

Pastoral Letter from the Salvadoran Ecumenical Movement  
September 3, 2007

El Salvador Alert:  
The People are Scattered and Forsaken

*“When he saw the crowds,  
he had compassion on them,  
because they were harassed and helpless,  
like sheep without a shepherd.”*

Matthew 9:36

A Pastoral Letter from the Historical Churches

To: All Salvadorans of good will

To: The three branches of the Salvadoran government: Executive, Legislative and Judicial

To: The Churches of the World

To: Governments and Diplomats accredited in El Salvador

To: The United Nations, The Organization of American States, International Organizations and International Solidarity

We, the historic Christian churches and Ecumenical Christians, send this message from this small country, home of the prophet Oscar Arnulfo Romero, to different Churches and Religions, men and women of good will in the world, with greetings of our faith in the one God.

We have entitled this letter: “El Salvador Alert”, because we live from crisis to crisis, from emergency to emergency, of disasters caused by natural, political, economic and social phenomenon. In the face of emergency and crisis, the recommendation is to “Stay Alert”. “Alert”, an expression of security that means to be awake, ears open, mind clear to be able to glimpse and distinguish the danger which threatens us. To be alert to denounce sin without forgetting to proclaim the Good News of an Abundant and True Life. (Matthew 25:46 and Romans 1:17)

Fifteen years after the Peace Accords, the unjust conditions of life persist due to unequal distribution of wealth. The country has neither food security nor social security. The Millennium Goals cannot be fulfilled, on the contrary, there is a general deepening of poverty. The government has completely abandoned agriculture and the industrial sector grows at pace disproportionately slow to that of the informal economy. The main source of support are the remittances sent back from almost three million Salvadorans who have emigrated to the United States and other parts of the world. Our youth are victims and perpetrators of the violence that dominates the country; violence which reaches all levels and parts of society. And there is also institutional violence which facilitates organized crime, gangs, corruption and impunity. We continue to accumulate debt and maintain low budgets for social spending. And when social groups and ecologists protest, they are repressed, taken as political prisoners, as “terrorists”. They are people who only want to defend their right to live.

Current affairs are alarming: constitutional and institutional order of the State have been violated. Basic principals of law, the constitution and universal jurisprudence have been distorted with the passing of laws and reforms to the penal code (article 348) where sentences are increased in a disproportionate way in order to impose fear. We are concerned about the legitimate protest of civil and environmental groups to which the response is totalitarian measures, laws which violate fundamental human, civil and environmental rights and which close off democratic opportunities. The institutions and systems of the government operate on the basis of corruption, lies, and polarization which in consequence erodes the ethical and moral base of the institutions, their legality and society as a whole.

We are especially alarmed that the Salvadoran State, in response to public protest, uses reactionary measures and harsher laws. More than speeches and publicity campaigns, the crisis we are living demands that State policies be generated which will resolve the issues responsibly and requires that the State, the government, manage seriously and decisively the different problems which the Salvadoran people face.

Our God of LIFE can NOT be in agreement with a State whose relationship with its citizens is marked by dangerous political polarization leading to greater confrontation and deepening of intolerance in the country. Jesus asks us to denounce the great suffering that the people are living through, he shows us the deep love that he has for us and calls on us to raise our voice, to give a message of hope and inspires us to act together, ecumenically and in solidarity, pacifically but with energetically to face these structural issues. It is not through harsher laws and persecution of the Salvadoran people that these problems will be resolved.

Once again we must remember the words of Jesus that the law was not made for man but rather man for the law. The mission proposed is to change all of the conditions that violate people's life and to build relations based on the values of truth, honesty, justice, responsibility and human solidarity. The sense of compassion and solidarity that Jesus had for his people is the same thing that moves us today in relation to our people who are forsaken and scattered. We must build new relationships where national unity becomes an unstoppable and necessary process. God's justice with God's people is an ethical and evangelical imperative. For this reason, in the name of the God of Life, we ask that Salvadorans make a decision, without fear and with faith, to win the Christian *utopia* and become together the Reign of God. (Isaiah 32: 1-8)

We firmly commit to continue walking with and accompanying the outcry of the poor, heard in public protest, and warn those who boast of their political and economic power in this country that no reconciliation is possible if the source of evil is not exterminated, as we have seen in the history of humankind. The time has come to put the interests of the nation over and above the interests of individuals, groups and sectors, let us put aside economic, political and religious partisanship and special interests. (Ephesians 4: 3-4)

Finally, we ask the God of Life to strengthen us to respond in a manner consistent with our faith, as committed Christians, continuing to sow hope amongst ourselves and with those who have placed their hope in us. Let us work towards consensus and action with all of those forces of life, productivity and organization, as salt and light in this country, in order to build a society based on the values of the Reign of God, which sustain a true democracy, dignity of life and better social, economic and political conditions.

Our pastoral call:

1. To the Salvadoran people: come together in a true encounter as a nation, making possible an understanding between brothers and sisters who are sons and daughters of God (Isaiah 44: 1-5) and that this be the foundation on which to build a broad social movement of national unity.
2. To the academic and scientific communities: play a more active role in the debate, analysis and proposals for the course which the country should take as an alternative to the crisis.
3. To the for-profit sector and big business: propose policies which will reactivate the productive base and fulfill your tax obligations, so that all Salvadorans, especially young people can find a future in their own country and not in distant lands.
4. To the political parties: change confrontational stances to more responsible positions which propose governmental policies that contribute to a course of development, social-economic justice and social coexistence for the country.

5. To the three branches of government: maintain independence each from the other and facilitate the participation of citizens creating civilized and democratic opportunities within a institutional framework so that as Salvadorans we can build a better future.
6. To all churches and religions in this country: take on the compassionate love of God, accompanying actively the process towards national consensus in which our brothers and sisters, and in a preferential manner the most humble and needy, become the protagonists of a democratic and just nation.
7. To the governments of the world, the United Nations, the Organization of American States, international organizations, the world Church, international solidarity, to our friends: we ask for your solidarity in order to decisively support the building of a model of democracy which will guarantee peace with justice in El Salvador.

Signed By:

1. Iglesia Episcopal Anglicana de El Salvador
2. Iglesia Luterana Salvadoreña
3. Iglesia Bautista Emmanuel
4. Iglesia Reformada Calvinista de El Salvador
5. J.P.I.C. - Franciscanos
6. Probúsqueda
7. Federación Bautista de El Salvador (F.E.B.E.S.)
8. Fraternidad de Religiosos y Religiosos de El Salvador (Confras)
9. Foro de las Iglesias del Consejo Latinoamericano de Iglesias (F.E. Clai – El Salvador )
10. Coordinadora Ecuémica de Pobres (Ceipes)
11. Comunidad Árabe – Musulmana de El Salvador