

HIV and AIDS in El Salvador: A Discussion with CARITAS' Jaime Aguilar

Jaime Aguilar is Director of Health Programs for CARITAS-El Salvador. Working through the country's eight dioceses, he directs that agency's response to the AIDS crisis.

Salvanet: What is the face of HIV/AIDS in El Salvador?

Jaime: For starters, since the first case of HIV/AIDS in El Salvador in 1984, the trend has increased and continues increasing. In the latest statistics we have, from Dec. 2005, there were about 16,000 cases of HIV/AIDS registered in the country.

Salvanet: And those are the registered cases?

Jaime: Yes, the registered cases, but don't forget that there are many cases that aren't registered for various reasons. For example, if the person didn't go to a treatment center, or the virus wasn't detected and the person died without an HIV/AIDS diagnosis, so in reality we think the cases are even more than the statistics show.

Salvanet: What is the estimate, then, if more than 16,000? How many cases are we talking about?

Jaime: Well as many of these cases aren't registered, we could be talking about around 20,000 cases, because you have to remember that in El Salvador – and in almost all of the countries in the region as well – there is a

great movement of people towards the United States, as well as people who are deported back from there, and this permanent and constant movement of people is another factor which makes it difficult to have a precise statistic of the cases.

Salvanet: So in this sense is El Salvador a distinct case in Central America or does the illness have the same characteristics here as in other countries in the region?

Jaime: Well, the situation is very similar. Nonetheless, maybe because El Salvador is a smaller country, the cases are limited to the numbers I just cited, because in other countries such as Honduras the problem is even bigger.

Also because of the significant movement of people, as well as the fact that in Honduras there was U.S. military base for a long time, which made the disease spread even more there. But in general the situation is very similar in Central American countries.

Salvanet: Who is becoming infected?

Jaime: Originally the disease was thought to be present mostly in the homosexual community and among sex workers, but



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Summer
2007

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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. As an organization, we are non-partisan and committed to nonviolence.



The Face of AIDS in El Salvador

Salvadoran society, like many in Latin America, has had a long journey in accepting the reality of HIV and AIDS in the country.

No other disease has generated the stigma, the self-blame and the fear that AIDS does. That stigma has prevented testing, diagnosis and treatment for hundreds of thousands of people throughout the region. It has also limited efforts to establish a sober evaluation about the spread of the disease and to figure out what to do about it.

AIDS once was considered a "homosexual" disease. True, AIDS deaths continue to devastate the gay community, but 92% of new HIV infections in El Salvador are found in heterosexual individuals. And 88% of new Salvadoran cases are the result of sexual contact.

Another startling fact is the feminization of the disease. A decade ago, the ratio of HIV+ men to HIV+ women was about 2:1. In new cases, that figure has dropped to 4:3. As more women fall victim to the disease, new prevention and treatment strategies are needed.

Immigration has played a role in the spread of the disease. Many Salvadorans have contracted the disease in the more sexually open waters of the USA. But it would be unfair to blame the spread of AIDS on deportees alone; transmission occurs in El Salvador too. Lack of quality healthcare for Salvadorans in El Salvador, and for migrant Salvadorans in the US, has stalled diagnoses and treatment efforts.

Churches have danced an unsteady dance with AIDS. In a previous age, many church leaders feared that by attending to HIV/AIDS victims, they were somehow explicitly or implicitly condoning homosexuality. But as the disease has spilled into the hetero-world, AIDS has become the elephant in the room, regardless of one's moral stance vis-a-vis homosexuality.

In El Salvador, all eight Catholic dioceses are currently organizing some type of AIDS ministry on the parochial level. Some focus on prevention education, others are prioritizing personalized care of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLA). Catholic Relief Services is funding a number of programs specifically for PLA to build self esteem and create economic opportunities. Many churches are supporting advocacy initiatives so that AIDS survivors can be better organized to demand higher quality and more extensive treatment.

Medical advances in HIV/AIDS treatments have increased longevity and the quality of life for patients worldwide. Churches complement these advances by opening space within Salvadoran society to address HIV/AIDS, and address the spiritual needs of AIDS survivors and their families. In this way, Salvadoran churches are helping to lift the stigma that cast a large shadow over treatment and prevention efforts. That's a solid step toward reducing the HIV infection rate and ensuring longer, fuller lives for survivors of the disease.

--Jason Wallach, Editor

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actually the disease is more widespread among heterosexual people than homosexuals. We have some official statistics from the Health Ministry which show that as of December 2005, 92% of those infected with HIV/AIDS were heterosexuals, and the rest were bi-sexuals and homosexuals.

Salvanet: Is the problem of HIV/AIDS considered an epidemic?

Jaime: If we look at it from the point of view of mortality rate, the mortality has gone down, but it is still considered an epidemic because of the great number of cases.

Salvanet: I read somewhere that it is not a general epidemic, but rather an epidemic specific to certain groups.

Jaime: In terms of ages the group between 25 and 59 is where the disease most frequently occurs, yes, it is considered an epidemic because including on a worldwide level it is a pandemic because it has spread throughout practically every country. Here in El Salvador, even though it's true that the mortality rate has diminished, the infection rate has gone up. This is very important –thanks to treatment, the mortality rate has gone down, but not the infection rate which involves the number of people with the disease.

The latter has gone up, and from this point of view the disease continues being a serious health problem.

Salvanet: And for CARITAS, what do you consider the role of the government to be in terms supporting infected people as well as the families that need to support infected relatives?

Jaime: We should acknowledge that there has been a significant effort and much has been invested in the fight against HIV/AIDS, but sometimes however... perhaps the way in which the approach to the problem is oriented is often questionable. For example, there is much talk that much has been invested in antiretroviral treatments, but what is lacking is more work in terms of prevention. That is, the root of prevention is at the school level, or by sectors. At the government level there has been a lack of more prevention than in treatments, much has been invested in condoms, when they could

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Re-Populated Residents in Santa Marta, Cabañas Challenge Eviction Order

The hand-painted sign strewn tightly across the road read: “Don’t thwart the dreams of Santa Marta’s children.” In front of the sign, representatives of 50 families from the small community located in El Salvador’s northern Cabañas province. For the last eight months, they have been threatened with eviction from the land they have worked for 20 years and owned for thirteen.

Community authorities hold a title to the land, which was purchased for \$26,400 in 1994, but the validity of that title was recently challenged in court by the former owner, Ms. Maria Elba Beltran, who says that she never received compensation for the land in question.

Beltran filed suit last September and was able to legally nullify the 1994 sale of three parcels to Santa Marta residents. She has allegedly offered to drop further proceedings if the community pays another US\$100,000. The legal decision rendered the land title useless, but community members and supporters decided to fight. They have vowed to stay on the land and have refused to pay a penny more.

Santa Marta residents are blocking the road to their community because an April 28 eviction order deadline has been handed down by a local judge. For the eviction to take effect, the judge must first verify that residents have not abandoned the property in question and are not complying with the initial order. Community members believe that delaying verification will buy them time to pursue other avenues to resolve the conflict.



Residents in Santa Marta block the only road that leads into their community. The community holds the title to the land, which was purchased in 1994 for \$26,400. (photo: Cocoda)

Over the Mayday weekend, there were no attempts to illegally cross the blockade.

Road blocks are a common form of non-violent protest in rural Central America.

Santa Marta is a repopulated community, comprised mostly of Salvadorans who returned from exile in Honduras during the peak of the conflict in El Salvador. As you can see below, thanks to the commitment of so many, the children of these courageous folks, are benefiting from what has been built in Santa Marta since the community’s return.✚

The following description was written by Tim Crouse of Indianapolis-based Cocoda. He discusses the gains and challenges that the people of Santa Marta have won in their 13-year struggle to re-build their lives in the wake of El Salvador’s brutal civil war. Most of this was possible through community organizing within Santa Marta and the sustained coordination with committed international grassroots partners, like Cocoda. After that, we print the last available update on the situation, as of press time.

“The third class of the first post-war generation was about to graduate from Santa Marta’s own high school, thirty-six of whom are now attending university in the city. Most families now have cinderblock homes with

running water, electricity, fruit trees, and cell phones to communicate with family working abroad.

“No one is turned away from the Santa Marta Health Center, which is mostly staffed by Santa Marta’s own health promoters and includes a physical rehabilitation and manual therapy facility. Santa Marta has one of the best equipped computer facilities in rural El Salvador, connected by satellite to the world wide web. The local radio station, Radio Victoria, is run by Santa Marta youth and has become the primary source of local news and radio entertainment in the region, also with loyal listeners across the border in Honduras. They just

(Santa Marta continued on pg. 10)

Where are Women Today?: PARLACEN Deputy Lorena Peña Talks with *Salvanet*

Lorena Peña is co-founder of the Mélinda Anaya Montes Women's Movement ("Las Mélidas"), a prominent Salvadoran feminist organization formed in 1992.

Lorena was one of three FMLN women who participated in peace talks with the Salvadoran government, which led to the signing of the Peace Accords in 1991.

Salvanet: What are the main challenges facing Salvadoran women today?

LP: I think that our principal challenge is to confront gender-based violence as it is expressed institutionally by authorities and the Government Agencies, workplace violence and domestic violence...among others.

Why do I say this is the principal challenge? Because I think that all these forms of violence put a yoke on women that controls us--from the public sphere, to work, to private lives—and makes it very difficult to be able to participate, on one hand in the struggle for self-determination and equality, and on the other, it impedes the development of our potential as individual women.

How does this work? For example, all of the legislation that concerns us as women, with few exceptions, is violent.

There's a refusal to address gender issues in the Electoral Law. And when we've argued for this, they say, "Based on what? Under what right?" [They say] we want the easy route. I mean, we get a slew of insults; like, women are incapable and opportunists and that what we can't earn in a fair fight, we want the law to facilitate it for us. That is violence...when you try to claim a right and they tell you that you're an

opportunist, and what's more, incapable.

We could go through everything...rape, harrasment, the femicides. Although the penal code was improved, they haven't been able to reform the victim protection system. So the victims that speak out are subject to violence on the part of the system. For that reason, we don't have enough women speaking out, nor is there perserverence [by authorities], nor follow-through which at times results in the murder of the victim [for speaking out].

“... our principal challenge is to confront gender-based violence, as it is expressed institutionally, workplace violence and domestic violence...”

Look at the issue of maternity: we need to improve the system of legal recognition for children, which is part of the women's struggle, actually. [Systemic] violence is perpetrated on women who want legal recognition for their children. The legal procedures are not being applied correctly so that one can do that. There are women who have waited up to four years fighting to legally establish who the father of their kids is. When you can't establish paternity, you can't establish the amount of child support benefits.

So, the women who ask for child support are beggars...literally. I'm going to take on a couple of women's cases and they sincerely have been converted into beggars...even more so when you take into account that the majority of women don't have the resources to maintain a four year legal battle.

Sexual harrasment: it is well recognized in the legal code. However, those who implement the law are too permissive, so very few women actually show up to denounce [their attackers]. And you'd have to check what percentage of them win their cases. There's no guarantee that if you sue someone over sexual harrasment that your case will be dealt with correctly. As one of my friends says: "The Law is applied to women, and men interpret it."

I see all of this in the context of institutionality. For example, labor rights: factories in the free trade zone--in spite of the free trade zone reforms in 1997--continue subjecting women to unbearable hours. It's true that they are hit less, because before there were systematic beatings. But they continue to work without ventilation, there's still harrasment, there's still only a three minute bathroom break for limited amount of times daily. Right?

And the State is incapable of guaranteeing the [labor] rights of these women.

Salvanet: We could consider the case of Hermosa Manufacturing where the company classified workers "temporary," and said, "We're going to lay you off temporarily..."

(Peña continued on pg. 10)

Fact box: AIDS at a Glance in El Salvador and worldwide

Worldwide

**People living with HIV/AIDS: between
36.7 and 45.3 million**

Number infected in 2005 worldwide: 4.9 million

Number of cases within Latin America: 2.0 million

El Salvador

**Amount El Salvador received from the
World AIDS Fund: \$22.9 million**

People living with HIV/AIDS nationally: 36,000

**Percentage of HIV+ Salvadorans currently
receiving anti-retroviral therapy: 59%**

Average number of new HIV cases daily: 4.4

**Heterosexuals, as a percentage of
new HIV+ cases: 92%**

Number of HIV tests given in 2005: 217,748

Infection rate, as percentage of total pop.: 0.9%

Infection rate among MSM: 17.7%

**Percentage of female sex workers with access to
on-going prevention programs: 60%**

**Percentage of MSM with access to
on-going prevention programs: 17%**

SALVANET, a project of CRISPAZ, is published four times a year.

Jason Wallach, Editor

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- † Rural Community Accompaniment
- † South-North Solidarity
- † Alternatives for High-Risk Youth

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Special thanks to Cristina Pineda and Josh Lewis for their transcription and translation help in this edition!

CRISPAZ relies on your contributions to produce this publication and to continue our accompaniment with the Salvadoran people.

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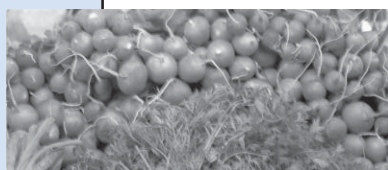
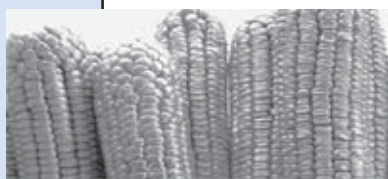
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From the Field to the Table: Building Sustainability with Rural Farmers

Annual Seed Fair Helps Small Farmers Market Their Products and Promotes Seed Diversity



The scents, tastes and colors of rural El Salvador were on full display during the VI Annual Seed Fair, which was organized by the Citizens Network Against GMO's. The Civic Plaza in downtown was converted into a GMO-free, organic farmers' market filled with dozens of traditional crops. CRISPAZ's Rural Accompaniment Program provided logistical and organizational support for the well-attended event.

"The food that small farmers produce is what feeds the people. We need to reactivate small scale agriculture so that the seeds native to this region continue to be grown and consumed," said Angel Ibarra, of the National Ecological Office of El Salvador (UNES).

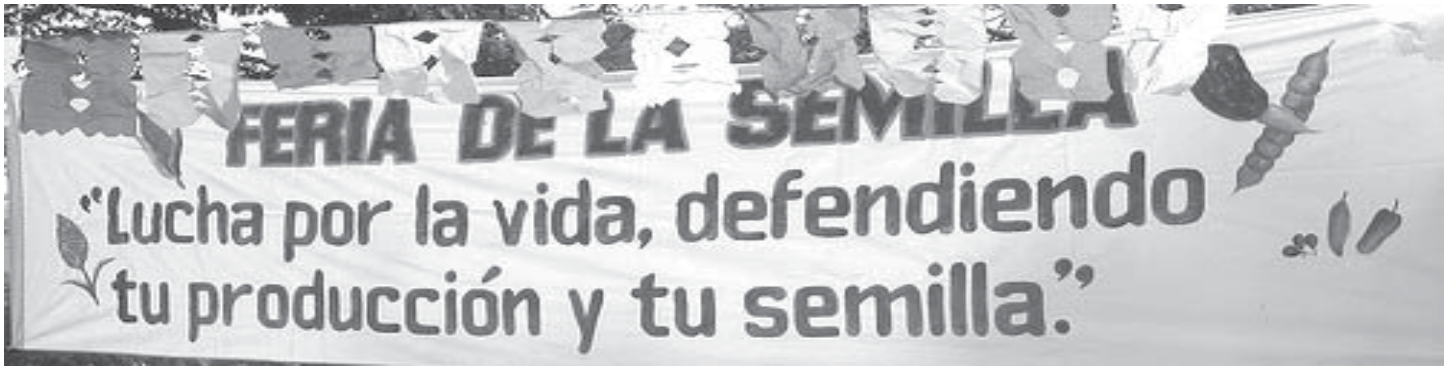
A MARKET IS BORN

Many of the farmers who came to sell their goods are participants in the bi-weekly "Alternative Community Market" at San José Park in the "Central America" neighborhood of San Salvador. Producers have gathered every first and third Saturday since mid-March. The idea for an alternative market grew out of last years seed fair. The market is organized by 13 producer groups that represent about 160 small farmers. The groups are organized geographically.

The success of the market has surprised even the most optimistic of its organizers. Organic fruits and vegetables, which are in short supply in El Salvador, sell out before 10am. A cornucopia of organically-grown products are sold each week including home-baked bread, cheese, natural medicines, grains, corn, sweets, artesanía and jewelry. Home-raised chicken and rabbit are also available.



Many of the small farmers that contributed to the seed fair also sell at the bi-weekly GMO-free, organic market at San José Park.



The market's success has generated its own growth problems, as more and more producers want to share in the bounty. But organizers are clear: not organic? Got GMO's? Then, sell it somewhere else.

GROWING PAINS

"Every market we see more and more customers," said Sally Hansen, 24, a volunteer with CRISPAZ's Rural Accompaniment Program, and who has played a key role in the organization of the bi-weekly event.

"The vendors don't make a lot, but one woman who sells organic produce told me that what she earned here was enough to send her son to high school," Hansen said. "It's a source of income she wouldn't otherwise have."



So far, the market has grown through word of mouth. Hansen said that business could be improved if the market was more widely promoted to consumers that are likely to buy organic. She adds that more education is needed about the advantages of organic production.

"Go organic!" said Hansen, when asked what message the market's success sends to small farmers.

"If small farmers want to compete with corporate producers under CAFTA, they need to have a better product.

"Growing organic foods is an effective way to preserve the local farming economy and the environment. As larger tracks of land are dedicated to mono-cultures, the countryside is losing skilled farmers and losing a way of life."+



Spirits were high. From top: 1) women organic farmers set up a produce stand. 2) Portioning out home-grown red beans, a Salvadoran staple. 3) A farmer extracts juice from raw, organic sugarcane.

(CARITAS continued from pg. 2)

have invested better in preventive programs, with young people and other risk groups.

Salvanet: And how is this information integrated in the prevention programs or the attention programs for infected people?

Jaime: Generally we approach this problem concerning infection in groups divided by sex, and we raise consciousness not only in terms of the question of why a woman becomes infected, but also in terms of the whole machista context. For example in the workshops, we always approach this problem by trying to make these groups, especially the men, see that its not that the woman in these cases is being unfaithful to her husband, but rather that usually she is the one who has stayed at home and it is the man who comes back and infects his partner.

Salvanet: The program seems to more focused on men's behaviour, is that true?

Jaime: Yes, because our society is so *machista*. Often when we talk about the feminization of the epidemic, men jump up and start saying that its because the woman is unfaithful and all that. That's where we try to raise consciousness about this trend. This topic always comes up in the workshops, always, and...the idea is to make people see this. That's why its important to show the statistics, right, and its really a job of 'conscientization' (raising consciousness) that is carried out.

The explanation of why the disease is increasing in women is being investigated, but up until now there hasn't been a profound study that shows exactly why HIV is increasing with women...but still, more or less what we have now is this explanation, that of the problem of *machismo*.

Salvanet: So speaking of the people...because you basically indicated two branches of approach, one of attending to the question of social prevention, and then the other in terms of treating infected people...so what are the challenges of this latter group, of the infected population?

Jaime: The problem of discrimination, of stigmatization, is still very present...in our country still, for example someone who is infected is generally fired, and because of this the infected person hides it, for fear of this rejection, which exists just as much in public spaces as well...the challenges are that more support is needed for this sector in terms of productive initiatives. Maybe this is a job not only for the Health Ministry, but maybe the government as well, which



would have to focus on how to support this sector of people with HIV/AIDS.

The majority of people with HIV don't have work. They don't have any stable economic source, precisely because of their situation. If someone with the virus looks for employment and it's known that the person is infected they don't give him or her work. This is true on every single level – on the domestic level, on the level of industry, even in the state apparatus, state institutions, and in the Church, too. There is still a lot of work to be done in this area.

There is still a big myth concerning the disease, a lot of ignorance, there are a lot of people who think that just by being next to someone with HIV they are going to contract the virus. So its this ignorance that shows what I talked about before, that all of this information still hasn't arrived, that all of this investment hasn't permeated many areas, because at this stage of the game there shouldn't be anybody who doesn't know how HIV is transmitted, which are the paths of transmission, etc. It's astounding when one finds that there is still a great amount of ignorance.

Salvanet: Do infected people have problems accessing treatment in the country?

Jaime: Yes, it's insufficient, there are statistics that show how many people have been treated with antivirals. However, many still don't have access, different types of access – economic access, geographic access to the health centres. According to the states of those health centers, that is in the case of OPS, access to antiviral treatment is around 42%.

Jaime: Another interesting statistic here shows that in 2005, 1,192 people started antiviral therapy. That's 1,192 out of the 16,000 cases. That gives you an idea, though I should clarify that not all of infected people need treatment. There are established criteria for when a person needs antiviral therapy and this has to be kept in mind. But the groups of

people with HIV/AIDS voice this problem: that many people who need therapy still don't receive it, and that existing resources aren't enough.

Salvanet: What is CARITAS' doing in response to the AIDS epidemic in El Salvador?

Jaime: In what is called our 'Health Ministry,' we started to approach this problem since 1999. In fact, it was the growth of the problem itself that gave rise to our attention. We asked ourselves, "What can we do as CARITAS, as a church?"

So, we started to work, initially re-taking work that other CARITAS' had already done with HIV/AIDS, especially in Honduras, with the diocese of Comayagua. And, we looked at the beautiful experience that they had working with young people.

In the diocese of San Miguel, which is in the east of the country, we started to work with this participative methodology with games for young people, what we call 'las exposivas', which is an activity where you create educational games for young people. So, we hold a fair and invite young people from institutions, high-schools, etc...and through these games the youngsters learn about different treatments, prevention, modes of HIV/AIDS transmission. Then, they also start to form groups, groups of young people so that after the fair these adolescents can be the ones who replicate these games, so that they can be the ones who organize these activities.

Jaime: Later we started to extend this program to the rest of the CARITAS, and then...thanks to the support of the CRS, a specific project of HIV/AIDS was started, which we've been working on basically since 2005, it's had a lot of stages. One of the first stages of this effort was focused inside the Catholic Church, because we saw the necessity to, before looking outside of the church, we had to look inwards into our own house. Like I said before, in the church there is still much to be worked on.

It was interesting, because this first stage oriented towards the church was focused on priests, religious members, parochial leaders, trying to sensitize them on the topic because the priests expressed a lot of doubts, because all of a sudden people with the disease were coming up to the priests asking for support. The priests had to face something new that many of them didn't know anything about, and so from these priests arose the desire to learn more about HIV/AIDS.

From there we started holding different workshops with them, for which there was a lot of support from the clergy. There have been various retreats in all the dioceses with priests. The process of sensitization includes learning what is AIDS, what the virus is, how it is transmitted, how it is prevented, and most importantly, what is church's response.

We've taken some documents from CELAM, which is the Latin American branch of the Vatican, where there are some parts that talk about how to work with people with HIV/AIDS, and what type of spiritual support must be given to them. So from the religious point of view these are the themes that have been brought up in attempts to get clergy members dedicated to this cause. Many priests have become active. Some have formed groups where they try to visit HIV/AIDS patients to support them.

We also had the opportunity to co-operate with the Catholic Medical Mission from the United States, CMMMD. We participated in the Central American HIV/AIDS Congress, which took place here in Nov. 2005, where we invited a

number of priests and clergy. They were there in the conferences and the different retreats, and now they support in one way or another the work that CARITAS does with the dioceses. They support the workshops, the retreats, the retreats that little by little have been opening doors. It was beautiful that after their experiences many priests took up the topic of the disease in their homilies. I think this has been a great achievement.

Salvanet: So you've increased the level of sensitization inside the church?

Jaime: Yes, it has increased, and we also had the opportunity to have an interchange with the CARITAS in Comayagua, from Honduras, where we sent some priests, and over there they were able to get to know attention centers for people with HIV/AIDS, which they run.

Interestingly, it wasn't a Catholic Church who ran the center there, it was the Anglican Church, a clinic for people with HIV. This was like a challenge, like saying "...and we as the Catholic Church, what are we doing?." I think that these priests have come away with the seed, because after their experiences in their homilies they take on this topic. So, this has been an experience for the priests, and later it has been continued with parochial leaders; once the priests were sensitized and accept that this topic is talked about.✚

"... the first stage of our educational effort was focused inside the catholic church, because, before looking outside the church, we had to look inwards into our own house, and there was much work to do..."



photo source: Cocoda

(Santa Marta from pg. 3)

inaugurated a science lab funded in large part by the Santa Marta immigrant community in Herndon, Virginia.

Despite free trade policies that have been disastrous for Cabañas farmers, it seems that Santa Marta is beginning to see evidence of the better future they envisioned back in the early days of resettlement during the war. To now be threatened once again with losing their land seems a sinister reminder that democratic reforms in El Salvador since the war may be no guarantee that the basic rights of citizens will be respected where economic interests are concerned.

Some speculate that plans for building a major highway through Cabañas as part of the “Plan Puebla Panama ” development corridor is jacking up the value of real estate. Just 10 years ago, the same land was considered the least desirable land in the country. The former owners in the dispute for Santa Marta ’s land say they will drop the case if the community purchases the land for \$100,000. Santa Marta representatives say they already bought the land, they have no intention of paying for it a second time, or of being forced out of their homes. How justice will be served in the Salvadoran courts remains to be seen.

UPDATE: Wednesday, May 16, 2007: A representative from Santa Marta reported today that the Salvadoran Supreme Court, *Sala de lo Constitucional*, is still reviewing Santa Marta's appeal for protection of their constitutional rights and for an over-turn of the lower court rulings that granted the former land owners right to evict Santa Marta families. The Supreme Court has sent some questions and requests for additional information and documentation to Santa Marta's attorneys. It is likely the Supreme Court will come with a decision on the case in the next week or two. The lower court order granting right to evict is on hold while the Supreme Court handles the appeal.

(Peña from pg. 4)

LP: “so that you come back [when we need you].” It was a maquila that worked to order. So, if there are no orders, they are laid off. And are contracted again in a way that the company has no employment obligations with them, first point. Secondly, when there is work, sometimes they make them work 48 hours over three days. They don't contract extra people. Later, they lay you off. This is an abusive form of counting work hours and it is violence.

These women later go home and have to confront domestic violence without a chance in most cases of stopping it. How many women have been assassinated where the neighbors report that there had already been an earlier problem?

The law says domestic violence is a public crime—which means that when there is a call [to authorities], it has to be followed up...that even when the victim says “no,” the State must follow through. This is so the victim doesn't become the target of repercussions. But when the police show up and there's a beat-up woman, and a man in front, and she says nothing happened, the police leave. They should have said: “You say nothing happened, but you've been beaten, so no...” because that is your job. So the men continue...

So, what can we hope for in terms women's equality on the theme of violence? This is a big question.

Another question is the general situation in the nation. And from this whether other social movements can work more in coalition [with women's groups]. More than anything on poverty, the environment, public services and fees. Women have always been made invisible, or they work separately [on these issues].

Salvanet: Here we have a social movement with a few women participating and...

LP: the women's movement is over there...

So yes, this limits the possibilities of everyone, not just women, right, to be able to confront the type of problem that haunts and reinforces the subordination and slavery of

Representatives of Santa Marta are also seeking a hearing with the Human Rights and Justice Commission of the Salvadoran Legislative Assembly, a body that includes representatives of all El Salvador's political parties, to ask for a resolution that would urge the Salvadoran Attorney General to order ISTA, the Salvadoran Institute for Agrarian Reform, to take charge of bringing about a resolution to the situation.✚

women. Why do I say this? Because if there's no water and we don't question the double shift, then women are going to have the task of carrying the water dumped on them. If they kick a kid out of Bloom (Hospital), the women have to take over caring for him. They don't make the men do it.

If there's less money, women have to figure out how to stretch it.

The more profound point here is that the left, the social movements and the women's movements have not made the link between neo-liberalism and patriarchy.

For me, patriarchy goes together with capitalism and is very compatible with the neo-liberal model. If we understand

“...to me, it isn't right that we don't maintain a constant political presence confronting patriarchy as part of the neo-liberal model.”

patriarchy, where women are subordinated to another person, where being a second-class citizen means covering all of the unregulated jobs that neo-liberalism needs done. You're taught to be submissive and, as such, bear the type of work the neo-liberalism requires.

Look at the concentration of property into the hands of the big oligarchies, and tell me that this doesn't correspond to women's lack of access to property. It is all one system.

Patriarchy and the neo-liberal work hand in hand.

For the neo-liberal to privatize the public services, he needs the woman to take on a double shift [one at home and the other for her boss]. Neo-liberalism needs women to start micro-businesses because they can handle the craziness of unemployment, and now that men can't fulfill the traditional provider role anymore, women are becoming the providers, but without abandoning household management.

So, the small, home-business is perfect, because they work the double shift and make a few pennies right there in the house.

Salvanet: What kind of alternative can we envision for the future of women's struggle?

LP: For me, the principal problem that we have is that the women's movement has turned NGO. Everything. This is a debate that we recently had in “Las Méridas.” Movement building work has taken second stage to the execution and liquidation of projects. What's given priority is accounting, spending money, make sure we are meeting the goals of the projects, which for the most part don't dedicate anything to political consciousness, mobilization, nor real empowerment.

To the extent that the women's movement has gone down the track of implementing projects—more and more assistance-based, like micro-credit, their political presence and mobilization work has decreased. So, it's good to go on March 8 and November 22 and take the streets. Great! We're always going to do that. But to me it isn't right that we don't maintain a constant political presence confronting patriarchy as part of the neo-liberal model.

If we as organized women adopt this route, we'll surely find ways to coordinate with working women and rural women on a higher level so that we'll be able to question, not only gender relations, but also question the areas of domestic violence, labor violations, overall—public violence [against women].

We need to search for ways to mobilize women under the “another world is possible” model, where we become the agents of changes we promote and of the specific benefits that those changes mean for women's lives. It has come to this because the left, in its majority, is male. So, if the political and social personhood of women doesn't even impact the progressive political forces (leaving the right aside), those forces weaken the women's struggle.

There is a big challenge to reformulate the socio/political struggle in clearer terms and question prioritizing the NGO-ization of the women's movement. At root, we need to examine the lives of women and the poverty they live on a daily basis.✚

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