

THE UNDERSIGNED ORGANIZATIONS, WITH GREAT PREOCCUPATION AND INDIGNATION, DENOUNCE BEFORE THE NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY:

We, the undersigned Canadian organizations with great preoccupation and indignation denounce before the national and international community, the arbitrary arrest and continuing detention of Marta Lorena Araujo Martínez, President of CRIPDES, Manuel Antonio Rodríguez Escalante, who was driving the CRIPDES vehicle, Rosa María Centeno Valle, Vice-President of CRIPDES, Héctor Antonio Ventura Vásquez, María Aydee Chicas Sorto, CRIPDES journalist and photographer, Sandra Isabel Guatemala, José Ever Fuentes, Patricio Valladares Aquino, Clemente Guevara Batres, Santos Noel Mancía Ramírez, Marta Yanira Méndez, Beatriz Eugenia Nuila y Vicente Vásquez, captured on Monday July 2, 2007 in Suchitoto, during a peaceful protest to oppose water privatization. They had not even gotten out of the vehicle, and were arrested for nothing more than heading out toward the demonstration. Those detained were transported by helicopter to Cojutepeque, and en route, were subjected to psychological torture with threats of being thrown out from high altitude.

We are aware that on July 2, 2007, The Association for the Development of El Salvador, CRIPDES an organization that is well known to us for its work in rural development, along with its regional branch in Suchitoto, PROGRESO, and the people of the organized rural communities in that municipality, exercising their right to freedom of expression, were peacefully demonstrating against the plans that the Salvadorean government has for the privatization of water.

We are aware that on July 2, 2007, the Anti-riot police, known as the Unit for the Maintenance of Order (UMO) of the National Civilian Police assisted by the GRP (Reaction Police Group) attacked the protesters for four hours with tear gas, pepper spray and rubber bullets. Helicopters circled the area, and a military unit was deployed in armored vehicles. A total of 25 people were injured with rubber bullets, 18 were injured by the pepper spray, and 14 were arrested. Three of those arrested were leaders of the Association of Rural Communities for the Development of El Salvador (CRIPDES) and the fourth member is their driver. The police stopped them as they were driving toward Suchitoto; the four had not even participated in the protest.

It is deplorable that in the year 2007, and after many years since the civil war ended, the PNC (National Civil Police) assisted by the UMO and the GRP that humbled citizens were besieged and pursued by land and by air, for more than 4 hours.

The families that live in the communities of the area were affected by the gas and had to evacuate children from schools for the same reason. This alone leads people to relive the worst moments of the repressive military sweeps during the armed conflict, with the only difference that today, the repressors are agents of the PNC, an institution born out of the Peace Accords and not the feared Armed Forces of the 1980's.

It is deplorable that in the end, the result was more than 81 persons reported wounds and blows attended to by first aid organizations, in addition to thirty persons attended to in the Suchitoto hospital and many cared for by the same local residents. The 14 detainees and CRIPDES leaders were tried on July 7, 2007 in a Special Tribunal for Acts of Terrorism. Judge Ana Lucila Fuentes de Paz dismissed the charges for Mr. Facundo Dolores García, and decreed "Preventative Detention" for 3 months for the other 13 detainees, maintaining the terrorism charges and allowing the prosecutors to collect more evidence.

We are shocked that in spite of Police reports that indicate that no knives or guns were found, nor there was any evidence offered by the Fiscal General de La República on July 7, 2007, and in spite of the irrefutable evidence presented by the defense, the Judge Licda. Ana Lucila Fuentes de Paz declared incarceration for the other 13 detainees who are being accused of acts of terrorism under the unconstitutional Anti-Terrorist Law. The 13 political prisoners were sent to prison with the pretext to investigate further and charge them with acts of terrorism at a later date.

The incarceration of the 13 activists only proves that these captures have a political end, and an effort of the government to intimidate, coerce and silence any dissent against the unpopular government policies.

In view of these facts:

1. We express our solidarity with the victims of the repression, as well as the affected families.
2. We claim the right of the people, set out in the Constitution of the nation, to demonstrate peacefully against government abuses and privatization policies, above all in the defense of water.
3. We reject the attempt to apply special or anti-terrorist laws to humble local residents
4. We call upon the international community to express its solidarity with the political prisoners and to speak out against this act of repression against the Salvadorean people.
5. We reiterate our conviction that both the Anti-terrorist Law and the Organized Crime Law are unconstitutional.

For these reasons, we urgently call upon the international community, the different sectors of Canadian and Salvadorean society and the people in general to demand and support:

1. The immediate release of the detainees; respect for their physical and moral integrity, and assurances that constitutional process will be followed.
2. Respect for the Constitution and therefore, the citizens' rights specified in it; the freedom of expression, assembly, movement and association, are inalienable rights of the

human person and the social expressions which took place in Suchitoto were no more than the legitimate exercise of constitutional freedom.

3. That there be respect for the Constitution and the rule of law, permitting without interference, the operation of the institutionality of the State. The FGR [Attorney General], the PNC and the Judiciary should submit themselves exclusively to the mandates of the Constitution and to constitutional laws.
4. Respect for the independence of the judiciary, which is a guarantee of access to justice for the population and the responsibility of those who should hand down justice. In that sense we demand from the Supreme Court of Justice that it acts consistent with respect for the Judiciary and insistence on the separation of powers.
5. To the United Nations and the Group of Countries who sported the Peace Accords, to verify the current state of respect for the Accords.
6. To the United Nations, that it use its good offices to establish an independent and impartial investigation of the events which are occurring in El Salvador; specifically those putting political stability and the construction of democracy at risk. It is very serious for the stability of the country, that legitimate and legal expressions of social discontent are being linked with criminal acts, for clearly electoral interests.

As Canadian organizations and institutions that embrace democratic principles founded in social justice, the respect for human rights and environmental and economic justice, and as organizations and institutions that have been supporting the process of democratization in El Salvador, we are writing to express our dismay at the present situation and claim the right of the population to demonstrate publicly on the basis of the legitimate use of constitutional freedoms. Any restriction of the free exercise of those rights should be interpreted as a serious violation of fundamental Human Rights and a reversal of the process of democratization which developed with the signing of the Peace Accords.

Canada July, 2007

CoDevelopment Canada

KAIROS - Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives

Alerta Minera Canadá/MiningWatch Canada

ASALCA - La Asociación Salvadoreña Canadiense-Toronto

The Atlantic Regional Solidarity Network (Nova Scotia)

Red Ciudadana Salvadoreña en el Exterior

Grupo de Apoyo a los Pueblos de las Américas (GAPA)

ASCORCAN (Asociación Salvadoreña Canadiense de Ottawa y Región de la Capital Nacional)

Inter Pares

Salvaide

Red Ciudadana Guatemalteca

Mennonite New Life Centre of Toronto