



EL SALVADOR TODAY: Advocacy Issues Series

International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA): No magic pill for peace and community security

At the June 2005 meeting of the Organization of American States General Assembly, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice announced that plans were underway for the establishment of an International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) in El Salvador. The academy is the continuation of an idea first presented in 1995 by former President Clinton to the United Nations General Assembly. According to his proposal, the academies would bolster international cooperation in fighting international drug trafficking, terrorism, and crime. There are currently three regional academies focused on law enforcement, in Budapest, Bangkok, and Gaborone, and a fourth academy with an academic focus in Roswell, New Mexico. The ILEA in El Salvador would serve as a regional academy for Latin America.

After a flurry of Salvadoran civil society organizing against the ILEA in late 2005, the Legislative Assembly passed legislation permitting the school to begin operations. The ILEA conducted its initial classes in late spring/summer of 2006.

The Academy is established at La Comalapa and intends to use existing police training headquarters in Santa Tecla. It is projected to enroll up to 1,500 students a year from throughout Latin America. The ILEA in El Salvador will offer multiple week courses in basic law enforcement topics such as organized crime and criminal investigation, and will also offer courses deemed appropriate for Latin America, such as international terrorism, financial crime, drug trafficking, and the promotion of government accountability and transparency. The students will take classes taught by a variety of international professors, but the curriculum and operations will be overseen by the U.S.

ILEA's primary director comes from the U.S. State Department, the Department of Justice, or the Treasury Department. Each ILEA is run by a joint committee from the U.S. and the host nation. Funding for classes and overall program come from the International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Bureau (INL) of the U.S. State Department, and the U.S. Congress approves that funding. Funding for facilities is expected to come from the Salvadoran government.

Critics have articulated serious concerns about the proposed school. First, the level of secrecy surrounding negotiations to institute an ILEA is troubling. Neither the Salvadoran nor the U.S. public was aware that negotiations were occurring until Secretary Rice made her announcement. Critics wonder if the ILEA, like the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) and Plan Puebla Panama, is simply another way for the U.S. to extend its reach into El Salvador.

Second, there is fear that training at the ILEA will fail to place adequate emphasis on human rights. In its critics' opinions, the U.S. has ignored human rights standards by refusing to ratify international legislation to uphold rights while using "the war on terror" as its justification. It is feared that the combination of this attitude with a seriously flawed human rights situation in the

Salvadoran law enforcement system could lead to a greater number of human rights violations in Latin America.

Third, there are concerns about the history of the ILEA in the region. Despite the Bush Administration's comments that El Salvador is the ideal location for the ILEA given its vibrant democracy and commitment to the rule of law, El Salvador was not the first country selected to house the Academy. The U.S. first presented the idea to Panama in 1999, where it was almost immediately rejected. The U.S. then approached Costa Rica in 2002, where the idea was initially accepted. After consideration, however, Costa Rica requested amendments to ensure that military instructors and personnel would be banned and that courses would be comprised of theoretical rather than hands-on training. The U.S. refused to meet these demands, and pulled out of negotiations.

Because of the Bush Administration's friendly relationship with El Salvador, the U.S. hopes to establish the new ILEA without confronting the challenges it faced in Costa Rica. Although the plan has the full support of President Antonio Saca and the ARENA party, not all Salvadorans are convinced that the school should have moved forward.

In a public statement, the Human Rights Ombudswoman, Dr. Beatrice de Carrillo, stated that "the construction of this Academy will mean a loss of national sovereignty; what they want is to repress the population even more in the name of national security when instead of this what they could be doing is building an academy to help find solutions to social problems in the country." A forum at the University of El Salvador highlighted civil society concerns, presented by people from a range of professions, including Dr. José María Méndez, the President of the Forum for the Defense of the Constitution, Rodrigo Carazo, Costa Rican Legislative Assembly Member, and María Julia Hernández, the Director of the Archdiocesan Legal Advice Office.

Defenders of the school argue that it will not be "another" School of the Americas, that no military instructors will teach at the academy, and that respected human rights groups like the Institute for Human Rights of the University of Central America will conduct the human rights courses.

The Salvadoran police *should* become more professionalized, particularly in light of July 5, 2006 violence between protestors and riot police during which police escalated tensions that led to death and injury. As mandated by the 1992 Peace Accords, police must maintain their civilian nature and learn how to manage potentially explosive situations with an eye towards calming involved actors and deescalating tensions. Yet it is still a question whether or not training at the ILEA will further this and other goals of police professionalization. Civil society is watching and waiting.

Of course, it's not all up to the police force: the Salvadoran government must advance policies that promote sustainable development through education, health care and real job opportunities, defend human rights, and encourage civic participation to fight violence and insecurity. "Professionalization" and training at the ILEA is no magic pill to ensuring that any of this happen: what's needed is government will and international cooperation for these policies for the well-being of all of Salvadoran society.