



SHARE Foundation

Annual Commemoration of the Life of Oscar Romero, 2007



Building Peace in a Post-War Society: Global Lessons from El Salvador





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SHARE **Foundation**

Building a New El Salvador Today

February 19, 2007

Dear Friends,

Gracias, thank you, for commemorating the life of Oscar Romero! Each individual who works to model Romero's solidarity brings honor to his legacy and meaning to his senseless death. We at SHARE sincerely appreciate your efforts to educate your community about the injustices that echo the time in which Romero lived.

On this 27th anniversary of his death, as the United States heads into its fourth year of war in Iraq, it is vital that we all remember the souvenirs left after US intervention in El Salvador. These include 75,000 dead and a legacy of violence, economic injustice, and environmental derogation. At this crossroads of US foreign policy, the experience of Salvadorans can teach us about the need to search for true and lasting peace. Romero Justice Week, 2007, with the theme of *Building Peace in a Post-War Society: Global Lessons from El Salvador* provides the perfect opportunity to host gatherings to discuss these issues. **Thank you for taking this opportunity to listen to the voice of Romero, as it speaks to the issues we face today!**

For over 25 years now, the SHARE Foundation has worked to build a real and lasting peace with Salvadorans. Our work empowers citizens to pressure their government to address the issues of poverty, violence, education, and the fragile environment. Enclosed you will find a host of information on these issues and what has been done to address them. We encourage you to use these tools to educate others about these issues.

In addition, as you plan your event, we ask that you use this opportunity to help SHARE remain strong in our work to build justice and peace in El Salvador. As you plan your event, please consider the following ideas:

- Show a movie like *Romero* or *Innocent Voices*. Follow the event with a discussion and ask those gathered to support SHARE's work through a financial donation to the Campaign for Peace.
- Sell tickets to a "rice and beans (or pupusa) dinner" providing a simple meal that celebrates Salvadoran culture and offers an opportunity to think about and discuss the legacy of poverty and malnutrition in post-war El Salvador.
- Have a sale of Salvadoran crafts to help fund projects that will build lasting peace with justice in El Salvador, or promote SHARE's Solidarity Gifts so that people can strengthen SHARE's work through the gifts that they give to others.

If you have any questions or could use some support in planning your gathering, please contact Elly Jordan at Elinor@share-elsalvador.org. This entire packet is also available on our website at www.share-elsalvador.org. As always, thank you so much for your commitment to *el pueblo salvadoreño*!

Suerte – good luck on your event!

Elly Jordan

US Grassroots Coordinator, The SHARE Foundation



Oscar Romero on Standing up for Peace:

**“Peace is not the product of terror or fear.
Peace is not the silence of cemeteries.
Peace is not the silent result of violent repression.
Peace is the generous, tranquil contribution of all to the
good of all.
Peace is dynamism.
Peace is generosity.
It is right and it is duty.”**

“If there were love of neighbor there would be no terrorism, no repression, no selfishness, none of such cruel inequalities in society, no abductions, no crimes.”

"Do you want to know if your Christianity is genuine? Here is the touchstone: Whom do you get along with? Who are those who criticize you? Who are those who do not accept you? Who are those who flatter you?"

"Before an order to kill that a man may give, the law of God must prevail that says: Thou shalt not kill! No soldier is obliged to obey an order against the law of God."

“What I want to say here in the cathedral pulpit is what the church is, and in the name of the church, I want to support what is good, applaud it, encourage it, console the victims of atrocities, of injustices, and also with courage disclose the atrocities, the tortures, the disappearances of prisoners, the social injustice...

This is building up the church and carrying out the church's duty, as imposed by the church's identity.

My conscience is undisturbed, and I call on all of you: **Let us build up the true church!**”

“In the name of God, in the name of this suffering people whose cries rise to heaven more loudly each day, I implore you, I beg you, I order you in the name of God: stop the repression!”

"If they kill me, I will rise again in the Salvadoran people."



Building Peace in a Post-War Society: Global Lessons from El Salvador

Encourage people to read this article and the other information about issues facing El Salvador today in order to prepare for your Romero Week gathering.

On the 27th Anniversary of Oscar Romero's death, we commemorate his legacy of peace by remembering all of the things we have learned from El Salvador. Many of us have come to new understandings about perseverance, compassion, and solidarity through our relationships with Salvadorans, and these lessons have had great impact on our lives. These are the lessons that we hope to share with our compatriots when we return to the United States and show our pictures to our family and friends.

The people of El Salvador have been dealt a lesson in suffering that we would never wish on another people. The pain of intense repression, a creaking and fragile transition to democracy, and the ache of economic and environmental exploitation echo in the stories that we hear when we visit El Salvador. To honor Romero's legacy, and that of all those who have died to bring a true and lasting peace to El Salvador, we have worked together with our brothers and sisters in El Salvador to ease those pains. In order to spread that legacy beyond El Salvador, we must use our experience there as a lens for viewing events throughout the world.

El Salvador and the World

In light of recent global events, the lessons we have learned from El Salvador seem all the more relevant. One of those events is the War in Iraq. This war has been compared to the Civil War in El Salvador. In many cases, El Salvador is even being used as an example of a model of how to create and build a democracy in country in conflict.

Many people consider U.S. policy to have been a success in El Salvador because the guerillas were kept from power, despite the deaths of many innocent civilians. Both Vice President Cheney and former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld contended that U.S. - backed elections in El Salvador helped defeat the rebel insurgency.

During Cheney's 2004 Vice Presidential debate with John Edwards, when discussing the insurgency in Iraq, he stated, "twenty years ago we had a similar situation in El Salvador. We had a guerilla insurgency that controlled roughly a third of the country, 75,000 people dead. And we held free elections. I was there as an observer on behalf of the Congress... And as the terrorists would come in and shoot up polling places as soon as they left, the voters would come back and get in line and would not be denied their right to vote. And today El Salvador is a [whole] of a lot better because we held free elections... And [that concept] will apply in Afghanistan. And it will apply as well in Iraq."

In these comments, Vice President Cheney omitted that 90% the 75,000 people who died during the conflict in El Salvador in the 1980s were reported by the UN to have been killed not by the guerillas, but mostly by the government that Cheney was supporting and its paramilitary death squads.

The “Salvador Option”

Newsweek published an article on January 8, 2005 that explained the Pentagon was “intensively debating an option that dates back to a still-secret strategy in the Reagan administration’s battle against the leftist guerilla insurgency in El Salvador in the early 1980s.”¹ This policy included supporting so-called death squads directed to hunt down and kill rebel leaders and sympathizers.

One Pentagon proposal would send Special Forces teams to advise, support and possibly train Iraqi squads, most likely hand-picked Kurdish Peshmerga fighters and Shiite militiamen, to target Sunni insurgents and their sympathizers, even across the border into Syria, according to military insiders familiar with the discussions.²

The problem military officials are finding is that while Iraqi people do not actively support the insurgents or provide them with material or logistical help, they do nothing to turn them in. Military officials suggest that new offensive operations are needed that would “create a fear of aiding the insurgency.”³

This “Salvador Option” represents a parallel between the mistaken methods and policies that have been pursued by the U.S. in the Iraq and El Salvador conflicts. While there is little evidence of direct U.S. involvement, questions have once again arisen as to what the U.S. forces have done—or not done—to encourage the death squads that are now rampant in Iraq.

Many of the US officials in charge of Iraq policymaking were involved in U.S. policy in Central America during the 1980s. Former U.S. Ambassador to Iraq and Honduras John Negroponte and former Secretary of State James Baker, now co-chair of the Iraq Study Group, were instrumental policymakers during that time period. James Steele, commander of the U.S. military adviser group in El Salvador from 1984-86, is once again in charge of a counterinsurgency force in Iraq.⁴

Much like what occurred in El Salvador, Iraqi troops are expected to do what American troops won’t. The U.S. seems to be abandoning a policy of winning hearts and minds in favor of one that aims to make the Iraqi people more frightened of the government than the insurgents. This policy has been reported to have been explored in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon.⁵

In harrowing language that speaks of the Salvador Option, Christopher Dickey of *Newsweek* writes: “What those of us in El Salvador learned was that American policy might call for surgical action, but once the local troops are involved, they’re as likely to use a chain-saw as a scalpel. And that, too, can serve American ends. In almost any counterinsurgency, the basic message the government or the occupiers tries to get across to the population is brutally simple: ‘We can protect you from the guerrillas, but the guerrillas can’t protect you from us, and you’ve got to

¹ Michael Hirsh and John Barry. “The Salvador Option”, *Newsweek*, January 8, 2005.

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/6802629/site/newsweek/>

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ali Al-Fadhily and Dahr Jamail. “Iraq Public Skeptical Government Can Reel In Death Squads It Backed.” *Global Information Network*. New York: October 19, 2006, pg. 1.

⁵ Trish Shuh. *Cakewalks, Forgeries and Smoking Guns: The Salvador Option in Beirut*, [The Wisdom Fund](#), February 8, 2007.

choose sides.' Sometimes you can win the population's hearts and minds; sometimes you just have to make them more frightened of you than they are of the insurgents."⁶

Romero said that peace is not the silent result of violent repression. In his memory and in order honor the many martyrs of El Salvador, we must ensure that our leaders know that for us, the Salvador Option is not an option.

Lessons from El Salvador

It is vital that we remember how events unfolded in El Salvador's Civil War in order to take lessons for Iraq and beyond. For example, the civil war raged on in El Salvador up until the FMLN forces were recognized and brought to the table of diplomacy. In the aftermath of the murder by the Salvadoran army of six Jesuit priests in 1989, the U.S. Congress began to cut U.S. military aid to the Salvadoran armed forces. In the absence of this aid, a joint decision was made by the George H.W. Bush administration and El Salvador's government to stop trying to eliminate the rebels led to a negotiated settlement. This resounds with what Romero meant when he spoke of peace as *dynamism*; it is something that requires negotiation and creativity and not simple military might.

Oscar Romero said: "El Salvador has much to learn from the U.S., but the U.S. has just as much to learn from El Salvador. Together, we can find the approach that is humane and progressive." We must learn the lessons that El Salvador has to teach us. El Salvador should not be considered a model in how to conduct the Iraq war. Through 25 years of solidarity, we have seen the post-war society that El Salvador has become. Salvadorans today face extreme levels of poverty, violence, and environmental degradation. In El Salvador, U.S. intervention has left a loss of life and livelihoods in its path. In honor of Monsignor Romero, we work to build a true and lasting peace, hand in hand with our Salvadoran brothers and sisters. We thank you for joining us in honoring Romero, and in seeking out an approach that is humane and progressive.

⁶ Christopher Dickey. "Death-Squad Democracy." *Newsweek*, January 11, 2005, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/6814001/site/newsweek/>



Questions for Group Discussion: Global Lessons from El Salvador

Spend time as a group sharing stories with one another based on the discussion questions below. If your group is large, encourage people to break into smaller groups.

1. What have you learned from your Salvadoran brothers and sisters about what life was like during the Civil War?
2. What stories have you heard from your friends in El Salvador about Romero? What about Romero's life do you think continues to propel faithful support for the poor in El Salvador today?
3. Would you feel represented by US leaders if they were to use El Salvador as an example for success in Iraq? What do you think Romero would say about the ongoing conflict in Iraq?
4. What lessons do you hope for leaders to learn from the tragedies in El Salvador when making policy decisions?
5. How does the voice of Romero and the many martyrs of El Salvador echo in the present day situation in Iraq and other conflicts throughout the world?
6. When you travel to El Salvador, who have you met who is carrying on the legacy of Romero? How does that person or group inspire you to continue to struggle for justice as Romero did?
7. How has building a relationship of solidarity with El Salvador affected how you see the world? How has the life of Romero changed your own life?



Sample Letter to the Editor on Lessons from El Salvador

Romero used his voice to be ‘the voice of the voiceless.’ Speak out by telling your leaders that the “Salvador Option” is not a just one! Use this sample letter to the editor to create your own letter to a local or major newspaper. Use this opportunity to educate people in your city or town, so that they can understand the dangerous implications of using El Salvador as an example for Iraq. *Gracias* for taking action today!

March 17, 2007

To: (address of your local paper)

From: (your name, address, and telephone number)

Dear Editor,

As it is for many U.S. citizens, the continuing turmoil in Iraq is worrisome to me. I want to see a successful strategy that will bring true and lasting peace to this country. I am concerned, however, that our leaders are mistakenly using the Civil War in El Salvador (1980-92) as an example for Iraq. As El Salvador marks the 15th Anniversary of its Peace Accords, I would like to explore the implications of that example.

Many U.S. leaders, such as Vice President Cheney and former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, have linked the United States’ intervention in Iraq with its intervention in El Salvador. The Pentagon has also been reported to have considered a policy known as the “Salvador Option” that would introduce Salvadoran-style death squads to stop the insurgency in Iraq. These death squads killed tens of thousands of civilians during El Salvador’s Civil War, one of whom was Archbishop Oscar Romero, who was killed 27 years ago this week while celebrating Mass.

U.S. leaders continue to indicate that the outcome we have seen in El Salvador is the outcome that they would like to see in Iraq. That desire is terribly misguided. In my visits to El Salvador, I have had the opportunity to listen to Salvadorans discuss the violence and repression that they continue to experience in their daily lives. I have seen the poverty and environmental degradation that our past military intervention and continued economic policies have helped to create in this country.

The policy of U.S. military intervention in El Salvador wrought terror on many innocent people. Our continued economic policies, such as the Central American Free Trade Agreement which promised that wealth would “trickle down,” have instead generated poverty and are pushing 700 people per day to leave El Salvador for the U.S. These failed policies of repression must not be repeated in Iraq. The “Salvador Option” is not an option for Iraq, or anywhere else for that matter.

Respectfully, (Your Name)



EL SALVADOR TODAY: Advocacy Issues Series

CAFTA and Trade Justice

*Some data courtesy of César Senci3n Villalona and the Stop CAFTA Coalition
Monitoring Report: CAFTA in Year One*

The United States Trade Representative negotiated parallel free trade agreements with El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and the Dominican Republic under the Bush Administration. Cumulatively, these agreements combine to create the Dominican Republic-Central American Free Trade Agreement (DR-CAFTA or simply CAFTA). CAFTA was signed by participating countries in 2004 and passed in the U.S. Congress in July 2005. As of February 2007, all countries aside from Costa Rica have passed the agreement in their legislative assemblies.

CAFTA is a part of a larger economic model called “free trade” or “neoliberalism.” Neoliberalism is a set of economic policies that include several main tools: cutting public expenditures; opening up the domestic market to the “free” movements of the international market; privatization; and deregulation. The International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the World Trade Organization all have promoted these neoliberal economic principles, and NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement), CAFTA, and bilateral trade deals between the U.S. and a variety of countries (Colombia, Peru, South Korea, Oman, etc.) are based on this model. Neoliberal programs also affect U.S. workers and families: it is under this logic that some economists and policy-makers critique the welfare system and social spending programs.

Over the past fifteen years, El Salvador’s poor have suffered as a result of this “free trade” model. As tariffs have steadily been lowered, poverty and inequality have been on the rise. Initial findings demonstrate that CAFTA is accelerating this process throughout Central America, much as NAFTA has in Mexico.

According to U.S. Department of Agriculture figures, agricultural imports, including red meat, dairy products, rice and white corn, from the U.S. to El Salvador grew substantially in 2006. Small- and medium-sized Salvadoran farmers have been unable to compete with the subsidized imports and are losing market share to U.S. corporate farming.

Meanwhile, consumer prices (for clothing, non-farm food, rent, utilities, etc.) in El Salvador have shown a tendency to rise—in spite of assurances pre-CAFTA that the opposite would occur thanks to the liberalization of import tariffs. The accumulated inflation in 2006 was 5.6%, which surpassed the 4.3% inflation rate for the same period the previous year. These numbers suggest that CAFTA is not damping down inflation and instead the cost the living for the average Salvadoran is steadily rising.

The promise of CAFTA also included textile and *maquila* (export processing plants) jobs for Salvadorans. Yet the fact that the implementation of CAFTA has happened at different times for different countries has meant that jobs have disappeared in the U.S. and parts of Central America and migrated to Asia. Far from creating the promised regional textile complex to offset competition from China, the CAFTA implementation has in fact contributed to a trend, already in place, of Central America losing market share to competitors from Asia.

Furthermore, CAFTA has had negative repercussions on fiscal income, even with an increase in imports. Fiscal income from tariffs has helped fund government social programs in El Salvador, and supports everything from education to police.

Not only is CAFTA threatening Salvadorans, but it also represents an unfair deal for U.S. workers and farmers. Labor protection laws in Central America fall below the United Nation's International Labor Standards. With no regional labor standards included in the agreement, CAFTA rewards businesses that keep costs down by keeping wages low and squelching attempts at union organizing: U.S. workers cannot compete with these low wages. Moreover, CAFTA benefits large-scale agricultural producers at the expense of the U.S.'s 1.5 million small farms. Small farmers expect the same from CAFTA as they experienced with NAFTA: overall farm income growth accruing to corporate farms, but a decrease in growth—even bankruptcy--for family farms.

What are SHARE partners doing about CAFTA in El Salvador?

SHARE partners fought to prevent the passage of CAFTA in the Salvadoran legislature. Since CAFTA's passage in December 2004, partners have focused on trying to delay CAFTA's implementation in El Salvador through protest mobilizations and advocacy actions. Now that CAFTA is in place, partners such as IMU (Women's Institute) in Chalchuapa and CONFRAS (Confederation of Federations of Agrarian Reform in El Salvador), are educating their bases about the effects of CAFTA on rural families and organizing to find ways to market and sell agricultural products collectively.

SHARE's Salvadoran sistering communities have expressed the fear that "the only ones in El Salvador who will benefit [from CAFTA] are the most rich." To view letters written by Salvadoran partners regarding CAFTA, go to <http://www.share-elsalvador.org/cafta/letters.htm>. Continue to stay tuned for ongoing monitoring of CAFTA's impacts in El Salvador and for opportunities to express your solidarity with affected communities.

Without the guidance of an overarching plan for development that is centered on people and the environment, opening the Central American economies to unconstrained competition threatens to further marginalize the poor majority, for the benefit of the few. Walk with the people of El Salvador as they find dreams to continue resisting the neoliberal model and survive the devastating effects of CAFTA.



EL SALVADOR TODAY: Advocacy Issues Series

Metallic Mineral Mining in El Salvador

The possibility of mineral mining threatens SHARE partner communities in the Chalatenango and northern San Salvador regions. Mining is also projected for the Departments of Cabañas, Morazán and La Unión.

Mining in El Salvador is largely being undertaken by Canadian multinational corporations. To date, the Salvadoran Office of Mining and Hydrocarbons has approved over 30 mining exploration licenses and one exploitation license for the exploration of gold and possible silver concentrations. With these licenses, under national mining law the companies are only allowed to explore and mine with the permission of land owners, yet some exploration has been undertaken despite the strong objections of affected communities. The entrance of CAFTA into force on March 1, 2006, has strengthened multinationals' rights and further weakened community control of lands and resources.

Mine proponents argue that the activity will bring much needed money to impoverished regions of El Salvador, yet in reality Salvadorans will not receive major benefits. For example, in Cabañas, Pacific Rim/Intrepid Corporation's estimates stipulate that while \$30 million in profit will be produced for foreign shareholders, only \$300,000 will reach the local government. Because the companies will import their own workers to do technical work, only 300 Salvadorans are projected to be employed in low-paying temporary jobs that will last for only 8 years. There is also a question of whether any workers from these communities will even be hired, since some companies have refused to hire workers from communities that protest mining.

The movement against the prospective mining operation has grown since the first protests in Chalatenango in October 2005, when residents formed a human chain to block mining company representatives from entering their communities. Local efforts have fed into the formation of the National Committee against Mining, which advocates on national policy and serves as a clearinghouse for local activities. The Committee has lobbied the Salvadoran government to stop granting licenses for exploration, and convinced Hugo Barrera, the Minister of the Environment and Natural Resources, to go on record against the mining. Barrera's support was key, given that the MARN must approve applications for mining exploration before permits are granted. Unfortunately, in December 2006, Barrera was replaced by Carlos Guerrero, a Salvadoran with ties to the construction industry.

In December 2006, the Committee presented legislation to the Economic and Agricultural Commission of the Legislative Assembly which would reform existing mining legislation and ban all metallic mineral mining in El Salvador. If the Commission passes the proposal out of committee, the proposed legislation will be up for consideration and vote in the full Assembly.

In February 2007, Rep. Michaud (ME) began circulating a letter in Congress in support of the mining reform legislation. As this document goes to press, we do not have a final tally of congresspersons who signed onto that letter. **Stay tuned to hear about the letter and SHARE other ways for you and your committee to support the ongoing struggle!**

Social, Economic and Environmental Impacts of Metallic Mineral Mining

1. **Competition for water consumption.** A small mining project consumes more than 104 liters of water per second which is 7,400 gallons of water per day and 2,701,000 gallons each year. How many families' water consumption needs could be provided for with the amount of water that a company would consume in just one day?
2. **Deepening of the water level.** The use of tons of explosives for open pit and/or subterranean excavations will cause the deepening or diverting of the water table, increasing the scarcity of water for the population.
3. **Poisoning of the water.** To extract the gold, the companies will use tons of cyanide, which dissolves in water, to remove gold and silver from crushed rocks daily. Cyanide is a deadly toxic substance which can kill an adult with a portion smaller than a grain of rice. The waste from the gold and silver extraction stays in the environment, producing acid waste mixed with heavy metals that will pollute rivers and streams.
4. **Landscape forever affected.** Millions of tons of sterile crushed rock will remain exposed and the landscape will lose its beauty. Erosion from the mountains of sterile waste can affect aquatic life and raise sediment levels in the rivers. Cave-ins can also be produced by subterranean excavation. Furthermore, the fauna will be disturbed or driven off by the noise and contamination of the air and water.
5. **Health risks.** The air will be contaminated with solid impurities, like dust, and toxic or inert gases able to penetrate to the lungs. The air will be contaminated with cyanide, mercury, and sulfur dioxide vapors. Long-term exposure to a small dose produces headaches, loss of appetite, weakness, nausea, dizziness, and irritation to the eyes and respiratory system. Lead seriously affects pregnant women, causing miscarriage, damage to physical and mental development of the fetus, and premature birth. It also harms the health of children and raises the arterial pressure of adults. Many suffer from cancer and chronic skin disorders.
6. **Economic Damage.** Agricultural production, fishing, and the livestock industries will be put at risk due to the level of contamination of the water. The many people who depend upon the Lempa River will have to buy water or transport water from far away.



EL SALVADOR TODAY: Advocacy Issues Series

Millennium Challenge Account 101: What is it and how does it affect El Salvador?

What are the Millennium Challenge Account and the Millennium Challenge Corporation?

The Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) is the Bush Administration U.S. foreign aid program. President Bush first revealed the MCA proposal in 2002, promoting it as a new paradigm in international development aid in which donor and recipient nations would share responsibility for success equally.

The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) is the governing body that oversees the distribution of MCA funds. The MCC is headed by a CEO who is appointed by the U.S. President. The governing board of the MCC consists of the U.S. Secretary of State, the U.S. Secretary of Treasury, the U.S. Trade Representative, the Administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development, the CEO of the MCC, and four others appointed by the President.

What countries are eligible for MCA funds?

The MCA eligible countries as of early 2007 include: Armenia, Benin, Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, East Timor, **El Salvador**, Georgia, Ghana, Honduras, Jordan, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mali, Moldova, Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Nicaragua, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Ukraine and Vanuatu.

Initially, only countries classified as “low income” could become eligible. Today the list has expanded to include both “low income” and “lower middle income” countries. To be eligible, countries must prove that they are striving to meet policy goals set for them by the U.S. in three categories: ruling justly, investing in people, and economic freedom.

El Salvador’s economic liberalization and support for the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) are likely among the factors that allow it to be among the first of the “lower middle income” nations eligible for MCC funds. Much like multilateral banks, the MCC dangles the carrot of aid in front of nations as a reward for its acceptance of a neoliberal economic model which promotes privatization of services, deregulation, and “free” markets.

What is El Salvador’s MCA proposal?

The Salvadoran government has proposed using MCA funds for three major types of programs. All have as their focus the development of the Northern Zone of El Salvador (Santa Ana, Chalatenango, Cabañas, San Miguel, Morazán, and La Unión Departments).

- The first program, which would receive approximately 20% of the funding, focuses on **social programs** to augment education and access to social infrastructure.
- The second program, which also represents about 20% of funding, is earmarked for **business investment**.

- The third program, slated to receive approximately 60% of funding, is the **construction of a highway** to connect to Guatemalan and Honduran roads. The highway would run through all of the Northern Zone departments.

The MCA proposal and its impact on development in El Salvador, raise important questions.

- **Consultation Process:** *Was civil society included in a broad-based consultation process to create the MCA proposal?* Segments of Salvadoran civil society argue that the consultation process was not conducted in its proper order: instead of the Salvadoran government approaching civil society to hear proposal ideas, it had a proposal in hand when it came to the consultations.
- **Poverty Impact Analysis:** The majority of MCC funding will be used to build a highway. It is unlikely the highway will help Salvadorans in the region move out of poverty, particularly small and medium-sized farmers threatened by agricultural imports from the U.S. under CAFTA. Economic growth alone is not enough: El Salvador must look at the distributional effects of projected growth. *Will the MCA funds truly generate alleviation of poverty?*
- **Environmental Concerns:** *Will the highway damage the environment?* The projected highway would affect vast natural habitats and important water sources in northern El Salvador. The road will complement mining activities in the same region, activities that seriously threaten human and animal health through water pollution and deforestation. The environmental impacts of mining will counteract development in the North.
- **U.S. Development Aid:** *How will MCA funds to El Salvador impact U.S. development aid?* Analysts are concerned that MCA funds will replace core humanitarian funds in the U.S. foreign aid budget. This trend shows up in U.S. foreign aid levels to Honduras and Nicaragua, two other MCA countries.

What is Salvadoran civil society saying about the MCA?

A number of Salvadoran environmental and social organizations have come out in opposition to elements of the MCA proposal, particularly the highway. Critics point out the potential negative impact on the environment and the people, and that water sources, natural habitats, and farm land could be threatened by the construction of the highway and the potential mining activity.

Where is El Salvador in the MCA Process?

El Salvador was announced as an eligible country for MCC funding in November 2005, submitted its proposal in March 2006, and was approved for \$461 million in November 2006. Funding will be disbursed over four years.

Go to www.mca.gov for more information about the program. SHARE will be working with Salvadoran partners to monitor the effects of the MCA compact on Salvadoran communities.



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 Maria Méndez, the President of the Forum for the Defense of the Constitution, Rodrigo Carazo, Costa Rican Legislative Assembly Member, and Maria Julia Hernandez, 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.



EL SALVADOR TODAY: Advocacy Issues Series

Plan Puebla Panamá: Who Benefits?

Plan Puebla Panamá (PPP) is a \$10 billion project supported by the Inter-American Development Bank, other public banks, and private investors that aims to achieve commercial integration throughout Central America by providing infrastructure for the implementation of the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). The PPP is divided into several mega-projects, which include the development of ports, highways, and hydroelectric dams.

Unfortunately, the PPP is not as attractive in reality as it appears on paper. The project fails to address the basic infrastructure needs of Central Americans, such as access to potable water, roads to community market places, and affordable, reliable and environmentally sound public transportation systems. While the PPP will pave highways between factories, it will not pave roads to small rural communities: while it will create hydro-electric power for *maquilas* (export-processing factories), it will not bring power lines to isolated rural towns or marginal urban neighborhoods: while it will develop port cities, it will fail to prioritize services in the rural sector such as primary education and health care.

Although the PPP claims to promote social development, programs that deal with human development, the environment, and the mitigation of damage caused by natural disasters have been afforded little beyond lip service. Social development programs account for only 10% of all spending. Yet without a human development focus in the creation of “infrastructure,” it will be impossible for Central Americans to develop and compete in the globalized 21st century.

For El Salvador, a major PPP project is the construction of a highway that will serve as a beltway and bypass system for San Salvador and as a shipping route between Guatemala and Honduras. In order to construct these projects, communities will be forced to relocate. In a non-partisan poll of over 500 businesses and families located in one of the proposed areas of construction, 94% are opposed to the highway.

There is opposition to the beltway beyond that of the affected communities. Serious flaws in the beltway plans identified through an environmental impact study worried the Inter-American Development Bank, as well as the Salvadoran National Development Commission, usually firm supporters and financial backers of PPP projects. As a result, the Inter-American Development Bank pulled its funding. In its place, the Central American Bank of Economic Integration will provide loans to finance the construction.

There are serious safety and environmental concerns associated with the current plan. For instance, the construction of the highway and bypass will create high-risk zones vulnerable to environmental disasters. During the January 2001 earthquake, it was unsound construction in this area, similar to the proposed construction that caused a landslide, killing more than 700 people. Furthermore, the highway construction plans pass through El Espino, an area declared to be an ecological reserve by the Municipality of San Salvador. Given El Salvador's level of deforestation, considered to be the world's worst by the United Nations in 2005, further deforestation promises future flooding and destruction in the wake of hurricanes.

The Salvadoran beltway and bypass system will only benefit a small group of citizens, largely those who already have access to wealth; yet this project will increase the tax burden on all citizens, increasing the already unsustainable national debt by over \$1 billion over the next ten years. With El Salvador's limited budget, paying off the loan for the PPP will most certainly come at the expense of other important projects that promote sustainable community development.

The creation of infrastructure in El Salvador is a critical goal for the development of the country and the region. Yet infrastructure must also take into consideration *human development* and start by prioritizing the needs of the Salvadoran people.

What are SHARE partners doing about the PPP in El Salvador?

SHARE provides financial and technical support to the Association of Communities Affected by the Beltway and Bypass (ACAPb), a group of local citizens who oppose the construction of the highway in their neighborhood. This group educates and organizes community members to halt the construction of the project. Through community education and advocacy pressure at the local, national and international levels, they have had success in halting construction along the eastern portion of the beltway. In place of the highway, ACAPb is proposing basic infrastructure projects such as community roads and urban planning efforts, to build El Salvador's economy from the ground up.

SHARE is also exploring ways to support partners' questions about the benefits of a major road, called the "*longitudal transversal*" that would connect Guatemala and Honduras through northern El Salvador. The road was envisioned as being a part of PPP transportation infrastructure. Local communities question whether the road will benefit people living in the area, or rather transnational companies shipping goods across the region. Notably, a significant portion of the road will be financed by a \$461 million grant from the U.S. Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) to be disbursed over the next five years. El Salvador will need to take out loans to finance the remainder of the road cost not covered by the MCC compact. Communities are monitoring the ramping-up to the road construction and will be sharing information with their U.S. partners and SHARE on the construction and use of the road.



EL SALVADOR TODAY: Advocacy Issues Series

Violence Threatens Every-Day Salvadorans

Homicide Rates

Worsening economic conditions, the proliferation of insecurity, and the government's inability to craft and enforce policies that promote the common good, are leading to increased violence. In January 2006, the magazine "*Enfoques*" reported that in 2005 El Salvador had displaced Honduras and Colombia as the most violent country in Latin America.

El Salvador has one of the highest homicide rates in the hemisphere. While other Central American countries have seen a drop in homicide rates over the past several years, El Salvador has experienced just the opposite. In 2005, there were 999 more homicides than in 2004, an increase of 34%. According to *La Prensa Gráfica*, in the month of July 2006, the average daily number of murders was 12. January 2007 ended with the same average. This number is astounding in a country of an estimated 4 million full-time residents and qualifies as an "epidemic" by World Health Organization standards.

Eighty percent of crimes in El Salvador are committed with firearms. Over 225,000 firearms are registered in El Salvador, indicating that one in every ten people over 13 possesses a firearm.

Government plans to deal with the violence largely include crack downs designed to combat gang activity, such as the "*Plan Mano Dura*" and "*Súper Mano Dura*;" yet murder rates continue to rise. Interestingly, civilian police figures demonstrate that less than 40% of homicides are committed by gangs.

Femicide and Violence Against Women

The situation of violence against women in El Salvador is bleak. In 2005, 390 cases of femicides (the murder of women) were reported, while in the first 8 months of 2006, 286 cases, or roughly 73% of the 2005 total with four months of the year still left to go, were reported. The majority of violence was committed against women between the ages of 20 and 29, and a full 75% of all femicide victims in El Salvador were women between the ages of 10 and 39. Femicides are most common in La Libertad, which saw 54 reported

cases. A surprising 42% of femicides were committed in public, 20% in the home, and 71% were the result of firearm use. A decreasing percentage seems to be the result of domestic violence, and a rising number is connected to organized crime and street violence.

Political Violence

Recent dramatic violence in El Salvador has provoked fears of a downward spiral into chaos, reminiscent of the years preceding the civil war. Overall, analysts note the increasing incidence of violence connected to reduced spaces for political dialogue, government policies that fail to promote human rights, and a weakened rule of law. A number of incidents of the past year have illustrated these concerns. The cases below are just a few examples.

First, the **torture and summary execution of Francisco Manzanares and Juana Monjarás de Manzanares**. The Manzanares couple was killed in their home on July 2, 2006 and forensic evidence indicates that both were tortured. Family members and legal groups have suggested that the murders were committed due to their affiliation with the FMLN. All three received threats, including a box full of bones and dirt delivered to their house by unknown individuals, leading up to the March 2006 elections. The characteristics of the threats and murders are typical of those utilized by death squads.

Second, **July 5, 2006 violence at the National University of El Salvador**, including deaths of two civilian police agents, injuries of protestors and police, the shooting of a university employee, and the ensuing chaos that threatened nearby civilians, including young children.

As a result of hikes in bus and electricity fares, students protested outside of the National University. When street disorder began, the civilian police called in anti-riot forces. A protestor shot back at police, resulting in the deaths of two agents and creating chaos, with protestors seeking shelter on the campus as police tear gassed the crowd. Police helicopters arrived and sharpshooters took up positions, including at a local hospital. Thirty-one people accused of participating in the street violence were arbitrarily arrested by police, while the shooter and his accomplice were both identified as FMLN supporters. This led to the government's public accusation—later determined to be inaccurate--that the FMLN had planned the violence.

Critics observe that police management of the confrontation lacked professionalism and proportionality, heightened tensions, and increased the level of insecurity for civilian bystanders.

Third, the **illegal entrance of 25 Salvadoran police into the *Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores y Trabajadoras Salvadoreños (CSTS)* union offices and the treatment of union employee Daniel Ernesto Morales Rivera** on July 5, 2006.

In the aftermath of the National University confrontation, police forced entry into the union offices without a warrant and detained Morales, the union's Press Secretary, after assaulting him. Police damaged office equipment and seized information on union activities and affiliates. These actions send a message to Salvadoran unionists that police can disregard legal procedures.

Fourth, the **arbitrary execution of four youth in San Bartolo, Ilopango** on July 10, 2006. As the men, believed to be gang affiliates, were waiting in a bus shelter, a black vehicle with shaded windows approached the men, forced them to the ground, and shot them in the head. There are suspicions that the murders were "social cleansing" efforts intended to scare gang associates.

Fifth, **the illegal entry of Salvadoran police into the Catholic Church in San Bartolo** where a vigil was being held the day after the four youth were murdered. Police entered the church without a warrant and rounded up nearly 200 youth present, accusing them of gang activity.

Next, on January 31, 2007, **the physical abuse and arrest of youth protesting** anti-terrorism legislation commonly understood to aim to eliminate any peaceful public protest against government policies.



EL SALVADOR TODAY: Advocacy Issues Series

U.S. Immigration Reform

The SHARE Foundation declares:

- We support immigrants because, as they say, “We are not criminals: we are students, workers, nannies, teachers, and doctors.” We oppose the criminalization of undocumented (not illegal) immigrants and those who support them.
- We oppose legislation that increases the militarization of the border. In the name of national security, thousands of immigrants have died because of inhumane border policies. Meanwhile, border communities are ravaged and the fragile borderland environment suffers the effects of a militarized border.
- We support amnesty for the approximately 12 million undocumented immigrants and a path for them to becoming U.S. citizens.
- We support policies that create economic opportunities in their countries of origin and that promote human-centered development, not free trade agreements that further impoverish the poor and increase migration.

SHARE invites you to join local efforts to mobilize support for just immigration reform and increase understanding of the root causes of migration.

We also urge you to contact your members in the U.S. Congress to ask them to support comprehensive immigration reform that follows the guidelines above. For information on how to contact your representative, call the Congressional switchboard at 202.224.3121 or go to www.senate.gov or www.house.gov.

The SHARE Foundation has been working with communities in El Salvador for 25 years to improve living conditions and support sustainable development in El Salvador. Meanwhile, the U.S. and Salvadoran governments’ policies, such as privatization of services and the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), have increased conditions of poverty in El Salvador, thereby increasing immigration to the U.S.

Please visit our web site for more information: www.share-elsalvador.org.

The SHARE Foundation stands in solidarity with immigrants.



Remembering Romero: The Life of Oscar Arnulfo Romero

"Peace is not the product of terror or fear. Peace is not the silence of cemeteries. Peace is not the silent result of violent repression. Peace is the generous, tranquil contribution of all to the good of all. Peace is dynamism. Peace is generosity. It is right and it is duty."

On August 15, 1917, a boy named Oscar was born in the small town of Ciudad Barrios, in the province of San Miguel, El Salvador. Little did he or his parents know that he would one day come to be known as the Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdamez, or more commonly as Monseñor.

In 1942, Romero was ordained, and was assigned his first diocese in San Miguel. As his career progressed, he became the secretary for the diocese and the pastor of the cathedral parish of Santo Domingo. By 1967, he was named the secretary to the Salvadoran Episcopal Conference and just three years later he was appointed auxiliary bishop for the Archdiocese of San Salvador under the leadership of the Archbishop Luis Chavez y Gonzalez.

It was not early in his career as a priest, that Romero was known as the "Voice of the Voiceless." He was actually thought of as a pious and relatively conservative bishop. In December of 1974, Romero was named bishop of the Santiago de Maria Diocese, which included his home town of Ciudad Barrios. However, it was in June of 1975 when Romero broke the mold of a conformist priest. On June 21st, the Salvadoran National Guardsmen raided a small hamlet of Tres Calles, and proceeded to hack five campesinos to death. The next day Romero visited the little hamlet and offered Mass. Romero denounced the attack as a violation of human rights. Over the next two years as the bishop of Santiago de Maria, Romero became increasingly sensitive to the people in his diocese. He became fearless and outspoken on behalf of the men, women and children who needed him most- the campesino families and the coffee farmers who were being exploited by the land owners. He became their friend and confidant.

As tensions rose throughout El Salvador, an aging Monseñor Chavez stepped down as he reached the age of mandatory retirement. Romero was chosen and installed as archbishop on February 20, 1977. About the same time, General Humberto Romero became the president of El Salvador through a highly fraudulent election. Violence soon erupted against priests and the general population.

Most influential on the new archbishop was on March 12th, 1977 when a friend, Jesuit Father Rutilio Grande was assassinated, along with an elderly campesino and a 15-year old boy. Romero is baffled by the murders and visits the community, offering Mass at the house where the bodies were laid. Two days later, in a Mass in the San Salvador Cathedral, Romero declared, "Who knows if the murderers hat have now fallen into excommunication are listening to this word. We want to tell you, murderous brethren, that we love you and that we ask of God repentance for your hearts." It was this day that Romero became the voice for justice in El Salvador.

Over the next three years, the violence continued, and Romero also continued to challenge the military authorities. He started his Sunday homily broadcasts by radio throughout the country, with a description of the week's violations of human rights, while pleading for sanity and an end to the repression- which he saw as the root cause of the conflict. However, this did not sit well with the conservative views of the Vatican and the ruling elite.

In February 1980, Romero told a journalist, "I have frequently been threatened with death. I ought to say that, as a Christian, I do not believe in death without resurrection. If they kill me I will rise again in the people of El Salvador.... But if God accepts the sacrifice of my life, then may my blood be the see of liberty, and a sign that hope will soon become a reality."

On March 23, 1980, Romero ended his homily with, "In the name of God, in the name of this suffering people whose cries rise to heaven more loudly each day, I implore you, I beg you, I order you in the name of God: stop the repression!" The following day, while giving Mass in the chapel of Divine Providence Hospital, Monseñor Romero was assassinated with a single bullet through the heart



Remembering Romero: Oscar Romero and Solidarity

By Ralph Robers, *SHARE Promoter*

"A Voice for the Voiceless." This is the first thought that comes to my mind when thinking about Monsignor Romero. This is how he saw himself and what he calls us to be. I was part of the SHARE delegation in March of 2000 celebrating the 20th anniversary of his assassination. On the first day we traveled to a small community in the Lower Lempa for a Eucharistic celebration. On the church wall was a large banner with these words of Monsignor Romero: "Be a Voice for the Voiceless". What was there about his life that can show us how to do this? How do we go about that?

Most of us are aware that when Monsignor was appointed Archbishop of San Salvador he came with a reputation of being very traditional and quite conservative. His appointment was actually a disappointment to the poor and those working with them. How did this change so that he came to be identified with the marginalized, the poor, and the powerless? How did the *campesinos* come to love him and listen with anticipation to his words? Simply put, he had contact with them and listened to them. He heard their stories. He walked among them as one of them. He did not come with solutions but with an open heart, an open mind, ready to receive love and be changed.

This must also be where solidarity work begins for all of us. We enter the world of the poor, not with ready answers, but with a readiness to learn, to be touched, to see things differently. We must first experience their poverty on physical, emotional, and political levels. We must enter their world and be touched by it. Only then can we begin to accompany them to where they want to go.

I had the opportunity to be in El Salvador again this past December to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the Martyrdom of the Four US Churchwomen. One of the strong images from that delegation is the Monument to Memory and Truth. This wall contains the names of some 35,000 Salvadorans out of 75,000 who were killed or disappeared during the civil war, 1980-92. One of its most striking features is that all the names are etched in the same fashion, the same font and size. No one stands out; not Romero or the Churchwomen, not even the Jesuit Martyrs. Monsignor Romero, as well as the Churchwomen and the Jesuits, would be happy with that. Romero totally identified with the people. He stood among them, neither above nor below them. This is how we in solidarity work must enter the world of the poor.

Monsignor Romero often spoke about the need for the Church, its priests, its women religious, and its catechists, to suffer the same fate and dangers as the poor. He invited the Church to literally and figuratively walk with, accompany, the poor. This is challenging and scary, at times even dangerous. While solidarity work for most of us does not hold the physical risks and dangers which Romero faced, it does carry with it its own costs. It can lead us into the unknown, into uncharted territory. It calls for personal conversion, a reordering of priorities regarding how time, money and energy are spent. It often results in taking unpopular stands and advocating for

policies which can separate one from family and friends. Solidarity work is demanding in that it makes one pay attention to a new set of realities. Ultimately it makes one see all of reality differently. To open oneself to that possibility is an act of courage in itself.

A favorite quote of mine is from a certain aboriginal sister activist: "If you have come to help me you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."

I believe Monsignor Romero saw his liberation very closely bound up with the liberation of the Salvadoran people. Visits to the *pueblo*, to the people, revived him. He often recognized that they changed him, nourished him, and taught him. We must be ready also to be changed, nourished, and taught by the poor.

Monsignor Romero was a man of honest Christian faith. He often spoke of and reflected upon his relationship with God and his role in God's Kingdom. His stance with the poor came from deep within himself. While I do not think that everyone committed to solidarity with the poor must be a person of Christian faith, I do believe that he/she must be acting out of some deeply held vision, value and conviction. Without that vision, and a constant nourishing of that vision, one's solidarity and ability to accompany dries up. We, as Romero, must drink regularly from our own well.

"Those who wish to treat with charity that which must be treaded with justice make a caricature of true loving action." These bold, challenging words of Monsignor Romero must guide those who claim to be in solidarity with the poor for the long haul. More is needed than short term help, band aids which keep the poor marginalized. SHARE's philosophy to empower the poor is to accompany them physically and spiritually, financially and politically as they create their own solutions to change the structures that keep them poor. This has been SHARE's mission for almost twenty-five years. This is also what has, over the years, attracted me to the SHARE Foundation. I believe it reflects the vision of Monsignor Romero. It is what solidarity with the poor is all about.





Remembering Archbishop Romero: What would Romero Say Today?

By Scott Wright, Director of the *Religious Task Force on Central America and Mexico*

Mons. Romero: Voice of the Voiceless

(This is a shorter version of a piece written for the 25th anniversary of Romero's assassination in 2005. 2005 also marked the 25th anniversary of the Religious Task Force on Central America and Mexico. We celebrate all the rich materials and opportunities they have provided the Mesoamerican solidarity community and thank them for 25 wonderful years.)

Twenty-five years ago, on February 17, 1980, Archbishop Oscar Romero addressed a letter to President Jimmy Carter pleading him to not send military aid to the Salvadoran Government. One month later he was brutally assassinated.

In response to Romero's letter, on March 7th, 1980, religious leaders in the US Catholic Church formed what became the Religious Task Force on Central America and Mexico. As the board, staff and faithful supporters of this organization, we wish to address a word to the leaders of our Church and nation in this season of Lent.

Archbishop Romero knew very well that the Gospel mandates the church to exercise its influence in the public arena, offering pastoral judgments on issues of war and peace, national security and the economy, and bearing witness to its teachings by calling the faithful to clear ethical and moral actions.

On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of his martyrdom, we want to call attention to some of the most painful signs of our times and shine the light of the Gospel on these events in history. We witness the defense of torture by high-level authorities in the US government; an unending war in Iraq with mounting casualties; attacks on immigrants and the militarization of US borders; and a widening gap between rich and poor.

What would Romero Say Today?

No one can say for sure, but we can—based on his preaching and witness in El Salvador—venture an educated guess. We are quite sure that Romero would not be silent today. He would be the “voice of the voiceless.” He would speak for the US soldiers at risk in Iraq and for their anxious and grieving families at home, as he would for the victims of torture and the tens of thousands of Iraqi civilians at risk.

He would surely condemn, as did religious leaders around the world, the pre-emptive war on Iraq as unjust, immoral and a violation of international law. But he would not stop there. He would condemn the current violence and war in Iraq—as he did each day in El Salvador,—as morally unjust and contrary to the gospel—because it destroys that which is most precious to the church: human life.

He would offer pastoral guidelines and encouragement, proclaiming the duty of every Christian and citizen to resist unjust wars; and he would remind every soldier of the duty and conscience to obey the law of God before obeying any unjust order to kill.

Indeed, he would call on soldiers and insurgents alike to obey the law of God that says, "Do not kill."

He would be concerned about the growing ideology of national security promoted by the current administration that tends toward institutionalizing lies and deception in order to pursue an agenda which favors US geopolitical and economic interests. Quoting the Latin American bishop's document from Puebla, Romero condemned the ideology of national security as "a new form of idolatry...leading to the abuse of power and the violation of human rights..."

He would certainly condemn every attack on immigrants-as he condemned every attack on the poor and defenseless of his people-and lift up the Gospel command to offer hospitality to the stranger. And he would criticize a global economic model that gives great advantage to the rich and makes the poor more and more vulnerable. Quoting the Latin American bishop's document in Puebla, Romero also condemned as "institutionalized violence" and idolatry an economic system that absolutized wealth and private property" and deprived the majority of men, women, and children of the necessities of life.

As we commemorate the 25th anniversary of the martyrdom of a humble and faithful pastor from El Salvador, we pray that we may be true to the spirit of the martyrs, and emulate the example of Archbishop Romero in proclaiming the Gospel boldly, speaking the truth with courage, and using every opportunity to work for justice and condemn war as a "defeat for humanity."

In the Christian tradition, lent is a season of repentance, a time for conversion. Let us be faithful to the spirit of this season, and worthy of Oscar Romero, by our actions for justice and the risks we take for peace, by our boldness in proclaiming the Gospel and the courage to bear the cost.



Sacred Service in Memory of Oscar Romero: The Spiritual Challenge of Peace

Note: This is a sample of a spiritual service, based on materials created by the Religious Task Force on Central America and Mexico. Please shape it to fit your needs. We hope it will help you remember Romero in a way that feeds your soul.

Beginning Processional

This procession could be led by a sacred dancer. The procession could include representatives of the community, as diverse as possible, especially Central Americans. They may carry incense, palms, a plain cross, Romero's name or image on a banner, scripture, and one large candle that will be the symbol of peace. A special peace table could be created to receive the candle, perhaps with drawings from children, a map of the Americas, a Romero quote etc.

Moment for Reconciliation

Leader: Oscar Romero reminds us that we have "not always given full importance to what was really going on in the world." For the times that we have not given full importance to the conditions of our world, to injustice, to violence and its causes, for the times we have been distracted, too busy, indifferent or uncaring, we ask for mercy.

All: Have mercy on us.

L: Romero has shown us the real faces of the suffering people. "This situation of pervasive extreme poverty takes on very concrete faces in real life. In these faces we ought to recognize the suffering features of Christ, who questions us and challenges us." For the times we have closed our eyes to the faces of the suffering, for the times we refused to recognize the presence of the divine there calling to us, for our resistance to the challenges and questions they pose to us, we ask for mercy.

All: Have mercy on us.

L: Romero tells us to be peaceful and not ashamed of it. For the times we prefer war to peace, for our failure to identify with the innocent victims on all sides of conflict, for the fear that keeps us from fully living peaceful lives in the face of the world's many conflicts, we ask the mercy of our God.

All: Have mercy on us.

L: Loving Creator, look with mercy upon your people, for we are human and overwhelmed by the many difficult challenges we now face in our world. We call upon the memory of Archbishop Romero who, in the face of so many challenges, never ceased to act with love. Help us to become instruments of peace in our world, to confront

political violence and its causes and to root out the injustice and hatred that disfigures the human person made in the image of Your Image.
For this we pray.

All: Amen.

Listening to Voices of Peace

Reading 1

Dr. Martin Luther King said:

“Peace is not merely a distant goal that we seek, but a means by which we arrive at that goal. One of the most persistent ambiguities that we face is that everybody talks about peace as a goal. However, it does not take sharpest-eyed sophistication to discern that while everyone talks about peace, peace has become practically nobody's business among the power-wielders. Many men cry Peace! Peace! But they refuse to do the things that make for peace. It is not enough to say 'We must not wage war.' It is necessary to love peace and sacrifice for it ... We must see that peace represents a sweeter music, a cosmic melody that is far superior to the discord of war.”

Reading 2

Mohandas Gandhi said:

“Hatred ever kills, but love never dies; such is the vast difference between the two. What is obtained by love is retained for all time. What is obtained by hatred proves a burden in reality for it increases hatred. Peace will not come out of a clash of arms but out of justice lived and done by unarmed nations in the face of odds.”

Reading 3

Oscar Romero said:

“Peace is not the product of terror or fear. Peace is not the silence of cemeteries. Peace is not the silent result of violent repression. Peace is the generous, tranquil contribution of all to the good of all. Peace is dynamism. Peace is generosity. It is right and it is duty.”

Speaking out for Peace

Encourage members of your gathering to come prepared to speak to the group. Discuss each quote and perhaps additional quotes about peace, talk about the ways in which peace has not been complete in El Salvador even 27 years after Romero's death. Discuss the life of Romero in the context of your own community's daily struggle. Today, as in Archbishop Romero's time, we are challenged to bear witness to peace in our world, ending the violence of wars that destroy lives, degrade the human person, and fuel hatred. Romero would not be silent today on the question of war. He would, as did Pope John Paul II, “War no more, war never again!” and “War is a defeat for humanity.” Be sure to remember the ways in which unjust trade policies, violent repression, and environmental derogation are impeding a true and lasting peace in El Salvador and beyond.

Remembering Other Lives Given for Peace

This is a time to remember the many lives that, along with Romero's, have been given for peace. The leader or leaders calls the names, and the congregation responds, "¡Presente!" meaning, "he or she is here with us."

You can use this time to commemorate people from the community or region where you have a sistering partnership, community leaders who were killed during El Salvador's Civil War, or any other group of people whose life you want to commemorate. Some examples may be:

- Those who died at the UCA, Rutilio Grande, the Four U.S. Churchwomen, and the 75,000 people of El Salvador killed during the Civil War.
- Dorothy Stang, the Sister of Notre Dame who defended the poor and the rainforests of Brazil.
- Tom Fox, Christian Peacemaker team member in Iraq who was killed in March, 2006.
- The tens of thousands of civilians and over 3,000 American soldiers who have died in Iraq during this war, as well as the Salvadorans serving in Iraq. Pray that our leaders may recognize that as in El Salvador, violence has not led to peace in Iraq.

Prayer for Commitment

Your group could close this time together by committing yourselves to go out into the world to be peacemakers. Start with one central peace candle in the center of your circle, then hand out candles to the community, then have representatives of the community light candles from the peace candle and spread the light to the congregation while all join in a peace song. Following the candle-lighting, have children and/or other community members lead the following prayers:

Leader: Our candles are lit. We are called to be light to our world. We take with us today this light lit by the great Oscar Romero of El Salvador. He had a word for his church and his people, and he had a universal word, a word for us gathered here this day.

He calls us to counter violence in our world with courage, to counter hatred with love, and to confront the brokenness of our world with the healing powers of justice and compassion. Let us now pronounce the commitment of our community to take this light out into our world.

All: We commit ourselves to becoming peacemakers by working for justice.

Leader: Now we are ready to take our light out into the world.

R: Amen.