

SALVANET

A Publication of Christians for Peace in El Salvador, CRISPAZ

More than Tomorrow's Leaders: Defending the Rights of Youth in the Present

by Mirna Antonieta Perla

Our country has lived with the belief that our children and young people are important because someday they will become adults and take the reins of the country. This belief has fostered the idea that children are objects in need of protection rather than individuals entitled to rights. They are viewed as prospective human beings, without their own thoughts and feelings, incapable of making suggestions. When decisions that affect them are made, they are not informed or consulted, but simply given orders that they must obey.

The Peace Accords sought to initiate a process of democratization that would include all active sectors of the country. For the first time, Salvadoran legislation was modernized to reflect the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Impressive legal and institutional frameworks have been

created to guarantee the optimal conditions for our children and young people to overcome the difficult situation of being treated as objects in need of protection. But it is even more impressive that after more than ten years, our children and adolescents are still not shown the respect they deserve or given the tools they need to fully develop themselves. They have not yet been recognized as human beings with rights in the *present*, rather than representatives of the *future* who are important because someday they will vote and pay taxes.

Looking at the news, we realize that the opinions of children and youth does not appear. We hear the voices of the fathers, mothers, relatives, or friends of children who have been victims of some kind of abuse or crime. Frequently we hear about children who die because of the actions of an adult, often involving sexually violence. These situations demonstrate both neglect by their close relatives and the absence of programs that guarantee our children safe places to live, play, and study.

Another striking aspect of media coverage is the emphasis on the negative actions of the youth in public schools.



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CRISPAZ, Christians for Peace in El Salvador, was founded in 1984. We are a faith-based organization dedicated to mutual accompaniment with the church of the poor and marginalized communities in El Salvador. In building bridges of solidarity between communities in El Salvador and those in our home countries, we strive together for peace, justice and human liberation.



CRISPAZ has five programs:

- † CRISPAZ Volunteer Program (CVP)
- † El Salvador Encounter Delegation Program (ESE)
- † Communication Information Network on El Salvador (CINES)
- † Summer Immersion Program (SIP)
- † Economics for People Fair Trade Program (EPP)

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For more information about our programs or to make a contribution, please contact us at:

CRISPAZ

122 Dewitt Drive
Boston, MA 02120
617-445-5115
info@crispaz.org

CRISPAZ

Apartado Postal 2944
Centro de Gobierno
San Salvador, El Salvador
tel: 011-503-275-4252
pazsal@integra.com.sv
www.crispaz.org

HIGH-RISK YOUTH

This biased coverage violates Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which reads, "The member states guarantee to the child that is capable of forming his/her own judgment, the right to express freely his/her opinion in all matters that affect the child, taking duly into account the opinions of the child according to his/her age and maturity level."

As a juvenile judge, with extensive experience in human rights, it disturbs me that young people's opinions about the subject of student violence are ignored today, just as they were ten years ago. Several months ago, a student of the INFRAMEN (Francisco Menendez National Institute, a public San Salvador high school) was killed by bullets fired from a passing bus as she waited at the bus stop. Once again, the students became victims of a negative backlash. Although it was their classmate who had been assaulted, accusations of violence immediately fell on all of the students.

Even the Minister of Education participated in the crowded meeting at the INFRAMEN auditorium following the murder. She made a proposal to the parents present that students seen wearing the school uniform outside of school grounds during class hours would be detained. When asked if those detained students should be taken to the police station or to the Institute for the Protection of Minors, I was shocked to see all of the parents raise their hands for their children to be brought to the police.

Later, we were invited to a round-table discussion to reflect on the causes of and solutions to student violence. Only students,

some parents, and delegated government workers were present. I asked the young people why they hadn't given their opinion in the assembly about the problems facing the school following the murder of their classmate. They answered that, while they had been asked to help with the set-up of the auditorium, they had not been invited to participate in the meeting. They had been given space to offer their suggestions in small work groups after the general discussion.

In these groups, the students clearly expressed their perspectives, especially the issue of persecution that they suffer for wearing the INFRAMEN uniform. They spoke about the bus drivers who refuse to stop for them and the harassment they receive from gang members and students of rival schools. They complained about police brutality, including violent and invasive searches in which students are often thrown to the floor, hit, and insulted.

Several young student leaders offered suggestions for changes at the school. They spoke about the school infrastructure that is still damaged from the earthquakes in 2001. They asked for the implementation of vocational workshops and for modern equipment that would allow them to specialize in the most advanced technology. They spoke of the violence in their homes and in the street, and the lack of opportunities to express themselves in their homes, in school, and in the city.

I mention all of this to point out that it has been very difficult for our government to prioritize a change of attitude towards our children and young people. We must stop *(continued on page 6)*

Youth Organizations Mobilize to Demand their Rights

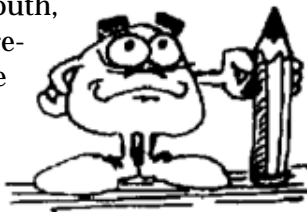
by Kela Luna

Young people represent a statistically large and important part of the various societies of our planet. Currently, there are 1.7 million people in the world whose ages fall between 10 and 24 years old, the majority living in underdeveloped countries. (Population Reference Bureau, 2000)

However, in spite of their numbers, young people in many cases have been made invisible in the legal system. One of the main reasons for this trend is that society has begun to view young people as a problem to resolve through punishment rather than through efforts at consultation and mutual understanding.

Latin America is no exception in the development of punitive juvenile legislation. Driven by the motivation to correct socially inappropriate behaviors, the Latin American governments of the last thirty years elaborated juvenile laws whose objective was the reform of young people through punishment. The creation of juvenile laws with the purpose of opening social opportunities for youth has happened only in recent years. However, it is not the date that is important but rather the reasoning that has inspired the new laws, reflecting a new way of conceiving youth in society.

In the context of this new perception of youth, we believe it is essential that El Salvador create a Youth Law. Most importantly, we believe this law must be elaborated with the constant participation of those whom it will benefit: Salvadoran youth.



The Pro-Youth Law movement was born after consultative workshops organized by the Legislative Assembly Commission on Youth Sports and Recreation that began in November of 2001. Representatives of several youth organizations that participated in the consultative process took the initiative to organize the movement with the following objectives:

- ◆ To continue participating in the analysis, promotion, and approval of the Youth Law
- ◆ To generate discussion about the advances in the Youth Law draft bill
- ◆ To use communications media to bring to the public agenda the idea of creating opportunities that allow for the social incorporation of all people, inviting them contribute to the development of the country, using activities such as forums, festivals, debates, etc.
- ◆ To bring information about the Youth Law to sectors of young people who have not yet been informed

Nearly two years into the consultative process, the legislative commission responsible for the bill has not given it the appropriate follow-up. Those of us in the Pro-Youth Law movement continue to work to promote the bill, at the same time realizing that the work does not end in the moment that it is approved. We must continue to be vigilant and ensure that the law is fulfilled and that it benefits the great majority of young people who inhabit our country.✚

Kela Luna, 23, is a member of the coordinating team of the New Generation XXI Youth Movement in Mejicanos, San Salvador.

Proposed Salvadoran Youth Law

The purpose of the Youth Law bill is to establish a legal framework to promote the integral development and active citizen participation of young people between the ages of 18 and 30 without distinction. Some of the goals of the bill are:

- Protect labor rights and ensure dignified working conditions and just compensation
- Promote vocational training opportunities
- Protect the right and the obligation of young people to pursue an education in order to fully develop their abilities; this includes formal, non-formal, and informal education, as well as extracurricular opportunities for learning
- Promote youth involvement in cultural activities as an indispensable element in recreating and maintaining national identity
- Guarantee free access to sports and recreational activities, making available resources such as state-run parks and facilities
- Establish integral health services with the capacity to attend to the specific needs of the young population
- Ensure spaces for young people to participate in the social, economic, cultural, and political development of their country

Convivencia: Sharing the Lives of High-Risk Youth in Ilobasco

by Idalia Argueta

The lives of the young people in Ilobasco, El Salvador, are very sad and lonely, since many have survived alone and without family. For this reason, many look to fulfill their social needs in groups of young people called *maras*, or gangs. In reality, gangs aren't groups of bad kids; they are merely trying to catch the attention of those who have never offered them even a second of their time.

The MOJE youth movement is an organization that looks for ways to share with these young people spaces of *convivencia*, or social coexistence that all human beings experience every day. We try to change some of the negative things, such as drugs, alcohol, and stealing, that these young people are doing that affect their lives and the lives of those around them. We begin this process subtly and over time make our goals more clear.

We start out getting in contact with the young people by going to the places where they hang out. We become friends with members of the groups by means of sharing some activity. It could be a soccer game, playing cards, sharing a meal, talking, doing some of the things that they do. After this initial contact, we meet with the group for six months, getting to know them well and building trust. At the end of this period, we ask them if they would like to continue as a group and offer to support them with recreational outings to help make their ties as a group more permanent.



During this whole time, we support those who would like to continue their educational process by offering them the opportunity to study. We help them to solicit their personal documents like their birth certificate, their Unique Identity Document (DUI), etc. If there are adolescents who are heavily into alcohol use, we get them to a rehabilitation center. If they are sick or have a medical emergency, we help them find medicine and get to a doctor. We help

some of the young people who want to remove their tattoos after they have been with the program for a significant amount of time. More than anything, we try to share in their life experience and to fill up some of the time that they usually spend with the gang.

When a group of adolescents begins, the three-year process seems very long. When they are in their second year with the group, it is time for them to decide what they want to do; realistically, not all finish the group process. But it is important to MOJE to try to keep the leader of the gang involved since the rest of the gang follows that person. Keeping the leaders involved is a key point for us to guarantee the functioning of the group.

For MOJE, it has been a year of many successes. We have been able to keep in contact with and influence some of the most powerful groups of young people in Ilobasco, a zone characterized by a lot of juvenile violence and danger. We have seen young people staining their bodies, tattooing beautiful pieces of art and the numbers that represent their gang affiliations on different parts of themselves. At the same time, we have seen young people who are finishing their process, erasing their body art and worrying about their appearance, about looking for a dignified job, and wanting to give a good example to their future families.

For them, it is a very difficult path to walk, lonely, isolated, without work and under constant social discrimination. It is very difficult to see many young people die along this path, struggling for their own survival. But many more are able to move forward, and it is important to keep fighting to help them seek out opportunities that will allow them to break through the exclusionary society of El Salvador.✦

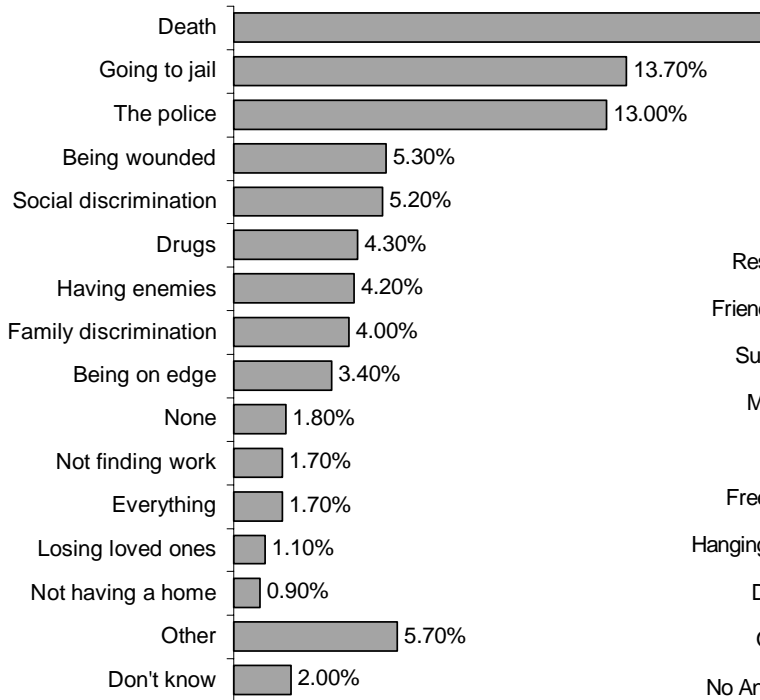
Idalia Argueta is a member of the coordinating team of the Association MOJE. She directs the area of Human Development.

Cory Henrickson, who recently rejoined the CRISPAZ team as a long-term volunteer, began working with MOJE in October. Cory's role has been to support work with the groups of young people, accompanying Idalia in the area of Human Development. Much of Cory's experience has focussed around "convivencia" with group members: sharing meals, playing games, dancing, going to the beach, or hanging out in the street. According to her co-workers, Cory's free spirit has been an example to many of the young people, especially young women, helping to lift up their own spirits and encouraging them to find new ways of expressing themselves.

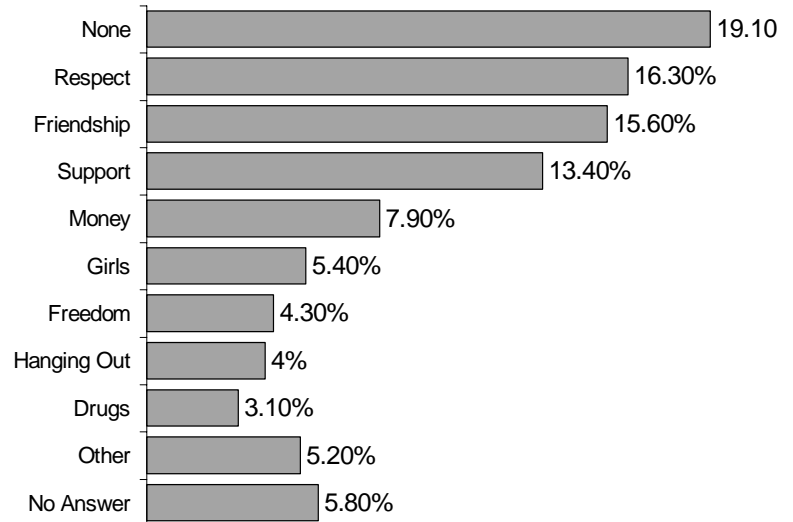
From the Streets: Young gang members speak about their lives

The following are results from a series of interviews conducted with young members of several gangs in the Metropolitan San Salvador area:

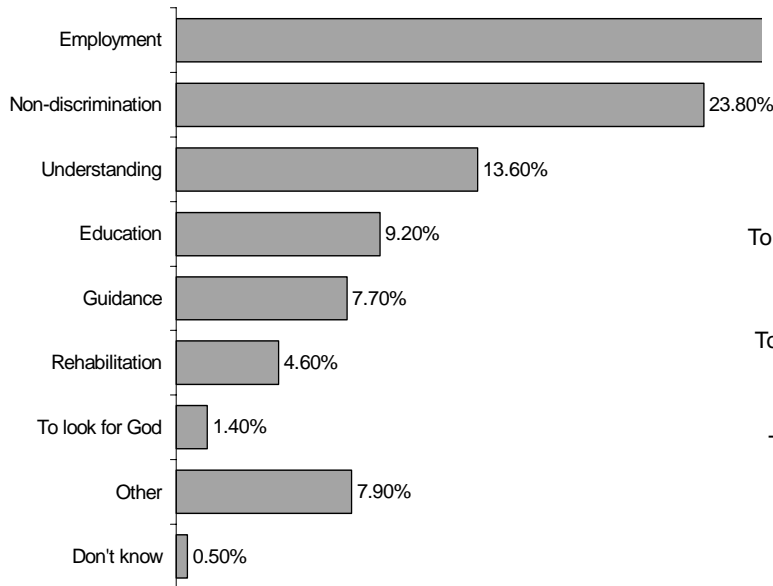
Disadvantages of belonging to the gang



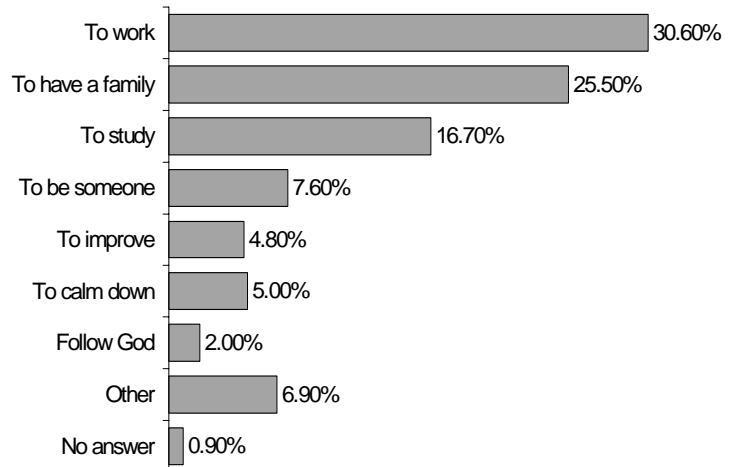
Advantages of belonging to the gang



Most important current needs



Goals for the future



Statistics taken from *Solidaridad y violencia en las pandillas de Gran San Salvador: Más allá de la vida loca*. UCA Editores, San Salvador, El Salvador, 1998.

(continued from page 2)

treating them as a problem and begin to recognize their importance in the development of the country. El Salvador's principal resources are its people, approximately 44% of whom are under 18 years old, according to a 1996 Ministry of Economy poll. We must make it a priority to develop a system of integrated support for our youth. We cannot continue to allow our children to be marginalized from a quality education. We must not allow them to be excluded from programs that teach them to identify with their history and to believe in themselves as human beings in the present with the right to a dignified treatment from all the people in their environment.

El Salvador must take seriously the creation of a system of support for children and adolescents based on the principles of nondiscrimination, the indivisibility of rights, and freedom of expression. It must provide the basic necessities for integral development, while also guaranteeing real spaces of participation so that young people can influence the decisions that affect them. To avoid exclusion and encourage a common focus on youth rights, there must be efforts to raise consciousness within society and to train public officials in the appropriate treatment of minors.

To implement this change, it is not enough to create national laws or to ratify international conventions. In order to make the fundamental rights of minors a reality, government institutions must be strengthened and there must be a budgetary strategy that will assign funds for children and youth. One suggestion is the 20/20 initiative agreed upon in the World Summit for Social Development. This initiative, proposed by the legislative Commission on the Family, Women, and Children, seeks to favor investment in basic social services by proposing that

at least 20% of national budget spending and 20% of foreign aid be oriented to social programs, principally in health and education.

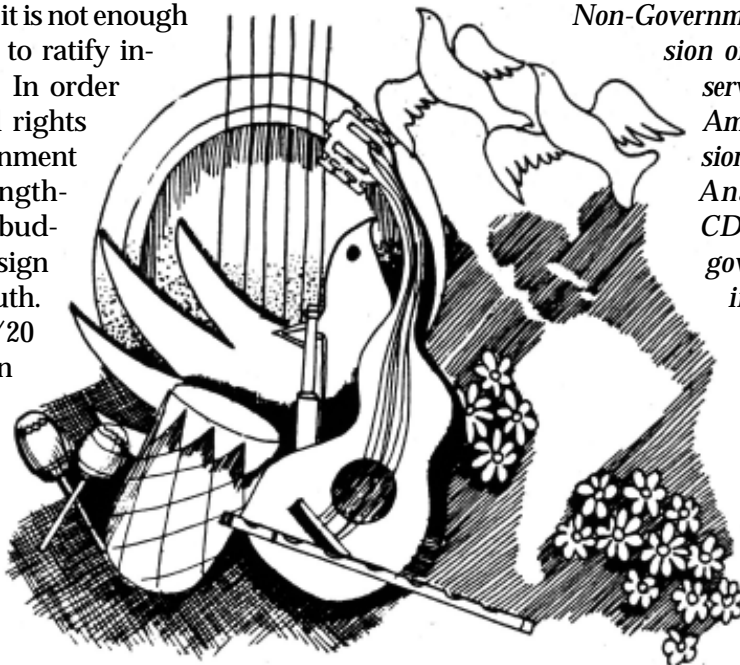
During my experience as a juvenile judge, I have worked for the formation of the Committee for Children and Youth of Santa Tecla to encourage children

and young people to participate in activities that facilitate their integral development and that make them take ownership of their rights. This effort began in 1997 and has brought together different governmental organisms on the local and national level, as well as the juvenile and family courts, the National Civilian Police, the community clinics of the Social Security system, and the churches. We have been able to count on the technical and financial support of UNICEF, the United Nations Development Program, Save the Children,

the Dutch Embassy based in Costa Rica, and Danish International Aid. We have focussed on educating ourselves as members of the committee in order to identify with children rights and work to guarantee adequate spaces for the quality education and recreation that all of our children deserve.✦

Mirna Perla has been a human rights activist for more than twenty years, working with organizations such as the Non-Governmental Human Rights Commission of El Salvador (CDH), and has served as coordinator of the Central American Human Rights Commission. She is the widow of Herbert Anaya, former president of the CDH, who was assassinated by government-backed death squads in 1987. Following his death, Mirna spoke to the United Nations to condemn the serious situation of human rights violations occurring in El Salvador. In her current position as a juvenile judge, she works to create spaces for youth expression and development and to seek alternatives to the penal system.

The students talked about the persecution and harassment that they suffer. They complained about police brutality, including violent and invasive searches in which students are often thrown to the floor, hit, and insulted.



Poeta Pandillero

por Dany Balmore Romero

He escrito un par de poemas,
 No soy un genio,
 Ni un sabio,
 Mucho menos un erudito.
 He sido un borracho, mujeriego, drogadicto y
 chiveador, ladrón y estafador.
 He ido de aquí para allá,
 Siendo fugitivo de la paz...
 Soy hijo de la calle.
 Gracias a eso,
 He adquirido el conocimiento para poder recitar...
 Porque allí,
 Aprendí a reír y a llorar,
 A odiar y amar...
 Soy prisionero de la historia,
 Hablo a señas.
 Me toco vivir la época de la hipocresía diplomática,
 De la venganza cegadora,
 De la envidia delirante...
 Mendigo migajas de felicidad,
 Construyo ilusiones frágiles que el viento como
 castillo de arena destruirá.
 Soy esclavo del tiempo...
 Donde las balas son pan caliente,
 Y la vida no vale nada...

GangPoet

by Dany Balmore Romero

I have written a couple of poems,
 I am not a genius,
 Nor a wise man,
 Much less an erudite.
 I have been a drunk, a womanizer, a drug addict and
 a gambler, a thief and a conman.
 I have gone from here to there,
 Being a fugitive of peace...
 I am a son of the street,
 Thanks to that
 I acquired the knowledge to be able to recite...
 Because there,
 I learned to laugh and to cry,
 To hate and to love...
 I am a prisoner of history,
 I speak through signs.
 I lived in the season of diplomatic hypocrisy,
 Of blinding vengeance,
 Of delirious envy...
 I beg for crumbs of happiness,
 I construct fragile illusions that the wind will destroy
 like castles of sand.
 I am a slave of time...
 Where the bullets are hot bread,
 And life has no worth...

Dany Balmore Romero has spent 8 of his 26 years in the Salvadoran prison system. He joined the *Mara Salvatrucha* gang as a youth and admits that he did many things that he isn't proud of. While in prison, he began a process of personal growth and transformation. He studied in the high school program at the Quetzaltepeque prison, and also got involved in OPERA, a youth group focussing on fellowship and personal growth. He served as president of the group for several years. After earning a high school diploma, he became an avid reader. He continues to study judicial and penal codes of Salvadoran law, and also read novels, history books, and poetry.

Dany's concern for the rights and well-being of his fellow prisoners translated into direct action. He served as an informal legal counselor and even wrote letters to the human rights office denouncing violations of inmates' rights. He spoke against discrimination and also wrote reports of the inadequate and overcrowded conditions within the prison of Quetzaltepeque. He was transferred without proper notice in October of 2001, and since then has been struggling to get his case re-examined. He has continued to stand up nonviolently for prisoners' rights through letter-writing, appeals to authority figures for the fulfillment of Salvadoran law, and direct actions such as a hunger strike in early 2002. In December of 2002, Dany's case was presented before a parole board and he was denied parole, presumably due to his denunciation of human rights violations committed by prison authorities against his fellow inmates. ❖



Dany Balmore Romero with CRISPAZ community member Miranda Buffam.

El Salvador Encounter: An Invitation to Reality

Reverend Kevin Bean, from St. Andrew's Church in Marblehead, Massachusetts, contributed this reflection after participating in an El Salvador Encounter in June of 2002.

These two words – BE REAL – were written across the small bus used to transport our group of fifteen from St. Andrew's around El Salvador during our week-long journey of June 22-29. Arriving at the airport in San Salvador we met Rosa Anaya from CRISPAZ who escorted us to the bus. Rosa, 25 years old, would be our interpreter and spiritual guide (even though claiming no religious affiliation) throughout the week. Many other buses and pickup trucks were at the airport collecting groups of people, including several with the sentence "The Children Need the Gospel of Christ" painted across their length. When I saw our bus that said simply, "BE REAL," – alongside a silhouette of Archbishop Oscar Romero painted onto one of its windows – I had a sense that we were starting this journey off on the right foot.

That first evening we settled in at the guest house in San Salvador and met with Rosa to go over our itinerary for the week ahead – a schedule that would bring us face to face with a number of Salvadoran people who have endured great tragedy and struggle during the civil war (1979-92), hurricanes (especially 1998), earthquakes (2001), and the economy of an extremely poor nation in the midst of a global market. Half of our trip would involve visits to locations both where atrocities such as the assassinations of Archbishop Oscar Romero (1980) and the Jesuit community (1989) occurred, as well as to places of present hope such as the (Jesuit) Universidad Centroamericana, Fundación Olof Palme (a children's rights organization), 22 de Abril (an artists' cooperative workshop), CRISPAZ (to meet the staff), and the Episcopal Diocese of El Salvador (to meet with Bishop Martín Barahona and to hear of his vision for the work of the Church in El Salvador).

The other half of our trip would include a number of encounters with our sister parish, San Andres Apostol (of whom most of the parishioners experienced the great tragedies and struggles listed above). These interactions would involve worshipping, working, eating, and playing together across the generations, and simply getting to know each

other. This would involve time at the church and their school (presently 110 students from pre-K through sixth grade), a visit to a large lake and the Pacific Ocean together, and also a trip together to a very poor rural community two hours east of San Salvador called San Juan de Letran with whom the people of San Andres have established a relationship that has led to assisting them with medical, educational and housing opportunities, and the development of the church community in this context.

That first evening after we went through the itinerary with Rosa (who would help personalize and integrate many of our experiences throughout the week), we were gently challenged by her to BE REAL – first by letting our hearts be open so that they "may be broken each day" (her words); and secondly, by seeing and feeling not only the Good Friday experiences of the people but also their Easter experiences as well – not only their sorrows but also their hopes and dreams and joys.

In one intense week, we all became that much more real – to the realities around us (in El Salvador and now back here in the USA), and to ourselves. Our hearts were broken – open. Our potential is infinite for further relationship and ministry together with CRISPAZ and our sister parish and their school and their ministry in San Juan de Letran.✙



Jen Von Hagel, participant in the St. Andrew's delegation, poses with some new friends in the parish of San Andres Apostol.

Another America is Possible! People's Declaration Against Free Trade

CRISPAZ recently joined a growing list of grassroots and non-governmental organizations from across Central and North America that have signed on to the People's Declaration Against Free Trade. By signing the declaration, CRISPAZ reaffirms its commitment to walk with the poor of El Salvador. The declaration reads in part:

"We emphatically reject existing agreements on trade and investment as well as those which are in the process of being negotiated such as the FTAA (Free Trade Area of the Americas), CAFTA (US-Central America Free Trade Agreement) and the PPP (Plan Puebla Panama)..."

"These agreements do not generate sustainable development or create better jobs. On the contrary, they increase public debt; threaten our historic, cultural and natural wealth; and destroy national sovereignty and food security. These free trade agreements undermine our people's struggle for a democratic culture that promotes justice and equality..."



"The winners in the CAFTA, FTAA and PPP are transnational corporations and their intermediaries at the national level. The effects would be the commodification of public services essential for life, the sale of natural resources, increasingly precarious working conditions, higher unemployment and deteriorating health as a result of genetically modified food consumption..."

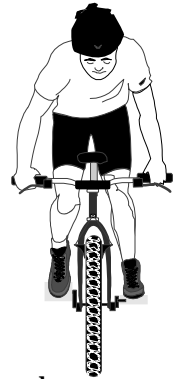
Read the full text of the People's Declaration Against Free Trade and sign on!
The declaration can be viewed on the Witness for Peace website:
http://www.witnessforpeace.org/tools/peoples_declaration.html

Pedaling for Life

On January 8, U.S. foreign trade officials met in Washington with the Ministers of Trade from El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Costa Rica and, behind closed doors, began deciding the terms of the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) with all its promises of "development" and "progress." Two days later, on January 10, about 25 young Salvadorans hopped on their bikes and took off from the capital on a 10-day journey to raise awareness about what is really going on behind those closed doors. The tour would take them through nine of the country's 14 departments under the slogan, "Pedaling for Life: Resisting Plan Puebla Panama and Free Trade."

The group was escorted into each stop by local young people on their bikes. Local groups hosted activities including music, food, creole seed exchange, and of course, lots of sharing of experience and information on the Plan Puebla-Panama, CAFTA, and a bilateral free trade agreement between El Salvador and the U.S. and how these treaties will impact our lives. Alejandro Hernández, 20, of San Ramón, San Salvador, was impressed by the lives of the rural farmers they met along the trip. "Leaving the city, you begin to see how harsh life is for people, how hard they have to work to scrape together the beans and tortillas for each day's dinner," says Hernandez. "These are the people that will lose the most with the free trade agreements, the poor; they know they won't be able to compete with the prices of imported products, and their situation will get more desperate."

By the time the cyclists returned home to San Salvador they had covered about a third of the country. The trip was organized by a youth initiative called Anmu-tsipical in Mejicanos, San Salvador and received the support of the Salvadoran ecological committee, UNES, and the Sinti Techan network, a group of non-governmental organizations working to raise awareness of the effects of free trade as it is being negotiated. If you would like to send a message or comment to the cyclists, you can send an email to: anmutsipical@navegante.com.sv.



WE OPPOSE THIS WAR: Voices from El Salvador

The United States Citizens for Peace (CEPP), a network of U.S. citizens living in El Salvador, has been meeting since October to look for creative means to express their opposition to the Bush administration's war plan. The group, which includes CRISPAZ team members, is circulating a petition that allows people to sign on and support their statement opposing a pre-emptive strike against Iraq. The petition currently has more than 3,000 signatures, including supporters from the U.S., El Salvador, and other countries.

by Sara Stowell and Dean Brackley

On October 11, the day the Senate agreed to let President Bush make war on Iraq, twenty-eight U.S. citizens living in El Salvador met with our ambassador, Rose Likins, to protest the planned aggression. Many of us have seen war up close. War destroys lives and families. It leaves wounds that the never heal. War corrupts and brutalizes. It buries the truth under deadly lies. Many in our group doubt that war can ever be justified. But we are all are convinced that attacking Iraq would be morally wrong and makes little political sense. Heroes also emerge in wartime. The memory of people like Archbishop Romero, who spoke up for victims here, inspires us to speak up now. Here is how we expressed our views to the ambassador.

Launching a war without a clear provocation may be without precedent in our nation's history. Crossing this threshold would violate fundamental principles of ethics and international law. Saddam Hussein is certainly a ruthless tyrant, and he may have weapons of mass destruction. But that, by itself, is not sufficient to justify attacking his country. According to well-known just-war criteria, military action can only be legitimate if it responds to an attack or a grave and imminent threat to our nation. These conditions do not apply in the case of Iraq. It would be immoral to initiate war, with its certain and terrible costs, with the intention of responding to a threat that is distant and even speculative.

If war can ever be justified, it must be undertaken as a last resort. We are not convinced, and neither are our country's principal allies, that peaceful means have been exhausted in this case. Moreover, in today's world, the United Nations, as representative of the community of

nations, is the proper instrument for dealing with threats to international security. An attack of this nature – in the absence of a palpable imminent threat and without the support of the international community — would undermine the fragile conventions governing international behavior. It would draw the U.S. down to the moral level of those adversaries which our government calls “rogue states” and make it more difficult to prevent other countries from acting in the same way.

The proposed attack violates another time-honored moral principle: It is far from clear that violent “regime change” in Iraq would not bring about greater damage than the harm it seeks to prevent. First, it would cause massive civilian casualties in a country whose citizens have already suffered immensely from war, dictatorship and economic sanctions. (Our fear for Iraqi civilians increases when we recall the lack of respect shown for innocent civilians in Afghanistan. U.S. bombing missions there, conducted from extremely high altitudes and with poor intelligence, have caused many civilian deaths.) Second, attacking Iraq would risk unleashing the very weapons we hope to eliminate. It would de-stabilize the volatile Middle East - with unpredictable consequences into the future. Finally, it would further inflame anti-American sentiment around the world and undermine international efforts to combat terrorism.

For these reasons, the leaders of many major church denominations in the United States have questioned or even rejected the proposed military campaign. (See *The New York Times* online, Sept. 28, 2002.) This, too, is probably unprecedented in our history and should give our government pause.

The quotes from Anthony Zinni are taken from Thomas E. Ricks, “Ex-Commander Opposes Iraq Invasion,” *The Washington Post*, October 11, 2002, p. A07.

The quotes from George Tenet are taken from *The New York Times* online, “C.I.A. Letter to Senate on Baghdad's Intentions,” October 9, 2002.

President Bush's policy of "pre-emptive" attack has elicited widespread rejection on pragmatic grounds, as well. Most recently, both CIA director George Tenet and the former military commander for the Mid-east region, retired Marine General Anthony Zinni, have suggested that the planned attack would be wrong-headed. Tenet and other CIA officials have assured Congress that Saddam is unlikely to attack the U.S. or use weapons of mass destruction if unprovoked, but that he would be "much less constrained in adopting terrorist actions" in the event of a U.S. attack. Zinni joined the chorus of voices for restraint: "I'm not convinced we need to do this (attack) now. I believe he is . . . containable at this moment." U.S. allies in the region warn that an attack would inflame anti-American feeling. It will most likely provoke terrorist activity against the U.S. and therefore actually undermine U.S. security.

Within the wider regional context, General Zinni relegates the Iraqi threat to "priority number six or seven" for the U.S. Iraq might have weapons of mass destruction; but India, Pakistan and Israel definitely have them and seem prepared to use them. Meanwhile the Israeli-Palestinian conflict rages out of control. Only creative carrot-and-stick diplomacy can solve problems like these. U.S. military action could be the match that ignites a regional conflagration.



Diplomacy can and must return U.N. weapons inspectors to Iraq, free from any restrictions on their work. They must have all the time they need to do their job, without regard to our domestic political calendars or military timetables. The Clinton Administration admitted to using the earlier team for spying. This time all parties must ensure the integrity of the inspections.

El Salvador provides a good example of how the U.S. can be a powerful force for world peace. As long as the U.S. backed the civil war in El Salvador, it continued; when the U.S. Government finally accepted dialogue, the U.N. was able to broker a negotiated peace.

During the Salvadoran civil war (1981-1992), the U.S. Executive lied to Congress and the American people in order to ensure continued funding for the Salvadoran Armed Forces. When nearly 1,000 civilians were slaughtered by a U.S.-trained battalion in the hamlet El Mozote in December 1981, then-president Reagan denied news reports of the massacre, to keep the military aid flowing. Eleven years later the U.N. Truth Commission and Argentine forensic doctors uncovered the bones of the women and children of El Mozote, who had been herded together and shot at close range.

Watching the Administration change its reasons for attacking Iraq leads us to wonder about unspoken objectives that may be guiding the "war on terror." Is this about controlling oil and gas reserves and distracting the American public from painful economic realities and scandals?

As U.S. citizens abroad in a land still torn by yesterday's bullets and bombs, we oppose our government's plans for war.✚

Sara Stowell is from Proctorsville, Vermont. She prepared human rights cases for the U.N. Truth Commission for El Salvador in 1991-92. Most recently, she was the Field Office Director of the SHARE Foundation in San Salvador.

Dean Brackley, a U.S.-born Jesuit priest, has been teaching theology and ethics at the Universidad Centroamericana in San Salvador since 1990.

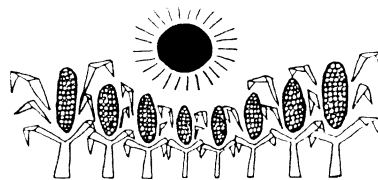
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