

Report on CISPES Delegation visit to the ILEA

May 3, 2007

More information: www.cispes.org

Introduction

On May 3, 2007 a group of eight people representing the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES) toured the facilities of the U.S.-sponsored International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) in Santa Tecla, a suburb of San Salvador. The group was part of a larger 16-person delegation that spent ten days traveling around El Salvador meeting with political and social movement leaders, government officials, and experts on the current socio-political situation in El Salvador.

The visit to the ILEA by CISPES was one of the first international tours granted to an outside civil organization, and therefore was key in raising questions and gathering information about this nascent institution¹. The CISPES representatives met with three ILEA officials (one of whom was Salvadoran and the other two U.S. citizens) and one official from the US Embassy. During their nearly two hour visit they also had the opportunity to visit ILEA classrooms.

Note: Congress will vote on appropriations to the El Salvador ILEA as part of the fiscal year 2008 Foreign Operations bill.

Statements about the Conduct of the Salvadoran National Police (PNC)

One of the most alarming things heard was the denial by ILEA and U.S. Embassy officials of the repression carried out by the Salvadoran National Police (PNC), not to mention other cases of misconduct and corruption by the PNC. The U.S. officials seemed oblivious to repeated reports and articles about human rights violations committed by the PNC, such as a report published on the day of the CISPES meeting by *Tutela Legal*, the human rights and legal aid office of the Salvadoran Archbishop. The report cites eight cases in which members of the PNC appear to have been involved in death-squad type assassinations in 2006 alone². The officials even went as far as to say that El Salvador was selected as the host country for the ILEA in Latin America because of the PNC's apparent "professionalism" and its lack of documented corruption.

The ILEA and U.S. Embassy officials also showed a complete disdain for the Salvadoran Human Rights Defense Office (PDDH), an institution created under the 1992 Peace Accords to oversee the human rights situation in El Salvador, and for its director Beatrice de Carrillo, who has visited the U.S. Congress on numerous occasions to report on the situation in her country. They denied detailed reports by the PDDH citing connections between the PNC and right-wing death squads, and dismissed De Carrillo as an illegitimate source of information saying that there was no evidence – namely "dead bodies" – to support her claims about death-squads operating within the PNC.

In fact, De Carrillo and the Human Rights Office have done exhaustive investigations into the conduct of the PNC and have published important reports cited by the Salvadoran and international press. Last June's report "Situation of Human Rights in El Salvador" included a section documenting how the local Sonsonate branch of the PNC was responsible for the extrajudicial execution of three alleged gang

¹ The agreement between the US and Salvadoran governments to open the ILEA was announced in July 2005 approved by the Salvadoran Legislature in November of that year. More background information at www.cispes.org/ilea.

² "PNC involucrada en 8 asesinatos," *Diario Colatino*, May 3, 2007.
<http://www.diariocolatino.com/nacionales/detalles.asp?NewsID=16483>

members.³ In CISPES's meeting with De Carrillo she denounced the government's lack of political will to investigate this and other cases, such as the murder of the two elderly parents of a well-known opposition figure. If the U.S. government refuses to head the reports of the government's own Human Rights Defense Office, not to mention a respected organization like *Tutela Legal* linked to the Archbishop's office, they are setting a dangerous precedent whereby only the PNC and the Salvadoran government can be trusted to make statements about their own conduct.

Meanwhile, the officials did say that if the PNC is corrupt and repressive, then everything carried out by the ILEA is tainted. Such statements would presuppose that more serious research would have been put into the conduct of the PNC and the very recent history of police repression and corruption in El Salvador. Although the ILEA is an international police and law enforcement training center, with students from many countries throughout Latin America, ILEA officials reported that 25% of the spaces at the academy are reserved for Salvadorans. This special relationship between the ILEA and the Salvadoran PNC heightens concerns about U.S. official's dismissal of evidence showing the PNC to be connected to repression and serious human rights abuses.

The Role of the ILEA in El Salvador

The US-funded ILEA conducts classes for students from throughout Latin America. When asked why it was so important for the U.S. to be part of training Latin American law enforcement officials, the ILEA directors responded that U.S. presence contributed to "networking possibilities" and added an "international flavor" to the training already being conducted in El Salvador. 95% of the instructors are from U.S. federal agencies, many of whom receive diplomatic immunity. According to the U.S. officials, the ILEA is not currently training military officials but could be open to the possibility of training military police forces in the future. Though they were defensively insistent in their position that the ILEA is not another School of the Americas (now called WHINSEC, the Western Hemispheric Institute for Security Cooperation), they also asserted that there is no need to train military personal at the ILEA since that is what they use WHINSEC in Georgia for, an apparent contradiction.

The U.S. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor is charged with completing background checks on students and the police units they come from. In terms of the selection of ILEA students, the so-called Leahy Law (normally used to screen for human rights abuses within foreign military units receiving training from the U.S.) is supposedly applied as part of vetting process in which the INL will reject students on the basis of moral turpitude, human rights violations, and criminal history. However, the U.S. officials' lack of knowledge about documented violations by the Salvadoran PNC raises concerns about whether the INL is in fact doing sufficient checks into the backgrounds of police units.

When the CISPES delegation asked the Human Rights Ombudswoman about the ILEA, she asserted that it only has the potential of making the PNC more "professional and elegant in its use of violence," and that she had no expectation of the ILEA improving the integrity of the PNC. Outside police training is simply not needed, she said; what is needed is a complete overhaul of the PNC, once a promising post-war civilian police force that has become increasingly corrupt and politicized over the last ten years. She also referred to the existing Salvadoran National Police Academy, and asserted that rather than introducing a new police training facility the Salvadoran government should work to reform the National Academy, an institutional accountable to the National Assembly.

³ "Situación de los Derechos Humanos en El Salvador." June 2006 Report by the Salvadoran Human Rights Office. www.pddh.gob.sv/modules.php?name=Downloads&d_op=getit&lid=73.

CISPES is troubled by the way in which the PNC has been manipulated by the current government to carry out targeted political repression; meanwhile, the Salvadoran government has refused to investigate specific human rights violations within the PNC or clean-up what is considered to be a damaged institution.

Finally, The officials were also careful to point out that the ILEA is not concerned with crime prevention by way of tackling the social roots of violence, which, they said, are not within their jurisdiction.

Transparency

One issue that has already been addressed by other organizations is the lack of transparency within the ILEA⁴. Though ILEA officials claimed that the institution is entirely transparent, their repeated refusal to provide names of students and instructors, as well as the curriculum and class syllabi to civil organizations in the U.S. and El Salvador, seems highly contradictory. When they refused to provide the CISPES delegation with this information, they referred to the course list published on their website.⁵ However, the site only shows the names of the classes being taught. The delegation asked them to provide a list of course descriptions, and they claimed to not have any written, short descriptions of what is taught in the classes. It seems unlikely that the police forces of various Latin American countries would send their police to a school that does not describe what they will be teaching.

Conclusions

While the lack of transparency at the ILEA is significant, the most disturbing aspect of the CISPES visit to the academy was the refusal of U.S. officials to acknowledge the problems – human rights violations, corruption, and links to death squads – related to the Salvadoran National Civilian Police. Given that by their own account the integrity of the PNC is essential to the integrity of the ILEA, CISPES will continue to expose and denounce the documented cases of PNC political repression and human rights abuses.

Ultimately, the CISPES visit to the ILEA raised serious concerns, especially given the U.S. officials' explicit backing of a repressive police force such as the PNC. In fact, 56 Congressional Representatives signed a Dear Colleague record last year calling on the State Department to investigate and monitor the misconduct of the PNC⁶. Clearly the current Administration has chosen not to head that call.

CISPES asserts that the presence of the International Law Enforcement Academy in El Salvador serves as an open endorsement by the U.S. government of the worsening police practices in El Salvador; and CISPES is firm in its position that the ILEA must be closed.

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⁴ "Visit to International Law Enforcement Academy in San Salvador," by Lisa Sullivan, SOA Watch.

http://www.cispes.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=193&Itemid=29

⁵ ILEA San Salvador Proposed Training Schedule 2007. <http://www.fletc.gov/about-fletc/locations/international-law-enforcement-academies-ileas/ilea-san-salvador/ilea-san-salvador-2007-proposed-training-schedule.html>

⁶ "Congressional Dear Colleague letter regarding violence in El Salvador", July 31, 2006. Posted on CISPES webpage at http://www.cispes.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=74&Itemid=29