

**THE UNDERSIGNED CANADIAN ORGANIZATIONS, DENOUNCE BEFORE
THE NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY:**

On July 2, 2007, Marta Lorena Araujo Martínez, the president of the Association for the Development of El Salvador (CRIPDES), a Salvadoran NGO; María Centeno Valle, the vice-president of CRIPDES, Manuel Antonio Rodríguez Escalante, a staff member of CRIPDES, Héctor Antonio Ventura Vásquez, Patricio Valladares Aquino, Clemente Guevara Batres, Santos Noel Mancía Ramírez, Marta Yanira Méndez and Vicente Vásquez, were arrested in Suchitoto, El Salvador, during a political protest to oppose the privatization of water systems.

On that day, riot police assisted by the GRP (a police rapid-response tactical unit) attacked the protesters for four hours using tear gas, pepper spray and rubber bullets. Some protesters responded by throwing rocks at police. Helicopters circled the area, and a military unit was deployed in armored vehicles. Twenty five people were injured by rubber bullets, and 18 hurt by pepper spray. Thirty were treated in the Suchitoto hospital for their injuries, over 80 people were treated by first aid organizations, and many others were cared for by local residents.

Some of the detainees were arrested at the demonstration, but four of them – the CRIPDES leadership and their driver – were stopped and arrested on their way to Suchitoto. All were taken by helicopter to Cojutepeque, and in mid flight some were threatened with being thrown out the helicopter. At a hearing before a Special Tribunal for Acts of Terrorism on July 7, 2007, Judge Ana Lucila Fuentes de Paz dismissed the charges against one of the accused whose arrest had been videotaped, noting that “to be in favor of the freedom of a person is not a crime, nor is advocating for it with the authorities.” And on July 20th, four people will be release: María Aydee Chicas Sorto, José Ever Fuentes, Sandra Isabel Guatemala y Beatriz Eugenia Nuila.

However, while noting that “establishing the origin, family, occupation and residence is an insufficient basis” given the severity of the charges she ordered preventative detention under the Anti-Terrorist Law for 3 months of the other 9 detainees despite the lack of evidence. Laying terrorist-related charges leading to the incarceration of these 9 activists for engaging in political protest is a political effort by the government to intimidate, coerce and silence any dissent against its policies.

In view of these facts, we express our solidarity with the victims of this repression and their families. We affirm the right, which is protected in the Constitution of El Salvador and in international human rights law, to demonstrate peacefully against government abuses policies, including in the defense of water as a public resource. We reject the use of special or anti-terrorist laws to intimidate the public and restrict democratic civil rights, and we call upon the international community to express its solidarity with the political prisoners and to speak out against this act of repression against the Salvadorean people.

For these reasons, we urgently call upon the international community and Canadian and Salvadorean society to demand and support:

1. The immediate release of the detainees; respect for their physical and moral integrity, and assurances that constitutional process will be followed.
2. That the Salvadoran government respect the constitutional rights to freedom of expression, assembly, movement and association. The demonstration in Suchitoto was no more than the legitimate exercise of constitutional freedom.
4. That the Salvadoran government and the Supreme Court of Justice uphold the independence of the judiciary and do not permit any political interference with the judicial system, nor the use of inappropriate laws for political ends.
5. That the United Nations and the Group of Countries who sported the Peace Accords, to verify the current state of respect for the Accords, particularly the role of the National Civilian Police and the Armed Forces in upholding the rule of law and internal order.
6. That the United Nations undertake an independent and impartial investigation of the events in El Salvador, which by criminalizing legitimate and legal expressions of social discontent place political stability and the construction of democracy at risk.

As Canadian organizations and institutions that have been supporting the process of democratization in El Salvador, and that more generally embrace democratic principles founded in social justice, respect for human rights and environmental and economic justice, we reiterate our dismay at these events and support the right of the population to attempt to influence government policy by organizing and demonstrating publicly. Any restriction of the free exercise of those rights is a serious violation of fundamental human rights and a dangerous reversal of the democratization process started with the signing of the Peace Accords.

(see Spanish version to view sign-on)
