

Center for Democracy
— IN THE —
AMERICAS



**Expectations for Change and the Challenges of Governance:
The First Year of President Mauricio Funes
Complete Edition**

With a Preface by the Hon. James P. McGovern, U.S. House of Representatives

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THE CENTER FOR DEMOCRACY IN THE AMERICAS (CDA) is devoted to changing U.S. policy toward the countries of the Americas by basing our relations on mutual respect, fostering dialogue with those governments and movements with which U.S. policy is at odds, and recognizing positive trends in democracy and governance.

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INTRODUCTION

The Center for Democracy in the Americas (CDA) is devoted to changing U.S. policy toward the countries of the Americas by basing our relations on mutual respect, fostering dialogue with those governments and movements with which U.S. policy is at odds, and recognizing positive trends in democracy and governance.

For the last two years, our organization has made a growing commitment to research and reporting on El Salvador. This has included hosting six delegations to El Salvador: for the March 2009 election of President Mauricio Funes, the first national political victory of the FMLN; the inauguration of President Funes; the commemoration of the assassination of the Jesuits; a Congressional delegation and two research trips.

The CDA has made this commitment to El Salvador for the following reasons.

First, CDA's staff and many of our board members have long histories with El Salvador. Our relationships with Salvadorans, including the new generation of government officials and leaders of social movements, provide access to information and the opportunity to have an impact on issues of mutual interest.

Second, El Salvador relates to CDA's mission in several fundamental ways. In terms of governance, El Salvador offers a rare example in which a guerrilla movement, the FMLN, became a political party that joined the democratic system. It engaged actively and loyally in more than two decades of political life after a civil war, and finally reached the Presidency after participating fully in free and fair elections. This twenty-year process of an unfolding political transition, culminating in the right-wing ruling party turning over power to its progressive successor, was done pacifically, without any of the traumatic events predicted by some national and international actors.

A country that is trying to consolidate the integration of all sectors, including the FMLN, in a national pact, can be a model for other societies attempting their own forms of reconciliation.

President Funes has also made it unmistakably clear that he considers the U.S. and Brazil as his main political references. At the same time, he has prioritized diversifying and strengthening relations with all countries in the region, including those considered adversaries of the U.S., such as Cuba. Solidifying our bonds with such nations in Latin America gives the United States a chance to be better integrated in the region as a partner and consequently build bridges to other governments who have opposed U.S. influence in the hemisphere.

The United States has an interest going forward in a stable and successful El Salvador. President Funes is fighting the impact of the global financial crisis, steering El Salvador in a new direction, and is committed to maintaining the nations' close relationship with the U.S. El Salvador is also a key to regional stability, and the U.S. has a stake in its success. El Salvador's relationship with the U.S. government can also be a template for how our nation can work effectively with hemispheric governments of the progressive left. Despite past difficulties, and to the surprise of many, El Salvador has now become one of the U.S.'s most reliable allies in the region.

Third, there are 2.5 million Salvadorans living in the United States. Their presence here affects our economy, our immigration policy, our trade policy, and our relations with El Salvador and

Central America more broadly. That they have come to this country is no accident of history, not due simply to the restless flow of migrants from the South to the North seeking economic opportunity. The Salvadoran diaspora came to the U.S. *en masse* largely in response to their nation's civil war and for reasons deeply connected to U.S. involvement in it.

Fourth, both countries are profoundly tied together by the agonies of El Salvador's immediate past and the security challenges of El Salvador's immediate future. Tiny El Salvador was considered strategic to U.S. interests in the 1980s as one of the final battles of the Cold War played out in the mountains and cities of this impoverished Central American country.

By choosing sides and intervening in El Salvador's civil war, our government became increasingly implicated in the human rights violations, atrocities, and attacks on democratic governance that characterized that conflict. Since the peace accords of 1992, in which the United States also played an important part, El Salvador has been involved in a long and difficult process of seeking justice and reconciliation, a process which has accelerated since the election of President Funes.

Now, another war is underway in Central America, and El Salvador is once again of strategic importance to U.S. policy, this time in the fight against organized crime and drug-trafficking – real enemies that could destabilize the region. Against the backdrop of its own history in Central America, and the implications of this war for our own security, the United States needs to proceed cautiously – alert to the lessons of the past and able to work with nations like El Salvador in partnership – so we can protect our own interests and live in peace with the nations of the region.

During one of CDA's visits to El Salvador we met with a courageous woman, the Inspector General of the National Civil Police. Zaira Navas received death threats earlier in 2010 as a result of her efforts to purge the institution of officials involved in organized crime. The threats against her life ended abruptly after Senator Patrick Leahy and the U.S. Embassy intervened.

This example of U.S. assistance should be one model for U.S. policy in the region: political attention as requested at critical moments to support democracy and institution building, in addition to providing technical support throughout the long fight ahead against organized crime.

Salvadoran president Mauricio Funes was the first Central American leader to visit the Obama White House, evidence of the developing strategic partnership between the two nations, a partnership based on – in the words of President Obama – “mutual interest and mutual respect.”

El Salvador's young democratic government is committed to investigating the corruption of the past, to transparency, and to improving the lives of the millions of its citizens living below the poverty line. But the fight against the desperate poverty that forces Salvadorans to emigrate to the U.S. can be derailed by everything from domestic conditions to transnational criminals.

We must pay attention to events in El Salvador and the region. During a November 2009 visit to the country, U.S. Congressman Jim McGovern said, “We need a true partnership ... to overcome the legacy of impunity and violence... If El Salvador succeeds it will be a model, a leader for the rest of the world.”

With this as its context, CDA is committed to following developments in El Salvador and working with policy makers on the U.S.-El Salvador relationship.

THE FIRST YEAR (overview)

The election of Mauricio Funes was a time of euphoria for Salvadorans who supported him and for the former guerrilla organization turned political party, the FMLN (*Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional*) that made him its candidate. After twelve years of civil war and two decades of conservative one-party rule, the impoverished and violence-wracked country was on the verge of real *change* with a progressive government.

Funes was sworn in on June 1, 2009, and faced an accumulation of dire economic conditions that had never been addressed in meaningful ways by previous administrations. Amidst crushing domestic and economic challenges, President Funes declared in his inaugural address “We don’t have the right to make mistakes.” He promised to form a government of national unity “to govern for all” with transparency, an end to corruption in state institutions, and an end to impunity.

At the time, the opposition predicted a “collapse of democracy ... and chaos.” But as the president noted one year later in his anniversary address, “none of that happened.”¹ Within the context of urgent economic, financial, social and security challenges, the transfer of power was, instead, a peaceful “transition without trauma.”²

His first year ended with a national emergency, as Tropical Storm Agatha slammed into the region. Mindful of the fate of presidents who fail to respond rapidly and effectively to natural disasters, the president and administration officials worked around the clock to prevent loss of life in at-risk communities. In his anniversary address to the Legislative Assembly, the president praised the government’s response: “The emergency services are functioning in the whole country. ... The state has reacted in time ... avoiding a greater tragedy.”³

The storm brought into sharp relief the new political reality in El Salvador: President Funes and the FMLN are truly governing the country.

The president’s first responsibility was to ensure the financial stability of El Salvador. Early on, the Funes administration implemented popular measures to alleviate the economic crisis for the most impoverished segments of the population. In fact, some say the greatest achievement of the first year was the provision of school uniforms, supplies, shoes and hot meals to all public school students.

He and his economic advisers also earned the confidence of international financial institutions, securing loans to stave off bankruptcy and keep the country afloat for the next four years. Capital flight has been partially avoided (although significant amounts left El Salvador before the elections); and while not yet investing, and still distrustful of the FMLN, the powerful private enterprise sector has expressed cautious confidence in the president.

On the left, however, there are suspicions that the president has gone too far to the right – that “they have been robbed of their president.”⁴ And critics from all sides argue that there is still no long-term plan to reactivate the economy.

Security is often referred to as the “Achilles heel” of the administration.

Despite the implementation of three national security strategies over the course of the first year, serious efforts to transform the PNC (*Policia Nacional Civil*) into an honest, trusted and effective police force, and increasing emphasis on strategies of prevention rather than reliance on the “mano dura” (“iron fist”) repression of the past, El Salvador remains one of the most violent countries in the world. In November 2009, the president ordered the military to patrol high-risk communities and play a “dissuasive role” in support of the PNC for six months; on May 7, 2010, the order was augmented and extended for one year.

In its first year, the Funes administration sent concrete signals of change and has acted differently from the ARENA governments that came before them. It has invited representatives of all sectors to the discussion of public policies, some of them organizations that were historically excluded from governmental circles. President Funes has separated the executive function from the official party, a significant departure from the practices of the Saca administration during which the president was also the top leader of ARENA.

President Funes’ foreign policy agenda has been subtle but unambiguous. From the beginning of his administration, Funes made the relationship of his country to the United States the highest priority. In his inaugural address, he referred to Presidents Obama and Lula of Brazil as models for governance, not Hugo Chávez of Venezuela. But his first official act was to reestablish relations with the government of Cuba. Later, when the coup d’ état occurred in Honduras during his first month in office, President Funes was praised by some supporters for his measured response and has since taken the lead in Central American efforts to normalize relations with the government of President Porfirio Lobo, elected in January 2010 to replace the coup regime.. Critics on the left accused him of legitimizing the coup by supporting Lobo so quickly.

Finally, in several historic statements, the president apologized on behalf of the Salvadoran state for crimes and violations of human rights committed during the civil war. Still, independent of these and other multiple gestures, many Salvadorans expect more from a government that used “change” as a key electoral slogan.

For the president, however, the ultimate task is governance, the exercise of power. He must manage expectations of *change*, the promise on which he, like Obama, ran, which is perhaps as difficult a challenge as managing the country’s economic and social problems.

ECONOMY

“Our only exports are mangos, horchata and people.”

Ernesto Rivas Gallont⁵

One year ago, El Salvador was on the verge of bankruptcy.

The Funes administration took office during a global economic crisis and faced an accumulation of dire economic conditions that had never been addressed in meaningful ways by previous administrations.

El Salvador’s dollarized economy is dependent on U.S. remittances from Salvadorans, amounting to 18% of GDP. With the recession, however, remittances fell 8.5% in 2009 to \$3.5 billion, and the Salvadoran economy contracted 2.4%.⁶

The controversial CAFTA-DR agreement, passed in 2004, led to increased trade for El Salvador, but the volume of trade declined in 2008 as a result of dependency on the U.S. economy. The U.S. purchases 48% of Salvadoran exports and supplies 34% of its imports.⁷ In November 2009, the country’s debt rating was lowered to “junk” status by Moody’s, citing declining revenue, collapse of economic activity and “a negative outlook.” Financial difficulties were attributed to “underlying vulnerabilities,” including dependence on the United States and limited diversification.⁸

The new administration assumed power to discover not only an enormous fiscal deficit, but uncertainty as to whether government salaries could be paid. President Funes and his advisers went to Washington, “to the wolf’s mouth,” as Alex Segovia, Technical Secretary to the president, said, “to talk with international financial institutions.”⁹ The commitment of international loans helped avert disaster.

The country has been granted millions of dollars in loans and assistance aid during the past year, in addition to a \$790 million “stand-by agreement” from the IMF to help alleviate the economic crisis as revenues plunge; in March 2009 it was announced that tax revenues were \$600 million below the predicted level.

The Funes administration also implemented popular measures to alleviate the economic crisis for the most impoverished population. Just days after the inauguration, the president announced the “anti-crisis plan” which would become the most popular program of the entire first year. The plan included an immediate end to fees in public hospitals, free uniforms and school supplies for students, a basic pension for seniors over 70 in the most impoverished communities, a massive low-income housing program, and property titles for thousands of agricultural workers. While the lack of resources delayed implementation of some measures, *change* in social policy was immediately apparent.

That said, the Funes government faces tremendous challenges going forward.

“The objective is strategic fiscal reform ... We must finance our own development.”

Alex Segovia¹⁰

El Salvador’s government has inadequate financial capacity for maintaining required levels of government service. Tax revenues amount to just 13% of GDP, one of the lowest in Latin America, and the government plans to increase it to 17% over the next four years. Tax reforms, passed in December 2009, were minimal: cigarettes, alcohol and on some bank accounts. There are no property taxes in the country, and most personal tax revenue comes from salaried employees, with an estimated \$400 million a year in revenue lost due to tax evasion and smuggling.¹¹

El Salvador is considered “one of the most open economies in the world” due to neo-liberal policies under ARENA, but 48% of the population lives in poverty and 25% see emigration as the only hope for survival.¹²

Designed in part to encourage confidence in the business sector, the Economic-Social Council (CES) created by the Funes administration is “very weak,” according to some analysts who had hoped for more, and has disappointed some private enterprise leaders who cannot understand the breadth of inclusion in the council, from big business to the informal sector. “We participate to contribute to the country,” said Chamber of Commerce president Jorge Daboub, “but the Council includes street vendors who sell pirated CDs! How can one discuss fiscal policy with someone who is breaking the law?”¹³ Another business executive added, “We can’t negotiate with outlaws!”¹⁴ Though it may be off to a slow start, many see this precedent-setting effort at truly inclusive dialogue as crucial to the future development of the country.

Private enterprise has expressed cautious acceptance of the new government, but there is “not one single centavo of [new] investment,” according to independent deputy Orlando Arévalo who said the wealthy “have their money in the banks and as long as Mauricio doesn’t touch it they will applaud.”¹⁵

Just days before the first anniversary of the Funes administration, former ARENA president Cristiani, who has apparently invested his money outside the country, declared “only a ‘loco’ (crazy person) would invest in El Salvador.”¹⁶ He was publicly rebuked by President Funes in his anniversary address: This “sad and regrettable statement ... could only come from enemies of democracy.”¹⁷

The question, as asked by analyst Carlos López, is: “Why would anyone invest in the midst of the economic and security crisis?” López asks, “What can we offer an investor?” He says the right will not invest or pay taxes until there is clarity about the direction of the government, “and there is no clarity.”¹⁸

Big investors are “very radicalized against the FMLN,” Deputy Sigfrido Reyes said. “We, the FMLN don’t have any problem with a free market, just with an unfettered free market. We must have a new deal with private enterprise, but it has to be based on respect for the laws, protection for consumers, labor rights and the environment, and investors must pay taxes.”¹⁹

El Salvador needs private sector investment. The country has one of the lowest local investment rates in Latin America, and that will not change yet, according to conservative analyst Francisco Bertrand.

Bertrand believes there will not be any investment until post-war polarization ends. And it will not end, he argues, until the FMLN wins and then loses an election democratically: “As long as the country lives with the myth of communism, the war continues,” he said. “Now this is the worst situation of all! The FMLN believes it won, and the right fears [the FMLN] will win the next election.”²⁰ Fear of the next election impedes the possibility of investment; for the Chamber of Commerce, the FMLN “continues to be a factor of concern.”²¹

The economic future of the country is unclear. El Salvador has few resources. Coffee production and exports are down, the trade deficit is growing and international loans will come due one day. The social cost of exchanging people for remittances is very high, with family disintegration and the resulting economic dependency of entire communities. Will the next generation of emigrants maintain the country afloat with hard-earned remittances and if not, where will that 18% of the GDP come from? Is there hope for a new economic model that will stimulate the economy and generate employment?

Despite severe financial hardship faced by the majority of the population, however, the economy is not the main concern, according to a survey by Borge y Asociados and the ultra-conservative *Diario de Hoy*. Results showed that 23.7% of those interviewed ranked security as their main concern, 22% corruption, 20.7% unemployment, and just 13.3% said the economic crisis was the main problem. Fear and personal insecurity – at least in this survey – trump economic concerns.²²

SECURITY

**Without development, there is no security;
Without security, there is no development.
“It’s a war economy.”**

Adilio Carrillo²³

The scope of the violence in El Salvador is a reflection of the country’s strategic location in the backyard of the United States, along the highway that connects producers and consumers – with drugs and immigrants moving north, weapons and stolen vehicles smuggled south. A deadly mixture of organized crime syndicates, drug/human/weapons traffickers, gangs, common criminals, corruption and impunity terrorize the populations of the region, threatening to destabilize fragile democracies and prevent economic development while usurping scarce state resources.²⁴

According to Carlos Araujo, president of ANEP (*Asociación Nacional de la Empresa Privada*), 11% of El Salvador’s GDP is invested in security.²⁵ There are 212 registered private security businesses with an estimated 23,000 private security guards protecting businesses and homes.²⁶ Twenty-eight weapons dealers have stores all over the country,²⁷ and some 500,000 weapons are in civilian hands with at least half not registered.²⁸

As Kevin Casas-Zamora, a senior fellow at Brookings and former vice president of Costa Rica, points out,²⁹ all of Latin America is involved in the drug trade either as producers, trans-shipment points, entry points to key markets, money-laundering locales or large consumption markets. The drug trade and the sophistication of organized crime networks “have transformed ... political and security landscapes.”³⁰

El Salvador is strategic both for trans-shipment and money laundering. The late Salvadoran analyst and investigator Leonel Gómez always advised, “Follow the money.” Big drug shipments just pass through El Salvador, he said, “on consignment.” Locals are paid to unload and store the merchandise until it is shipped north in containers. “The big profits in El Salvador are in money laundering,” he said, and this involves “a different class of people” than those who provide security for the drugs.³¹

Salvadoran officials have been concerned for some time that U.S.-supported anti-narcotics efforts in Colombia and Mexico are squeezing the cartels into Central America. In April, President Funes informed the press of evidence that the notorious Zetas cartel from Mexico was in El Salvador.³² That information was confirmed by the Minister of Defense,³³ and five alleged Zeta hit men were arrested in late May in the parking lot of a San Salvador discotheque.

New U.S. policy reflects a more sophisticated understanding of the problem and the reality that U.S. consumers are responsible for the flourishing drug market. The Kerry-Menendez bill introduced in the Senate (“Counternarcotics and Citizen Security for the Americas Act of 2010”) is based on a less militaristic approach in the region including support for institution-building and citizen safety, attacking the causes, not just the symptoms in what the State Department referred to as “building pragmatic collaborative partnerships.”³⁴

Administration officials say the new strategy in the U.S. will focus on treating illegal drug use more as a health concern and less as a criminal justice problem.³⁵ Meanwhile, Salvadorans

confirm that drug use is on the rise in the region as traffickers increasingly pay local smugglers in narcotics rather than cash.³⁶

“Just a band aid.”

Salvadoran writer³⁷

A State Department report issued in March 2010³⁸ verified El Salvador’s role as a transit point for cocaine and heroin. The report acknowledged the government’s efforts and cooperation in controlling drug trafficking and money laundering, stating, “no senior government official is known to engage in illegal activities.” But organized crime and corruption have infiltrated state institutions in recent years and, conservative analyst Juan Héctor Vidal cautioned, “they have their own means of transmission, they metastasize like a virus.”³⁹

On May 8, 2010, the State Department announced an increase of \$210 million to Central America for security, an amount considered insufficient by one Salvadoran writer: “Considering the source of the crime and our circumstance in the backyard of the U.S.,” he wrote, “this is just a band aid to stop the hemorrhage from a profound wound.”⁴⁰

Meanwhile, the United Nations drug control agency UNODC opened an office in San Salvador joining INTERPOL, the ATF, FBI and DEA. UNODC Director José Manuel Martínez has said it’s a regional problem that needs “regional coordination” and “operational interchange of information.”⁴¹

Discussions are underway to formalize regional response to organized crime. Additionally, talks are being held among human rights groups to form a regional commission against impunity among the northern triangle nations of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, the region described by the UNDP as “the most violent in the world.”⁴²

“We’re in a war without a war plan”⁴³

“The answer is social prevention, not ‘mano dura’ ...

We see now the results of the bad policies of the past.”

Commissioner Hugo Ramírez, PNC⁴⁴

In El Salvador violence is endemic and the motivations behind it are not always apparent. Some crimes are random, some political, some due to gangs and trans-national criminal activities, while others appear to be social cleansing. Domestic violence is on the rise, with over 5,000 cases reported between January and September of 2009, and 465 women murdered between January and October of the same year.⁴⁵

During the spring of 2010, homicide victims included three teachers on their way to school, students executed on campus, an evangelical preacher shot near his church, several massacres of alleged gang members and the attempted assassination of an INTERPOL agent in the capital. The alarming levels of violence can be attributed to post-war trauma, to historic social and economic conditions and to the complex networks of national and regional organized crime.

The roots of gang-related crime date back twenty years. Delinquency increased throughout the 1990s as the U.S. deported thousands of young Salvadorans, including many gang members who arrived tattooed, without family, money, jobs or prospects other than gang life. According to PNC records, the “MS”, “18” and other gangs have grown to 11,700 members known to be free,

with another 4,250 in prison.⁴⁶ There is increasing evidence, according to the Minister of Defense⁴⁷ of working relationships between the gangs and organized crime, “and that could destabilize the country,” opined Francisco Bertrand.⁴⁸

“The gangs are the social price we are paying for remittances.”

Hugo Ramirez⁴⁹

In the opinion of analyst and former PNC officer Carlos López, the gang problem must be resolved “or we will all go to the U.S.” The gangs control territory, have weapons, a military structure, strategy and coordination, he explained. “They have social roots, they sustain entire communities and are often seen as ‘Robin Hoods.’”

López has met with gang leaders in prison and says many of them are deportees who speak English, “so they coordinate against the nationals... They have another dimension of life because they have been outside the country.” According to López, they arrive in El Salvador “charged up, with a rearguard in the U.S. ... They won’t break the blood pact... They are like combatants and their commitment can be irreversible.”⁵⁰

The hard-line “mano dura” policies of previous ARENA governments did nothing to reduce the violence. Thousands of alleged gang members were thrown into primitive, overcrowded prisons with no effort by the state to implement rehabilitation programs. Now “they live like kings,” according to López, who says prison “is a way of taking a rest.” The two large gangs are separated with “MS” in some prisons, “18” in others. “The state gives them protection, food, and they can leave when they want.”⁵¹

“The gangs shouldn’t be underestimated,” according to PNC Director Carlos Ascencio, who said many youth were arrested during “mano dura” days “just for having tattoos.” As a consequence, some had their tattoos removed and even began to dress up in order to avoid arrest, “but the violence became more radicalized.”⁵²

The prisons are in total collapse, affirmed an activist who sometimes works inside. Most of those incarcerated have fungus infections, the facilities are hot, humid and overcrowded with over 23,000 prisoners held in spaces with a total national capacity of 9,000. Under previous governments the prisoners were abused, and there was often not enough food. In May, two prisoners were killed, and 26 were wounded during riots. “It’s like hell,” Adilio Carrillo said, “but at least now there is the will to change.”⁵³

Director of Prisons Douglas Morales has begun to tackle the problem of corruption inside the prisons by firing 70 corrupt penitentiary officials⁵⁴. Morales alleges that 50% of the staff, including teachers, medical personnel and guards, “are part of the organized crime network that controls the prisons.”⁵⁵

“Half of the country lives under the shadow of death and the other half is permanently extorted.”⁵⁶

***“Yo no me deajo rentear!
I won’t pay the extortion!”***

Campaign poster⁵⁷

Extortion in El Salvador has become one of the most common of all crimes, and the most difficult to prevent or prosecute. Anyone, wealthy, middle class or humble, can be a victim; from bus drivers to business owners to ordinary citizens. Gangs are responsible for the vast majority of the thousands and thousands of cases, but anyone can extort and use the fear of gangs to terrorize victims.

Many crimes, including extortion, are ordered from inside the prisons via cell phone, according to the PNC.⁵⁸ It is estimated that \$700,000 per month enters the prisons as a result of extortion, with eight of every ten extortions ordered from inside.⁵⁹ Homicides are also ordered by prisoners including those of four young women who were executed in Apopa on May 12, 2010 – two were apparently witnesses to a previous homicide, and the other two were accidental witnesses to the second crime, reported PNC Director Carlos Ascencio.⁶⁰

The army began patrolling the perimeters of prisons in November of 2009 to prevent cell phones and chips from being tossed over the walls, according to the Minister of Defense,⁶¹ and the PNC recently reported arrests of participants in a business modifying cell phones to prevent number tracing. Thousands of phones were confiscated in that raid, all this in a country with more cell phones than people.

Meanwhile, average citizens continue to be extorted daily, usually via landline phones, their names often chosen at random from the phone book. Given this situation, many Salvadorans have simply disconnected landlines and rely on mobile phones instead.

There is evidence of incidents of vigilante justice in response to the inability of authorities to control the extortion rackets and homicides. Five massacres of young men in areas around the capital have been reported since February. In most cases, the victims were examined for tattoos before being shot. The perpetrators were heavily-armed, masked men wearing dark clothing, using operational military tactics. Police officials say they have no evidence to prove social cleansing as the motive, but the director of Tutela Legal, the human rights office of the Archdiocese, believes that death squad structures exist and can be reactivated “to assassinate political opponents or for social cleansing.”⁶² There is also speculation that the victims were recent deportees murdered by gangs after attempting to carry out criminal activities outside the established gang structures.

A creative, non-violent civilian-initiated call to action began in April 2010 as posters and banners were pasted and hung surreptitiously around the capital urging citizens not to pay extortion. The campaign uses the face of a low-life character from a popular 1970s Mexican sitcom, Don Ramón, who was called the “rent-dodger.” *La renta* is slang for an extortion fee and an anonymous website calls on people to “shed our fear and retake our lives... Our fear, silence and passivity are accomplices to this crime... We are all Don Ramón!”⁶³

***“Impunity is the main problem... If we don’t fight impunity,
crime cannot be reduced because there are no consequences.”***

Carlos Dada⁶⁴

Of every 100 crimes reported to the police, only three are investigated, according to Human Rights Ombudsman Óscar Luna.⁶⁵ The judicial system was not reformed under the 1992 Peace Accords, and despite millions of dollars of international aid invested in efforts to train judges and modernize the system, it is politicized and dysfunctional from the attorney general’s office on down. “One single person still has all the power, the attorney general,” affirmed David Morales,

director of the Foreign Ministry's human rights office, "and this will continue at least until the 2012 election."⁶⁶

Attorney General Romeo Barahona was appointed in 2009 after lengthy negotiations between the president and political parties. Human Rights Ombudsman Óscar Luna described the Attorney General and his office as "ineffective."⁶⁷

And while the new leadership of the PNC is committed to investigating organized crime with a department targeting money laundering, prosecutors are not following through, according to PNC Assistant Director of Investigations Augusto Cotto. Cotto stated that "the crucial factors here are the attorney general and the prosecutors: there is no specific unit to investigate financial crimes or contraband." Cotto lauded a report from the U.S. Treasury Department noting the PNC's efforts to combat money laundering, but also citing the Attorney General's "low capacity to investigate in El Salvador."⁶⁸

The post-war security force, the PNC, was created as part of the Peace Accords. It was born with great expectations in 1994, but a lack of leadership, resources and commitment, combined with an ineffective judicial system prevented the development of a professional institution; and, in the eyes of many, the PNC has failed the population. Underfunded and in deplorable conditions, the demoralized force soon lapsed into corrupt practices, with personnel from top to bottom participating in or cooperating with organized crime and delinquency. The PNC was "co-opted by Mafias," according to Jeanette Aguilar of the UCA, "by power groups linked with the military and business."⁶⁹

Despite international aid and technical assistance, the PNC never had regulations for investigative procedures, criteria for intervention or even a database of criminals. According to Commissioner Augusto Cotto, the U.S. and Spain tried to help, "but we didn't listen, there was so much pressure every day."⁷⁰

Cotto described the intense efforts during the past year to professionalize and decentralize the PNC and to train investigators. The public does not yet see the change, he said, "but the institution has improved a lot and it's beginning to be felt."⁷¹

The new focus, under Director Carlos Ascencio, is on community policing and public participation, inspiring the confidence of citizens with improved relations. "For us the greatest achievement this first year has been to contain the situation," Ascencio said, "we hope by the end of the year to turn things around."⁷²

"We have to guarantee the safety of the community and the relations between the community and the police," said Commissioner Hugo Ramírez, who added that the media is a big problem in changing perceptions about the police: "There is a permanent bombardment about violence."⁷³

Ongoing violence has become the issue for conservative media and political parties to attack the government, in particular the Funes-appointed FMLN security chiefs. ARENA women from the *Comité Cívico de Mujeres* staged a demonstration in late May 2010 demanding three top security officials be fired for incompetence. "Stop asking me for the heads of the officials from my security cabinet, because I'm not going to give them to you," said President Funes said. He responded to critics saying, "I have full confidence in the leadership of the PNC ... and to the men and women ... who risk their lives daily to protect us."⁷⁴

“We can’t lose our way... I am optimistic.”

Zaira Navas, PNC Inspector-General⁷⁵

Former defense attorney Zaira Navas has one of the most dangerous jobs in the new administration. As Inspector-General of the PNC, she has been designated to restructure the heretofore ineffective internal affairs agency and to oversee investigations of organized crime, corruption, and dereliction of duty in the entire police force.

Navas assumed leadership of the agency in August 2009 to find an outdated and under-resourced institution without cell phones or computers. “All information was taken by hand!” she said. Of the 250 personnel under her management, “only 30% were qualified for their jobs; many of the people have been here for 16 years under a bad conception of the work.”

As designed by the Peace Accords, the Inspector General’s office was under the Ministry of Justice and Security, independent of the police; but, in 2001, the ARENA government moved the office under the auspices of the PNC which resulted in more impunity.

The internal affairs agency includes four investigative units: internal control, discipline, internal affairs and human rights, including practices of violations of human rights by police personnel. As a defense lawyer, Navas said, she saw some cases of torture and disappearances by the police “but now I can see there is much more.”

A Long Road Ahead

Zaira Navas, PNC Inspector-General⁷⁶

In late 2009 – when Navas began to pursue the investigation of Ricardo Menesses, a commissioner from San Miguel – things heated up. Menesses was accused of belonging to an organized crime group, “Los Perrones,” of having personal relationships with gang members, and facilitating drug trafficking during his tenure as police chief in San Miguel. In 2007, he was assigned by then-president Tony Saca as Consular Minister in Washington, but was removed from that position by President Funes in 2009.

When Navas received death threats in the winter of 2010, U.S. Senator Patrick Leahy wrote a scathing letter demanding protection so that she could continue the important work of investigating Menesses and purging the PNC. The U.S. Embassy also intervened on behalf of Navas. “The letter from Senator Leahy had a big impact,” Navas said. “It stabilized things. All this changed the climate and the pressure against me.” Her personal security was increased and two months later the situation was calm. “International support is very important for us,” Navas emphasized.⁷⁷

The police had never been questioned like this before, she explained. “Internally, the agents always investigate the agents, the chiefs investigate the chiefs, and so the cases don’t move.”

Now, Navas says, she has the complete support of PNC Director Carlos Ascencio and the Minister of Justice and Security, and “we are earning trust internally.” One day a week she meets

with people who have problems or complaints, mostly with police “who ask me not to use their names because of fear.”

According to Navas, El Salvador has one of the most educated police forces in Latin America; 80% have high school degrees and 300 are qualified lawyers who should be trained as investigators, “but they work in the streets as agents because there has never been any process of promotion.”

The overall strategic plan for the PNC – the first ever – includes promotions, and, among other changes, a focus on gender. In March, 2010, 600 policewomen participated with Director Ascencio and others in a congress to discuss issues such as sexual harassment, and now all traffic control in the capital is under a very successful *Unidad Mujeres de Tránsito*. “For the first time they are taking us seriously,” one woman told Navas.

In mid-May 2010, the Inspector-General announced that 1,622 complaints had been made against police since June 2009; of those, 151 personnel had been fired “for serious misdeeds and links with criminals,” including four executive officers. An additional 986 were sanctioned. “We want to send a clear message to the population by going after high-ranking officers,” Navas said. “We have begun the process of purging, but the attorney general isn’t responding and this requires international support.”⁷⁸

Zaira Navas said that the police has had some success, but she also recognized that there is a long road ahead.⁷⁹

“It’s not that soldiers act like police, it’s that police act like soldiers.”⁸⁰

Commissioner Hugo Ramírez

There are no short-term measures to reduce violence; solutions over time include regional coordination, strengthening the police force, jobs, education and opportunities for youth, a ban on weapons in public, and more. But, under pressure to control the situation in the short-term, President Funes has called on the military.

By October 2009, over 1,000 soldiers were in the streets under President Funes. A month later, in an effort to contain escalating violence, the president ordered the army to participate in joint patrols with the PNC as a dissuasive force. The original six-month mandate included patrols in 19 high-risk communities, perimeter control of prisons, and authorization to conduct searches and detain criminals caught in the act.

The mandate was extended in May 2010 for another year and now includes work inside volatile prisons and control of 62 previously unguarded border areas called “blind points.”⁸¹

The president has been accused by critics of militarizing public security and instituting a *de facto* state of siege, but the military patrolled violence-ridden communities during ARENA administrations as well. Additionally, the measure enjoys high approval from a fearful population. “As far as the people are concerned the army should be in the streets all the time,” Ombudsman Luna said, “but we can’t be a militarized country ... The police must be strengthened so the people have confidence in them.”⁸²

PNC Director Ascencio agreed. “The right uses this to accuse us of incompetence,” he said, “and there could be problems with the way people are treated by soldiers.”⁸³

For its part, the Catholic Church is divided on the issue. Archbishop José Luis Escobar Alas approves the measure, but Bishop Gregorio Rosa Chávez criticized it as “desperate.” He said it reminds the population of the 1980s, and there have been some abuses.”⁸⁴

The head of the president’s National Security Council, Aída Luz Santos de Escobar insisted the solution to the violence is social, not military. “If we have a bad police force we are going to have a bad army,” she said. “If we don’t take care of social problems we can’t resolve criminal problems.”⁸⁵

***“Violence has to do with the conditions of the people,
and youth are the most vulnerable to a criminal economy in order to survive.”***
Adilio Carrillo⁸⁶

Latin America has the world’s highest murder rate, according to a report by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), and the victims, for the most part, are young people. Among low and middle-income youth the murder rate is 89.7 per 100,000 people.⁸⁷

The report described the public security situation in Central America as “catastrophic,” particularly for youth.⁸⁸ For most young people in the impoverished communities of El Salvador, there are only two options for survival: either participate in criminal activities, or emigrate, according to youth activist Adilio Carrillo who says “everyone is fleeing.” He described the policy toward youth throughout the region as “retrograde,” but praised efforts of the Funes government, including the new PNC strategy which designates 50% of its budget for prevention.⁸⁹

The National Security Council was formed in the 1990s to advise presidents on security issues, but has been transformed to also oversee prevention programs. The council is headed by former juvenile court judge Aída Luz Santos de Escobar who is a strong proponent of prevention and rehabilitation.

Santos oversees funds from international cooperation channeled through the council for programs including tattoo removal, job training, sports activities, therapy for ex-gang members, and work in local communities with municipal councils and classes in prisons. She is optimistic about her ability to promote prevention as the priority: “I’m the only woman in the security cabinet, but I’m the one with the money, and I can be strong!”⁹⁰

SOCIAL INCLUSION

“The population has been abandoned, living outside the law without protection or obligations. There is nothing for those living on the edge.”
Jaime López⁹¹

It is estimated that some 2,000 Salvadorans make the costly and dangerous journey north every month, “in the search for personal salvation in exile at the risk of losing one’s life,” First Lady Vanda Pignato wrote. This is “evidence of the profound desperation of thousands and thousands of Salvadorans.”⁹²

Pignato, a long-time political activist, heads the Secretariat of Social Inclusion, a new position under the Executive Branch. She has a daunting task.

According to the UNDP/FLACSO poverty map⁹³ some two million Salvadorans – 56% of the urban population – live in 2,508 precarious settlements, 58% lack adequate sanitation, and 75% of the youth in these communities lack minimum educational requirements to continue higher education. Only one-half of eligible workers have jobs, and of those only two in ten have decent employment with benefits.⁹⁴ An estimated 1.4 million people do not have access to potable water.⁹⁵

The devastation in November 2009 caused by a few hours of heavy rain from Hurricane Ida exposed the vulnerability of the population: 157 people died and 14,000 lost their homes; Tropical Storm Agatha in May 2010 left nine dead, 11,000 homeless.

The government is prioritizing social inclusion, to transform the lives of the most impoverished, most excluded sectors of the population. “For the first time in history,” presidential adviser Alex Segovia said, “the government no longer functions solely in the interest of private enterprise.”⁹⁶

Pignato reformed the paternalistic nature of the old “Secretariat of the Family” to reflect the administration’s commitment to a social policy of inclusion by reducing the vulnerability of the population, providing access to basic services and job training, particularly for youth and women, “to break the barriers that have kept the majority of Salvadorans on the edge.”

The Secretariat of Social Inclusion coordinates with other state institutions to reduce poverty, discrimination and inequality faced by women and children, the disabled, indigenous and those with different sexual orientations. The challenge is enormous, but, Pignato says, “institutional and governmental change is underway.”⁹⁷

Two institutions working for this change are FISDL (*Fondo de Inversión Social para el Desarrollo Local*) and CONAMYPE (*Comisión Nacional de la Micro y Pequeña Empresa*). Héctor Silva, President of FISDL, says the quality of the work in this institution has changed dramatically, that the objective now is to strengthen municipalities and local productive capacity in one-hundred of the most impoverished communities. A new program, PATI (*Programa de Apoyo Temporal al Ingreso*), provides a monthly income to 15,000 at-risk youth in exchange for community service and training.

The director of CONAMYPE, Ileana Rogel, has been charged with implementation of the government’s innovative, dual-purpose program to provide free uniforms to all students and

create jobs in local communities by hiring women from the informal sector to sew the uniforms. The task is not easy, Rogel said, because many of the women have no knowledge of business plans, budgets and so on. But, she says, “I have seen the joy on the faces of the women now sewing uniforms and earning an income.”⁹⁸

Rogel argues for direct government intervention to change peoples’ lives. “Sometimes they are not prepared the first time the government comes to them, but it can work,” she says, and there are “many firsts.” People tell her, “this is the first time my children can go to school,” or this is “the first time I am taken into account by the government.”⁹⁹

HUMAN RIGHTS

“We will dignify the victims and ask for forgiveness.”
David Morales¹⁰⁰

The Foreign Ministry has assumed a new, pro-active role in human rights, with a commitment to fulfilling international obligations and protecting the rights of all Salvadorans. “Historic impunity is over,” according to the ministry’s director of human rights, David Morales, who said the government will comply with recommendations from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and with the Truth Commission.

The amnesty law - passed just days after the release of the Truth Commission report in 1993 with the approval of the ARENA government and the FMLN - continues to be a source of debate. For Father José María Tojeira, rector of the UCA, the amnesty “is an insult to the victims.”¹⁰¹ President Funes insists, however, that he does not have the power to repeal the law and any change must come from the Legislative Assembly or the judiciary.

A Supreme Court ruling on a case involving the amnesty in 2000 was ambiguous. One attorney, Francisco Bertrand, argues that some historic crimes can be prosecuted even within the law. For example, if the crime “continues” in the sense that the victim was “disappeared” and the body never found, as done in the prosecution of human rights violations that occurred under Pinochet’s regime in Chile.¹⁰² International human rights institutions including the IACHR and Amnesty International have demanded repeal; but in the meantime, all crimes committed during the war remain in the obscurity of impunity – and that impunity continues to impede the possibility of justice.

President Funes made important symbolic gestures during his first year, apologizing to the nation for crimes committed during the war. He was criticized by former ARENA presidents including Armando Calderón Sol who proclaimed, “The state should never have asked for pardon,” and described the apology as “an unnecessary excess.”¹⁰³ For his part, President Cristiani declared “it’s already been done” and said he had asked for pardon in a speech in about 1992.¹⁰⁴

“Pulling back the veil of darkness and lies.”
President Funes¹⁰⁵

Three of the historically most heinous crimes were brought back to light during this first year: the Jesuit murders, the assassination of Archbishop Romero, and the 1975 execution of Roque Dalton – a poet, journalist and guerrilla combatant.

On November 16, 2009, the 20th anniversary of the Jesuit assassinations, the president asked for pardon in the name of the state and honored the priests with the nation’s highest award “as an act of recovering our collective memory.” For me, he said, this act “lets in the light of justice and truth ... and to begin to cleanse the house of our recent history, our house.”¹⁰⁶

Minister of Defense General David Munguía Payés said the army was prepared to ask for forgiveness¹⁰⁷ and suggested “other actors who committed war crimes” should also request pardon: “The people must know the truth.”¹⁰⁸

In January 2010, on the 18th anniversary of the 1992 Peace Accords, President Funes apologized, in the name of the state, to all victims of crimes committed by security forces, army, and paramilitary organizations, and announced the formation of commissions to study reparations and to search for some 700 children disappeared during the war.

Finally, on March 24th, 2010, the 30th anniversary of the assassination of Archbishop Romero by a right-wing death squad, the president said, “I ask forgiveness on behalf of the Salvadoran State for this assassination perpetrated 30 years ago ... I ask forgiveness to Romero’s family.”¹⁰⁹

Both sides in the war have benefited from the amnesty. The organizations that comprise the FMLN also committed crimes that have never been clarified and have received little attention in recent years. Poet and guerrilla Roque Dalton was executed in May of 1975 by three members of his organization, the ERP, apparently in the belief that he was a CIA agent. The execution has never been investigated. The family is demanding to know the truth about Dalton’s death and where he was buried. They also called on President Funes to fire a government official they believe was involved in the crime; the president rejected any action until such involvement is clarified by a court of law.

The human rights community believes the amnesty must be repealed, not for punishment, “but for reconciliation, to know who did what.” If there is one reason this country does not function, said analyst Juan Carlos Sánchez, “it is this: it hasn’t reconciled.”¹¹⁰

“Cabañas is like a small, savage wild west.”

Carlos Dada¹¹¹

“Pacific Rim sowed the seeds that caused this situation.”

Commissioner Augusto Cotto, PNC¹¹²

The first major test of the government’s commitment to human rights and to end impunity came just days after the inauguration with the disappearance of a community activist in the department of Cabañas. The man was a leader in the movement to prevent the Canadian company Pacific Rim from developing gold mines in the department.

Marcelo Rivera disappeared on June 18, 2009. His body was found by his family on July 8th at the bottom of a well with signs of torture. The action and inaction of the police and prosecutors on this case and several other murders in Cabañas, all related to mining, illustrate the difficulty of reforming corrupt, inept, and politicized security and judicial institutions.

Pacific Rim arrived in Cabañas in the mid-90s, promoting “green mining,” and promising jobs and money for the communities. After visiting a similar project across the border in Honduras in 2005, local activists began to understand the impact of mining on the people, the water supply and the environment, and organized to oppose the project.

The controversy escalated, dividing the community. Supporters of Pacific Rim, including several local ARENA mayors, were pitted against social activists who were also protesting alleged election fraud. During 2009, workers at the community radio station received death threats, a priest was attacked, and several more people murdered under mysterious circumstances.

To date, the cases remain unresolved; several young men were arrested for allegedly killing Marcelo Rivera but have not been brought to trial and the “intellectual authors” of the crime have not been pursued. The police say they have no evidence that Pacific Rim has had direct involvement in any of the cases, but Commissioner August Cotto suggests that “at the very least they were negligent and did not look at the social consequences of mining in Cabañas. They created contradictions, intentional or not I cannot say.”¹¹³

Everything that has happened in Cabañas “is related to the mine,” according to the director of Tutela Legal, who added, “The company has divided the population with promises of money and jobs.”¹¹⁴ And Human Rights Ombudsman Óscar Luna believes Pacific Rim “continues to encourage confrontation,” with campaigns promising jobs and medical care.¹¹⁵

The young team of reporters from Radio Victoria, the local community station, is under the witness protection program as a result of a chain of death threats apparently related to its opposition to mining. Óscar Beltrán, one of the reporters under 24-hour protection, criticized the police and judicial authorities and predicted, “as long as impunity is not ended, assassinations will continue in Cabanas.”¹¹⁶ Further investigation depends on the Attorney General, the only official who can authorize prosecution.

The Funes administration has not given authorization for the mining to proceed, but nor has it supported legislation to prohibit mining.

Foreign Minister Hugo Martínez insisted the government is committed to ending impunity “for crimes like Marcelo,” and suggested that “international motivation” to the Attorney General “would be helpful.”¹¹⁷ David Morales considers the Pacific Rim case to be a violation of human rights: “There is a collective right to the environment,” he said, “the ombudsman and minister of environment agree about this.”¹¹⁸

Meanwhile, Pacific Rim’s \$100 million lawsuit against the state of El Salvador for non-compliance with the original contract will be decided in mid-2010 and the murder investigations remain in limbo. As a western diplomatic official said, the Cabañas case “demonstrates the incapacity of the PNC under ARENA, and the difficulty of catching up.”¹¹⁹

On the Senate floor in Washington, Senator Patrick Leahy demanded an active, transparent investigation of the Rivera case, “of the brutal manner in which he was tortured and assassinated ... which could be a warning to other community activists.” The government must investigate not only the actual perpetrators, Leahy said, “but also those who ordered this atrocious crime.”¹²⁰

FOREIGN POLICY

*“The foreign policy is defined by the president,
not by the FMLN or its deputies, only by the president.”*
President Funes¹²¹

“The relationship with the United States is the priority.”
Hugo Martínez¹²²

In a January 2010 opinion piece, Foreign Minister Hugo Martínez described El Salvador’s new foreign policy as “guided by our nation’s interests, and certainly not in the interest of any group, be it economic, political or ideological.”¹²³ One of the first foreign policy decisions of the administration was to renew diplomatic relations with Cuba after a 50-year hiatus, and the president has plans to visit the island later in 2010.

But relations with Washington are the priority. President Funes and his policy team worked diligently before the inauguration and into the first year to reassure U.S. officials that a Funes/FMLN government would not be anti-American and could, in fact, be an important regional ally for the Obama administration. The president’s response to the crisis in Honduras and his concerted efforts to re-integrate Honduras into the OAS and regional institutions were acknowledged and appreciated by Washington.

Equally important, some U.S. officials apparently recognize they have lost valuable time in building a new relationship with Latin America, and El Salvador could provide a unique opportunity to reset the agenda. The two countries share strategic priorities that require bilateral cooperation: immigration, regional security, trade and economic development. And there are strong social ties with one-third of the Salvadoran population living in the U.S.

On March 8, 2010 President Funes was the first Central American president to visit the Obama White House, and one of few Latin American heads of state to be received by the leaders of both Houses of Congress. The two presidents and their advisers met for nearly two hours to discuss security issues and immigration; according to press reports, the Salvadoran president requested a 15-month extension to the TPS (Temporary Protected Status) granted to Salvadorans and other Central Americans following the devastation of the 2001 earthquake, and a public announcement to that effect was made in July 2010.¹²⁴ The TPS allows the 240,000 Salvadoran beneficiaries to work legally in the U.S.

President Obama later told reporters he had been “favorably impressed” with President Funes’ efforts to build consensus and praised his “pragmatic and wise approach” to the Honduran crisis. The U.S. president emphasized that cooperation between the two countries “must be based on mutual interest and mutual respect.”¹²⁵

For his part, President Funes said that El Salvador must do its share to reduce the flow of immigrants by creating opportunities so that people will be able to remain and have a better life. He continued, “I am not here to ask President Obama to do for El Salvador and for Central America what we haven’t been capable to do ourselves ... We have to see the United States as a strategic partner, a partner as [president Obama] said, neither senior nor junior, but an effective one.”¹²⁶

“Extraordinarily positive”

President Funes¹²⁷

The successful meeting reflected “a change of vision” by the Obama administration toward Central America, “with concrete actions,” President Funes later told reporters.

Funes informed the press that President Obama “gave precise instructions” to his advisers “to work together with my government to implement programs of support and economic development.” This seems to be a change in attitude, he said, “that should give us faith. President Obama promised a different relationship with the region, and our meeting confirmed that new vision.”

President Funes also assured Salvadoran reporters that Obama had asked nothing of him, and that he made no commitments “other than to work responsibly and pragmatically.” This will be a new relationship of equals, he said, a true alliance to resolve problems in Central America with the U.S. as one of the principal partners.¹²⁸

A Salvadoran analyst described the meeting as “one of the most important political moments in the history of El Salvador,” and credited the Funes administration with “creating spaces that promise to pull the country from the ideological trap between Neoliberalism and the traditional left.” He cited renewed diplomatic relations with Cuba on the one hand and a “more balanced relationship” with the U.S. on the other.¹²⁹

Since his return from Washington, President Funes has promoted Central American integration and recognition of the Lobo government in Honduras. As Foreign Minister Martínez explained, “We believe that problems, including human rights, can be better resolved if Honduras is integrated into regional and international organizations.” But, he added, “that doesn’t mean we are satisfied; we express our concerns to President Lobo.”¹³⁰

The president’s international policy position has earned praise from the private enterprise sector: “Foreign policy is being handled with moderation and respect,” director of one business organization said.¹³¹ “It is well-managed,” agreed Claudia Umaña of FUSADES, and “diplomatic relations are good.”¹³²

“A change in the conception of diplomatic and consular work.”

Foreign Minister Hugo Martínez¹³³

One year into the Funes administration, El Salvador still lacks a U.S. ambassador; President Obama’s appointment of Mari Carmen Aponte has been held up by Senator Jim DeMint. Meanwhile, it has taken months for the Foreign Ministry to restructure its diplomatic corps, to replace corrupt and inept officials and institute new policies for embassies and consulates, including austerity measures that have reduced expenses by 70%, according to the chancellor.¹³⁴

Francisco Altschul, an architect and former member of the FDR-FMLN Political-Diplomatic Commission, was formally named as ambassador to Washington in March 2010.

Observers say the Foreign Service was “a family affair” under previous governments, with over 100 of former president Saca’s relatives serving in various diplomatic posts around the world.

And according to Gilma Pérez of the UCA's immigration project, the treatment of Salvadorans in the U.S. and Europe by the consular services was "terrible, corrupt and inefficient."¹³⁵

Under the Funes administration, all diplomatic representatives have been ordered to provide protection as well as services to Salvadorans abroad. In Mexico, for example, consulates have been moved to the cities most often transited by migrating Salvadorans, and they coordinate work with community organizations. "We hope people don't emigrate," Martínez said, "but if they do and if they pass on these dangerous routes, we will protect them."¹³⁶

The Foreign Ministry has initiated training to develop professional Foreign Service officers and has instituted vice-ministerial positions for Salvadorans abroad, and for international cooperation, as well as a director of human rights.

The historic relationship with the U.S. "is now based on friendship, respect and cooperation," Chancellor Martínez said, "we are passing from war-time 'cooperation' to cooperation for development." A bi-national commission comprised of Homeland Security, State Department, the Foreign Ministry and Director of Immigration has been formed to discuss issues including immigration, delinquency and deportations. "Communication is very fluid with the embassy, the State Department and the White House," he confirmed."¹³⁷

POLITICS:

President Funes and the FMLN

*“Funes and the FMLN have different visions of the state.
Now there is some resentment in the FMLN: ‘Can we at least be heard?’”*
Carlos Dada¹³⁸

*“It’s not that the FMLN is being marginalized;
it’s more to do with the strategy of how to project the president.”*
A government official¹³⁹

Mauricio Funes was never a member of the FMLN; his selection as presidential candidate was a pragmatic decision by the party understanding that the country was not ready to accept a former military commander as president. Ernesto Rivas Gallont, El Salvador’s ambassador to the U.S. during the 1980s, said he and many other people voted for Funes as an expression of repudiation for ARENA “but if he had been a commander, he would not have won.”¹⁴⁰

During his inaugural address, the president was inclusive, saying, “The FMLN won, I won, and the country is still standing,” but within a few months his tone had changed and indicated a distancing from the party.

The FMLN considers the relationship an alliance. “Mauricio was never a militant,” coordinator Medardo González explained in October, “This hasn’t been and never will be a problem.”¹⁴¹ Despite their disagreements, the party understands that President Funes “represents the aspirations of the people,” as FMLN deputy Sigfrido Reyes acknowledged.¹⁴² But by early 2010 it appeared the honeymoon was over as disagreements were aired publicly.

Some say Mauricio Funes and the FMLN came together enthralled by mutual attraction and a shared objective: election victory. Analysts suggested that the early affinity diminished with intimacy, the necessity of both participants to respond to their constituencies, and the need to exert power and push their agendas. But most observers agree that some level of understanding – a minimal shared agenda – is better for the country than a “divorce.”

The president has chosen to assert leadership by publicly projecting his independence from the party, to be the president “for all Salvadorans.” This decision should not have been a surprise to the FMLN, but his public defiance of the party – and even of his own vice-president, former FMLN commander Salvador Sánchez-Cerén – has angered many militants and forced party leadership to re-examine its posture toward the relationship.

Sigfrido Reyes suggests the president’s political posture could be due to a “lack of experience, the atmosphere of power ... and his own character.”¹⁴³ “I hope political reality will prevail,” Reyes continued, “The FMLN is the only party that consciously supports the president... We know that he is under a lot of pressure but we are very strong and we can help him.”¹⁴⁴

In foreign policy, the practical ideological differences are clear. The FMLN has had a long and close relationship with Hugo Chávez. In October 2009, party leaders attended and supported the “21st Century Socialism” conference in Venezuela, speaking out against U.S. imperialism. Back in San Salvador, the U.S. Embassy publicly asked for clarification. President Funes responded

immediately by openly criticizing his vice-president who, he said, “speaks for the party, not my government.”¹⁴⁵

The right continues to be preoccupied by Chávez, but the FMLN insists it is charting its own course. “We think the projects of social transformation in Venezuela and other places are very interesting,” Deputy Reyes said, “but we’re not interested in copying anyone... We must find our own way.” Furthermore, he continued, “At the beginning of our struggle no one had heard of Chávez! We are very proud of our national identity and dignity.... The FMLN is not the long arm of Hugo Chávez.”¹⁴⁶

Furthermore, the FMLN strongly opposed the June 28th coup d’état in Honduras and has been quietly critical of the president’s commitment to normalization of relations with the post-coup government of President Lobo.

“The goal of the FMLN is to build socialism, not to manage the neoliberal crisis.”
Conservative analyst Francisco Bertrand¹⁴⁷

In broad strokes, the domestic agendas of Funes and his party are not dissimilar. The president’s “preferential option for the poor,” coincides with the FMLN’s historic commitment to social justice. The social and security ministries belong to the FMLN, while the economic cabinet and financial institutions are headed by independent professionals close to the president. In reality, the president and his group control financing for the ministries, which has been the cause of some consternation as ministers lobby for their budgets without guidance. “The ministers are on their own,” one analyst asserted, “there is no communication strategy between the president and the cabinet.”¹⁴⁸

The FMLN has supported the president on legislation from budget approval to wiretapping (to combat organized crime), credit card and penal reforms and authorization for the military to assume a public security role. But there have been differences on domestic legislation from the tax code to approval of international loans, tariffs on landline phones, penalties for minors and larger issues including the amnesty and investigation of past corruption.

The party endured months of apparent conflict with the president without calling for public demonstrations, but the dispute in the spring over leadership of the National Register and the president’s alliance with the conservative parties against the FMLN brought people to the streets in May.

In part, the problem seems to stem from a lack of communication, a complaint made publicly for the first time during the FMLN’s celebration on March 14th of its 2009 election victory when Vice-President Sánchez-Cerén said somewhat plaintively, “we would like more communication with the president.”¹⁴⁹ President Funes responded the next day by declaring that communication exists, “but if they need a more expedited relationship I agree to that.”¹⁵⁰

“We gave him our vote of confidence based on the assurance that he would be transparent,” one FMLN supporter said, “we expected more wisdom from him and we’re missing the terms of ‘change’, a minimum agenda that allows us to work together.”¹⁵¹

*“The FMLN is up for election in 2012,
not the president. We can’t just sit with our arms folded.”*
Sigfrido Reyes¹⁵²

A month later, the Assembly vice-president described the relationship between the president and the FMLN as “unstable.” Sigfrido Reyes noted the lack of dialogue and admitted, “Its fortunate for us that the right is so destroyed that it can’t take advantage of this situation.” He insisted that the FMLN has demonstrated its willingness to collaborate, “but we won’t play the role of a party that jumps when the president snaps his fingers.”¹⁵³

Some analysts expressed concern that the stalemate in communications can result in a rupture that would endanger not only the left but the future of the country. “The situation is delicate,” analyst Carlos López said, “The left is losing the opportunity it deserves... We owe a debt to those who died.”¹⁵⁴ Former FMLN deputy Ileana Rogel agreed: “Time is running out... The president must dialogue more with the FMLN.”¹⁵⁵

Carlos Ramos of the Latin American think tank FLACSO suggested that neither side wants to take the first step toward improving the relationship,¹⁵⁶ but the FMLN has been publicly conciliatory. In May, Coordinator Medardo González insisted that the FMLN is in the government and will continue supporting it, critically when necessary, but, he said, they will do nothing “to damage the president.”¹⁵⁷ And the vice-president added that the party will not be an obstacle in the process for change or for Funes’ governance.¹⁵⁸

The president has also reached out. On May 13th, 300 former combatants representing the five organizations of the FMLN were invited to the Casa Presidencial for an informal gathering with the president, the First Lady, and several top advisers. The president said he convened the meeting because “I want to listen to you ... The truth is that I am president now and I am here thanks to you, to the contribution that you made to this transformative process.” He promised a commission would be established to follow up with specific requests¹⁵⁹ and also met with war-wounded ex-combatants to understand their needs.

Mid-life Crisis?

*“When the war ended we all said, why don’t we become politicians? Some of us were afraid,
‘Oh, no, not in politics!’ And here we are again, just like the 60s and 70s.”*
Carlos López¹⁶⁰

The complexities of a relationship as the party in power with a president who is not of the party present a dilemma for the FMLN. Increasingly, grassroots members and supporters demand that principled positions be maintained, that the historic ideological precepts which guided them through the terrible years of war not be twisted by pragmatic agreements.

What some call the president’s dismissive and seemingly arrogant responses to criticism do little to instill confidence with party members. One journalist asked, “How many negatives from the president can (the party) suffer without looking ridiculous?”¹⁶¹

The tenuous relationship with the president is one issue, but for its part the FMLN is also undergoing a crisis of identity. After decades as a group of revolutionary political and military organizations, the party participated in the post-war democratic electoral process, winning

mayoral and legislative seats. Now its leadership finds itself “becoming that which they formerly abhorred,” *El Faro* noted, with suits, ties, bodyguards, SUVs, secretaries and “a lot of papers on the desk.”¹⁶²

There are immense contradictions between a leadership that has adapted successfully to a more “bourgeois” lifestyle and the thousands of party members and former combatants struggling to survive in urban shantytowns or rural villages for whom *change* must be substantive. “The FMLN is too comfortable now and needs to move,” one student said. She spoke about meeting a humble ex-combatant who said he had great hope after the election, but said “we need more attention from the FMLN.” The current vice-president was this man’s commander, he said, “but now he’s just sitting in his chair.”¹⁶³

And while the FMLN represents the five historic revolutionary organizations, two (PC and FPL) are the most powerful and the party is not necessarily monolithic in ideology or strategy. In addition, there are pressures on the party from a radical left group, *Tendencia Revolucionaria*, which split from the FMLN in the late 1990s and has organized demonstrations denouncing various government policies during the course of the first year.

“There will be more and more turmoil until 2012.”

Alberto Enríquez ¹⁶⁴

Both the president and the party enjoy high popularity ratings at the end of the first year, but some in El Salvador ask who will pay the price if violence continues to escalate, if the economy shows no improvement, and if the promised *change* fails to materialize? President Funes is successfully negotiating with the right to implement his agenda, but where does that leave the FMLN?

Analyst Roberto Rubio suggests that the contradictions between the president and the FMLN could be useful for the party: “The FMLN can be both government and opposition without paying the price for governing.” The economic and security situations are deteriorating and being badly managed, and improvements in the short term are unlikely, Rubio said: “There will be more violence and there is no economic strategy to ‘wow’ the country.”¹⁶⁵

That situation could benefit the FMLN, but Rubio and others hope there will also be a change inside the party. As one analyst noted, “The dissolution of the right must contribute to the moderation of the FMLN.”¹⁶⁶

In the meantime, as FMLN Coordinator Medardo González said during the March celebration, “we aren’t going to agree with the president on everything... The nature of the FMLN, as a party, is to be a revolutionary project with a socialist leaning, and (the nature of) the national unity government is broader.”¹⁶⁷

The collapse of ARENA and emergence of a “more humane” right

“ARENA and the right are like a tiger without teeth and claws, but still dangerous.”

Orlando Arévalo ¹⁶⁸

No one was surprised by the fractious feuding on the right following the election defeat, but the resignation of twelve ARENA deputies and the formation of GANA was an “October surprise” in 2009 that left all party allegiances and the correlation of forces up for grabs. In the following

days, an arrangement among the FMLN, PCN and GANA deputies resulted in a sharing of the presidency of the assembly for the coming period¹⁶⁹ – first PCN, then FMLN, and GANA was awarded three positions in assembly leadership thanks to FMLN support.

Observers initially talked of a “dark marriage” between the FMLN and the two right parties, PCN and GANA; ARENA accused the FMLN of buying deputies with an alleged \$700,000 from Hugo Chávez,¹⁷⁰ but the blame soon shifted to former ARENA president Tony Saca, the scapegoat for the party’s electoral defeat. Saca was accused of misappropriating \$219 million from the discretionary presidential fund during his time in office.

Mary O’Grady, the conservative *Wall Street Journal* columnist,¹⁷¹ argued against any international aid or loans to El Salvador, accusing Saca of corruption and President Funes and the FMLN of lack of interest in investigating the case. She warned “a corrupt political class could drag the country backward toward collectivism and authoritarianism.” Saca denied any corruption, said he “didn’t recall” how the money was spent, and claimed the charges were part of a “witch hunt.”¹⁷²

Within two months, whatever the provenance of the money, GANA had financing, new offices in the Legislative Assembly, and a sophisticated propaganda campaign with the party’s distinctive blue and orange logo splashed all over the country.

GANA was born “with a sobering load of fresh cash,” one journalist wrote. In less than two months, “Mr. Saca managed to provide GANA with a functioning political structure.”¹⁷³ As two more deputies left ARENA for the new party-in-formation, former president Armando Calderon Sol accused the errant legislators of raising funds through money-laundering, and some GANA deputies claimed they had received death threats, purportedly for leaving ARENA.¹⁷⁴

***“ARENA was shattered and has gone over the edge,
but the brand has value and is not dead yet.”***
A western diplomat¹⁷⁵

The remaining ARENA deputies were devastated. “Nobody could have expected that your brothers and sisters would go, leaving the 20 of us watching,” Deputy Margarita Escobar lamented just two weeks after the apocalypse. “It started internally and should have been resolved inside the party. It’s a difficult moment,” she said, “but we will transcend.”¹⁷⁶

GANA is being projected as a “derecha light” or “light right” but the division on the right is not ideological in the opinion of conservative analyst Francisco Bertrand: “It’s about power groups and it’s generational, between the old fourteen families and the new economic groups representing the financial and service sectors.”¹⁷⁷

For months, GANA deputies insisted Tony Saca was not the force behind the new formation, and Saca himself coyly denied involvement. One deputy declared, “GANA is not the party of the ex-president” and described its philosophy as bringing “a more humane ingredient to market economy.”¹⁷⁸

Few if any observers doubt that GANA is a creation of Tony Saca. “He is astute and unscrupulous,” a conservative analyst said, “determined to destroy ARENA; it’s about personal ambition. The Saca factor distorts everything and is definitive in the political decision-making.”¹⁷⁹

The implication that Saca is building his own structure to run for president again in 2014 concerns some analysts who hint at his participation in illicit activities and are worried about the alleged relationship between Saca and President Funes. “This kind of alliance would be a great tragedy,” warned Juan Héctor Vidal.¹⁸⁰

Saca was a populist president, a good communicator and very accessible to the population, but Salvadorans are unforgiving about allegations of corruption. The results of a CID-Gallup poll in March 2010 showed a 59% unfavorable rating for Saca, with just 33% favorable.¹⁸¹

“We must fight in the trenches!”

Alfredo Cristiani¹⁸²

In an interview at the end of April, Saca said he was run out of ARENA because “I am not docile,” and insisted he has every right to participate in political life.¹⁸³ The former sportscaster, now owner of various radio stations and the Grupo Sanix, said he did not belong to any party and was “very surprised at the speed” with which GANA had grown.

Meanwhile, the official party website has removed a photo of former president Saca from its roster of presidents but ARENA is not dead yet. According to analyst Alberto Enríquez, none of the most powerful economic groups are moving to GANA.¹⁸⁴ A diplomatic source described the GANA deputies as “not the best and brightest,” and said the “adults” in ARENA “are trying to move the party forward,” but warned “there could be a problem of vigilante justice.”¹⁸⁵

For his part, Ernesto Rivas Gallont suggested the party might “clean up its act,” that perhaps its leader, ex-president Alfredo Cristiani, will ask for a pardon “for everything ARENA did” and present a new “clean” party.¹⁸⁶

ARENA was born with anti-communist fervor and its founders allegedly provided operational and financial support for the death squads, including the group that murdered Archbishop Romero.¹⁸⁷ The Cold War is over, but for President Cristiani the battle has just begun. “We can’t lower our guard!” he said in an interview at the end of March. “We must fight in the trenches... I ask that we all convert to soldiers for the freedom of our country!”¹⁸⁸

The former president struck a more moderate tone a few months later. Asked if bipartisanship was possible, he responded, “Yes, with President Funes,” and added, “I think everyone except the FMLN is interested in designing long-term policies.”¹⁸⁹

GOVERNANCE

***“The political parties are thinking about elections;
I’m thinking about how to resolve the problems of the country.”***
President Funes¹⁹⁰

During a visit to Brazil two months before his inauguration, Mauricio Funes set the tone for his style of governance. In response to a statement made in El Salvador by an FMLN deputy suggesting the government may have to renegotiate the terms of international loans, the president-elect published an angry paid announcement in mainstream newspapers chastising and discrediting the deputy – who had been a close supporter during the campaign – and, in essence, establishing the rules of the game for his leadership.

The president has been criticized across the political spectrum for lack of communication and transparency, arrogance, authoritarianism and preoccupation with his image. “Funes has good intentions,” Chamber of Commerce President Jorge Daboub acknowledged, “but governance is complicated.”¹⁹¹

A professional journalist but an uncomfortable communicator, Funes’ relationship with the press has been unexpectedly tense and often hostile. “He was a communicator but it was always one-sided,” one conservative analyst said, “he’s uncomfortable with social interaction and tries to avoid it.”¹⁹²

“The first year they were putting out fires,” explained analyst Carlos Ramos of the think tank FLACSO.¹⁹³ The new government was faced with crises from the previous administration and unanticipated challenges with the Honduran coup d’état, Hurricane Ida and finally Tropical Storm Agatha. But the general evaluation in early days was “positive” according to former ANEP president Juan Héctor Vidal. He praised President Funes as a “good negotiator,” citing successes with international financial institutions and in the Legislative Assembly.¹⁹⁴

Meanwhile, in the first months, the new administration was already facing criticism from right and left. ARENA president Cristiani described the government as “disorganized, inept and incompetent,”¹⁹⁵ and the left began to think about “how to criticize without sinking the ship.”¹⁹⁶

“During the campaign the left had to give clear messages about stability.”¹⁹⁷
Alex Segovia

As Alex Segovia, the president’s top adviser explained, it was clear from the beginning of the electoral campaign that the only guarantee for stability and democratic governance would be to build national unity through a process of dialogue and the search for consensus. The president had to be clear, Segovia said, that he would govern for the nation, not for party interests.¹⁹⁸

In September 2009, the CES (*Consejo Económico-Social*) was convened with 62 leaders from the business sector, universities, unions, churches and social organizations who met to begin a dialogue about the critical issues facing the country. For the first time in the nation’s history, the government was committed to building consensus among historically confrontational groups.

The purpose of the council, President Funes said, was to promote “democratic and civic participation in governance,”¹⁹⁹ but by the end of the first year there were doubts about its

effectiveness. “The government is using it as an escape valve for debate,” the president of the Chamber of Commerce said, “but without a vision for the country.”²⁰⁰ In May, businessman Jorge Zablah dismissed the CES saying, “it hasn’t contributed anything.”²⁰¹ There is concern even among still-enthusiastic supporters that the process of consensus-building can be exhausted unless there are concrete results.

In November, the government was applauded for its rapid response to the floods caused by Hurricane Ida and celebrated by many for its official acknowledgement of government responsibility for the 1989 assassinations of the six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter.

But, by the end of 2009 and into 2010, it was apparent that governance was becoming more difficult. The presidents of four state institutions were fired by President Funes in December without explanation. In February the president dismissed the highly qualified Secretary of Culture, Breni Cuenca, saying only that he had “lost confidence” in her. On May 11th the Minister of Agriculture resigned, citing a lack of effective working relationships between the cabinet and the executive and “pressures” from the presidency to distribute government-donated agricultural supplies on a partisan basis; namely, to two of the parties on the right, GANA and PCN,²⁰² a charge denied by the president.

Questions were also raised about the president’s commitment to investigate corruption following allegations of misappropriation of funds during the previous government. “I’m not interested in prosecuting corrupt people,” President Funes said in March, adding that his priority was to eliminate corrupt practices.²⁰³ Following an outcry, he clarified: “I, as the president, will not tolerate (corruption). I will investigate the corruption from the past, but I’m not the one to put corrupt people behind bars.” He added that this is the job of the attorney general.²⁰⁴

Brazil’s President Lula de Silva has known Mauricio Funes for many years through the Salvadoran president’s wife who is Brazilian and was a member of Lula’s party; the president traveled to Brazil before and after the election. During Lula’s visit to El Salvador in February 2010 he publicly cautioned President Funes on governance by citing his own experience: “Never lose your patience, never act precipitously,” he advised. “Count to ten and then count again and then decide.” And he warned the president: “Don’t listen only to your friends.”²⁰⁵

These events, the fallout from the acrimonious division of the right and the ever more apparent differences between the president and the FMLN, presented serious concerns about governance. “The question is with whom is he going to negotiate the governability of the country?” asked Juan Héctor Vidal.²⁰⁶ Analyst Roberto Rubio agreed, warning that powerful forces are “contaminating” the political system. “It’s about money, not ideology – and from the president’s point of view, it’s about who is king.” The result of all this, Rubio continued, is obscure: “Uncertainty is the word that characterizes the moment. It’s hard to understand right, left, center.”²⁰⁷ Allegiances are fluid, complicating governance and the legislative process.

Political differences and shifting alliances played out in the Legislative Assembly throughout the winter of 2009 and spring of 2010. While the FMLN supported the president on many issues, there were also important differences between the party and the executive.

By April, ARENA was left with 18 deputies, GANA had 14, PCN 10, PDC 5 and CD 1. The FMLN held the majority, 35, but by voting in a bloc the right could defeat the FMLN, which it did at the behest of the president on some important measures.

Political unease increased in May when the president announced his new organization, Movimiento Ciudadano por el Cambio (MCC), the heir apparent to his campaign organization “Amigos de Mauricio.” Though organizers say MCC is not intended to be a political party, simply a pressure group to push for the Funes *change* agenda, some analysts describe it as a “challenge to the FMLN’s territoriality” and “a confirmation of the divorce between Funes and the FMLN.”²⁰⁸ Others see MCC as the president’s strategy to strengthen his support from the center, protecting himself from both his right and left flanks. Within a few days of the announcement, GANA leaders were said to be “flirting with MCC.”²⁰⁹

After some speculation about its evaluation of the MCC, the FMLN expressed its support for the organization in those areas of common interest and called on its members not to confront the new movement.²¹⁰ These actions demonstrate a pragmatic strategy from the FMLN, hoping the President keeps his focus inside the alliance and not within the right side of the political spectrum and avoiding any confrontation that can damage future electoral possibilities.

“For the first time, a president is trying to comply with the Constitution, to govern for all, not just for a party.”
Ileana Rogel²¹¹

“Funes, you’re deserting the party that brought you to power!”²¹²

The strategic post to head the National Registry (RNPN) – which oversees electoral rolls – was one focus of the power struggle between the president and the FMLN during the early spring. Throughout ARENA administrations, the person who served in this position was determined by the majority party: ARENA. At the same time, the rolls were believed to have been contaminated over the years, and international observers have strongly encouraged thorough purging of the registry.

Several measures were presented to reform the selection of candidates for the post, but the FMLN as majority party demanded its right to name the RNPN president, citing the necessity of an honest, transparent electoral process in 2012.

For his part, President Funes declared that no one party should control the registry and insisted that he has the authority to nominate three candidates for the position. His legislation passed with the 47 votes of the right, leaving the FMLN in the cold. Funes defended his actions, saying, “They named me their candidate so they have to trust me.”²¹³ Assembly vice-president, FMLN deputy Sigfrido Reyes responded, “I hope he has the courage and determination to clean-up the registry.”²¹⁴

President Funes and the party have different time frames and different agendas. The president cannot run for re-election in 2014, thus has just four more years to implement his programs. “He has to move between the exercise of power – managing political relationships – and his idea of change,” one government official explained. “And the strategic purpose of the change is to clean out government structures of the corruption left by the right.”²¹⁵ The president believes this must happen “without pressure from any political force.”²¹⁶

As Héctor Silva explained, *change* requires a balanced strategy that maintains open dialogue, economic freedom, democracy, “and good relations with the United States.”²¹⁷

“Everyday governance is buying good will.”
Jorge Daboub²¹⁸

The president has often expressed his commitment to dismantling the structures of privilege that have ruled the country for over a century, unraveling the tangled webs of corruption in every state institution and tackling organized crime. “The fights against corruption and for transparency are commitments that I assumed from the first day in office,” the president reiterated in his anniversary address.²¹⁹

Profound institutional change doesn’t happen overnight; the accumulation of entitlement and power cannot be stripped away in one or perhaps even five years but there has been an important change already, as an official explained: “For the last twenty years, the right appropriated and privatized public resources and they can no longer do that ... They no longer have access to public money.”²²⁰

Analyst Jaime López acknowledged “small, maybe invisible signs that the monopoly of power has changed.” But the *change*, according to López, also involves a complex, behind-the-scenes and uncertain struggle for financial and political hegemony between President Funes and his inner circle of the Caceres family which controls certain banking sectors; some groups of the FMLN that control the lucrative relationship with ALBA petroleum; the Cristiani group representing the oligarchy, and the Saca group of new capital – the financial and services sector.²²¹ Publicly, this struggle plays out in the legislative process but there are layers of corruption below the surface, Lopez says.

“Politics here are primitive,” the analyst explained. “One can’t be very civilized.”²²² One business leader agreed that Salvadoran politics move with money: “The last government could be characterized by the mystique of corruption,” he said.²²³

***“Change means moving from a culture of taking advantage
of the state to one of serving the state.”***
Ileana Rogel²²⁴

Non-governmental organizations now have access to government which is a new development. The president convened a meeting of leaders of the social movement last year, leading to a first visit to the presidential palace for many of them. “This is strange for us,” one NGO leader said, “we can go there and coordinate our work. Many of us are now in government and it’s easy to communicate.”²²⁵

Communication has not been as easy for the right. As one business leader explained, “In bilateral conversations one doesn’t know if he is speaking to the moderate or radical part of the government.”²²⁶ And while the left has been thinking about gender issues for years and now unconsciously uses the inclusive language so important in Spanish, the right has apparently had difficulty adapting, according to one analyst who said “the amigos y amigas” ... “Salvadoreños y Salvadoreñas” – now so natural in the government – “are hard for them.”²²⁷

Not everyone agrees that there has been positive change. Conservative think tank FUSADES is concerned about the lack of transparency in government and about the relationship between President Funes and GANA. Claudia Umaña of FUSADES described the administration as

“inefficient, bureaucratic and inexperienced: They don’t know how to govern.” While her colleague Marion Vidaurri did concede “positive signs in foreign policy,” she also questioned the president’s ability to govern under the new balance of power in the Assembly and said, “it’s not good if he’s a lame duck president for four years.”²²⁸

And for independent deputy Orlando Arévalo there is too much thinking and not enough action: “This government is full of philosophers and intellectuals,” he said, “with very little operational capacity. Everything is about studies and consultations!”²²⁹ Commenting on the government’s long-awaited five-year plan, analyst Francisco Bertrand described the administration as “paralyzed.” “There are PowerPoint presentations about the plan,” he said in April, “but what’s lacking is a real dialogue.”²³⁰

TAKING STOCK

El Salvador faces seemingly intractable challenges and problems, decades and generations in the making, that cannot be solved during one term of the Funes administration. But in four more years' time, when a new government succeeds this one, President Funes will be evaluated on whether he not only began the process of change but also whether his form of governance actually produced real irreversible results. Like a photograph that has just begun to develop, the record after one year cannot be said to be complete. While there are concrete indications of progress, there are also obvious examples of policies and issues where a tremendous amount of work is still left to be done.

Economically, El Salvador moved away from the precipice, but the long-term prospects for the country are extremely uncertain. While President Funes has begun to convince the business community that economic stability is valued by his government, investors do not trust the FMLN and are yet to be persuaded. El Salvador cannot succeed without an economic recovery led by the private sector, and there are not signs now that businesses are ready to play this role.

A state's budget reflects priorities, and those priorities have changed: 44% of the new budget will be designated for social projects,²³¹ and government subsidies will benefit the formerly excluded population rather than the wealthy. Throughout the campaign and into his presidency, Mauricio Funes insisted that his administration would have a "preferential option for the poor." His commitment is reflected in the budget's focus on social inclusion, targeting health, education, housing, "universal social protection" and respect for human rights.

Equally important, like many Central American countries, the fiscal position of El Salvador is undermined by tax evasion and low rates on high income individuals. Without resources, the state cannot make investments in programs ranging from education to police that are essential for the country's long-term success.

No social or economic problem can be solved or substantially addressed in El Salvador until problems relating to security and crime are brought under control. Security is one of El Salvador's longest standing and most critical problems. There has also been a change in medium- and long-term solutions to counteract crime, prioritizing prevention over repression.

But a fearful and weary population demands immediate relief from the violence, and the president resorted to a solution from the past – deploying the military – despite protests from the human rights community and misgivings by the PNC and others.

At the same time, his appointees are engaged in the tremendously difficult but necessary work of examining corruption and organized crime in the criminal justice system among police and judges – because corruption encourages and increases crime and attacks the confidence of average Salvadorans in the rule of law. Improvements in public security will require not only human, technical and financial support for the National Civil Police, and a serious commitment to preventive work with youth, but a transformation in the area of prosecutions and the entire judicial system to bring an end to impunity.

The conservative newspaper *La Prensa Gráfica* warned that the country is at risk of becoming a failed state if the true structures of organized crime continue to move with impunity. It also states that all institutions must be more attentive than ever to infiltration by organized crime.²³²

Effective regional cooperation and assistance from the United States are both essential to attack this potentially destabilizing problem. The international community must be vigilant and provide political support as the government embarks on serious investigations that can endanger the fragile institutions of the state and the region.

Analyst Roberto Rubio suggests the president needs a national pact, “a second peace agreement, now, on security and governance.” The only way he can succeed, Rubio says, “is with a shared development strategy.”²³³

To be tough on crime, El Salvador also needs to deal with the sources of crime, and here the administration has made a significant and personal commitment. Vanda Pignato, the Secretary for Social Inclusion, is working on programs that will give the youth and other marginalized sectors of the country an alternative to criminal activity. This work is essential and will require a long-term effort and more resources to make a dent in the problem.

Reconciliation in El Salvador depends on repairing the rent fabric of the nation’s human rights. A most noteworthy change brought to the country by President Funes was his apology in the name of the state for crimes committed by government forces and civilian groups during the civil war, especially for the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero in 1980 and the Jesuit killings in 1989. But for many Salvadorans reconciliation is only possible through a process of truth and justice, and that involves the larger and more delicate issue – repeal of the 1993 amnesty law.

At the helm of his nation’s foreign policy, where he enjoys more autonomy, President Funes has been a skillful navigator – restoring full diplomatic relations with Cuba, attempting to play a consensus building role in the region for Honduras, and reaffirming the importance of El Salvador’s relationship with the United States while becoming the first Central American president to meet with Barack Obama in the White House.

The latitude with which President Funes can function depends, in part, on his relationship with the two principal blocks of political power in El Salvador – the FMLN, and the parties of the right. His marriage with the FMLN, a marriage of convenience at the outset, provided access to political dominance in El Salvador for both parties. As a marriage of convenience, the relationship has waxed and waned. At times, the president has pushed off against the party to show his independence or to make progress on issues over their opposition.

Complicating his efforts to navigate El Salvador’s political waters – but also providing unique opportunities to him – has been the sudden realignment of forces within the political right, with ARENA losing power and the newly created GANA rising in influence. How his relationship evolves with both sources of power during the remainder of his term will play a deeply important role in whether he can deliver on his promises of change to the country at large.

The changes in the structures of power may be imperceptible, but there are visible changes in the way government operates and how it distributes resources. For the past twenty years, despite increasing poverty and inequality, private enterprise had been the beneficiary of government largesse. That has changed.

Other major reforms are needed and will require some degree of national unity, including judicial, tax, fiscal and electoral reforms, and regulations for political parties. And pulling the

over two million impoverished citizens into the middle class will require truly effective anti-poverty programs that go beyond social welfare and a successful strategy of job creation—difficult goals during economic hard times.

Great challenges face El Salvador in the remaining four years of President Funes' term, and not much time is left before the 2012 electoral campaign for control of municipalities and seats in the Legislative Assembly begins. During his anniversary address, the president called for unity in the coming year: "I ask ... for one year for the homeland. One year in which party interests stay in second place."²³⁴

For the FMLN, the task is to prepare for the 2012 and 2014 elections. The party must secure independent votes in order to succeed; that means providing good management for the ministries it controls and maintaining a calm relationship with the president. Electoral success is critical to making *change* a permanent reality. As Hato Hasbún, the Secretary of Strategic Affairs, explained, "The change must be irreversible and the people are the guarantee of that, not the government... The people have to make it their own."²³⁵

The challenge for the right is to rebuild a solid bloc among ARENA, GANA, PCN and the Christian Democratic Party (PDC). Those parties are all in some disarray in mid-2010, but alliances are fluid, ideological differences minimal, and much can happen in the coming years.

In the end, what we believe is motivating President Funes is not ideology or even enactment of his own program, as important as that will be to changing El Salvador. The slogan of the administration is "to unite, to grow, to include," a sign that what he is really after is national reconciliation. "I know that our political detractors continue saying to the four winds that the government has no direction," the president once said. "Archbishop Romero is the spiritual guide of the nation, and also the spiritual guide of this government."

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