been pressing for the case to be investigated.

.Disappearance of Student Activist Francisco Contreras. Contreras has been missing since February 7, 2007, after being detained by the police and afterwards disappeared. This disappearance is yet another case of the repression against those who participate in protest and organizing work. Some people have believed that Contreras was kidnapped by death-squad like structures, which are connected to the state, and they are therefore calling on the ARENA government to release Contreras and calling for a full investigation.

.Criminalization of Student Protests. On January 30, 2007, students held a protest against the recently approved Anti-Terrorism Law, which criminalizes forms of social protest rather than actual terrorist threats. Police presence during the protest was minimal, creating an image of the police as keeping order and looking out for the well-being of even the protesters. However, after the protest, police followed leaders of the youth organizations and coordinators of this protest to the surrounding municipalities where they live. There, the police arrested 9 of the youth including one minor. One youth leader was badly beaten before they were transferred to a police station in yet another municipality. The protesters were charged with public disorder, carrying of weapons and resisting arrest.

.Negligence by Prison Officials as Riot Led to Riot and 21 Deaths. A riot took place on January 5, in the Apanteos Prison and for hours, prison officials did not intervene while a group of inmates murdered 21 other prisoners. Beatrice de Carrillo, Human Rights Ombudswoman, held a press conference in which she offered scathing criticism of the government's handling of the violence, saying the prison officials' actions in the case were negligent at best. She called on President Saca to immediately remove both the national head of prisons and the Apanteos director from office. Church officials and FMLN representatives publicly denounced the irresponsibility and negligence of the directors of the prison system. Even the Organization of American States expressed its concern and called on Salvadoran President Saca to improve prison conditions.

.Police Intimidation and Arrest of Activists in San Lorenzo. Early in the morning of November 28, more than 600 police and 150 soldiers violently entered the community of San Lorenzo and arrested seven members of the "Committee of People Affected by the Storm Stan and the Ilamatepec Volcano Eruption." The community came together after being left homeless or devastated by the natural disasters, and was highly critical of the government's ineffective response. The police and military stormed into people's homes, intimidating both children and adults. The community then came together with ANTA (National Association of Agricultural Workers) and held a press conference the following day to denounce the arrests and the police intimidation.

.Police Attack on CD/DVD Vendors Movement. Also on November 28, 2006, in San Salvador, members of the CD/DVD Vendors Movement were attacked by police. The police raided the "pirated" CD/DVD vendors to enforce the CAFTA laws protecting intellectual property rights. During the confiscation of goods, the police beat and arrested various members of the organized Vendors movement. The police also threatened the movement leader for his organizing as they ransacked his home.

.Lutheran Pastor and Wife Killed. On November 4, 2006, Francisco Carrillo and Jesus de Carrillo, two religious leaders, human rights advocates, and activists in a local community volunteer rescue program, were shot and killed outside their church in the town of Jayaque, La Libertad. Francisco was a pastor in the Lutheran church; as he locked up after service, the assailants approached on bicycles and shot him and then his wife, who was waiting in a nearby car. The Carrillos were known for being vocal community activists and had recently received death threats for their work.

.Catholic Priest Murdered. On September 25, 2006, the body of Father Ricardo Antonio Romero - parish priest of Santa Catarina Masahuat in the department of Sonsonate - was found on the highway to Acajutla. Father Ricardo was recognized as a priest who identified with the opposition and carried out the preferential option for the poor. Because

there were no signs of robbery at the crime scene, and because of his promotion of organizing and popular struggle, many believe that it was a politically motivated murder.

.Youth Kidnapped for 1 week. 18-year old Luis Edgardo Osorto Gomez was kidnapped for 1 week in September 2006, after leaving his house to facilitate a youth meeting in Santa Rosa de Lima, department of La Union. Luis Edgardo is a student at the National Institute of Santa Rosa, and had been organizing a youth group, from which all the leaders have since deserted due to safety concerns. Luis Edgardo was also the son of a recognized FMLN activist in the area. His father received threatening calls in the previous weeks, in which he was told he was a “stubborn lefty” and that his son would pay. Luis Edgardo also reported having been followed by a black car with no license plates.

.Riot Police Attack Water Privatization Protest. On September 8, 2006, the Salvadoran riot police violently dispersed a peaceful protest in the Santa Eduvigis community, which had taken over the Carretera de Oro (one El Salvador's main highways) in the city of Soyapango. The community was demanding that the state-run water company ANDA take over the administration of the water system since the privately-run system was failing and the community had not received water in more than two months. The riot police attacked the community with teargas, despite the presence of children and the elderly, and later riot police sprayed pepper gas at community members who sat down in civil disobedience. Five people were beaten, captured and threatened with trials for public disorder.

.Murder of FMLN leaders. Alex Flores Montoya and Mercedes Peñate de Montoya, two well-known FMLN leaders, were found dead on August 23rd in the municipality of Coatepeque, department of Santa Ana. The husband and wife were traveling in their vehicle when they were intercepted by another vehicle. They were then forced to lay face down on the ground, each shot with a single bullet to the head, and abandoned in a nearby alley. Alex Flores Montoya was a teacher in two of the local public schools, and as an FMLN activist he served as the local FMLN board's adjunct coordinator and ran for municipal council with the FMLN in the March 2006 elections. Mercedes Peñate de Montoya was also a recognized FMLN activist and former candidate to the FMLN municipal council in the March 2000 elections.

.Death Threats on Unions. At the end of July, 2006, the water workers union (SETA) received a death threat that listed their union, as well as the public health care workers union (STISSS) and teachers union (ANDES), and signed by a group calling itself ‘Viva mi mayor,’ in reference to the well known and infamous founder of the Salvadoran death squads and of the ARENA party, Roberto D'Aubisson. The union held a press conference to publicize the intimidation attempts and called on the government to investigate and stop the threats. SETA has been very active in organizing a national coalition bringing together water workers, water users, environmentalists and other community activists in stopping the government plans to halt water privatization, and union Secretary General Wilfredo Romero made clear that his union was targeted for its resistance to state policy.

.July 5th Repression on Student Protest of Bus Fares. On July 5, 2006, violence erupted during a student protest against bus fare hikes and led to the police occupation of El Salvador's National University (UES) for days, the emergency evacuation of more than 700 people, the capture of between 20 to 30 students, as well as a university administrator being gravely injured. The students were later released from jail due to lack of evidence, the police finally left the university, and on Tuesday a captured union leader was also released. The Human Right's Office called the violence instigated by the National Civilian Police (PNC) the "worst violation of human rights since the Peace Accords," and social movement organizations, human rights groups, and student groups called the government's response an unjustified use of force that representing a serious setback to the 1992 Peace Accords.

.Killing of Manzares Elders. On July 2, 2006, Francisco Antonio Manzares, aged 77, and Juana de Manzares, aged 75, parents of Radio Venceremos co-founder and recognized FMLN militant Marina Manzares, were brutally tortured and murdered in their Suchitoto home early on the morning of July 1. Their death squad style assassinations sent shockwaves through the Salvadoran social movement.

Sources: La Prensa Grafica, Diario Colatino, Diario de Hoy, CISPES San Salvador Office, Procuraduría para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos (Salvadoran Human Rights Defense Office)