

SOL EL SALVADOR EDUCATION PACKET

Welcome to Seeds of Learning. We are delighted that you have made the commitment to participate in Seeds of Learning's (SOL) Work Group Program. SOL's Work Group Program is one of our many programs designed to promote conditions for quality learning in developing communities of Central America, while, at the same time, deepening your understanding of the rich cultural diversity, educational and socio-economic needs of communities with which you will be working.

Over the past nineteen years, SOL has worked with over 2,000 volunteers in Nicaragua and El Salvador. Volunteers like you, together with Central American community members and staff have helped to build 105 classrooms in 35 schools, assembled thousands of school desks and furniture, worked with scores of children in our sister schools on the construction site, shared, laughed, and learned so much about themselves and those around them. These work group volunteer contributions are integral to the success of SOL's work.

When you think of Seeds of Learning it is our hope you will not only think of the seeds of learning as those that SOL workgroups are planting by helping to build schools and to improve educational opportunities in Central America. We also hope that you will begin to think more and more about the seeds of learning being planted within you as you participate in the SOL work group program.

Working in Central America can be an incredibly fulfilling and life changing experience. But it is one that requires preparation and reflection. The social and economic realities of the country you will visit will undoubtedly call forth questions, reactions, and confusion. You will be prompted to analyze some of the overall as well as every day causes of the pervasive poverty that you will witness. These conditions are a product of a history that has been determined by geography, culture, politics, economics, international relations, among other social forces.

Seeds of Learning staff have developed this packet to assist you in preparing for your SOL volunteer experience. The materials are intended to be a tool for you to learn more about the country where you will be volunteering. While some work group leaders may use it to lead pre-departure meetings, as well as in-country meetings; others may not. Whether with the rest of the group, or individually, we encourage you to read thru it, and reflect on the questions with your group, friends, or yourself.

We ask that you read all of the recommended readings as preparation for the pre-departure meetings and discussions. These will help you gain a basic understanding of the country you will visit and help contextualize your experience there. It has consistently been our experience that the more people educate themselves before they travel, the richer their experience will be.

It is our hope that you will find these questions and the following packet of educational materials useful in enriching your Seeds of Learning experience. We appreciate and welcome your feedback to help us improve our Work Group Education Program. Thank you for joining a SOL work group and helping SOL to fulfill its mission in Central America.

Mil Gracias- The SOL Staff

Seeds of Learning Education Packet

EL SALVADOR

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SECTION A – History, Politics and the Struggle for Social Justice

Recommended Readings:

- (1) **A Brief Narrative History of El Salvador** (see below)
- (2) **Wikipedia:** In depth overview: (see sections on History, Civil War, Politics, Geography)
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/El_Salvador
- (3) **Center for Exchanges and Solidarity**, See ‘News’ link for articles on current news and politics in Spanish and English. www.cis-elsalvador.org

Recommended Videos: (available @ Netflix)

- (1) Romero, a 1989 movie (video—102 minutes) with Raul Julia portraying Archbishop Romero’s transformation from passive cleric to eloquent defender of his church and people (this filmed was financed by officials of the U.S. Roman Catholic Church).
- (2) Voces Inocentes (Innocent Voices), a 2004 movie presents a society of innocent victims who are caught in a blinding cross fire, a life-or-death environment in which survival is a daily struggle. Based on the true story of a now-grown Oscar Torres, this moving film (set in El Salvador in the mid-1980s) follows the drama of a young boy who must choose between enlisting in the Salvadoran army or joining up with a band of guerrillas. Very violent and graphic.
- (3) Hombres Armados (Men with Guns), (1997) John Sayles' is politically aware and social, religious, political, military realities in this movie, while being generic to the region are very accurate to the general sentiment and complexity of the times. Set in an unnamed Central American country, it is the story of one man's discovery of what actually happened in the political history of his nation, and what happened to his students.

A Brief Narrative History of El Salvador by John Donnelly (*revised* November 2007)

Introduction

El Salvador is the smallest and most densely populated country in Central America. Approximately the same size as Massachusetts, it has a population of 6 million. “El Salvador”—the name still evokes images of the brutal civil war fought throughout the 1980s, and finally halted by Peace Accords signed in 1992. Today, El Salvador is a country striving to address the root causes underlying the war and the pressing need for more democratic, equitable economic development. Organizations from the US, Europe and Australia are helping to rebuild El Salvador through programs devoted to education, agricultural reform, reforestation, micro-financing, human rights, and health care. In 1999, drawing upon nearly 10 years of volunteer projects in Nicaragua, Seeds of Learning began working in El Salvador. SOL volunteer projects offer you a powerfully rewarding way to visit the country. Working together with the locals to

rebuild their communities gives you the opportunity to hear and learn much more of their experiences and to see first hand how your efforts are contributing to their hopes for the future.

Colonial History and Independence

When the Spanish arrived in the 16th century to colonize the country they found a culture similar to that of the Aztecs, with heavy Mayan influences. A maize (corn)-based agricultural economy supported several cities. There was a complex culture that included hieroglyphic writing, astronomy and mathematics. The Spanish developed plantations of cotton, balsam and indigo. Throughout the 1700s agriculture boomed, but a wealthy elite of 14 European families (still known today as “the 14 families”) maintained control of most of the land, which was farmed by enslaved indigenous people or slaves imported from Africa.

Following Napoleon’s invasion of Spain, El Salvador finally gained independence in 1821. However, independence did not alter the dynamics of highly concentrated land ownership. During the last half of the 19th century, synthetic dyes undermined the indigo market, and coffee became the leading sector of the economy. By the 20th century, 95% of El Salvador’s income came from coffee exports, but only 2% of the population controlled that wealth and income. Intermittent efforts and rebellions by the poor majority to redress El Salvador’s social and economic injustices were met with severe repression.

A Profile of El Salvador as an Economically Underdeveloped Country Today: Neo-Colonialism

Similar to most poor, non-industrial countries, the dynamics of imperialism and colonialism created strong dualistic structures of inequalities in wealth and power in El Salvador. As in neighboring Nicaragua and Guatemala, agricultural land continues to be tightly held by a wealthy elite. With little access to agricultural land, and to the resources that are needed to make raw land productive, El Salvador’s masses of peasants have been trapped in a cycle of deepening poverty. Today, more than 70 percent of El Salvador’s inhabitants live in poverty.

As El Salvador has become more and more integrated into the global economy, the huge majority of peasants have been driven into increasing landlessness, marginalization, and new forms of wage-slavery in agro-export plantation crops (coffee, sugar, cotton, cattle). These same dynamics have contributed to a massive environmental crisis (deforestation, erosion) in El Salvador.

Within the past decade, El Salvador has tried to compete with many other poor, developing countries to provide multinational corporations with low-wage “free trade zones” in textiles and clothing assembly—so-called “sweatshop factories” (check the labels on your clothes to see where they have been made—e.g., Gap, Fruit of the Loom, etc.!). In short, El Salvador’s own domestic markets have been too poor, and wealth has been too inequitably distributed, to stimulate much internal economic development that meets the basic needs of the people. Despite periods of strong, export-led growth, the gains of economic growth have not “trickled down” to the masses, but, instead, “trickled up” to the wealthy elite and foreign-based multinational corporations.

Thus, as in most poor, economically underdeveloped countries, the primary roots of El Salvador’s social conflict and struggle for revolutionary changes are located in the internal

dynamics of highly unequal and unjust socio-economic structures and conditions. The next section provides a brief historical narrative of the revolutionary struggles in El Salvador that have attempted to redress these conditions, starting with the early 1930s, with special attention to the horrendous civil war throughout the 1980s, up to the present.

Evolution of the Struggle to Overcome Poverty and Injustice in El Salvador—A Brief Accounting of Significant Events, 1930s –2000

1930s _ La *Matanza* (Massacre) of 1932. El Salvador’s first popular movement for revolutionary change followed on the heels of the stock market crash of 1929 and the subsequent plummeting of coffee prices. In January 1932, Augustin Farabundo Martí, a founder of the Central American Socialist party, led an uprising of peasants and Indians pushed off their lands by the coffee-exporting oligarchs. The military responded by systematically killing anyone who looked Indian or supported the uprising. More than 30,000 were massacred. Martí was arrested and executed by firing squad; his name and spirit were adopted by the FMLN guerillas in 1980 (*Farabundo Martí Liberacion Nacional*).

_ **Next six decades of continuous military-controlled regimes (1930s-1980s):** “state-terror” used to suppress any popular expression or organization for greater access to land, for better wages (union organizing), and for an end to military repression.

1950s _ **Increasing marginalization of poor majority** as the economy became more commercially integrated into agro-export markets (coffee, cotton, sugar, cattle) and peasants were forced off their meager landholdings.

_ A democratically elected reformist (socialist) government in **Guatemala** that was beginning to implement land reforms, including the redistribution of banana plantation lands owned by United Fruit Co., is overthrown by a **1954 U.S./CIA-sponsored military coup d’etat**.

1960s _ **Fidel Castro-led Cuban Revolution**, 1959.

_ **President Kennedy’s Alliance for Progress:** Latin American elites were coaxed by promises of US aid to implement some “top-down” land- and tax-reforms to head off more Cuban-style revolutions. 1961 **Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba** to overthrow Castro ended in failure. By 1965, the Alliance for Progress had “lost its way” with the U.S. military invasion of Dominican Republic to restore “stability” after land reforms initiated by President Juan Bosch.

_ **“Liberation Theology” within the Catholic Church:** Latin America’s highly dualistic structures of inequalities in wealth and power were identified as “sinful social structures” by the 1968 Bishops Conference in Colombia; “the Church’s “preferential option for the poor” is declared. New **“Christian-based communities”** began to mobilize popular participation through worship, study and consciousness-raising, and social action to address poverty and injustice. Note: Haiti’s President Aristide, a former priest, was a leading practitioner of liberation theology.

_ Soccer War, 1969: Throughout the 1960s, El Salvador's failing economy and severe overpopulation drove hundreds of thousands of Salvadorans to cross illegally into Honduras seeking work. In 1969, allegations of Honduran mistreatment of Salvadoran immigrants were raised just as a World Cup soccer match between the two countries was being played. National rivalries and passions escalated to an absurd level that resulted in El Salvador invading Honduran territory and bombing its airports. The "war" lasted less than 100 hours, but relations between the two neighbors remained hostile over the next decade.

1970s **_ Increasing landlessness, poverty, unemployment:** With increased popular mobilization and guerilla activity, the government responded by unleashing "death squads" which murdered, tortured, kidnapped, or "disappeared" thousands of Salvadorans—especially teachers, students, priests, and those active in peasant organizations and workers' unions.

_ Fraudulent elections: Military-controlled governments manipulated and altered elections to retain their image as "elected governments" (with United States support); civilian politicians were forced into exile or were murdered.

_ 1977: Jesuit priest Father Grande killed by "death squad", the first of seven priests killed in next two years; more than 200 peaceful protestors were gunned down by army during demonstration in San Salvador; the Catholic Church boycotted inauguration of newly "elected" president, General Romero.

_ 1979: Longstanding Somoza military dictatorship in Nicaragua was overthrown by **Sandinista Revolution**. President Carter was accused by presidential candidate Reagan of "losing" Nicaragua because of his administration's foreign policy emphasis on human rights.

1980s **_ El Salvador Archbishop Oscar Romero** requested that President Carter halt U.S. foreign aid to military government/death squads. Salvadoran soldiers are told by Romero not to obey orders to kill peaceful protestors. Archbishop Oscar Romero was **assassinated** by an army "death squad" while saying Mass, March 1980. [You may wish to rent movie video "Romero" with Raul Julia depicting Romero's life and the events leading up to his assassination—see references at end]

_ Civil war: Following Romero's assassination: Centrist politicians were forced into exile or killed by death squads as leftist political opposition joined guerrilla groups in **armed struggle**. The Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (**FMLN**) coordinated a coalition of 5 leftist groups. FMLN guerillas gained control of areas in north and east of El Salvador, blowing up bridges, destroying power lines and burning coffee plantations in an effort to shut down the country's economy.

_ Four U.S. Maryknoll nuns raped and killed by Salvadoran Army units near airport (December, 1980); U.S. military aid suspended temporarily.

_ President Ronald Reagan elected. Hoping to erase the stigma of U.S. defeat in Vietnam, alarmed by Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua, and arguing the U.S. "must draw the line against Communist aggression in our backyard," a **massive escalation of U.S. military aid is resumed**. Between 1981 and 1992, Reagan and Bush administrations disbursed \$6 billion in foreign aid to "stabilize" El Salvador's military-dominated governments. More than ¾ of U.S. aid was war-

related assistance was in the form of military equipment, field advisors, and CIA and DOD counter-insurgency intelligence development

_ 1981: “Scorched earth” operations and massacres by U.S.-equipped and trained Salvadoran military units: More than 1000 peasant civilians, including babies and children, were massacred by U.S.-trained special Salvadoran army unit; (“Atlatl Battalion”) in El Mozote [see, especially, Mark Danner, “The Truth of El Mozote”—reference at end]. In Chalatenango, the village of Las Minas (where SOL helped build two schools in 1999-00), and other surrounding villages, were destroyed by the Salvadoran army, assisted by U.S.-provided helicopters and planes.

_ 1982: A new ultra-rightist, anti-Communist political party, ARENA (National Republican Alliance), was formed by **Army officer Robert D’Abuisson**; he was known as **organizer of secret “death squads”** in the Army, and linked to Archbishop Romero’s assassination.

_ 1980-89: “Death Squads” tortured, murdered, “disappeared” tens of thousands of civilian, non-combatants suspected of “leftist leanings” --students, teachers, peasants, union organizers, priests and church workers, human-rights workers, judges. Amnesty International, and later the UN Truth Commission in El Salvador (see 1994 below), documented what the U.S. government repeatedly denied: the “death squads” were not simply right-wing extremists, but were made up of regular army and police agents under orders of superior officers in the central chain of command. Moreover, the emergence of the death squads in El Salvador, and elsewhere throughout Latin America, was directly related to U.S. Army counterinsurgency intelligence and army/police training programs.

_ In addition to massive U.S. military aid, the U.S. government sponsored so-called **“democratization programs” of presidential elections and land reform.** These programs aimed at creating some image of legitimacy for the centrist Christian Democratic Party government of President Duarte (1983-88), and to obtain U.S. Congressional support for more military aid. Given the Reagan Administration’s priority to defeating the FMLN militarily, the democratization programs soon became an integral part of the U.S. military policy, and assumed the character of the “reform-with-pacification-or-repression” model pursued by the U.S. in Vietnam. In 1988, the right-wing ARENA party defeated the centrist PDC, and proceeded to escalate the military repression and to reverse the partial land reforms.

_ 1989: FMLN made a peace proposal by offering to give up armed struggle along with previous demands to share power in a transition government, and to participate in 1989 elections *if* they were postponed for 6 months. Thinking that the FMLN guerrillas had lost steam and could eventually be defeated, the proposal was rejected by the ARENA government; the FMLN then called for a boycott of the March election.

_ FMLN launched a major military offensive in the capital city of San Salvador that surprised and embarrassed the Salvadoran military; the military retaliated with aerial bombardment of poorer neighborhoods in the city.

_ Soldiers from the elite Atlacatl battalion murdered six Jesuit priests of El Salvador's University of Central America in their residence, along with their housekeeper and daughter. U.S. Congress suspended one-half of U.S. military aid package to El Salvador.

1990s **_ Economic decline and stagnation.** By 1990, El Salvador's per capita income had fallen to one-fourth of the 1980 level and was barely above the 1960 per capita income level. Unemployment reached more than 50%, and nearly 70% of the population was living in absolute poverty unable to meet their most basic, subsistence needs. Nearly one-third of the 5.5 million population had been internally displaced or forced to flee the country because of the war. Over a million refugees came to the U.S., and their remittances of income back to family members became the major source of El Salvador's foreign earnings.

_ 1992 Peace Accords are signed to end the civil war following two years of United Nations-mediated negotiations between the FMLN and the government. The Peace Accords called for (1) the FMLN to disarm and demobilize, and to become recognized as a legal opposition political party; (2) the Army to demobilize and to eliminate especially those major army and national police units most directly linked to the death squad networks; (3) creating a new national civil police force to guarantee human rights; (4) land resettlements and reforms; (5) reform of the judicial system and the electoral system; and (6) a UN-appointed "Commission on the Truth of El Salvador" to investigate the massacres and human rights abuses in the 1980s. **_ An estimated 75,000 people were killed during the war.** The U.S. government donated a staggering US\$6 billion to the Salvadoran governments' war efforts, despite knowledge of repeated human rights atrocities carried out by the military. The **UN Truth Commission concluded** in its 1993 report that 85-90% of all human rights violations can be attributed to the Salvadoran Army and national police. El Salvador's President Cristiani from the ARENA party called for an immediate general amnesty for war criminals. No high-ranking military or police officers have been tried or convicted for any of their massive human rights atrocities against civilians.

_ 1994: First post-civil war elections ("Election of the Century") were held in March in which all political factions and forces, from left to right, agreed to participate. The new civilian police force were deployed, and backed up by UN and other international election observers (including the author of this briefing paper!). Although the FMLN's presidential candidate lost to the ARENA party's candidate, the FMLN established itself as the leader among the leftist opposition parties. In 1997 and 1999 elections, the FMLN gained significant political influence, winning a majority of seats in the national congress, and many important mayoral races, including the capital, San Salvador. Today, the FMLN governs a greater percentage of the population than ARENA. However, ARENA has continued to control the powerful presidential office.

2000+ **_ Nearly 15 years after the Peace Accords were negotiated:** Despite some improvements in El Salvador's export economy, there has been little "trickle down." Many Salvadorans consider the current situation to be no better than it was before the civil war. Unemployment, widespread poverty, disgruntled ex-combatants and a proliferation of guns in the country have led to high homicide rates—just one of the reasons why nearly 30% of Salvadorans still live abroad. Efforts to provide land, jobs, and credit to many former members of the military and the guerrilla forces have gone more slowly than planned. Many peasants who received land transfers had to pay for them with loans; subsequent indebtedness, including housing debt, has led to foreclosures on

many small farms. The hope of many is that the FMLN political party will gain more political power through elections and popular mobilization to accelerate the reform programs

_ Meanwhile, the **ARENA-dominated national government** has enthusiastically adopted neoliberal economic policies championed by the United States/ World Bank/ and International Monetary Fund. In recent years, ARENA has privatized the banks, telecommunications, electricity, and pensions. Despite strong FMLN opposition, the ARENA-led governments have (1) dollarized the economy (see below), (2) sent troops to Iraq, (3) been first to sign the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), and (4) been the only Latin American country joining the U.S. trade blockade of Cuba. In July, 2007 ARENA began repressing peaceful protests of plans to privatize health care and water. A new “anti-terrorism” law has been passed and used to stifle social movements and protest, along with another law making “public disorder” a felony.

Since 1995, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have required El Salvador to implement an **economic “structural adjustment program”**. Parts of the program package include: (1) a dramatically increased sales tax that has significantly increased cost of living for the poor majority (a 13 % sales tax, no property tax); (2) the privatization of some state enterprises that has been a boom for El Salvador’s elite, while putting more than 15,000 people out of work ; and (3) the expansion of El Salvador’ export “free trade zones” with so-called “sweatshop factories” that have helped to create more low-wage jobs, especially for women. However, in recent years, lower-wage competition from China has caused significant job loss in El Salvador.

In the capital city of San Salvador, new shopping centers, improved roads, chain restaurants, and numerous gas stations give the impression that post-war El Salvador is rapidly bringing prosperity. Yet **El Salvador remains one of the poorest countries in Latin America**, with a grossly unequal distribution of wealth and resources. As a result, poverty continues to increase in both depth and scope, and the gap between the rich and poor grows ever wider. In 2007, some 740 Salvadorans were leaving El Salvador for “el Norte” each day, with nearly half failing or being deported to try again. Some consider this huge out migration to be a “safety valve” for ARENA and its failure to adopt policies designed to redistribute wealth and income to the impoverished majority.

_ **“Dollarization” of El Salvadoran Economy (2001):** Dollarization occurs when residents of a country extensively use the U.S. dollar alongside or instead of the domestic currency. In January 2001, the dollar replaced El Salvador’s *colon* as the official currency. Other Latin American countries were also poised to take the plunge toward dollarization (e.g., Guatemala, Costa Rica, etc.). In theory, dollarization helps cure several economic problems. It helps to guarantee that bank savings will not be eroded by currency devaluation and to attract increased foreign capital inflows because foreign investors will no longer be put off by fluctuating exchange rates. It is hoped that the economic stability promised by dollarization will curb interest and inflation rates, which in turn will boost domestic spending and economic growth. Many Salvadorans argue that dollarization means they are sacrificing national economic sovereignty. With dollarization a country gives up its monetary policy and allows it to be directed by the U.S. Federal Reserve acting to shape monetary (dollar) policy in the U.S. Without the ability to print its own currency, dollarized economies are virtual hostages to U.S. monetary policy, thereby losing the ability to dampen domestic economic recessions. The FMLN has opposed El Salvador’s dollarization

while the ARENA party has supported it as part of its overall embrace of globalization and neo-liberal (free-market) policies.

Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA): This free trade agreement adopted by the ARENA government over the strong opposition of the FMLN in 2005 boosted El Salvador's maquila apparel assembly export sector and parts of agriculture, while granting extensive intellectual property rights to global corporations. CAFTA advocates argue it will diversify the economy, bring jobs to El Salvador and industrialize the workforce. Crucial objections to CAFTA are that it provides no support for labor unions, does not guarantee even minimal working conditions, contains no protection for the environment and will put El Salvador's small farmers out of business by allowing cheaper corn and beans to come in from heavily U.S.-subsidized U.S. farmers.

SOL's volunteer workgroups not only build schools in rural areas neglected by the government, but also provide volunteers with powerfully rewarding opportunities to work in solidarity with peasants as they struggle to rebuild their lives and communities. Volunteers sometimes wonder if Salvadorans feel resentment for the way that they have suffered from the U.S.-assisted Salvadoran military during the 1980s. Fortunately, the answer is "no": most Salvadorans graciously are able to differentiate between neighbors and friends from the North and the past policies of our governments. They are very friendly and will warmly welcome you into their communities and homes.

John Donnelly retired from Washington State University in 1998 as professor of economics and associate director of international programs. He and his wife have participated in four Seeds of Learning workgroups to El Salvador. In 1994, he was a member of the U.S. Citizen Electoral Observer Mission monitoring El Salvador's first post-war election. He also has served on SOL's Board of Directors. E-mail address: donnelly2@sbcglobal.net Note: Some of this overview is drawn from the Lonely Planet World Guide, El Salvador.

SECTION A - Questions to Consider

- 1) You are asked to give a brief history the U.S. relationship with El Salvador, highlighting changes and shifts in U.S. involvement with El Salvador. What would you highlight or emphasize in your brief report?
- 2) How do you think U.S. free trade policies, foreign aid, and military assistance policies have impacted the economic and political development of El Salvador and Nicaragua? For better or for worse?
- 3) Can you explain how U.S. foreign policy toward these countries has been shaped and determined over time in terms of the dynamics of our own American political-economic system? Do you think that North American citizens bear any responsibility for the economic and political conditions in El Salvador?
- 4) How has the religious community integrated into the historical and political climate of El Salvador? Do you see any parallels between Archbishop Oscar Romero and Martin Luther King, Jr.?

SECTION B - Economic and Social Themes

Dollarization, inflation, CAFTA, trade policies, minimum wage, job opportunities, privatization, migration, remittances, sweatshops and globalization are all themes that have immediate implications for Salvadorians and are important to study both before your trip and while you are there. Read through some of the web links and articles below and then discuss with your group some of the questions at the end of this section.

Recommended Readings:

1) **What is Fair Trade? / How "Fair" is Fair Trade?** (See below)

2) **Report from El Salvador: Why They All Keep Coming** (see below)

3) **Committee in Solidarity with People of El Salvador.** Free trade zones and anti sweatshop campaigns. www.cispes.org

4) **Remittance Trends** in Central America

www.migrationinformation.org/feature/display.cfm?id=393

What is Fair Trade?

Fair trade is an organized social movement and market-based approach to alleviating global poverty and promoting sustainability. The movement advocates the payment of a fair price as well as social and environmental standards in areas related to the production of a wide variety of goods. It focuses in particular on exports from developing countries to developed countries, most notably handicrafts, coffee, cocoa, sugar, tea, bananas, honey, cotton, wine, fresh fruit, and flowers.

Fair trade's strategic intent is to deliberately work with marginalized producers and workers in order to help them move from a position of vulnerability to security and economic self-sufficiency. It also aims at empowering them to become stakeholders in their own organizations and actively play a wider role in the global arena to achieve greater equity in international trade.

Fair trade proponents include a wide array of international religious, development aid, social and environmental organizations such as Oxfam, Amnesty International, and Caritas International.

Like most developmental efforts, fair trade has proven itself controversial and has drawn criticism from both ends of the political spectrum. Some economists and conservative think tanks see fair trade as a type of subsidy. Segments of the left criticize fair trade for not adequately challenging the current trading system.

How "Fair" is Fair Trade?

In a strange turn of events it seems the protesters got exactly what they wanted. Companies like Starbucks are joining the fair trade movement. In 2000 there were hundreds of anti-Starbucks protests staged across the United States. Starbucks was targeted by fair trade activists who were enraged by the profitable company's buying habits, which left their producers in poor countries barely able to eke out a living. In these demonstrations, protesters called Starbucks the "the evil empire" and tried to shame them for their exploitation of poor farmers in the name of corporate

greed. They demanded that Starbucks join the Fair Trade movement. In a strange turn of events it seems the protesters got exactly what they wanted. The 'evil empire' now has fair trade stamped on its coffee! Starbucks is part of a growing trend as more and more large corporations are calling their products "fair trade". In the past year Nestle, Proctor & Gamble, Dunkin' Donuts, and now Wal-Mart's Sam's Club have all decided to produce fair trade lines of coffee. But this raises the question: are the protesters satisfied with their corporate lattes? More importantly, do coffee farmers stand to gain from Corporate America's sudden embrace of Fair Trade?

The term 'Fair Trade' has come to be interpreted differently by different companies. Unlike the term "organic" which is regulated by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the labeling of a product as "Fair Trade" does not have a strict definition or certification process. In reaction to this, TransFair USA, a non-profit, non-governmental organization introduced itself in 1999 as one of the strongest voices in the fair trade movement. They offered a standardized certification process and label to producers and consumers. They also whittled down their definition of fair trade to a few core requirements: fair prices for farmers, decent living and working conditions for workers, workers organized as democratic decision-making bodies like co-ops, and farming done using sustainable growing practices. Along with offering certification, TransFair launched a huge marketing campaign to promote sales of certified Fair Trade products. In the past few years public awareness of fair trade issues and product sales have seen amazing growth.

TransFair measures its success by their products growing popularity. It tells wholesalers that certifying their product with a TransFair label is a great way to tap into the booming market for specialty coffee. According to TransFair promotional materials the certified fair trade market grew 53% in 2003, and continued to grow by 20% in 2004. TransFair prefers to tout their success in sales and not in terms of actual improvements in the quality of life of the farmers that produce the coffee. It should come as no surprise that a company preoccupied with market growth would gladly join forces with the large multinational corporations who are concerned with increasing sales.

In 2002 the price of coffee dropped tremendously on the world market, forcing some farmers to sell their coffee for less than it cost them to grow the beans. With free trade and fierce market competition it seems that even coffee wholesalers like Nestle began searching for a more stable pricing scale, which is offered by TransFair certification. Companies like Starbucks claim they are selling fair trade products to appease their occasionally riotous consumers. But many cynics believe these large corporations are simply trying to protect themselves from falling coffee prices.

Just before the global marketing campaign of TransFair was launched, an alternative fair trade movement had begun. This political movement was started on a small scale by wholesalers, like Larry's Beans, who describes fair trade as "more than an equitable way to buy fantastic coffee from farmers who put their hearts and souls into growing it - it was an alternative economic model," and even "a way to connect people from all corners of the world." Small scale roasters in the United States formed direct relationships with the farmers' co-ops that provided them with green coffee beans. Those involved looked at fair trade as a way of empowering producers, (since consumers already have buying power), and shifting money from rich countries to poorer

countries. These alternative coffee roasters and farmers consider themselves to be dealing in "fair trade" regardless of TransFair certification.

The small roasters who tout their product as being 100% fair trade now wonder what will happen to their sales as they begin to compete with multinational corporations who dabble in fair trade. Many complain that businesses like Starbucks can call themselves "fair trade" while only 1 to 2% of their coffee is actually fair trade certified. Others worry about what will happen when fair trade is no longer a hot topic and big producers decide to move on to some other trend in novelty coffee. During the 2005 Future of Fair Trade Conference the leaders in the industry were divided. Some sellers welcomed the increase in fair trade sales. They hoped to ride on the coattails of what they expect to be an expensive marketing campaign launched by corporate coffee to promote their new 'socially conscious' line. Others who consider themselves purists decided to break away from TransFair USA and a certification process they no longer believe marks an alternative to traditional trade.

If current figures in market growth continue, fair trade will continue to grow in popularity within the United States. The effect of a growing number of "Fair Trade" consumer options is yet to be seen. At this point the Fair Trade movement is still relatively young and even dedicated companies that work directly with farmers in other countries have had difficulty measuring the effect fair trade has had on the local farming communities they hope to aid and empower. The biggest change has been in the level of awareness consumers are being encouraged to have. For decades most Americans have bought products without considering where they came from or how the global economy that brought them cheaper prices effects the producers on the other end of the economic spectrum. At this point, changes in farming communities are slow to develop, and many hope that as the fair trade spreads consumers will start to think... "If this coffee is considered fair trade what is my chocolate, cereal, gasoline, clothing,... are they unfair trade?" and they will start to seek out more alternative products.

Source: <http://www.globalenvision.org/library/15/833> October 26, 2005

Report from El Salvador: Why They All Keep Coming

By Alexandra Early

Having just spent time south of the border in a poor country whose major export is people, I've seen firsthand what's driving people north – and why conventional political solutions aren't going to deter desperate Salvadorans from coming to the U.S. Largely missing from this year's campaign is any serious reappraisal of our foreign, military, and trade policies that have forced millions Latin Americans to uproot themselves and seek opportunities for a better life far from home.

On the presidential campaign trail, even free trade critics provided little public education about the link between corporate globalization, trade deregulation, and the resulting forced relocation of people, in both hemispheres. For example, while courting blue-collar workers in farm states and the rust belt (often one and the same these days), Edwards frequently denounced the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) – and its new Central American counterpart, CAFTA – as “trade laws that send American jobs overseas”. In Iowa, Michigan, and Ohio, free trade has fallen into disfavor because it threatens local manufacturing in rural communities already so economically depressed that some are becoming depopulated. As Lorri Brouer, a middle-aged Iowa Falls gift shop owner, asked a *Boston Globe* reporter in January: “Who’s

going to turn off the lights when we grow old and die, because all the young people are going away?”

In my recent travels in the Salvadoran countryside, I heard Lorri Brouer’s fearful refrain echoed in many small villages (where the absence of people between the age of 25 and 55 is often quite noticeable). In one remote farming community in Usulután, the remaining peasants were struggling to survive by grazing cattle and growing beans and corn amid cycles of flooding and drought. Most had settled in the region after being made refugees by El Salvador’s 12-year civil war. Some had served as combatants against the government forces, which received \$4 billion in U.S. counterinsurgency aid during the 1980s. Because most residents still support the left, the right-wing Republican Nationalist Alliance (ARENA) government of Antonio Elias Saca has failed to provide needed agricultural assistance and social services (which are made available to friendlier constituencies instead).

The mother and father in the large family I stayed with proudly showed me middle-school graduation photos of their two oldest children. But their pride was mixed with sadness and regret. Their son and daughter had both immigrated illegally to Houston after completing 9th grade, joining the 100,000 of their countrymen who flee every year. With few employment opportunities locally – and not many in the capital city of San Salvador either – the youth of the town “turn fourteen, and then they all leave”, the woman explained. She pointed to the picture of her daughter smiling in her cap and gown: “When we talk on the phone, she says she misses us. She cries and says she doesn’t like it there and wants to come home.”

This forced displacement of people – a human tragedy on a massive scale – is at the heart of the trade agreements. Enacted fifteen years ago, NAFTA established a now familiar regional pattern. It has allowed U.S. grain companies “to dump cheap corn on the Mexican market, while at the same time Mexico was forced to cut its agricultural subsidies.” Poor farmers in Oaxaca and Chiapas can no longer sell their crops at prices covering their production costs. So they’ve joined the stream of six million Mexicans seeking work here.

The Salvadoran economist Alfonso Goitia sees the same phenomenon occurring in El Salvador, where 40 per cent of the workforce is still employed in agriculture. Out of a total population of six million, 750,000 Salvadorans became political or economic exiles prior to the 1992 peace accords ending the civil war. Today, two million live in the U.S.A. because – under a series of ARENA governments over the last fifteen years – El Salvador has embraced free trade, adopted the dollar as its currency, privatized public services, ratified CAFTA, and consigned a large percentage of the population to continued poverty and exploitation.

In the countryside, small farmers can’t maintain their own plots without government support or survive on the wages paid for day labor at larger farms. For those forced to seek work in urban areas, the choices aren’t good either. In the manufacturing sector, jobs are concentrated in high-security export zone factories with low wages, sweatshop working conditions, and union-busting multinational employers. An effort last summer by SUTTELL, the telephone workers’ union, to organize women assemblers at ABX Industries, an electronic component maker in San Bartolo, led to 30 of them being fired and then blacklisted, with the complicity of the Labor Ministry. As is often the case, the casualties of this campaign – when I met them in November – had been forced into the informal economy, joining the vast army of Salvadorans already peddling fruit,

sneakers, toys, packaged snacks, and home-made food items at rickety roadside stands and in crowded central market places throughout the country.

One of the street vendors' biggest product lines – pirated CDs and DVDs – is now making them a special target of local police, trained by the U.S.-financed International Law Enforcement Academy in San Salvador. Where the U.S. once aided and abetted “death squads,” it spends millions of aid dollars today orchestrating a crackdown on any would-be infringers on CAFTA-protected “intellectual property rights.”

Not surprisingly – given such a problematic urban and rural “job market” – I would regularly see large crowds of people at the American Embassy in San Salvador, waiting for hours with their documents in hand, to apply for some form of legal entry into the U.S.A. A recent study by the University of Central America reported that 42 per cent of all Salvadorans still living in their own country would leave for the U.S. if given the chance. Whether you're approved or not, the nonrefundable fee for the personal interview required to get a U.S. visa is \$65 – a hefty sum in a country where the monthly minimum wage is \$157. The lines of hopeful people who snake around the high outside walls of the castle like embassy complex are now enclosed in their own adjacent structure, a kind of immigration bus depot (with a very limited number of tickets available).

When legal entry into the U.S. is thwarted, Salvadorans who can afford to sell any land they own or take out personal loans hire a coyote who charges \$4,000 to \$6,000 for unofficial immigration assistance. With or without such a “professional” guide, migrants are vulnerable to assault, theft and rape along the long overland route through Guatemala and Mexico. In 2006, the Central American Resource Center documented hundreds of deaths and injuries among Salvadorans attempting to cross into the U.S. on foot. While U.S. newspapers report on local fears about Spanish-speaking invaders, the Salvadoran media regularly runs stories on children who disappear in the Arizona or Texas desert or young women who drown when their leaky boats capsize off the coast of Mexico. Meanwhile back home, family disintegration is a major Salvadoran social problem. Departing mothers and fathers leave their children in the hands of grandparents and other relatives; some kids grow up loosely supervised and feeling abandoned and end up contributing to the country's world-renowned “gang problem.” Everyone's favorite local scapegoat, Salvadoran street gangs are indeed violent and a feeder system for a national prison system filled to twice its capacity. And legitimate popular concern about street crime – which has many urban residents afraid to walk outside after dark – is easily manipulated by the right, to further its own program of (civil liberties-infringing) domestic security measures.

Where President Bush and his ARENA allies are actually quite at odds is never publicly acknowledged. In Bush's rosy world view, loyal members of the “coalition of the willing” not only send troops to Iraq (as President Saca did) to bring the benefits of free markets to the Middle East; they also keep folks down on the farm at home – instead of coming to the U.S.—by exposing them to benefits of unfettered domestic capitalism. In reality, El Salvador is heavily dependent on remittances – the earnings of hundreds of thousands of its citizens working abroad. In 2006, Salvadorans sent home \$3.3 billion – which equals about 18 per cent of the nation's GDP. These remittances keep the economy afloat and, by cushioning the impact of austerity policies imposed from abroad, operate as a huge social safety valve. With hard-earned dollars from the U.S. flowing to so many lower-income families and communities, there's far less pressure on the government to tax the rich or corporations to pay their fair share of the cost of

schools, roads, solid waste disposal, health care, and other public services. In another town in Usulután that I visited, a group of farmers proudly showed me the recently improved road connecting their fields to the closest markets; tired of waiting for public works assistance from the government, they had taken matters into their own hands and, with their own labor and funds – from children, siblings and others working in the U.S. – had done the necessary construction themselves.

Despite stepped up repression (in the form of new laws making various forms of political protest a potential “terrorist” act), Salvadoran social movements are also stirring. Their goal – and, hopefully, campaign platform, when the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) challenges ARENA in next year’s presidential election – is to reclaim the idea of national economic development, fueled by much needed public investment. Last fall, thousands of banner-waving Salvadorans marched in the capital to “Defend the Right to Water” – in a major anti-privatization protest aimed at averting a threatened corporate takeover of the country’s ailing public water system. On their heads, demonstrators balanced the colorful plastic containers that women and children use to carry water on their long walks to and from wells, springs, and pumps in rural areas. Local speakers were joined by several North American visitors, including former U.S. Ambassador Robert White and Maryland legislator Ana Sol Gutierrez, who joined the call for expanded access to potable water. Unfortunately, only a handful of North Americans currently share their understanding that publicly funded job creation, agricultural assistance, workers’ rights, decent roads and schools, and other basic services are exactly what’s needed to keep far more Salvadorans in El Salvador, where most would much prefer to be.

Source: <http://www.counterpunch.org/early06302008.html> June 30, 2008

SECTION B - Questions to Consider

- 1) What is the difference between “free” trade and “fair” trade, and the pros and cons of each?
- 2) What do you think accounts for the high and persistent level of poverty and economic inequality in El Salvador? What role would you say population growth has played in perpetuating poverty?
- 3) How are these economic realities directly or indirectly affecting you? As an investor? As a consumer? As a global citizen?
- 4) How do you think that the work that SOL has been doing in El Salvador might relate to the broad economic conditions there?
- 5) How would you explain why so many Salvadorians have immigrated to the United States, or still want to? What are the causes and consequences of migration for El Salvador?
- 6) How is the natural environment been impacted by the development and economic trends in El Salvador?

SECTION C - Culture, Food, and Arts

Read your choice of additional books or articles about El Salvador from the last page of this packet. Come prepared to discuss what you learned and share some Central American cuisine and music in preparation for getting a ‘taste’ of El Salvador on your last meeting.

Recommended Reading:

Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/El_Salvador (see sections on Culture –Education, Cuisine, Music–and Newspapers)

Music: Use the local library or the internet to listen to some Latino music, including popular Nicaraguan genres: salsa, merenge, reggaeton, ranchero, traditional music, and bachata

Food: Find some Salvadorian recipes online and prepare them for your final group meeting. Try to make the traditional Pupusas and a fresh fruit ‘fresco’ beverage

Spanish: Practice some key phrases with your group this evening and try to speak Spanish as much as you can. Use the Basic Spanish guide on the SOL website as a guide.

SECTION C –Questions to Consider

- 1) What did you learn from the additional readings you have done?
- 2) What do you notice about the Latin and Central American music and “flavors” of the art and food that you have experienced so far?
- 3) How has Salvadoran culture, art, music, and food been changed or lost as many have migrated across borders? Consider the deeper implications of losing cultural roots which is a common result of migration.
- 4) What are some Central American cultural influences that are alive in the community where you live? How authentic are these cultural expressions?

Additional Reading/Resource Suggestions for El Salvador

El Salvador: The Face of Revolution (1982), by Robert Armstrong & Janet Shrenk, provides a very readable history of the country, focusing on the roots and reasons behind the 1980s civil war.

Ashes of Izalco, by Claribel Alegria/ Darwin Flakoll Written in two voices, *Ashes of Izalco* is a love story set against the events of 1932 when thirty thousand Indians and peasants were massacred in Izalco, El Salvador. *Ashes of Izalco* brings together a Salvadoran woman and an American man who together struggle over issues of love, loyalty and socio-political injustices.

The Massacre at El Mozote: A Parable of the Cold War, by Mark Danner (1994). An in-depth investigation of how the U.S. trained and equipped special Salvadoran army unit, the “Atlatl Battalion”, massacred more than 1000 civilians living in the village of El Salvador Mozote in

1981, and of how the Reagan Administration tried to deny it in order to prevent Congressional cut-off of military aid.

One Day of Life, by Manlio Argueta (1991—English translation). Exiled novelist and poet Argueta is one of El Salvador's finest writers. This banned novel is a down-to-earth portrayal of peasant life in the country.

Bitter Grounds, by Sandra Benitez (1997) Winner of the 1998 American Book Award, this beautifully told epic is set in the heart of El Salvador, where coffee plantations are the center of life for rich and poor alike. Following three generations of the Prieto Clan and the wealthy family they work for, this is the story of mothers and daughters who live, love, and die... More for their passions.

The Weight of All Things by Sandra Benitez (2000) A novel based on two actual massacres in March and May of 1980: one at the funeral of a martyred archbishop in San Salvador and another along the Honduran border as hundreds of families, fleeing the horrors of the government and the horrors of the revolutionaries, were gunned down. A story of hope and the faith of one 9-year-old boy.

Rebel Radio: The Story of El Salvador Salvador's Radio Venceremos, by Jose Ignacio Lopez Vigil (1994—English translation). Tells the heroic story of FMLN freedom fighters moving all the radio equipment from place to place to hide it from attacks by the Salvadoran army.

When The Dogs Ate Candles: A Time in El Salvador, by Bill Hutchinson (1998), affords intimate accounts of how a handful of U.S. citizens went to El Salvador in the 1980s to accompany Salvadoran human rights workers in order to shield them from the death squads. Hutchinson served as the Director of the Marin Interfaith Task Force on Central America during the 1980s, and now lives in Sonoma, CA.

The University and Its Martyrs: Hope from Central America, by Dean Brackley (2005). Purchase this excellent booklet when visiting UCA in San Salvador at the Centro Monseñor Romero.

Recommended Websites

- 1) Washington Office on Latin America, News and discussions promoting to human rights, democracy and Social Justice www.wola.org
- 2) Salvadoreña Daily Newspaper (in Spanish) www.elsalvador.com
- 3) Latin America Working Group: Click on Issues- Central America-El Salvador- Links, then explore the links www.lawg.org/countries/central_america/intro.html
- 4) CRISPAZ -Christians for Peace in El Salvador. See Newsletter. www.crispaz.org/news/snet
- 5) Truth Commission for El Salvador. *From Madness to Hope: The 12-Year War in El Salvador: Report of the Truth Commission for El Salvador, 1990-95.*
http://www.usip.org/library/tc/doc/reports/el_salvador/tc_es_03151993_toc.html

6) The Inter Religious Task Force on Central America (IRTF): Economic Justice, Sweatshop Labor and Fair Trade www.irtfcleveland.org/Links.html

7) Latin America Working Group: Advocacy group whose mission is to encourage U.S. policies towards Latin America that promote human rights, justice, peace and sustainable development www.lawg.org/countries/central_america/intro.htm

8) Fair Trade and CAFTA websites sharing different perspectives promoting fair trade www.TheFairTradeFederation.org, [www.TransFair USA.org](http://www.TransFairUSA.org), www.Fairtradeusa.org

9)“Enemies of War” a powerful documentary about the history of El Salvador. This link provides a wealth of information and resources related to the video shown on PBS. See the links on the site. <http://www.pbs.org/itvs/enemiesofwar/>

10) Migration Information Source
<http://www.migrationinformation.org/Feature/display.cfm?id=387>

11) Article on Gangs in El Salvador and other news
<http://www.wola.org/media/Gangs/Salvador%20FINAL.pdf>