



**The First Year: A Chronology of the  
Gang Truce and Peace Process in El  
Salvador**

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## **The Salvadoran Gang Truce and Peace Process: Reflections on the First Year**

Since March of 2012, El Salvador has experienced an unprecedented drop in violence due to a truce between the country's two largest street gangs, the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and Barrio 18. Exceeding many early expectations, the truce has lasted over a year, and evolved to encompass a broader peace process within Salvadoran society. The extent to which the Salvadoran government has been involved in the process, even the nature of its involvement, remains uncertain and is a source of contention. But, the ongoing truce and peace process presents real lessons and serious public policy implications and now, with many communities signing on to the "violence-free municipality" initiative and thousands of lives saved by an over 50% reduction in homicides, much is at stake.

Even before news of the truce was broadly known, the Center for Democracy in the Americas (CDA) had been monitoring the unfolding process in El Salvador, when a Salvadoran government official hinted to us in February 2012 that a dialogue between the gangs might be underway. In the pages below, we present our chronology of the process compiled over the last year, which details this historic series of events. The chronology provides a more complete picture of the process as it developed day-by-day during the first year: from the original confusing, contradictory versions of its creation, to the various commitments and good-will gestures offered by gang leaders. The truce's advances and setbacks are chronicled, alongside the suspicions and distrust expressed by many Salvadorans. It also records the critical support provided by the Organization of American States (OAS). Finally, the chronology helps us understand the motivations of the facilitators and gang leaders. It gives us a glimpse into the lives and thoughts of young people who are struggling to find a way out of tumultuous lives of poverty, crime and often unspeakable violence.

This chronology, focused on the gang truce and peace process, complements CDA's extensive coverage of developments in El Salvador. It is CDA's hope that the full telling of this story will encourage the debate and reflection, already underway in El Salvador, about the issues of exclusion and poverty, so closely connected to the causes of and solutions for the violence. The human dimensions highlighted here are crucial when considering policy choices; choices that heavily impact the lives of so many Salvadorans, not only in El Salvador but also in the diaspora. The Salvadoran government faces the challenges of developing a coherent public policy, that recognizes the possibility of human transformation from criminal to productive lives, and providing resources to implement that policy. If successful, the peace process could perhaps be the most significant legacy of the current government.

It should be emphasized that the truce in itself is not the solution, but it has transformed the conversation from repression to prevention and rehabilitation. As President Funes said, the only options for youth have been to emigrate or join a gang for survival. To change that dynamic, the peace process must be institutionalized and funded as part of a long-term strategy to provide educational and job opportunities to all at-risk youth in the historically impoverished barrios and municipalities of the country.

Advocacy of the peace process does not signify impunity for crimes committed. Nor does it reflect ignorance of the horrific violence inflicted on the Salvadoran people and their communities in recent decades: the murders of thousands of youths; the savagery of sexual violence; dismembered bodies; clandestine cemeteries; the uprooting of fearful families, and the scourge of extortion. Advocacy does mean a belief in the possibility of redemption. It reflects aspirations for an inclusive, nonviolent, democratic future for the country. "If it doesn't work," Bishop Colindres said, "we will have lost a little effort and illusions, but if it works the country will have found peace."



*Photo: Thomas Munita for the New York Times*

## **A Chronology of the First Year of Peacemaking in El Salvador**

\*Dates and information are as reported in Salvadoran press coverage

### **2011**

Imprisoned leaders of El Salvador's two powerful gangs, MS and Barrio 18, initiate a process of internal "reflection" after 20 years of bloody warfare.

Raúl Mijango, a former guerrilla, ex-FMLN "reformist" deputy expelled from the party in 2002 and now retired from politics, becomes the principal facilitator of the process. He is the author of four books, a small businessman and personal adviser to Minister of Defense General David Munguía Payés (now Minister of Security). Over the year, he has developed relationships with gang members in communities where he works distributing propane gas and must "negotiate" extortion fees with local gangs in order to do business.

#### **September**

Family members of the two gangs meet with Military Bishop Fabio Colindres to request his intervention with authorities on prison conditions and the health of some prisoners. Colindres speaks with General Munguía Payés, then Minister of Defense, but no action is taken as the Security Cabinet is divided about strategies to reduce violence.

#### **November 22**

Munguía Payés is named Minister of Justice and Security; authorizes Raúl Mijango and Bishop Colindres to begin process of mediation with gangs and arranges access to the prisons.

# 2012

## **January 1**

Bishop Colindres and Raúl Mijango facilitate the first direct talks in twenty years between the leaders of MS and Barrio 18, in the high security Zacatecoluca Prison. The Bishop discusses the protocol of the talks and Mijango acts as moderator. Meetings continue throughout the month. The “process of reflection” includes analysis of the exclusionary social and economic conditions that fueled the development of the gangs. Their situation is at an [impasse](#), they conclude: “Either we prepare ourselves for an all-out war with the government, or we seek alternative solutions.”

The principal leaders involved in the talks are Carlos Ernesto Mojica Lechuga (“Viejo Lin”) of Barrio 18, Dionisio Umanzor (“El Sirra”) and Borromeo Henríquez (“El Diablito”) of MS.

## **February 1**

The leaders of MS and Barrio 18 reach a cease-fire agreement but decide not to make it public until after the March 11<sup>th</sup> elections, in order to have time to communicate with and educate all members of both gangs on the outside as to the new situation.

## **March 1**

Homicides are averaging 14 per day.

## **March 8-9**

The leaders receive information that “*los libres*” (gang members outside prison) are planning actions to sabotage the March 11<sup>th</sup> election by enforcing a transportation boycott. In order to “facilitate communication” between the leaders and the members on the outside, the leadership and others – a total of 30 prisoners - are transferred to minimum security facilities. According to later declarations by Bishop Colindres, Raúl Mijango, the Minister of Security and President Funes, the transfers do not involve “negotiations.”

## **March 10**

The truce is quietly in place without any public announcement.

## **March 11**

Election Day; six homicides reported.

## **March 12-15**

Two, three and five homicides respectively are reported.

## **March 15**

[El Faro](#) breaks the news of the truce, reporting that the government has negotiated with gangs and alleging large cash payments to the leaders and their families.

### **March 17**

Minister of Security meets privately with some press representatives, excluding El Faro; says [El Faro](#) should “be careful.” He denies any “negotiations” and says transfers were for “security, humanitarian and health” reasons.

El Faro Editor Carlos Dada sends out security alert to colleagues around the world. El Faro staff have been threatened and harassed for months following investigative reports on drug trafficking and corruption; Munguía Payés’ warning is taken as a threat.

### **March 18**

Carlos Dada meets privately with Munguía Payés.

### **March 21**

[Bishop Colindres](#) tells reporters the mediation and transfers were the result of a “pastoral role between the two groups” and part of a humanitarian gesture, not negotiations. He says that the gang leaders had confidence in him because he was advocating for them to the Minister of Security.

### **March 23**

Public [communiqué](#) released from the leaders of MS and Barrio 18, who denounce El Faro’s reporting and accuse Carlos Dada of putting their lives in jeopardy: “According to our codes this puts us in a situation of having committed a betrayal of the more than 100,000 members that compose the gang, for which we could be subjected to internal reprisals.” They also discuss their “process of reflection” over the past year, saying, “We can be part of the solution.” Bishop Colindres and Raúl Mijango “guided us to dismantle all the plans to boycott the elections...As a good will gesture we have cancelled all attacks against police and soldiers... We have begun a historic process...We ask to be treated as human beings.”

### **March 24**

Auxiliary Bishop Gregorio Rosa Chávez gives public support to the truce and urges Salvadorans to give the benefit of the doubt to the gangs.

### **March 27**

Bishop Colindres and Papal Nunciature Luigi Pezzoto preside over a [thanksgiving Mass](#) at two prisons. Gang leaders ask for forgiveness. “El Sirra” requests pardon in the name of MS 13 and asks for the “opportunity to change”...We too are Salvadorans and human beings.” Barrio 18 leader “Viejo Lin” says this is not a truce or a cease-fire: “We see this as a process of definitive pacification for our country...Violence is not an option.” The Bishop declares the effort is “worth gold” and requests those present to “have the courage to maintain the decision you have made.”

### **March 28**

[President Funes](#) discusses the truce for the first time at a press conference, denying any negotiations or financial arrangements and saying the government facilitated and accompanied the Church’s initiative. “This was an initiative of the Catholic Church... the only role that the government has had in this process has been as a facilitator.” He vows to lead a national campaign to reverse social exclusion...” [The gangs have the right to jobs...the right to education and the right to health care.](#)”

The Assistant Director of the Office of State Intelligence (OIE) is fired; Colonel Molina Montoya was said to be the strategist behind the truce arrangements and perhaps a source for El Faro’s reporting.

## March 30-April 9

Easter vacation; homicides are down 46%.

### April 4

[Minister of Security](#) Munguía Payés says the El Faro report disclosing the truce impeded the implementation of the strategy: “A lot of time was lost trying to give explanations.” He also reports that homicides are down to an average of five per day since March 9.

### April 5

[President Funes](#) speaks on national television, calling for a “national accord” against violence.

### April 6

Government spokesperson confirms [El Faro](#) editor and staff are receiving protection.

### April 10

Soldiers providing [internal security](#) in prisons are removed and replaced by newly trained prison staff; x-ray machines have also been installed to facilitate visitor searches; invasive body searches by soldiers have been a strong point of contention with prisoners. [Minister of Defense José Atilio Benítez](#) denies the redeployment is a result of the truce: “Many things are going to happen and people will believe it is all linked to the pact...but that’s not it.”

Residents of high-risk communities report a reduced presence of soldiers in the streets.

### April 11

Reporters Without Borders issues alert that [Carlos Dada](#) has fled the country in exile due to threats. Dada immediately refutes the story, (“*No estoy exiliado*”) saying he is in Panama for a three-day conference. RWB apologizes for the “good faith error.”

[Raúl Mijango](#) says he is busy mediating disputes - solving “small conflicts” - among independently-acting gang members over territorial issues: “There will always be someone who doesn’t understand the situation.”

### April 13

On the 34<sup>th</sup> day of the truce Bishop Colindres presides over Mass in Izalco Prison, with 700 inmates and members of the Barrio 18. Long-time gang member [Óscar Aguilar](#), 42, participates in the Mass and says, “The only thing we wanted was to be heard.”

Relatives of two gang leaders have been kidnapped in recent days. During the Mass, [Raúl Mijango](#) tells gang members not to allow themselves to be provoked and to remain calm. He says people who want to “sabotage the process” are responsible for the kidnappings but, he promises, “You are not alone. Bishop Colindres and I are going to be at your side.”

Homicides continue, according to the [Minister of Security](#), due to internal problems in the two gangs and continued violence from smaller gangs not participating in the truce.

### April 14

In Cartagena for the Summit of the Americas, [President Funes](#) announces zero homicides today, the first time in anyone’s memory that the country has had a murder-free day. The president attributes the reduction in violence to the work of the army and the police, in addition to the truce. According to a later story by [El Faro](#), the National Police actually report one murder today.

## **April 16**

Four homicides are reported over the weekend (March 13-15).

The government has given “positive signals,” [Raúl Mijango](#) reports, with the removal of soldiers from inside the prisons and improvements in the water supply and hygiene facilities in some penitentiaries. He says the gang leaders respect him because he lived the war from beginning to end and was part of the resolution of the conflict. The leaders are “not animals” he explains; most are well-read, bilingual and over 30. “They say, ‘we no longer think like kids. We made many errors which we are paying for... We are not asking for pardons, we are just asking for respect for human rights.’”

The government is looking for \$20 million funding for “[labor parks](#)” according to the Vice-Minister of Security Douglas Moreno, as part of a strategy to train and employ gang members and their families.

## **April 17**

The gangs are considering another “[good will gesture](#)” according to Raúl Mijango who adds that none of this would have been possible without the vision and collaboration of the Minister of Security. Three hundred lives “have been saved” since the truce began, Mijango contends, and for the first time the gang phenomenon is part of a national discussion. “Forty days ago they were seen as bad boys with animal tendencies,” he says, but now they are discussed as a social problem.

Minister of Security Munguía Payés notes that extortions continue, but are down. He calls for patience.

## **April 18**

[Mijango](#) remains optimistic about the truce and the commitment from both groups, saying the leaders have given their word, which has “much greater meaning than we give to people we call ‘normal’... It is the greatest (thing they have)... When they pledge (to you) they defend you to the end.” He contends the state has resources that can be reassigned for reinsertion programs for gang members and insists the gangs do not depend on connections with organized crime; they are “autonomous and this is good for the country.”

## **April 19**

Gangs will announce a [reduction in extortions](#) as another “good will gesture.” Mijango asks that the government, public security apparatus and private enterprise “take advantage of this historic opportunity” and not “politicize” the process.

[President Funes](#) announces that a “national dialogue” for the pacification of El Salvador will begin next week. Representatives of political and social organizations, private enterprise, universities, international organizations and diplomats have been invited to participate “in the search for a national accord against violence.” In his remarks at the graduation of the elite anti-gang unit, he adds, “We don’t expect magic solutions or overnight changes.”

## **April 20**

The government is encouraging businesses to hire ex-gang members and will provide training for both the business and the new employees, according to [Vice-Minister of Security Douglas Moreno](#). Two companies have already hired over 200 former gang members.



### **April 21**

[El Faro](#) notes a 59% reduction in homicides, with 336 “lives saved,” six weeks into the truce. Of the 5-6 murders per day now, most are gang-related, and most of those due to dissension within Barrio 18. The only “concessions” to date have been the removal of soldiers from deployment inside prisons, the proposal for labor parks, and permission for some prisoners to have kitchen appliances in the cells.

### **April 23**

Seven more [prisoners are transferred](#) from high-security Zacatecoluca Prison to other facilities.

### **April 24**

Television sets and DVDs will be allowed in the prisons, [Munguía Payés](#) announces, to help “lower tensions and aggression,” and as part of concessions for good behavior.

### **April 26**

In [Mariona Prison](#), a spokesperson for 4,000 “common prisoners” (not affiliated with the gangs) asks that they be included in the dialogue process. Bishop Colindres will preside over a Mass in Mariona on May 2<sup>nd</sup>.

### **April 30**

A 20-year problem can't be resolved in 50 days, [Raúl Mijango](#) says, “but every day that passes I believe the skepticism and doubts will be dismantled... We are working to put out the fuse so things don't explode...and society and the state will have time to respond.” Asked if he is afraid for his life, Mijango says there is a defamation campaign against him. He admits he is afraid of those who have profited from the violence, but that if this process works, Salvadoran society as a whole will benefit, “so it is worth it to risk anything, even one's life if it is necessary.”

### **May 1**

This is the 54<sup>th</sup> day of the truce between MS and Barrio 18, El Salvador's two most powerful gangs. The [homicide rate](#) plummeted 55% in April, to an average of five murders a day according to Minister of Justice and Security David Munguía Payés. An average of 14 homicides a day was registered during January and February but if the current tendency is maintained, the Minister says, there could be a [75% reduction](#) by the end of the year.

### **May 2**

President Funes meets with leaders of [private enterprise organizations](#) (ANEP, ASI, CASALCO, Chamber of Commerce) to promote his national security accord and respond to questions and doubts about the gang truce. Participants include Javier Simán, Roberto Murray Meza, Jorge Daboub, Luis Cardenal and Roberto Kriete, all well-known businessmen. The President presents projects including training and jobs, expansion of the “labor parks” proposal and prevention programs under the auspices of local metropolitan governments. ANEP leader Jorge Daboub expresses “doubts,” saying “political instability” is also serious problem for the business community: “We have backtracked in liberties...to do business.” A working group is established with representatives of the government and business leaders.



In [Quezaltepeque Prison](#), leaders of Barrio 18 read a joint communique from 18 and MS13 announcing “zones of peace” in and around public and private schools. For the past decade schools have been used for gang recruitment and dozens of students have been murdered in territorial disputes; now all forms of forced recruitment are prohibited. The historic “good will gesture” is announced by Victor Antonio García Cerón of 18, in the presence of the Minister of Security, the peace facilitators (Bishop Fabio Colindres and Raúl Mijango) and the media. He declares that parents “are now free of worry when they send their children to school.” The communique acknowledges, however, that controversy continues within the gangs: “No one is betraying anyone...to the contrary this benefits all the Salvadoran people of which we are a part,” and calls on the police and army to “control those who are violating human rights.” The leaders accuse several well-known conservative politicians of “sewing discord,” but Cerón vows, “we will not be provoked.”

Now it is up to the government and private enterprise to respond, according to facilitator Raúl Mijango. And Bishop Colindres adds, “I beg, I pray and I demand an opportunity for them,” (the gangs.)

### **May 3**

[Police arrest](#) 90 members of various gangs in the metropolitan area under anti-gang legislation.

### **May 4**

“We all have doubts about the truce,” Minister of Security [Munguía Payés](#) admits in response to Jorge Daboub’s skepticism, “but I understand that private enterprise is ready to close ranks with our government and generate jobs... This is a process, little by little there must be gestures of change by one side and tolerance by the other.”

The [President](#) meets with representatives of the major media organizations to discuss the national accord. He informs them there is a reduction in extortions as well as homicides. Police conducted 120 operations against gangs during the month of April but, he insists, “This understanding creates a different and favorable scenario to lead to a process that will culminate in a national accord on public security.” In response to criticisms and doubts by ANEP, the [President](#) declares no one is going to be released from their prison term to be given a job: “We’re not going to release Chino Tres Colas (a gang leader) to offer him the management of a bank!”

### **May 5**

The President announces that Minister of Security [Munguía Payés](#) will be his spokesperson on issues related to the national accord.

[Bishop Fabio Colindres](#) calls on all sectors of the society to support the process: “No one can cross their arms when the life of the nation is at stake.”

### **May 7**

Common prisoners (non-gang members) in [Mariona Prison](#) announce a prohibition on extortions from inside the prison. Spokesperson Carlos Serrano says “Within our capability...we are going to oversee and guarantee” that extortions stop. Bishop Colindres and Raúl Mijango are present for the announcement.

## May 8

Bishop Fabio Colindres and the Minister of Security will travel to the U.S. tomorrow to meet with [OAS and UN](#) officials about the gang truce. According to the Minister, Guatemala and Honduras are also closely observing the Salvadoran process.

The truce is a “great event” in the words of lawyer [Dr. Nelson García](#), “unprecedented on the continent.” He says the intelligence of the gang leaders should not be underestimated and other Central American countries, Mexico and the U.S. “must be thinking they need a Munguía Payés, a Bishop Colindres, a Mijango...this intelligent core.”

[El Faro](#) demands more transparency from the government on the truce: “Society needs reliable information in order to discuss where the state public security policy is headed. The success or failure of the current process does not depend on how much information is hidden.”

[Antonio Rodríguez](#), a Spanish priest who has been working with gangs in Mejicanos for a decade and was fired from a commission in 2010 for suggesting the possibility of a dialogue expresses his anger at the government and cynicism about the truce in a letter published today.

He addresses the document to what he calls “the new ministers of justice and security,” gang leaders Viejo Lin and El Sirra, who now have the “real power” over issues of security and insecurity due to the “total incapacity of your predecessors.” Rodríguez says “the ministers” should provide information on corrupt judges, prosecutors, police, military and prisons officials, and lists a series of measures to advance from a “Mafia Peace” to a “Lasting Peace” including fiscal, police and prison reform, a weapons ban and restorative justice for the victims of gang violence and concludes, “You can count on me.”

## May 9

President Funes continues series of meetings to discuss the national accord, today with [academics and rectors](#) of 15 universities who agree to collaborate with the government on education and training efforts for at-risk youth.

## May 10

OAS [Secretary-General Insulza](#) will visit El Salvador in June to witness the truce process first hand.

[Chargé d’Affaires of the U.S. Embassy](#), Sean Murphy says the truce “opens interesting possibilities, but is only the beginning or a part of tackling the problem in its totality.”

## May 11

An 8<sup>th</sup> grade student is murdered in San Marcos, near the capital; [17 students have been homicide victims](#) since January 1, 2012.

The international community is paying close attention to the process, according to UN representative in El Salvador, [Robert Valent](#) who congratulates the Catholic Church for its initiative “to dialogue without fear.” He calls on all sectors of society to contribute and says he is confident that private enterprise, think tanks and others will participate.

## May 12

[Minister of Security Munguía Payés](#) admits “no concrete agreements” were made during the president’s meetings with business, the media and academics, “only good intentions.”

“It is clear there are many doubts...but I believe it would be unforgivable to let this opportunity pass by,” opines EU representative in El Salvador, [Stefano Gotto](#) who promises the EU will be supporting the process. According to Gotto, El Salvador is one of the best of all 17 Latin American countries the EU supports in terms of “results in the execution of cooperation (projects.)”

## May 13

Spanish priest [Antonio Rodríguez](#) accuses the press of being “too romantic” about the “negotiations,” and warns that El Salvador could be a failed state where drug traffickers, gangs and organized crime take control. The peace process is not sustainable, Rodríguez insists, “because the negotiation was mediocre, (and) it is giving mediocre results.”

## May 14

In an extensive interview with El Faro, [Minister of Justice and Security Munguía Payés](#) says he is hopeful about the truce but takes responsibility for all eventualities: “We are prepared for the worst scenario.” If the process fails he believes he will have the moral authority to go to legislators to request the “extraordinary legal tools” necessary to pursue and arrest gang members. The mediation of Bishop Colindres and Raúl Mijango was “a part of my strategy...but the process moved faster than we had planned.”

Munguía Payés explains that he had the “road map...but it went beyond expectations” and the latest gesture (“zones of peace”) “is more than we could have hoped for.” He insists, however, that the truce is between the two gangs, not with the government: “We continue operating and we have increased the operational capacity of the PNC.” According to the Minister, there are 62,000 gang members in 127 municipalities; of every five homicides now, two or three are gang related.

[Homicides down 57.7%](#) so far in May, with extortions reduced 48%, according to the Minister who credits the operational level of the PNC. He attributes 50% of crimes to gangs, 50% to common criminals.

## May 16

Accompanied by his security cabinet President Funes meets with 20 [mayors](#) of the metropolitan municipalities, asking their active support for prevention and employment programs for youth. The mayors agree to participate in a working group, a “metropolitan security cabinet” as part of the “pact for peace and security.” The President promises to meet with all 262 mayors in the country, but also warns the truce could be unsustainable due to disagreements between the gangs.

Police arrest 28 gang members in [Sonsonate](#) under the gang prohibition law.

Seven homicides were reported in the past 24 hours. [Minister of Security Munguía Payés](#) says it would be “a mistake to think that all security problems are going to end with the truce.”

## May 18

Presidential economic adviser [Alex Segovia in Washington](#) seeking support for youth employment programs to sustain the truce. Segovia meets with officials of the Millennium Challenge Corporation, Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank and others at the Council of the Americas, emphasizing the “urgency” of the situation. The truce is “fragile but has opened a great opportunity,” Segovia says: “The solution is not prisons but through an integral policy we can insert the youth into the work and academic worlds.”

President of ANEP [Jorge Daboub](#) accuses the government of abdicating its responsibilities by asking the support of private enterprise, the media, academics and local governments with the pact for security and peace: ...the central government is washing its hands in regards to this delicate issue.”

## May 19

“I am not the creator or the father of this model,” Minister [Munguía Payés](#) says, “I am just the manager.” He adds that “Plan B” – total confrontation with the gangs – is in place if necessary.

There have been [19,000 arrests](#) since January 1<sup>st</sup>.

## May 20

[Archbishop José Luis Escobar](#) informs reporters that the “protagonist role” of the Church in the peacemaking process is ended, saying it is now up to the rest of society to take the lead.

## May 21

On the 70<sup>th</sup> day of the truce, facilitator [Raúl Mijango](#) says the process is not “fragile” but he spends every day “putting out fires.” Two days ago gang members in Tonacatepeque captured and issued a death warrant for a policeman. Neighbors alerted Mijango and Bishop Colindres to the critical situation; they were able to secure the safe release of the agent. “It is not an easy task,” Mijango commented, “but I believe what we have achieved is very significant for Salvadoran society.

## May 23

Security ministers from Guatemala and Honduras meet with [Munguía Payés](#) in San Salvador, saying the truce is “worthy of study.” Munguía Payés tells reporters the Archbishop’s comments were “misinterpreted,” and the church will continue to “mediate.”

## May 25

According to a poll by [LPG Datos](#), 52.3% surveyed say there has been a reduction in violence; 46.8% say it is due to the truce but only 10.9% believe the gangs have repented; 13.5% of the households surveyed have been victims of crime during the past three months.

## May 26

Security conditions in the [prisons](#) are vastly improved, Munguía Payés asserts, due to reforms to the system and personnel changes. Corrupt guards and other staff have been fired, he says, and new personnel are better trained.

## May 28

Women internees at the [Ilopango Women's Prison](#) ask to be part of the process and commit to ending the smuggling of illicit items into the prison. 1,800 women are imprisoned in the facility.

Public security officials sign an agreement with private enterprise organizations (ANEP, Chamber of Commerce and the *Patria Unida* Foundation) to [reward confidential informants](#) who denounce alleged criminals. The informants would be given an ID number and receive payment if the information is proven to be correct.

[OAS](#) representative Adam Blackwell is in El Salvador to lay the groundwork for a visit by Secretary General Insulza in late June. Accompanied by the Minister of Security, Blackwell visits prisoners and will meet with European Union, US and Canadian officials to seek support for the “historic opportunity.” He tells reporters that the truce could be extended to Honduras: “President Lobo is very involved in this.”

## June 1

An average of [5.5 homicides per day](#) were reported during the month of May, a total of 172.

President Funes meets with 39 [religious leaders](#) as part of his effort to reach agreement on a national accord in support of the “historic opportunity” presented by the truce, in effect since March 8<sup>th</sup>. The [President](#) admits his administration has not done enough in terms of prevention and rehabilitation during the past three years and says, “This is the moment to correct mistakes and begin to do things a different way.” The pastors and priests agree to participate in working groups.

## June 4

[Director of Prisons Nelson Rauda](#) reports that 25,742 people are currently held in prison with another 2,800 in police jails around the country. The prisons are said to be 317% over capacity.

## June 8

Three-month anniversary of the truce.

President Funes meets with representatives of [international institutions](#) seeking support for the national accord. He announces that a second prison farm will be inaugurated on June 14<sup>th</sup> as part of the efforts to alleviate prison overcrowding.

## June 10

In an extensive interview with *Diario de Hoy*, truce facilitator [Bishop Fabio Colindres](#) says peace “can only be achieved by believing it is possible.” He describes the events of recent months as “a peace process, not a truce,” and a process “that is involving and must involve the entire nation.” The Bishop insists on the need to “attack the system of injustice in and out of the prisons,” and to move away from repression as the only solution. He calls for “a greater dose of humanism” in the treatment of prisoners toward “rehabilitation, not destruction.” In the words of Bishop Colindres the gangs “are not blackmailing us, they are not demanding freedom or a reduction of their sentences, they are not demanding anything outside the legal framework. They simply ask for humanitarian treatment and health care.”

## June 11

Controversy continues over discrepancies in the number of persons reported [disappeared](#); forensics officials report 877 disappearances from January 1-April 30<sup>th</sup> ([68 more](#) than for the same period in 2011) but Minister of Justice and Security Munguía Payés insists that the number is much lower. Some analysts suggest the numbers are being manipulated to give the perception that the peace process has been successful. Archbishop José Escobar Alas asks for more investigation into the cases.

[El Faro](#) reports on the challenges of prevention and of reinsertion of gang members into conventional society. One former gang member explains the enticement of gang life: “In my house we had nothing. Nothing. And that’s how it is for so many young people – nothing to eat, nothing to wear, no shoes. And (to us) the gang member looks well-dressed, with money.”

Clothing manufacturer Rodrigo Bolaños of League Central America has hired former gang members who are recommended by pastors or priests to work in teams with other ex- members and receive counseling, child care and other benefits. “They weren’t born in Korea,” Bolaños says, “They are from here. This is our problem. They are Salvadoran brothers. It is not enough to help. You have to get involved.”

However, [El Faro](#) continues, not everyone wants to leave the gangs. As “Duke” in Quezaltepeque Prison explains, “In the long term we hope that to be a gang member is not synonymous with delinquency, violence, crime, but that it becomes a minority with its own culture, clothing, tattoos and language.” Meanwhile it is unclear if those on the outside (“*los libres*”) will continue to respect the truce. The prisoners have benefitted from the peace process (longer conjugal visits, visits from their children, food deliveries from families) but “*los libres*” say they continue to be “provoked” by some police and soldiers. Three months into the process, the government has made efforts to garner national and international support, but it seems little concrete action has been taken. In any case, El Salvador could be at the “point of no return” from one of the most violent countries in the world to a nation on the road to peace.

## June 12

[Police](#) report an average of five homicides per day during the first ten days of June.

Second day of disturbances in the [Juvenile Detention Center](#), Ilopango, allegedly involving members of Barrio 18 angry about new regulations inside the prison. Six guards and two police are reported injured.

## June 14

President Funes inaugurates construction of a second minimum security [prison farm](#) in Santa Ana as part of the effort to alleviate overcrowding in prisons. The \$2.5 million construction project will house 90 prisoners and is funded by Taiwan. Prisoners will work in agricultural and textile production.

## June 16

On the 100<sup>th</sup> day of the truce, [Bishop Colindres](#) is optimistic: “From the beginning I have seen more lights than shadows.” There are “dark interests” opposed to the process, he adds, “but those of us who believe in peace must continue.” Raúl Mijango asserts there is a “conspiracy to block the process” including “extermination groups” in the north and east of the country that are responsible for murdering gang members.

“The gangs must be controlled and it would be better if they disappear,” according to the director of the PNC Anti-Gang unit. [Pedro González](#) says his 400 elite agents are using the period of “calm” as an “opportunity to prepare for any eventuality,” and they are training “like a boxer going into the ring.”

### **June 18**

One hundred days of truce, with a reduction in homicides from 13.6 to 5.7 per day have saved 800 lives, according to [El Faro](#). The journal also addresses the contentious issue of disappearances since the truce, in response to accusations that the number of homicides is being manipulated to favor the peace process. The concern was noted by [Bishop Gregorio Rosa Chávez](#), who criticized the “passivity” of authorities in the investigation of disappearances. The Institute of Legal Medicine (IML) received notifications of 877 disappearances from January-April, while the PNC reported 677 from January 1-June 7. As [El Faro](#) notes, of the 677 complaints of disappearances received by the police, 361 were resolved (307 alive, 54 dead), leaving 316 whose fate is unknown. The IML does not purge its lists, which could account for the discrepancy. El Faro concludes there has not been an increase in disappearances since the March 8<sup>th</sup> truce was declared, and also notes a reduction in reports of extortions.

In an extensive interview with [Contrapunto](#), gang member Carlos Antonio Romero (“Baby”), age 35, explains that he and others want the process to succeed, to have “a full life where we can have our children and be sure nothing is going to happen to them...if the system accepts and helps us.” He complains of “persecution” and “abuse of authority” by police and soldiers, but insists the truce will not be broken: “There is an arrangement and it is difficult that it be broken.” Romero admits it is problematic for society to forgive acts of violence but says, “What we want are opportunities to demonstrate yes, we can be someone in society...We all have a positive outlook and the people who are watching over us are hoping things advance in the best way....All this is the result of dialogue. How did the civil war end? With dialogue.”

### **June 19**

The Institute for Legal Medicine [IML](#) reports 128 homicides so far in June, 7 per day.

Police move [525 prisoners](#) from overcrowded jails to overcrowded prisons.

Writer-activist [Luís Rodríguez](#), a member of the Los Angeles-based “Transitional Advisory Group in Support of the Peace Process in El Salvador” writes that 15,000 people were killed during the Los Angeles gang wars from 1980 until the successful peace agreement in 2000. The current process in El Salvador, he believes, “is a window of opportunity...with ramifications for Central America and the U.S.”



[Comparative statistics](#) illustrate the dramatic decrease in homicides:

<b>March 2011</b> 377	<b>March 2012</b> 255
<b>April 2011</b> 340	<b>April 2012</b> 156
<b>May 2011</b> 368	<b>May 2012</b> 172

Bishop Fabio Colindres officiates Mass at both Ciudad Barrios and Quezaltepeque prisons to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> day of the peace process. In [Ciudad Barrios](#), MS leader Borrromeo Henríquez (“Diablito”) thanks the Bishop and Raúl Colindres “in the name of all of us here, in all the different prisons, those who are in hospitals, those who are in the streets trying to survive... There had to be someone who had confidence in us, who believed in us.” For his part, the Bishop says, “What is happening is more than a truce; it is (the result of) deep reflection by these men who have suffered a lot but who today talk of the possibility of dignified treatment.”

Asked about the controversy over numbers of homicides and disappeared, Ciudad Barrios prisoner [Carlos Tiberio Valladares](#) of MS says the process “has enemies”... “We reject all manipulation of data that is intended to overshadow the positive effects of this process.” Valladares does not deny that some problems exist, but demands a more serious study of the cases and data. He also claims that 21 gang members have been murdered by “extermination groups” in the East and North of the country: “People with money and police” are behind the groups, he claims.

Minister of Security [Munguía Payés](#) adds that the numbers controversy “could be malicious, to try to discredit the great efforts to reduce the violence... It is morbid to play artificially with these numbers that send a message of despair to the people and a bad message to investors.” According to the Minister’s data, 373 people were disappeared to this date in 2011, 306 in 2012.

Following Mass in Ciudad Barrios, the prison theater troupe “*Vencedores*” (Winners) presents a play called “[Children of War](#),” illustrating the trajectory of a gang member from war orphan to gang member to prison and rehabilitation. Released from prison, the young man is excluded from employment and in the end returns to the gang.

In [Izalco Prison](#), Oscar Armando Reyes of Barrio 18 tells the AP, “We want to reach a definitive ceasefire to end all the criminal acts of the gangs... but we have to reach agreements because we have to survive.” He says there was some talk about jobs but nothing has happened and now “it is time for the government to listen to us.” Carlos Rivas (“*Chino Tres Colas*”) reads a third joint [communiqué](#) from MS-13 and Barrio 18 calling for a formal dialogue and negotiation process with the country leading to a “firm and lasting solution” and a “social/work reinsertion.”

## June 20

Twenty-one gang members have been executed this year by [clandestine groups](#). Minister of Justice and Security Munguía Payés admits the existence of these groups and says they could be the result of purges inside the gangs but haven't yet been identified. "Social cleansing is also a crime and we are going to pursue (them)." According to Raúl Mijango there are two groups: "Mirada Loca" in San Miguel and "Jaque Mate" in Chalatenango. [Mijango](#) suggests these groups are composed of former soldiers and police.

[Munguía Payés](#) tells CNN that 20,000 "criminals" have been arrested this year; disappearances are down 57% from 2011 and extortions reduced 10%. Asked about prison overcrowding, the Minister says the problem exists throughout Latin America and the government is negotiating funding to build new facilities through the Central America Integration Bank (BCIE.)

## June 21

In a massive [police operation](#), nearly 200 alleged gang members are arrested this morning in the metropolitan area, charged variously with homicide, extortion and membership in illegal groups.

The [Constitutional Court](#) has yet to rule on challenges to the appointments of the Minister of Security and the Director of the National Civil Police (PNC) based on their military status. On June 14<sup>th</sup> President Funes declared that the decision of the Court must be enforced. Munguía Payés says he and PNC Director Salinas have discussed the issue: "We are conscious that at any moment we (could) have to leave our posts." The viability of the truce could be at risk, according to Raúl Mijango, who insists the process owes its success to their support: "If someone comes who doesn't understand or believe in the process it is going to be very difficult."

Less than half of the current homicides are gang-related, according to the [Minister of Security](#). The homicide rate in 2011 was 67/100,000 and has been reduced to 35/100,000. Most of the victims are male, 11-30 years old, killed by firearms.

## June 25

Students, bus drivers and guards are no longer being killed by gangs, notes [Munguía Payés](#), who promises a 30% reduction in homicides by the end of the year.

The visit of OAS Secretary-General José Miguel Insulza has been postponed due to the crisis in Paraguay; Insulza had scheduled a visit to the country to witness the truce process.

In [Los Angeles](#), the 100<sup>th</sup> day of the truce was celebrated by former gang members and activists; author and activist Luís Rodríguez, a "peace warrior" explains the successful Los Angeles community-based gang prevention model. It involves an analysis of the assets and resources of each community, recognition of the victims of gang violence, and participation by gang members in community projects, he explains. Peace depends on the economic survival of gang members and the trust of the community.

Interviewed by El Faro, facilitator [Raúl Mijango](#) urges the government to get serious about the peace process, toward a “definitive solution.” Sooner or later, he says, it is “my personal vision” that there must be “face-to-face” official negotiations that include government agreements on prison conditions and opportunities for those on the outside; on the part of the gangs, extortions, street sales of drugs and handover of weapons are all issues that must be on the table. Time is of the essence, he insists, due to the 2014 presidential elections and uncertainty about future policies. Mijango also relates the experience of one gang in the west of the country that has successfully negotiated with local businessmen, exchanging an end to extortions for employment and business opportunities.

### **June 26**

According to data collected by the PNC in the large metropolitan municipality of Soyapango, 43% of persons reported as [disappeared](#) are found and/or return to their families within six days. As related by ODAC (Office of Citizen Attention of the PNC) 33% of the cases reported this year are still “in limbo.”

### **June 27**

Minister of Security [Munguía Payés](#) affirms the existence of clandestine death squads or “extermination groups,” saying they “strike and then it is as if they are sleeping and after one or two months they return.” It is not known if they are military or police: “We know they exist but we don’t know exactly how they are conformed or who sponsors them.”

### **July 2**

115<sup>th</sup> day of the truce between MS and Barrio 18. Gangs report killings of [200](#) members and ex-members since the truce was declared on March 8<sup>th</sup>; they say some are inter-gang murders, others have been committed by “extermination groups” but that there have been no “revenge” killings between the two gangs during this period.

[National Civil Police](#) (PNC) confirms 26% reduction in homicides during the first semester of the year; 560 lives “saved.”

### **July 3**

[Thirteenth day](#) without homicides in the huge metropolitan municipalities of Soyapango, Ilopango and San Martín; a total of 7 homicides were reported in these communities in June.

### **July 4**

[Minister of Security David Munguía Payés](#) reports 1,562 homicides during the first semester of 2012, a reduction of 552 over the same period last year. There was an average of 5.5 homicides per day during June for a total of 166, compared to 343 in June 2011. Sixty percent of reported disappearances have been resolved, but 313 persons are still listed as missing- including five students abducted outside a school in Santa Tecla. Ten investigators have been assigned to that case. Some crimes are still high, the Minister admits, including rape, bodily harm, robbery and burglary but in general, he says, criminal activity is down 16%.

[National Civil Police](#) (PNC) organized crime unit arrests fifty gang members in the west and central areas of the country, accused of 16 homicides from 2003-2011. Twenty-four of those arrested are from “*Los Revolucionarios*” a dissident faction of MS.

## July 8

Truce facilitator [Raúl Mijango](#) laments the lack of interest and participation from other sectors of society, saying success “is not just up to the poor priest and me.” Mijango, Bishop Colindres and the gang leaders gave a 100<sup>th</sup> day evaluation of the sacrifices the gangs are making, also referring to murders of members and former members by “extermination groups.” Mijango says it is “an error to think that resolving the gang problem is only their responsibility, or to think that violence in the country can be ended just by a gang truce.” President Funes has asked the private sector to participate in the process but has received no response. “Anyone here who believes that the private sector is going to open doors to give jobs to these people is out of it,” says Mijango. He and the Bishop contributed their own funds to donate 50 industrial sewing machines for workshops in three prisons “but we have our limits... We have invested our own money in this. No one has given us a nickel... We hope that what we have done opens the door to something more serious, a serious search for peace.”

## July 9

Eighteen days since the disappearance of five 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade students in Santa Tecla; still no information.

## July 10

Police [Anti-Gang Unit](#) concludes specialized training of 42 investigators.

[OAS Secretary-General José Manuel Insulza](#) will arrive July 12<sup>th</sup> to observe the peace process firsthand. His two-day visit will include meetings with gang leaders in two prisons accompanied by Mijango and Colindres. On July 13<sup>th</sup> Bishop Colindres will lead a “humanitarian event for peace and an end to violence in El Salvador” in the Plaza Cívica.

## July 11

123<sup>rd</sup> day of the truce. [Raúl Mijango](#) tells Contrapunto that gang leaders are hopeful the visit of the OAS Secretary-General will lead to recognition of the gangs as a “belligerent force” with the OAS as “guarantor.” He explains that this would “legitimize” them as “forces capable of dialogue with the government.”

Interviewed by [Minnesota Public Radio](#), El Faro Editor Carlos Dada admits there was not much optimism about the truce initially but now, he says, “We are hopeful... We are surprised, we thought it would only last three months... but now the rate of homicides has decreased significantly.” Asked if changes are notable in the communities, Dada says no polls have yet been taken but the murder rate has been cut in half, there is less overall violence in the affected communities, “and the people are feeling much safer.” Alex Sanchez, the Director of Los Angeles-based Homies Unidos, discusses the successful truce in that city, saying it can be a difficult process but the leadership “has to be obeyed... There are some inner struggles... It takes a lot for the leadership to convince (members).” The meetings between former enemies can be very emotional with “crying and hugging,” he says. “They don’t really want to do these things... Once a space is created they break down. They are also victims.”

## July 12

[OAS Secretary-General José Manuel Insulza](#) arrives in the country and visits La Esperanza (“Mariona”) Prison accompanied by heavy security and Minister of Security Munguía Payés. He meets with *la ranfla* (the national gang leadership) in private. Later, [Insulza](#) says he is very impressed: “This is an alternative path that greatly impresses me, makes me very hopeful and we are going to do all we can for this.”

Gang leader Borromeo Henríquez presents a document titled “[Proposal for a Framework Agreement for the Recovery of Social Peace in El Salvador](#)”, with a list of negotiating points for the government. The gangs will reduce all acts of violence and criminality in exchange for: an end to police operations in the communities; repeal of the law prohibiting gangs; reforms to the Penal Code and prison conditions; an end to torture and abuses by police during interrogations; removal of soldiers from public security deployment; pardons for aged and infirm prisoners; an end to extermination groups; and reinsertion programs including education, training and jobs for those on the outside and relatives of incarcerated members. Insulza responds, “Now is the time to enter into a negotiation and a discussion that cannot be delayed for long because these things have a rhythm.”

Following the OAS visit, gang leaders announce another unprecedented “gesture of good will”: a partial [disarmament](#). Carlos Lechuga Mojica says MS and 18 will surrender half of their weapons and ammunition. A meeting will be held with facilitators and the OAS to determine the logistics of the handover: dates, types of weapons and their final destination.

In a [communiqué](#), the gangs call on artists to use the weapons to create a sculpture “that symbolizes the beginning of this process.” They also respond to the call from President Funes last month to end violence against women: “We have given precise orders to contribute positively to this call.”

The [Secretary-General](#) meets with President Funes in the afternoon. The OAS will support the work of Minister of Security Munguía Payés and act as guarantor of the “transparent and legal” process, but will not recognize the gangs as a belligerent force: “Supporting the process is not a blessing for people who have committed crimes.” The OAS will observe and verify the disarmament process but, [Insulza](#) says, “They continue being what they are and it is not a negotiation... They spoke of concrete things... The important thing is that the process advances.”

Minister of Security [Munguía Payés](#) reiterates the government denial of direct dialogue or negotiations with the gangs: “The violence is down without the direct participation of the government. I don’t see (any reason) to change that when there are results. We continue in the role of facilitators.”

The truce shows “a real desire to lower the level of violence,” Assistant Secretary of State [Roberta Jacobson](#) says in a Washington press conference. Asked if it could be a model for other countries, Jacobson replies, “Truces are temporary measures while you put in place more structural and institutional changes.”

There are 25,195 [prisoners](#) in the country; 9,627 are gang members.

### July 13

Four hundred relatives of gang members, Secretary-General Insulza, Minister of Security Munguía Payés, Bishop Colindres and Raúl Mijango participate in a [symbolic handover](#) of weapons in the Plaza Cívica, downtown San Salvador. Members of MS and 18 surrender 77 weapons including three M-17s and one mine. Bishop Colindres asks the OAS to “certify” the truce and requests that the arms be destroyed in the presence of the OAS. The [Minister of Security](#) says all weapons will first be registered and investigated to determine if they have been used in criminal activities.

During the event, [the wife of one gang leader](#) says the truce has benefitted family members, who visit prisoners and now receive “dignified treatment” instead of the invasive body searches of the past. Asked about the disarmament, she declares, “We are on a good path...Both sides did their part.” Most of the gang members were abused as children, she says. Now there must be projects for youth and gangs “to be occupied.”

### July 14

In his first weekly radio call-in program, [President Funes](#) is asked about the truce. He insists again that the government is not negotiating with the gangs but acknowledges results – from 14 down to 5 homicides per day, a 52% reduction – and the work of Bishop Colindres and Raúl Mijango. The president also promotes the “National Plan for Security and Jobs” and announces that the “Prevention Cabinet” will meet soon.

### July 16

The FMLN knew nothing about the truce beforehand, according to [Deputy Benito Lara](#), and has been silent, preoccupied with the constitutional crisis. In an interview with El Faro, Lara explains that a dialogue with the gangs was initiated in 2009-2010 with working groups inside the prisons but it ended with the tragic bus burning by gang members in August 2010 that resulted in the deaths of 16 people. The government has been on the defensive since then, but this year “facilitated” the peace process. Now, the government “must stop acting in a lukewarm way,” Lara insists, but “go on the offensive and contribute with plans and projects that will sustain (the truce).”

The party believes the truce “is an opportunity,” but sustainability depends on the policies and measures taken: “To sit (and talk) just to sit doesn’t make sense. The point is to discuss policy and resolve structural problems, he says: “The State has an obligation to resolve the problems of the communities affected by violence.” At this point, a rupture in the process “would generate a situation of greater insecurity for the population, a disaster.” Lara concludes saying the results of the process are positive, but chastises “groups that continue to be preoccupied with whether or not negotiations (took place.) We will not resolve the problem that way.”

### July 17

Homicides are down to [4.3/day so far in July](#), according to Minister of Security Munguía Payés. He says the visit of OAS Secretary-General Insulza and the OAS commitment to act as guarantor of the process is “unprecedented,” a dramatic difference from sectors of the country that remain “incredulous” and “doubtful.” The [Minister](#) praises the “good will” of the gang offer to disarm and reiterates that the facilitators, Colindres and Mijango, are responsible for that process. There are 70,000 gang members, he estimates, but suggests they may only have three or four guns per “*clica*” or group of about 15 members.



## July 18

Gangs in both Guatemala and Honduras are following the Salvadoran truce. “They have looked for us and we have talked with them,” Raúl Mijango tells [Contrapunto](#). “All I can say is that I know of (their) willingness to enter into a process like this.”

## July 19

In 2011, the government was preparing for “total war” against the gangs. The gangs were arming themselves in preparation for battle with authorities, according to [Raúl Mijango](#). Mijango says their weapons, purchased on the black market or stolen from private security companies, are scattered all over the country and include pistols, revolvers, shotguns, FAL rifles and AK47 automatic weapons, mines and grenades. The gangs don’t have warehouses or camps but, he explains, they do have “zones of control” and a rearguard in the cities. Mijango, a former guerrilla, said that in contrast, during the war the FMLN had to retreat from the cities to the countryside.

Of the 77 [weapons](#) surrendered by the gangs last week, 71 are in good condition, six beyond repair, and most came from private security companies.

Asked whether the government will consider the gang requests made last week including a dialogue, [Minister of Security Payes](#) responds that it is not government policy to negotiate with gangs but, “We approve of the process. We don’t discard anything and we are evaluating.” The Security Cabinet will meet with President Funes to discuss the proposals.

The bodies of the [five young students](#) abducted in Santa Tecla last month have been discovered in a clandestine grave. No arrests have been made but it is alleged they were murdered by a local gang who believed they were forming their own gang “[without permission](#).”

[An Israeli team from “Grupo Golan”](#) is in the country to give advice on violence prevention in communities.

## July 20

Ninety percent of the [20,000 arrests in 2012](#) have been gang-related, according to the Security Ministry; 800 weapons have been confiscated.

[President Funes](#) meets with representatives from 36 transnational businesses seeking support for reinsertion programs. The “Prevention Cabinet” will meet next week.

## July 21

A peace process with [Guatemalan gangs](#) would be impossible, according to Guatemalan analyst Virgilio Alvarez because “there aren’t any intelligent gang members (and) we don’t have intelligent politicians.” The most important reason, says Alvarez, is El Salvador “is a country that learned to negotiate.”



## July 22

Former gang members from the [Los Angeles](#) – based “Transnational Advisory Group to Support the Peace Process in El Salvador” visit Quezaltepeque Prison on a peace mission. “We want to know how we can help,” one visitor said, “because we are clear that peace is necessary...We want to tell your story so the rest of the world knows possibly one of the greatest miracles in the history of El Salvador.” Noted former gang member and writer Luis Rodríguez tells the prisoners, “What you are doing requires a lot of courage... You are a light of hope for everyone.” The delegation of four former gang members, their lawyers and representatives of non-governmental organizations in Los Angeles will also visit the prisons of Cojutepeque, Ciudad Barrios, Izalco, and the women’s prison in Ilopango to determine how they can support the peace process.

## July 23

The truce and peace process are resulting in a better economic outlook for the country, according to a report in [Bloomberg News](#), citing a 70% drop in homicides. Dollar bonds due in 2023 fell to 6% after the gangs announced a partial weapons handover. “A reversal in the violence bodes well for the economy,” explained Carl Ross, Managing Director of Oppenheimer and Co. “El Salvador bonds are finally getting a bit of attention again.” The Salvadoran debt has returned 6.4% since the truce started, compared to 2.2% Costa Rica and 4.9% Panama. An international finance expert who oversees El Salvador’s \$1.8 billion debt says the truce “is very positive...and is necessary for creating a better growth and reform situation for the country.”

Munguía Payés confirms that two gang leaders from [Guatemala](#) are in the country meeting with truce facilitators Mijango and Colindres, seeking advice on how to initiate a similar process in their country. Mijango advised them to seek support from security officials and “national personalities.”

## July 24

Forty-six gang members are arrested in [San Vicente](#), charged with six homicides.

## July 26

Eighty-one gang members arrested in the [metropolitan area](#), charged with homicide and membership in illegal group; one police agent collaborating with gang members also arrested.

[El Faro](#) publishes extensive interview with a Guatemalan gang leader incarcerated in Guatemala City, who confirms that gang representatives were sent to El Salvador to explore the possibility of initiating a similar truce in that country.

## July 31

146<sup>th</sup> day of the truce. [Authorities](#) report 152 homicides (July 1-29,) a 50% reduction from the same period last year and a 30% reduction between [January and July of 2012](#) from that period in 2011: 1,714 homicides 2012 versus 2,461 in 2011.

In “[Death of a Gang Member](#)” [El Faro](#) relates the circumstances of the murder of 19-year old Carlos Alfredo Sorto Ramírez on July 27<sup>th</sup>, unarmed, by a PNC agent in the marginal community of El Progreso on the north side of the capital. The Human Rights Ombudsman received 535 complaints of violations of human rights by the police from January 1-May 31, 2012.

### **August 1**

Nearly five months into the truce, the homicide rate has been reduced from about 14 per day to 5 homicides per day. Prison Director Nelson Rauda acknowledges reports that gang members in prison now have access to cable television, improvements in rooms for conjugal visits and a camera and printer in at least one prison.

### **August 7**

PNC Director Francisco Salinas announces a change in operational strategy: “We must be more selective in arrest operations” of gang members. The priority from now on will be homicides and rapes; the objective is to avoid massive round-ups and to reduce overcrowding of jails and prisons. An average of 250 arrests per day have been made in recent months.

El Faro publishes the first chapter of an extensive history of the origin of Salvadoran gangs in Los Angeles in the early 1990s: “*El viaje de la mara salvatrucha.*”

### **August 8**

Auxiliary Bishop Gregorio Rosa Chávez criticizes the “lack of transparency” in the peace process, including the “privileges” enjoyed by some prisoners. He also calls for a serious purge of the police force, insisting that some are linked to organized crime. And, he says, his church and its educational center San Francisco have been victims of attempted extortion by gangs.

Minister of Security Munguía Payés responds to criticisms that inmates have been receiving “privileges” including televisions and other improvements in the prisons, insisting they are part of rehabilitation and help maintain peace both in and outside the facilities.

### **August 9**

The Minister of Security Munguía Payés visits Bishop Rosa Chávez and his community to investigate the alleged extortion and reassure families. He says police will guarantee the security of the school and suggests the extortion phone calls “could be a joke in bad taste by students.” The schools are much safer now than five months ago- as a gesture of good will the gangs have promised not to forcibly recruit students or to conduct turf wars on school grounds.

El Faro publishes an interview with four leaders of Barrio 18 in Izalco Prison, who discuss the truce process and their disappointment with the response of the media, police and government. They call the period before the initiation of the truce “the time of war,” and say at the beginning, the process was just considered a “cease fire” but later became a truce. Among the comments of the leaders:

*“The humble people, the poorest people are those who believe the most that we are complying.” (with the truce)*

*“We’re not asking (the media) to believe in us...but that they report what is happening in the communities.”*

*“We haven’t negotiated anything with the government, directly or indirectly.”*

*“On the issue of reinsertion we haven’t received anything.”*

Asked why they think there is such opposition and skepticism, one leader says, “*Because insecurity is a business in this country...Many people live from the insecurity.*”

They admit the gangs have caused great harm and that extortions continue: *“Some things are out of our hands...Some things (happen) that we don’t know about here inside...Orders have been given not to demand anything from the poor or the street vendors.”* And homicides continue: *“Remember that this (the truce) happened overnight and there are kids who only know how to kill and it’s not easy to calm them (down).”*

There is no time limit on the truce but *“sowing peace is not just the responsibility of the gangs.”* The truce is just the first stage, the second will be *“to talk with the State...We are willing.”* They call for an end to police harassment, citing examples where police have thrown a member of one gang into the territory of another to provoke problems: *“There are different behaviors from the police...Some don’t agree with the process.”*

### **August 10**

The Institute for Legal Medicine (IML) reports a slight increase in homicides during the first week of August and an average of 6 homicides per day during July. The IML and the police have frequently disagreed about numbers and methods in compiling homicide data.

### **August 11**

Seventeen gang members arrested in San José Villanueva, La Libertad on this morning. They are accused of extortion, homicides, and kidnapping.

During his newly inaugurated weekly radio broadcast, President Funes informs listeners that homicides have been reduced 51%, with 920 murders during the past five months.

### **August 13**

Time Magazine publishes a story on the truce: *“Central America’s Gang Wars: A Truce Leads to an Unusual Peace.”*

### **August 18**

Minister of Security Munguía Payés denies he is using the truce as a “trampoline” to promote a candidacy for president: *“I am not thinking about that.”* He also insists the truce has not been broken, despite some media reports: *“It is unfortunate that some ‘four cats’ are crossing their fingers that our plans are not successful.”*

### **August 24**

Zero homicides reported for the second time since the truce began on March 8th; the first zero homicide day was April 14th.

A band of criminals claiming to be gang members was responsible for the attempted extortion of the Catholic Education Center led by Bishop Rosa Chávez and at least 20 other schools. Munguía Payés shows reporters the cell phone used to threaten school officials and says the men are common criminals, now under arrest.

It is announced that Anti-terrorist units will be deployed to guard busses against extortion attempts; 132 six-member teams comprised of police and soldiers, undercover and uniformed, will protect drivers and fare collectors.

### August 25

The New York Times has a story on the truce, which reports that 200 soldiers stood guard during the first tense meeting between gang leaders in prison earlier this year. Over five months into the process, gang members are growing impatient at the lack of support. “It’s not that the truce is weak,” one says. “We feel it is strong. But the lack of involvement of the authorities and the public could make it weak. They all think we are animals but we have rights and we are taking a step, so they should take a step.” Another says, “We need, like, an affirmative action law.” During his weekly radio address, President Funes reports data on daily average homicide rates since the truce began:

April	5.7
May	5.58
June	5.53
July	5.26
August (1-24)	5.5

### August 28

The government is taking steps that could institutionalize the efforts of the facilitators, establishing a “technical security cabinet” with Vice-Minister of Justice Douglas Moreno and others who will seek funding for specific youth projects. President Funes holds final meeting with national sectors seeking support for his peace and security accord, this time meeting with social organizations.

The series of meetings began months ago but was suspended during the political crisis. No specific agreements were announced. “If we don’t give an institutional and social response...we are going to continue having gangs...the truce is not the solution but has created a different scenario,” the President argues. The President presents his administration’s three security plans: a national accord for jobs and security; prevention (to include new legislation to institutionalize state policy); and rehabilitation and reinsertion including conversion of prisons into rehabilitation and reinsertion centers.

Following the final meeting, Raúl Mijango tells Contrapunto it is “time to lower the rhetoric” and take concrete steps, including a dialogue as proposed by gang leaders in June.

### August 30

There have been more than 1,500 arrests for alleged extortion so far in 2012, according to the Minister of Security, 150 of those linked to public transportation.

**September 1** The PNC reports 153 homicides in August, an average of 5 per day and a 35% reduction during the first 8 months of the year. January 1- August 30, 2011: 2,868 January 1- August 30, 2012: 1,867

The highest rate of homicides occurred in Soyapango and 65% of the cases are inter-or-intra-gang. Seventy arrests take place around the country in what is described as a “mega-operation” ordered by the Attorney General’s office. Most of those arrested are said to be gang members accused of homicide, rape, robbery and illegal association.

### **September 2**

In an effort to enlist the support of the private sector, Adam Blackwell, Secretary of Multidimensional Security of the OAS meets with gang facilitators, FUSADES President Antonio Cabrales and UNDP representative William Pleitez. They discuss the possibility of a “humanitarian foundation” designed to support the truce by improving prison conditions. The foundation would be a permanent, private, apolitical non-profit.

### **September 3**

Bishop Fabio Colindres explains that homicides continue because not all gangs are participating in the truce. Efforts are ongoing to convince them to join the process but there is great distrust, he says, due to early reports that the gang leaders received \$10,000 each and that negotiations were taking place in the *Casa Presidencial*. “They felt betrayed...They believed that because they didn’t receive any money they had no reason to obey...They believed something was hidden or money was involved.” There could be additional handovers of weapons “but there must be an understanding with the society, with the government...They can’t be left hanging by a thread...They have given more than a gesture.” Colindres praises the OAS for “having the courage to come in the midst of a lot of criticism...Society must begin to have faith in the process...to try to give them the benefit of the doubt.”

### **September 3**

President Funes confirms a 53% reduction in homicides in 2012 over 2011.

### **September 5**

Police begin the process of transferring 1,000 detainees from jails to prisons to ease jail overcrowding. PNC Commissioner Douglas Omar García Funes reports that 21 alleged gang members were rounded up in Santa Ana, related to 19 violent crimes. Facilitators Colindres and Mijango visit prisons of Ciudad Barrios and San Francisco Gotera to report on advances and encourage gang members to hold firm on the truce. Two “technical committees” have been formed with the Minister of Security as liaison: one committee represents the CES/Economic-Social Council, the other led by the OAS.

Benjamin Cuellar of the Human Rights Institute of the UCA (IDHUCA) says he is “not a fan of the truce.” He criticizes the lack of transparency and says homicides, extortions and disappearances are still too high: “This is the continuation of a failed public security policy.”

### **September 6**

Institute of Legal Medicine (IML) reports 168 homicides in August (5.4/day) whereas the Minister of Security had reported 157 (5.06/day). Investigators from the IML, PNC and Attorney General’s office must agree on the cause of death in each case; the discrepancy is reportedly due to disagreements. The director of the IML should stick to his work, and not spend time arguing about statistics, President Funes declares.

## September 7

Attorney General Romeo Barahona praises efforts by police and prosecutors in fighting extortions; 1,691 arrests related to extortion in 2011, versus 1,601 to date in 2012. He notes 925 convictions in 2009, versus 1,058 to date in 2012. Over 52% of extortions target the trade sector, 7.8% business, 5% public transportation, 4.5% professionals, 2% educators and 24.5% “undetermined.” In a communique demanding a change in the direction of the government, ANEP contends, “It is not sustainable to reduce homicides at the cost of negotiating with organized crime.”

**Six month anniversary of the truce.** During his weekly radio program President Funes reports a 9% reduction in extortion cases from January 1-August 31, 2012. An AP story headlined “5 Schoolboys in Mass Grave Sharpen Debate over El Salvador’s Controversial Gang Truce,” is widely distributed including one version in the Washington Post with the title, “Is the Salvadoran Gang Truce a Farce?” The report highlights the June kidnapping and murder of five teenagers in Santa Tecla by members of the MS-13 gang as the prime example of the “farce” of the truce. “It’s all a lie,” according to Carlos Ponce, said to be from the Attorney General’s office. “The gangs continue to operate, people continue getting killed, people continue disappearing and the gangs get stronger and stronger.” The article also cites Max Manwaring of the U.S. Army War College: “The gangs hold all the cards...and the government is simply grasping at straws.”

## September 10

Pastor Mario Vega, of the large Misión Cristiana Elim evangelical church in Soyapango, describes the truce as “an authentic opportunity” for the country, but warns if the truce is broken “a very difficult situation awaits society.” In an interview with El Faro, Pastor Vega says he participated in the meeting with President Funes and other religious leaders and is a defender of the truce, but he regrets the “lack of interest” from the government and society: “I don’t see any sign of serious work or plans of insertion or prevention.”

Despite the fact that homicides continue – purges within the gangs and “many murders by people who know they will be attributed to gangs” – Pastor Vega contends that many lives have been saved. “They deserve an opportunity,” he says, “not a ‘second’ opportunity because they never had a ‘first’ one.” He also prefers the term ‘insertion’ rather than ‘reinsertion.’ “I think their offer is honest. The only thing of value they have is their word.”

Responding to criticisms that prisoners are being coddled, Prison Director Nelson Rauda again defends the right of inmates to have televisions in recreation areas. He also confirms that 900 prisoners were moved from overcrowded police jails last week to prisons, also overcrowded but with slightly improved conditions. Efforts are being made to refit existing facilities and secure funding for new construction. Many of the existing prisons are simply former military installations or were built for other purposes including one that was a coffee processing plant.

Security Minister Munguía Payés contends that 1,200 lives have been saved during the six months of truce and reports 3.6 homicides/day from September 1-8.

## September 12

Six months after El Faro broke the story of the gang truce, the journal publishes “The New Truth About the Truce Between Gangs,” based on interviews with the principal actors involved from the beginning. The March 14th El Faro report that the government was negotiating with gangs has been fiercely denied by the Minister of Security, the facilitators and the president for the past six months but now, as El Faro reports, it is clear that in the words of the Minister of Security, the original story “exposed something we did not want to reveal.” The lack of public confidence in the truce can be attributed at least in part to the inability of the government to respond honestly and coherently to questions from the beginning; now it is clear that the truce is part of a “carefully designed process from the Minister of Public Security with the support of the President” and transparency is essential for success.

### Important elements of the story:

- Bishop Fabio Colindres was invited in order to lend credibility to the process; the Archbishop and Auxiliary Bishop Rosa Chávez declined to participate and the Catholic Church response continues to be “cold.”
- During 2011 then-Minister of Defense Munguía Payés and his advisor Raúl Mijango discussed the strategy
- Dialogue between the gangs did not begin until January 2012, after Munguía Payés and his team were in place in the Ministry of Security, Office of Intelligence and PNC, most from the military
- The first joint meeting of the facilitators with leaders of both gangs was February 20th and was “very tense” until the two principal leaders shook hands and “broke the ice”;
- February 29th a “non-aggression” pact for three months was signed, all in “total secrecy” and “on hold” until after the March 11th election
- On March 4th information was received that “homeboys” on the outside planned to institute a massive boycott of the elections so the process was accelerated urgently, with 30 leaders transferred from maximum security prisons in order to facilitate communication with members and prevent the boycott
- Transfers took place on March 8th and 9th; by March 11th homicides were down from 13.6 per day to two, then 3, then five.
- Five joint communiques (MS and Barrio 13) have been issued during the six months; homicides are down, schools are off limits for gang activity, forced recruitment has ended, orders have been given to end violence against women.
- For its part, the government removed soldiers from the prisons, allowed longer family visits and overnight conjugal visits, more money from families to prisoners, TVs in recreation areas, and some small appliances; efforts are being made to improve conditions but overcrowding and lack of hygiene still create an “inhumane” environment.
- The OAS is acting as guarantor of the process, will supervise the handover of 3000 weapons on September 30th and has organized a “technical board” to work in support of the truce.
- Ex-guerrillero, now Diario de Hoy columnist, Paolo Lüers is acting as an intermediary with the business community in the formation of the “*Comité Humanitario*” with the objective of assisting with job opportunities for gang members and their families.
- The June 22nd communique from the gangs called on the government to begin formal negotiations but there has been no public response.



In an interview with the U.S. Catholic Magazine, Bishop Colindres denounces the critics of the truce: “There are people who don’t understand this process and don’t want anyone to support it; that is not only negative, it is evil.”

President Funes lambasts critics (“salaried mercenaries”) who call the truce “a farce”, in particular referring to the Washington Post article: “No one “can say that this is a farce, that it has not changed El Salvador.” The truce has saved 1,200 lives, he says and “It seems really surprising that there are groups that still call it a farce....If we know how to conduct this intelligently it will bring a historic change.”

Father Antonio Rodríguez, a Spanish priest who has worked with gangs in Mejicanos for a decade reports receiving death threats and accuses the Minister of Security of a “passive” response to the threats. The priest has not been involved in the truce and has been very critical of the process.

### **September 13**

UN Representative Robert Valent describes the truce as a “window of opportunity” that needs a comprehensive social, economic and security public policy to reduce poverty and inequity in order to be sustainable: It is time to “roll up sleeves a little and all go to work to sustain the truce.” There are 300,000 – 400,000 youth between the ages of 14 and 24 not in school and unemployed, “a dormant army for the gangs.” Bishop Colindres officiates at Mass in Cojutepeque prison to celebrate six months of the truce. Carlos Mojica Lechuga, “Viejo Lin” leader of Barrio 18 calls on “*compañeros*” to be “steadfast”: “This is no longer a truce, but the beginning of a peace process.”

### **September 14**

The Minister of Security confirms the formation of the “Humanitarian Commission,” a transnational support group comprised of representatives of the OAS, “friendly nations,” NGOs and the Salvadoran business community. The commission will administer prevention and reinsertion projects in addition to penal reforms to alleviate overcrowding, and efforts to reduce violence. The board of directors will include representatives of the OAS, Ministry of Security, the Executive branch and the business sector. Unnamed Salvadoran and international donors have provided \$500,000 to the facilitators for ongoing work.

An average of 3.83 homicides per day are reported so far in September.

### **September 15**

During his weekly radio program, President Funes says extortions have been reduced 10% He encourages the population to trust the police, and not to be afraid to report crimes. Some police were “accomplices” to extortion in the past, he admits but have been identified and “purged.”

President Funes furiously denies the El Faro report on the “real story” behind the truce: “There is a digital newspaper that says the truce was born in the office of the Minister of Security guaranteed by the President. This is not true, this is the biggest lie that has been told in respect to the truth.” He continues, “We have never participated in or negotiated, not the minister or any official of public security and much less the president of the Republic has ever sat down to negotiate with gangs.”

According to an OAS study, El Salvador had the second highest homicide rate in Latin America-Caribbean from 2000 to 2011: 69.02/100,000, higher than Mexico, Venezuela and Jamaica. Honduras had a rate of 91.6/100,000; the U.S. 4.6. President Funes says the rate now, six months into the truce, is 24/100,000.

### **September 17**

El Faro reports on the President's attempt once again to remove himself from any knowledge of or participation in the planning of the truce, insisting his government only "facilitated" the efforts of Mijango and Bishop Colindres.

An El Faro editorial, "Lies and truths about the truce," describes the "serious dilemma" facing the president: if he refuses to admit his participation "in the most transcendent public security policy in recent years" it will be difficult for him to rally efforts to sustain the truce because it would be "exclusively dependent on the good will of the gangs."

If the President believes in the truce, "he must fully commit, assume the responsibility and the consequences of the agreement." And, El Faro continues, he must learn to differentiate between those who are trying to destroy the truce and those who are trying to clarify the issues: "This is an extraordinary opportunity for us to debate a stable solution."

### **September 18**

The Humanitarian Commission is an "independent citizen initiative" according to the Minister of Security, comprised of businessmen, professionals and academics "responding to the call of the Church.... "to humanize the prison system."

### **September 19**

Five people massacred in La Libertad, apparently members of a gang "purged" by the gang for withholding extortion money. Representatives of 36 non-governmental organizations propose the formation of a national institute for the rehabilitation of gangs and gang members, repeal of the law prohibiting gangs, and the implementation of a "security tax" as proposed by the president last year, with funds designated for prevention and rehabilitation. Participants agree that the peace process must be legal, transparent and sustainable, with clearly defined responsibilities of the government, the churches and society.

### **September 20**

The OAS and the Institute for Children and Adolescents (ISNA) present the first concert with female gang members – from both MS and Barrio 18- who are inmates. Seventy-three teenagers perform with the National Youth Orchestra at the training center for women in Ilopango.

### **September 23**

Police show La Prensa Gráfica two notebooks confiscated from a gang member in San Miguel, used to keep a detailed account of local extortion routes, businesses extorted, receipts, expenses and amounts turned over to the national structure of the gang.

### **September 24**

The 200th day of the truce is celebrated on the Day of Prisoners; ecumenical services held in La Esperanza (Mariona) and Ilopango Prisons with the participation of leaders of the Lutheran, Presbyterian, Episcopal and Catholic churches. September could see the lowest homicide rate: 3.6/day so far this month.

Gangs issue a communique promising to reduce extortions but Barrio 18 leader Carlos Ernesto Mojica Lechuga says the "scourge" cannot be "eradicated completely" until "conditions" are created that make it possible.

## **September 25**

PNC Director Francisco Salinas reports 10 homicides last Saturday and Sunday. Four were gang-related, while six were classified as “social violence” including crimes of passion and domestic violence.

In his address to the United Nations General Assembly, President Funes highlights the “drastic reduction in homicides...due to the citizen security policy and the non-aggression pact between rival gangs...mediated by the Catholic Church and facilitated by the government.”

OAS representative Adam Blackwell begins two-day visit as part of OAS commitment to act as “guarantor” of the truce.

Extortions have been “eradicated” from inside Mariona Prison, according to Ricardo Antonio Serrano who represents the thousands of non-gang inmates. In exchange, authorities have permitted greater visitation rights to family members. It is now estimated that 1,712 lives have been saved due to the truce.

## **September 26**

Minister of Defense Atilio Benitez and OAS representative Adam Blackwell oversee the destruction of 828 weapons handed over by the gangs in August. It is hoped that another 5,000 will be surrendered by the end of the year.

## **September 28**

President Funes meets with the mayors of 17 metropolitan municipalities to discuss the Metropolitan Security Cabinet. Even though some sectors still don’t believe in the “pact,” he tells the mayors, “and think there is some business behind this, (...) the concrete results cannot be denied.” The President emphasizes jobs and education, and other issues related to violence prevention are discussed including the installation of video cameras and improved data analysis.

## **October 1**

The Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI) issues a statement in El Salvador calling on churches and the international community to support the peace process: “From Violence to Dialogue in El Salvador.” Minister of Security Munguía Payés reports a total of 167 homicides in the country during September, a reduction of 204 in comparison to September 2011, for an average of 5.5/day. El Faro publishes an extensive report on families displaced from their communities due to gang violence: *La Legión de los desplazados*. Also in English at InSight Crime: The Legion of the Displaced.

Contrapunto publishes an interview with Carlos Ernesto Lechuga “Viejo Lin,” leader of Barrio 18, in Cojutepeque Prison. He is wearing an ALBA t-shirt, acknowledges that he is a member of the PRTC, one of the historic revolutionary organizations of the FMLN, and refers to members of the gang as “*compañeros*”: “Our *compañeros en la libre* (outside prison) are showing great willingness,” he says, “We are making enormous efforts to definitively eradicate extortions.” He explains that the country is fragmented into gang territories; members of a gang cannot get on a bus and travel freely from one city to another.

Lechuga praises President Funes (“I take my hat off to this gentleman.”) and the facilitators (“true patriots...We admire their determination and strength...They are not collecting a nickel from this.”) The country has violated international human rights treaties for years, he contends, with prisoners living in “dark cells under inhumane and degrading conditions” and “humiliation of our families” including invasive body searches conducted by soldiers. But following the truce, the army was removed from inside the prisons following the truce: “Patriots in the government have restored our rights.”

In an address to the Institute of the Americas in San Diego, California, William Brownfield (Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of International Narcotics and Enforcement Affairs) discusses gangs and breaking the cycle of violence, with a focus on Salvadoran gangs. According to Brownfield, MS and Barrio 18 have an estimated 85,000 members in the U.S., El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras who “facilitate logistics and transportation for the drug trafficking industry.” Breaking the cycle of violence, he contends, involves effective policing combined with education, training and employment: “A society that cannot provide for its youth is guaranteed to fail.

### **October 2**

Four people are massacred in Lourdes, Colon including a 5-year old child and two women; gang members are suspected.

The 710 inmates of Santa Ana Prison, including members of three small gangs (*La Raza*, *Los Traslados MD* and *Los Lmgareños*) join the peace process. They hand over 76 weapons -most knives and machetes- at a ceremony in the prison yard. Guillermo García, President of the Association of Former Prisoners (AEIPES,) facilitates a dialogue between the prisoners and authorities. The dialogue results in a commitment by the inmates to halt smuggling of illegal items into the prison, such as cell phones, chips and drugs. Three prisoners were killed inside the prison earlier this year during a dispute. Now, one inmate says, “Stability in the prisons is beneficial for the country, the State, security officials and prisoners.”

### **October 3**

Forty alleged gang members (Barrio 18) are arrested in Armenia, Sonsonate.

Fundaungo releases the publication “Atlas of the Violence in El Salvador.” Over 29,000 people have been murdered since 2005, the majority being young men between the ages of 15 and 29. A 61% increase in femicides between 2005 and 2011 brought the number of women victims to 3,314, most between the ages of 15-19.

### **October 4**

Security officials report a reduction in denunciations of extortion from 371 at this date in 2011, to 167 so far this year but admit an increase in extortions in Sonsonate, San Vicente, Mejicanos, San Marcos and Apopa. Disappearances are also down from 926 in 2011, to 541 over the same period this year. Officials say 1186 lives have been saved due to the truce. Police agent Jesús Bonilla Méndez is arrested in Sonsonate with gang members and is charged with illegal possession of weapons, membership in an illegal organization and resisting arrest.

Forty-four members of MS held for months in the Sonsonate jail remain on hunger strike protesting overcrowding and demanding transfer to prison. The OAS has been a protagonist in the peace process for two years, according to Adam Blackwell, Secretary of Multi-Dimensional Security of the organization. Interviewed by El Faro, Blackwell describes the process as a “mediation” rather than “negotiation” and says it has been an “unprecedented evolution...with no guidebook.”

The OAS presented a diagnostic of the violence to Munguía Payés late last year as security officials were preparing for war against the gangs. Blackwell made the argument for a different policy. At that time there were an estimated 60,000 gang members, the prisons were 300% overcrowded, the jails 400% overcrowded and, Blackwell says, the United Nations was about to declare El Salvador the most violent country in the world.

To critics of the peace process Blackwell says, “What is the option? I haven’t heard any options.” The gangs have “organization, structure, strength, communities, interests, wealth,” he says. “They are an intelligent group, they know how to reason and express themselves, they can understand the realities...They understand their situation but don’t want their wives and children to be victims of their errors.” The Technical Committee, organized by the OAS, is an official negotiating table, Blackwell insists, that formalizes the dialogue with the full support of the President. An office shared by the OAS and the Commission will open shortly.

One dead and two wounded during an intra-gang dispute in Santiago Nonualco, La Paz.

#### **October 8:**

##### **Seventh month of the truce.**

When El Faro journalists José Luis Sanz and Carlos Martínez met with twenty members of *la ranfla*, (the leadership) of MS 13 in Ciudad Barrios Prison on September 4th, they were asked to apologize for the original El Faro story on the truce that included insinuations from “sources” that the leadership had received large sums of money in exchange for the truce. The reporters answered everyone’s questions until the principal leader, Borromeo Henríquez (Diablo) and the others agreed they were “satisfied.”

Some of the points made during two separate interviews in September:

- In 2005 the Saca government opened “secret and direct” talks but after the talks failed the leaders were imprisoned, leaving a vacuum of leadership in the communities. If the government continues to delay a formal dialogue “we can mount international pressure.”
- MS and Barrio 18 are willing to discuss and put “all issues on the table” including clandestine cemeteries and disarmament but not internal disciplinary measures or dissolution of the gang: “This is our family...MS will always be MS.” Unresolved issues between the gangs include crossing each other’s territory and pardoning traitors.
- The overnight reduction in the homicide rate was due to “strong control of the structures” and to “weariness” from the repression: “We were in a war where they were killing us and it was an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.” The gangs outside obeyed the decision of the leadership because “they had confidence that the decisions we were going to take together were going to be correct.”

- The document presented to OAS Secretary- General Insulza in July included an end to harassment of families including massive, indiscriminate police operations and army deployment in the communities; an end to torture of prisoners; repeal of legislation criminalizing gang membership and an end to the use of “protected witnesses” as evidence. According to “Diablo” these witnesses implicate many people in order to receive reduced sentences and “85 or 90%” of the accusations are false.
- On at least two occasions (2007, 2009) inmates were subjected to brutal treatment by members of CAT (Transnational Anti-Gang Unit) led in 2007 by Douglas Omar García Funes, recently appointed as police commander for the western zone of the country, and in the presence of U.S. agents. Prisoners were kicked and beaten with gun butts and rubber hoses, tied and frog-marched, and then sprayed with pepper gas directly into the anus resulting in serious health problems. (Asked by El Faro to respond, García Funes said, “It doesn’t make sense to comment on rumors.”) There has been no direct response to these demands but “some improvements” have been made.
- A formal census has been initiated of the skills and labor potential of all gang members, their cells (“*clicas*”) and their families to prepare for employment/business proposals to donors.
- Sustainability of the peace process depends on reforms to the prison system and opportunities for the members and families on the outside. “There are certain officials or high-ranking members of the police and intelligence who are against this process and are going to try to smear those of us here.”
- They are patient and understand that upcoming elections present a problem for President Funes who “has to be very careful.” The process “has been a great success for us,” Diablo says, “but it must keep advancing...and needs fuel from outside, not just us.”
- A photo accompanying the article shows a cell built for 40 prisoners, now housing 125 people; hammocks are strung six levels high to accommodate everyone. El Salvador and Bolivia have Latin America’s most overcrowded prisons. El Salvador is 299% over capacity, Bolivia 233% and Haiti 218%.

### **October 10**

The prisoners held in the Sonsonate Prison join in the peace process today, in the presence of Mijango and Bishop Colindres. Nearly 700 inmates, many ex-gang members, agree to end smuggling of illegal items (drugs, cell phones, etc.) into the prison and surrender weapons (knives, machetes) and cell phones. This is the fourth Salvadoran prison to join the process (Mariona, Ilopango, Santa Ana and now Sonsonate.)

Speaking for the prisoners, Juan Lisandro Urías says: “We are aware that building peace is not easy but it is a responsibility of everyone...We have decided to unite with this historic effort together with our family members, committing ourselves to maintain a climate of peace, to avoid entry of illegal items and to halt homicides and extortions.” A year ago Sonsonate had the highest per capita rate of homicides.

On August 28th Raúl Mijango and Bishop Colindres met with city officials for three hours to discuss ways in which civil society could support the process. Sonsonate became the first municipality in the country to adopt the facilitators' anti-violence proposal, which includes vocational workshops and support for micro businesses. At the time, Raúl Mijango lauded the city as the "pioneer...where the authorities are willing and enthusiastic to join in the process." The community was willing, but wanted to see some reciprocity on the part of the gangs; today's ceremony in the local prison could be the response.

### **October 11**

The U.S. Treasury Department announces that MS-13 will be added to the list of "transnational criminal organizations" as "one of the most dangerous and rapidly expanding criminal groups in the world" along with the Zetas (Mexico), Yakuza (Japan), Camorra (Italy) and the Brothers' Circle (former Soviet Union). Under Executive Order 13581, MS is charged with drug trafficking, kidnapping, human smuggling, sex trafficking, murder, assassination, racketeering, blackmailing and extortion. US officials say there are 10,000 members in the 46 states and Central America. Under this order, U.S. officials can freeze all assets thought to be derived from criminal activities.

On the same day, the Los Angeles, California Gang Reduction and Youth Development project (GRYD) announces an unprecedented grant from USAID to provide technical assistance to the Salvadoran peace process, promoting successful strategies used in Los Angeles (LA) including community based efforts to dispel rumors and encourage non-violent solutions to disputes. LA Deputy Mayor in charge of the program, Guillermo Cespedes says, "We've had a significant role in exporting this culture.... and I think it's important to take a significant role in exporting some of the solutions we've come up with." The project will begin in January.

According to the USAID press release, the partnership with the City of Los Angeles "will improve regional security and reduce gang violence." The city and USAID will share best practices, collaborate on at-risk youth initiatives and assist city-to-city partnerships.

### **October 12**

The U.S. Treasury Department order will have little effect in El Salvador, according to Raúl Mijango who agrees that Mara Salvatrucha is a criminal organization, "but it is in the process of transformation that has been very successful to date...In the U.S. they are aware that there is a process in El Salvador with good results and that we are moving ahead with this effort." The homicide rate has dropped from 69/100,000 in 2011 to 26/100,000 this year. Mijango suggests to Contrapunto that the announcement could be linked to the U.S elections. "Here in El Salvador the dynamic is totally different...The image is changing...MS is one of the main actors in this (peace) process."

Minister of Security Munguía Payés agrees that the order will have little impact in El Salvador. "We have our own way of reducing violence and it is bringing results," he explains. The Treasury Department alleges that money from criminal activities in the U.S. is sent to the leaders in El Salvador but Munguía contends that the leaders "are not people who have large quantities of money," though he admits there may be some who "have direct relations with drug cartels."

The Los Angeles Times notes the history of the gang in Los Angeles and says its power in the communities has been reduced in recent years and "is not as overtly brutal" as it once was due to crackdowns and overall reduction in criminal activity in the city. "They don't even dress like gang members anymore," according to City Councilmember Ed Reyes. The Treasury Department estimates 30,000 members overall, with about 8,000 in 40 states in the U.S.

David Cohen of the U.S. Treasury Department tells National Public Radio that MS-13 is a “very violent and powerful gang” that sends “significant sums” of money through wire transfers to El Salvador. U.S. officials will focus on the leadership, “key individuals who guide and benefit” and invest proceeds from criminal activities in “apparently legitimate businesses” to launder money.

PNC Director Francisco Salinas says the designation was expected and “will not affect the peace process developed by the Catholic Church.” El Salvador has anti-gang laws in place, and, he insists, prisoners are only receiving benefits “within the law.”

### **October 13**

The U.S. has “overblown” the economic or financial risk of MS’s criminal activities, President Funes declares, by equating the gang with Mexican cartels or the Italian Camorras. Salvadoran jails and prisons are overcrowded with gang members and the main leaders are all incarcerated, the President says, “They are the product of poverty, exclusion and lack of opportunity...Repression must be accompanied by respect for (their) rights including dignified employment, education and health care.”

The Salvadoran government will continue to facilitate the truce despite the U.S. designation, the President adds, with a recommendation that the U.S. increase internal efforts to control drug use and distribution.

According to an analysis by InSight Crime, the designation could have more to do with pressuring gang leadership in El Salvador than with its transnational crime. MS is “highly decentralized.” There is no evidence that cross-border drug trafficking and extortion is a problem at local levels.

Salvadorans in Los Angeles express concern that the designation could “criminalize” all Salvadorans, especially in the context of the polarized electoral campaign in the U.S. “We are afraid it could have collateral damage for our community, El Rescate President Salvador Sanabria remarks, “especially for at-risk youth in big cities like L.A.”

Three young men killed in Izalco, possibly related to Barrio 18.

### **October 14**

The U.S. Treasury Department designation should not be taken lightly, Auxiliary Bishop Rosa Chávez warns: “It will have consequences for our country.” Calling again for transparency and a comprehensive solution to the problem of violence, the Bishop reaffirms his skepticism about the truce, saying “If the data is so optimistic why aren’t the people reacting with optimism?”

Four men are murdered in San Pedro Perulapán, possibly the result of intra-gang violence according to police.



### **October 16**

U.S. Ambassador Mari Carmen Aponte responds to reporters' questions about the Treasury Department ruling, saying it has nothing to do with the truce. President Funes "has the right to his opinion and we respect that," she says, but "For us it is very important to hit the effectiveness of the gangs not only transnationally but also in the U.S." The decision was months in the making and was made by the Department of Justice, Security and Treasury.

Uprising in the Montserrat jail as 220 prisoners protest inhumane conditions including severely overcrowded cells, inadequate food and lack of visitation rights. Police admit the former theater converted to a jail is inappropriate for the number of prisoners.

The State Department's Special Adviser for Global Youth Issues Zeemat Rahman is in El Salvador to meet with Vice-Minister of Justice Douglas Moreno, youth organizations and to visit Supérate, USAID sponsored after-school programs for 13-18 year-old young people.

### **October 17**

"We have never arrested gang members with large sums of money," Minister of Security Munguía Payés says, "with the exception of Los Perrones (an organized crime and drug trafficking group in Eastern El Salvador), from whom we confiscated property and vehicles." The Minister also confirms the government's collaboration with the U.S. "in the framework of the Partnership for Growth."

### **October 18**

Anti-gang unit of the PNC arrests 12 alleged members of Barrio 18 in Apopa charged with extortion and homicides, and confiscate the property of their small business; the accompanying photo shows 12 young people standing behind several pairs of sports shoes and a small television set. The head of anti-gang work, Pedro González, describes the objective of his units' work as going after the property of the gangs. Officials display a small notebook with records of the collaboration of each member of the group with the business. González comments that this work is "independent" of the Treasury Department designation.

Minister of Security Munguía Payés says 35,000 arrests have been made so far in 2012. The rate of homicides has been reduced from 69/100,000 to 23/100,000. His violence reduction strategy includes control and repression, prevention, rehabilitation and reinsertion, attention to victims, and legal reforms. The gang culture per se is not a problem: "We pursue them because they are involved in crime; Salvadoran society can tolerate a culture that goes around with faces (tattooed). The problem for society is when they are involved in crimes."

### **October 19**

Police announce the arrest of Marcos Calzadilla Vásquez, a member of the dissident faction of Barrio 18, (*Los Sureños*) accused of the 2009 murder of the girlfriend of imprisoned Barrio 18 leader Carlos Mojica Lechuga, (*Viejo Lin*) and four other homicides. According to Raúl Mijango, a family member of Mojica was also murdered in Santa Ana shortly after the truce was announced: "They wanted to sabotage the peace process."

**October 20**

Extortions are down 9% but continue to be a problem, with extortion calls being made from inside prisons. Cell phone companies have resisted blocking reception in urban areas, and there has been a 30% increase in phones thrown into prisons from outside the walls, according to President Funes, who says: “things must change.” Funes reports that 608 prison guards have been fired in an effort to control smuggling of illicit items into the facilities.

**October 22**

Information on all prisoners has been systematized for the first time, with a database on all inmates including legal, family and health status, which will be “available within 15 seconds,” according to Prison Director Nelson Rauda. A total of 29,990 prisoners are incarcerated in the country’s 19 facilities with a capacity of 8,100.

**October 23**

The Minister of Security reports 125 homicides so far this month, a 5.4 average per day. There has been a 38.4% reduction for the year overall, with a 68% reduction since the truce was implemented on March 8th.

**October 24**

Salvadorans in Los Angeles are concerned about the impact of the Treasury Department ruling on the diaspora community. “No one denies that the problem (of the gangs) exists but there is a serious risk that the just will pay for the sinners,” El Rescate President Salvador Sanabria suggests. “First, because unfortunately this announcement comes in the middle of a polarized political campaign (in the U.S.) and there is a risk of criminalizing an entire community,” he says. The gangs in LA were “a consequence of the war, a legacy of the violent exclusion in (El Salvador)...and forced migration.” The gang structure was a way to organize and survive “the violence and exclusion of the barrios,” living “by the laws of the urban ghettos.”

**October 25**

PNC Assistant Director of Investigations Héctor Mendoza Cordero will propose the formation of an anti-extortion task force based, he says, on the Partnership for Growth “Goal #3: to reduce the impact of crime on small and medium business.” The PNC has received 2,334 denunciations of extortion to date in 2012.

Mendoza Cordero estimates 95,000 cases of extortion occurred between 2005-2012 but says only 21,000 cases were reported to the police, “95% gangs.” He says he has no idea how much money the gangs are moving, but “their women are going around in good cars.” Central American Economic Integration Bank (BCIE) will donate \$1 million to the PNC to improve equipment and conditions at local police stations and \$7 million to help alleviate prison overcrowding.

## **October 29**

Twenty-one members of an MS structure in Chalchuapa, Santa Ana were convicted last week of multiple homicides committed from 2008-2009, and sentenced up to 150 years in prison.

In an interview with the Spanish newspaper El País, ARENA presidential candidate Norman Quijano accuses the government of lying about the truce: The government “lies a lot, as communists lie, there is no veracity in their numbers...(the agreement) violates all the laws of the country and I don’t want to do it (maintain the agreement.)”

Minister of Security Munguía Payés presents the 2013 security budget, a total of \$356 million, with \$42 million destined to the penal system. The goal is to reduce overcrowding from 330% to 160% by constructing new facilities, prison farms, and the use of electronic bracelets for prisoners eligible for parole.

The Minister says overcrowding is a huge problem, but there have been no prison riots in the eight months of the truce. Reforms including access to televised soccer games and films have created a more “peaceful” atmosphere; in exchange, prisoners are now responsible for cleaning the lavatories, putting trash in trashcans, and refraining from mistreating guards. The Minister asks that the truce not be politicized.

## **October 30**

Forty alleged gang members are arrested in a police operation in Soyapango this morning, charged with extortions, homicides and belonging to an illegal organization.

## **November 1**

[October](#) closed with 177 homicides, 54% less than October of 2011, bringing the daily average to 5.4. A total of 3,964 arrests were made during the month; 32,197 since January 1<sup>st</sup> of this year.

[Minister of Security Munguía Payés](#) travels “incognito” on a city bus to review his public transportation security plan, which now includes undercover police on buses. He reports 48 arrests in the past 50 days of alleged robbers on the buses or at bus stops.

A husband and wife are reported murdered in [Aguilares](#), allegedly for refusing to pay extortion.

The U.S. has requested the [extradition](#) of Moisés Rivera Luna and Marvin Geovanny Monterrosa Larios, said to be members of MS, responsible for ordering homicides in 2009 and 2010 of two gang members in Washington D.C. they believed were collaborating with U.S. authorities. Rivera Luna has been incarcerated in the Zacatecoluca maximum security prison since 2010.

## **November 5**

The truce is not the solution to the violence but without the truce there is no solution, Minister of Security Munguía Payés tells Contrapunto. “I have always said that the truce is the beginning of a process of pacification of the country.” The homicide rate jumped from about 1,400-1,500 in 2006 to 4,300 in 2011; 14 deaths per day before the truce, with little possibility of investigations or prosecutions.

According to studies conducted by the Ministry of Security, after Munguía Payés was appointed in November 2011, 90% of all homicides were committed by gangs, 75% of those resulting from the war between the gangs. The truce, the Minister explains, resulted from the understanding that any prevention strategy would not work in the midst of the gang war.

The government could not meet officially with gang leaders, but could facilitate the work of the Catholic Church and civil society (Bishop Fabio Colindres and Raúl Mijango.) The success of the truce has brought international attention to the country. Munguía Payés has stated: “In Latin America and the Western Hemisphere who has been able to reduce homicides 65%? No one! We are the only ones who have done it.”

### **November 6**

[President Funes](#) inaugurates a program for at-risk youth in Ilopango. The project will provide vocational training, violence prevention workshops and sports activities. A similar program will be launched in Zacamil in January 2013. The President affirmed that the pilot project for gang members called “Insertion and Peace Culture Parks” would be inaugurated next spring in the high-risk community of Distrito Italia, Tonacatepeque, a suburb of San Salvador.

[Four gang members are killed](#); two are wounded during shoot-out among Barrio 18 members in Palo Grande, Colón.

### **November 8**

Second day of a [hunger strike](#) in the Quezaltepeque jail- 103 gang and non-gang prisoners demand to be transferred to prisons.

### **November 13**

The results of a [Cid-Gallup poll](#) show that 33% of Hondurans, 29 % of Guatemalans and 28% of Salvadorans have been victims of violence.

### **November 14**

Accompanied by the Anglican and Lutheran bishops, Raúl Mijango and Bishop Fabio Colindres announce the “Pastoral Initiative for Life and Peace.” The ecumenical event was to be held in downtown San Salvador on November 17<sup>th</sup> for family members of incarcerated gang members. Asked about continuing violence, [Bishop Colindres](#) responds that it is impossible to resolve a decades-long problem in eight months: “Not all the gang member have made the decision to participate.” [Raúl Mijango](#) says efforts are being made to incorporate dissident groups into the process and adds, “there could be surprises” of new good will gestures on the part of the gangs to reduce extortions, including the creation of [oversight commissions](#) to keep track of the commitments and compliance by gang members.

There have been five cases of [multiple murders](#) in the department of La Libertad since June, most apparently gang-related.

## November 15

[Bishop Colindres](#) is asked about the disputed role of the Catholic Church in the peace process and the prevailing skepticism among Salvadorans: “It is not important now to see who supports (it) and who doesn’t, or who took the initiative and who didn’t...All peace processes have their skeptics.” Bringing the churches together is “a sign of unity in support of something that is suitable for everyone and its collapse doesn’t suit anyone.”

This is the third day without one homicide since the truce began on March 8<sup>th</sup> according to a tweet from [Howard Cotto](#), the Assistant Director of Public Security for the PNC, who says the current rate is 5.3 per day. The other occasions were April 14<sup>th</sup> and August 24<sup>th</sup>.

## November 16

The series of homicides in [Panchimalco](#) in recent months is “complicated,” due to land disputes and rivalries between families in addition to their gang relationships, according to Minister Munguía Payés. Police are conducting operations in the area in an effort to stop “the chain of revenge.” Truce facilitators Raúl Mijango and Bishop Colindres may also be sent into the area to mediate.

## November 17

Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran and evangelical bishops and pastors lead an ecumenical service in support of the truce and peace process. Gang members and families participate, wearing white t-shirts emblazoned with the dove of peace and “united for life and peace.” Anglican Bishop [Martín Barahona](#) says “We consider that this is a great opportunity...Our country cannot continue shedding blood.” No formal announcements are made, but Raúl Mijango suggests the process is entering the “[second stage](#)” and “some criminal activities that have not been a priority” could become part of the truce, possibly referring to extortions.

In San Miguel, 23 members of the “*Mirada Loca*” clique of Barrio 18 are sentenced 5-18 years for participation in a complicated [triangular extortion network](#) between members in El Salvador and the U.S. According to the report, extortions were ordered from San Miguel, victims sent money orders to Virginia and the funds were converted to remittances to be sent back to El Salvador.

## November 19

Jorge Cervantes, president of the [Evangelical Alliance](#), criticizes the lack of transparency in the truce process: Who are the real leaders? What is the role of the Executive branch? Were there payoffs to gang leaders? He suggests that while homicides are down, disappearances are up.

## November 20

In the opinion of another critic of the truce, [Father Antonio Rodríguez](#), it “has to go beyond the strategy of the child who blackmails his parents.” The Passionist priest has worked with gangs in Mejicanos for a decade and was fired from a government commission two years ago after publicly supporting a gang proposal for dialogue. He has been a strong opponent of the truce since its initiation in March, critical of the lack of transparency and the “political interests” of Minister of Security Munguía Payés. Rodríguez contends that the truce is a “political trick ...based on a strategy of blackmail.” He proposes a transparent, open dialogue.

Contrapunto publishes a speech given by [Jeanette Aguilar](#), Director of the Public Opinion Institute of the University of Central America (UCA) on November 13<sup>th</sup>. Aguilar also questions the lack of transparency and the statistics presented by security officials, maintaining that the government is “minimizing the presence and the impact of organized crime.” The current truce is not trustworthy or sustainable, she believes.

Questions that need to be answered include:

- What was the role of the government?
- What other privileges or benefits were granted to the gang leadership?
- What is the true role of the facilitators?
- Are there other truces we don't know about?
- Is the truce only a distraction to facilitate a logistical corridor for drug trafficking?

The UCA would support a transparent, legal and responsible dialogue with the participation of civil society, churches and the international community and with methods of verification and follow-up.

### **November 21**

[Three people are wounded](#), and one is killed during a shootout in a shopping center in Antiguo Cuscatlán, allegedly involving a gang member recently deported from Los Angeles.

### **November 22**

[David Munguía Payés](#) is widely interviewed today, on the first anniversary of his appointment as Minister of Justice and Security. A year ago he promised to reduce homicides by 30%; he says that he has met and surpassed that goal with a 39% reduction in homicides - to 5.3 per day - and a 15-18% reduction in extortions since January. Last November, security officials promised the use of more “muscle” to control the gangs; today the minister says “muscle” ... “does not mean more police but rather more intelligence, involving more actors” (in the process)...The truce was “part of a larger strategy.”

The [Minister](#) contends that without gang violence there would only be one or two homicides per day and adds that 60% of the violence today is gang-related. The homicide rate has fallen from 65-68/100,000 a year ago, to 24-25/100,000 today. Of the 1425 disappearances reported this year, 673 have been found with 122 of those deceased, most of them young men related to gangs. Impunity continues: of the 45,000 people arrested this year, only about 2,000 have actually entered the system and only 3-4% are prosecuted due to the inability of the judicial system to cope with such a massive number of cases.

During a press conference with the Minister, Raúl Mijango and Bishop Colindres propose the “second phase” of the peace process: [special peace zones](#), or sanctuary cities. Ten communities will initiate the unprecedented program, which is based on non-aggression pacts between the gangs and between gangs and communities, meaning that everyone will be allowed to move freely. Weapons will be surrendered and gangs will promise to reduce and eradicate homicides, extortion, robberies, theft and kidnappings. Policing will not include large-scale or nighttime operations, and will be done by community police. Private enterprise and international donors will provide training and employment opportunities; the ministries of Health and Education will provide services, while local committees comprised of police, gangs, churches, business, authorities and community leaders will oversee the process. The names of participating communities will be announced soon, according to Mijango.

[El Faro](#) publishes the full proposal, noting that it comes from the facilitators, not the gang leaders.

## November 24

Sixteen [evangelical pastors](#) participate in the National Day of Prayer religious service in support of the peace process. Neftali Alvarenga, President of the Salvadoran Evangelical Union (UNESA) expresses UNESA's support for the sanctuary cities project, promising financing for skills training and the start-up of small businesses such as bakeries.

## November 26

[Munguía Payés](#) defends the truce against critics, whom he says don't understand or still have doubts, arguing that neither repression nor prevention alone can resolve the problem of violence. The Security Ministry is "part of the process" of the truce, he states, "but does not participate directly in the negotiations with criminal groups because this is not a policy of our government." He asks that the peace process be given the benefit of the doubt, saying the work "is a reality, it is not ethereal, it is not a promise, it is not virtual, it is real." The Ministry of Security approves of the sanctuary cities proposal, despite critics who believe it means sanctuaries for criminals, and suggests the government will support it "within the framework of the law."

[El Faro](#) investigative journalist José Luis Sanz reports on interviews with Homeland Security agents in Washington regarding the Treasury Department designation of MS as a transnational criminal organization. U.S. officials began investigating the gang activities in 2005 and say "nothing is hidden" behind the designation, and it has no relationship to the truce. They describe the gang as more sophisticated now, more "in the shadows" like a Mafia-type organization, with money from criminal activities going to leaders in El Salvador, the headquarters.

The FMLN and ARENA presidential candidates differ on the issue of violence. [Salvador Sánchez Cerén](#) maintains that crime must be punished, but emphasizes reinsertion opportunities for those who respect the truce process, and insists that more effort must be made to go after drug traffickers and organized crime. In the opinion of ARENA candidate [Norman Quijano](#), gang members "have lost their rights" ... "The work of the government is to pursue and punish crime, not to be making agreements with the criminals."

## November 28

On December 11th, Raúl Mijango will ask the National Assembly to repeal the law that criminalizes gang membership. He will do so on the basis that it is a hindrance to implementation of the second phase of the peace process, sanctuary cities. In the opinion of Munguía Payés, the law as it stands has been "a useful tool" and will continue to be enforced, but, he added, "if the situation changes, laws change." He also says that sanctuary cities could include San Salvador, Ilopango, Soyapango, Nejapa and Apopa.

## November 29

Rodrigo Ávila, former director of the PNC and ARENA presidential candidate in 2009, criticizes the sanctuary cities proposal, saying it would be dangerous for society.

Police arrest Oscar Geovanny Alvarado, a member of the "Los Sureños" faction of Barrio 18 in Puerto La Libertad. Alvarado is allegedly linked to at least 30 homicides in the area, including the massacre of five people in September. Two clandestine graves are also said to be linked to Alvarado.



### **November 30**

Sanctuary cities could put municipal governments “at risk,” in the opinion of Will Salgado, the controversial Mayor of San Miguel. He suggests that the gangs are looking for social and political power and could organize communities to demand better public services, could become leaders, and even run as candidates for electoral office. He does, however, approve of dialogue and negotiations with the gangs.

### **December 1**

Former Security Minister [Francisco Bertrand Galindo](#) is skeptical of the truce and believes the government is ceding too much, but praises Minister of Security Munguía Payés for “bringing order to the disaster left by his predecessors.”

The ARENA mayor of Ilopango, [Salvador Ruano](#), announces his support for reinsertion programs in his city. He insists he is not “negotiating” with MS and Barrio 18 but is asking local businesses to employ at-risk youth. “What they (the gangs) want is to not be treated badly and to be given an opportunity...They are not asking for immunity, they are asking for a transformation in their lives.” [ARENA](#) supports this effort, saying it is “transparent.”

### **December 4**

Truce facilitators Raúl Mijango and Bishop Fabio Colindres will ask the National Assembly to repeal the 2010 [anti-gang law](#) that criminalizes membership in gangs and doubles the maximum sentences for minors. Mijango argues that repeal would be a sign of support for alternatives to the “iron fist” policy of the past, and would relieve the overwhelmed judicial and penal systems. The anti-gang law, he says, “has only unleashed police operations and mass arrests,” and those arrested end up being released or thrown into overcrowded prisons.

During an event held in [Mariona Prison](#), in the presence of Vatican representative Luigi Pezzuto and the facilitators, gang leaders announce acceptance of the sanctuary city proposal and the beginning of disarmament in ten yet-unnamed municipalities. The communique also endorses the request made by Munguía Payés for a commission of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to observe conditions in the prisons and the rights of prisoners.

Some [900,000 Salvadorans](#) live in the ten municipalities that will be designated sanctuaries of peace, according to Barrio 18 leader Carlos Mojica Lechuga (el Viejo Lin). Three gangs have joined the peace process with MS and 18 (*Mao Mao*, *Máquina*, and *Mirada Locos*), agreeing to a progressive disarmament, by which all weapons will be handed over to the facilitators. The process is “irreversible,” Mojica affirms, with verification by the OAS and the ICRC, whose presence is of “strategic importance.” The OAS representative is Carlos Orozco. The leaders also demand the repeal of anti-gang legislation.

“We want to eradicate all illegal activities and have a better relationship with the communities,” [Mojica](#) says... “We know it is not easy for people to forgive us. I have had a dark past but don’t I have the right to change my life, to live differently?”



## December 5

In a speech to the graduating class of new military officers, President Funes lauds the participation of the Armed Forces in public security duties as “vital” to the peace process. A possible ruling by the Constitutional Chamber against the appointments of retired generals David Munguía Payés and Francisco Salinas to head the security ministry and the National Civil Police would “threaten” the peace process, he warns. The two former generals were named by the President, who contends the appointments do not violate the Constitution or the 1992 Peace Accords.

## December 6

The [Inter-American Development Bank](#) (IDB) has approved a \$45 million loan for prevention, rehabilitation, and reinsertion projects, as well as “institutional strengthening.” According to IDB project manager Jean Eric Theinhardt, one of every ten dollars generated by the Salvadoran economy is destined to cover the cost of crime and violence.

## December 7

According to a study by [UCLA](#) economics professor Raúl Hinojosa-Ojeda, Salvadoran gangs make about \$60 million per year. Professor Hinojosa questions the U.S. Treasury designation of MS as a transnational criminal organization, saying members in the U.S. earn “less than employees at McDonald’s,” and that the Zetas – also on the list – are believed to generate profits totaling well over \$1 billion each year.

Three alleged gang members are executed in [Tonacatepeque](#), Apopa, with 9mm bullets to the head. Police suggest the triple murder was part of a “purge” of dissidents.

[Retired General Mauricio Vargas](#) argues there are no parallels between the 1992 peace accords and the current truce/peace process. No one opposes peace, he says, “but at what cost?” The death rate during the war was 16-17 per day, versus 14 per day before the gang truce, but Vargas insists all previous truces with criminals – with the Italian Mafia, for example – have only “empowered” gangs. The proposal for sanctuary cities is a “sacrilege,” Vargas states. The general, who participated in the negotiations to end the war, recommends a strategy of repression, operational reorganization of the police, and prevention.

In an extensive interview broadcast on Channel 12, imprisoned Barrio 18 leader [Carlos Mojica Lechuga](#) “Viejo Lin” warns that the attacks by detractors of the truce “could put the peace process at risk.” He denies that the gang is responsible for current violence: “That would be an enormous contradiction. We are not executing young men... We have a commitment to end homicides, whether they are our comrades or from other gangs or whoever.” He denies accusations that the number of “disappeared” people has increased since the truce: “We have investigated ourselves and found at least 100 (on the list of disappeared) are out of the country. They (the Institute for Legal Medicine) aren’t investigating, just adding up numbers.”

[Mojica](#) rejects the term “sanctuary cities,” preferring instead “violence free cities” (“*municipalidades libres de violencia*”). Explaining that the objective is not “impunity,” or, as some have charged, a refuge for criminals, he states, “What we are looking for is to reinsert our comrades on the outside (of prison), to de-polarize the process and to reconcile with local communities... We are aware that due to the violent and illegal nature of the gangs and of the actions carried out by some comrades of ours, we have earned the repudiation of society... we believe that the conditions are ripe to begin the peace process.” The gangs expect the police to do their work in the “violence-free communities”... “within a legal framework, without torture and abuses.”

## December 10

For 15 years, the barrio [Popotlán II of Apopa](#) has been the territory of Barrio 18. Today, residents are surprised to see gang members collecting trash, sweeping the streets and painting over graffiti. Gang member Julio César Cordón tells a reporter the gangs want to end criminal activity and re-enter normal society: “Now we don’t want to be seen as criminals... We want to change, to be useful to society.” Facilitator Raúl Mijango says this is a symbolic step: “In the past they shed blood for these graffiti and now they themselves are erasing them.” Paint was donated by the ARENA mayor’s office.

[El Faro](#) publishes an interview with Gilbert Portillo, a former member of MS who is a spokesperson for some 2,000 ex-gang members represented by the Association of Ex-Gang Members of El Salvador.

## December 11

Raúl Mijango and Bishop Colindres meet with members of the [Legislative Commission](#) of the National Assembly to explain the truce process and present specific requests including:

- Reform or repeal laws that can hinder the peace process (such as the Law to Prohibit Gangs)
- Pass a transitory law that will permit the reinsertion of gang members who renounce violence
- Create a special fund for peace that will include compensation for victims and programs for at-risk youth
- Reform municipal codes that will allow communities to participate in violence prevention programs, including designation of 25% of FODES (Fund for Municipal Development) resources
- Approve multilateral loans for the penal system

“This is a process that has surprised the world because homicides were reduced from one day to the next,” [Mijango](#) tells the deputies. The objective of Violence Free Municipalities is to reinstate local authority in areas controlled by gangs. Deputies are interested, and will analyze the proposals.

[Prison officials](#) report fewer inspections of cells since the truce. Before March, inspections were considered high -risk assignments carried out by the anti-riot squads. Now, authorities say, the situation is peaceful, the inspection is announced, prisoners are taken out of cells and searches proceed without incident.

Public security in the cities is not just about sanctuaries, or just a police problem, suggests analyst [Roberto Cañas](#), but must include other elements. Elements might be inclusive local security committees, local “observatories” to collect information and provide analysis, legal, economic and psychological attention for victims of crime and violence, coordination at a national level, and citizen participation.

## December 12

In El Salvador, [UN Assistant Secretary Heraldo Muñoz](#) describes the peace process as “very important,” but questions its sustainability.

ARENA supports the process, but [Deputy Margarita Escobar](#) criticizes the “murky negotiations” of the government with the gangs.

The [Public Opinion Institute](#) of the UCA (IUDOP) releases the results of its latest survey, including data on violence: 89.4% say they have “little or no” confidence in the truce; 66.4% believe the truce has reduced crime “a little or not at all;” 44.5% say violence has increased in 2012, while 55.5% believe violence has remained the same or decreased; 19.9% report having been victims of violence in 2012.

Thirty-nine alleged gang members are rounded up in [Cinco Cedros, Colón](#), following a four-month investigation. The operation was carried out by the DECO (Elite Division Against Organized Crime) in coordination with the Attorney General’s Unit Against Organized Crime led by Rodolfo Delgado.

Vice-Minister of Justice and Security Douglas Moreno participates in a [World Bank](#) meeting in Washington on the role of the private sector in reducing violence in the Northern Triangle. Moreno emphasizes that the “unique opportunity” presented by the truce must not be lost. U.S.-based Rio Grande Foods is one of the businesses that have been employing former gang members. Owner Josué Alvarado says the program has been very successful, but “many people told us we were crazy...(and said) it’s necessary to kill them all or put them all in prison.”

## December 13

[Minister of Security](#) Munguía Payés announces that the government will study proposed reforms to gang legislation.

Some 25 alleged gang members of [Merliot Locos Salvatruchos](#) are arrested in Ciudad Merliot this morning, charged with homicide, extortion and membership in an illegal organization.

Eleven alleged members of [Fulton Locos Salvatruchos](#) are arrested in San Miguel, charged with five homicides; ten members of Barrio 18 arrested in Zacatecoluca.

In [Mariona Prison](#) today, incarcerated gang members and non-affiliated prisoners hand over 285 illegal items including knives, machetes, cell phones, cell chips and chargers in the presence of Carlos Orozco (OAS representative,) Raúl Mijango, and prison director Patricia Pacheco. Representing the prisoners, Carlos Serrano says the event is part of “our firm commitment to continue the consolidation of the peace process.” Raúl Mijango describes the prisoners as “the most hated and forgotten” members of society: “This contributes to demolishing the walls of skepticism,” about the truce, he adds.

[IUDOP Director Jeanette Aguilar](#) insists the problem with the truce process is “the manner in which the process has been managed by the authorities...the serious contradictions.” The proposal for sanctuary cities has “little credibility” because it is not coming from the government and the President has not made any concrete policy statements.

## December 14

According to [La Prensa Gráfica](#), the Salvadoran military requested intelligence information on gangs from the PNC. Citing a “secret document” dated October 1<sup>st</sup> from the Transmission Unit (CATFA), the army asked for intelligence on the “order of battle of the gangs, the location of “destroyer houses”” (safe houses) and lists of names of gang members in ten municipalities: Panchimalco, Santo Tomás, San Marcos, Santiago Texacuango, Rosario de Mora, Mejicanos, Cuscatancingo, Ayutuxtepeque, San Salvador and Tonacatepeque.

The document was reportedly sent to the PNC Director on December 1<sup>st</sup>, then forwarded to the Assistant Director of Investigations Héctor Cordero, who sent it on to the chief of metropolitan operations, Mauricio Arriaza Chicas. Cordero denies any knowledge of the document. Meanwhile there have been “clean-up operations” recently in Tonacatepeque, (mentioned on the list) and La Prensa Gráfica speculates that the ten municipalities may be the “sanctuary” cities.

According to the Executive Decree in 2010 that authorized the participation of the military in public security duties, the institution is limited to “operations to maintain public order,” including prevention and dissuasion patrols to support the PNC. Troops are not authorized to make arrests except “en flagrante.”

## December 16

The government will receive \$12 million in loans from the Inter-American Development Bank and the Central American Economic Integration Bank for a program of [electronic bracelets](#) that will allow for the release of 4,000 prisoners convicted of minor crimes or eligible for parole. The arm or leg bracelets are equipped with GPS to facilitate the location of the users. If approved by the National Assembly, the program will be implemented in the spring of 2013. The country’s 19 prisons currently house 26,891 men and women in facilities built for 8,110.

The controversial director of the [Institute of Legal Medicine](#) (IML), Miguel Fortín Magaña was fired on December 14<sup>th</sup> by the Supreme Court, together with dozens of other Court employees. The IML is under the jurisdiction of the Court. Fortín has had a running battle with the Minister of Security over statistics related to homicides and disappearances. Today, he accuses the government of “manipulating data” to favor the truce. He agrees that homicides have been reduced but only “fictitiously,” because “the two gangs aren’t killing each other,” and adds that the “perception of violence” and the victims are also problems. “I am not saying that the government is lying, I am saying that it is wrong... only they know if they are lying or not.”

## December 17

[FMLN Deputy Benito Lara](#) understands the doubts and skepticism about the truce but adds, “However this began...I believe it is important to take in account that we now have positive results.” The process has been “full of contradictions” but it opens possibilities for the Northern Triangle and other countries. Lara says that ARENA cannot criticize the process because now there are two ARENA mayors (Mejicanos and Ilopango) who are in talks with Barrio 18.

## **December 18**

[President Funes](#) says he is in favor of revising the anti-gang law “to make it more efficient,” but does not support repealing the law. He also confirms that the government is studying the sanctuary city proposal but that “no firm decision” has been made. [Night-time police operations](#) will continue “because of the surprise element,” the President confirms, adding that “sanctuary city” does not mean a “refuge” for criminals.

Newly-appointed Attorney General Lu s Mart nez observes that he opposes the repeal of anti-gang legislation and says investigations will continue in “sanctuary cities.”

In Los Angeles, charges against Homies Unidos executive director [Alex S nchez](#) are finally dropped, three years after his indictment by a grand jury for racketeering and conspiracy to commit murder. S nchez was accused of acting as the “shot caller” in the 2006 murder of a man in El Salvador and other crimes. He was a member of MS in his youth, but has been a strong leader of anti-gang work in Los Angeles.

## **December 19**

Twenty-seven alleged members of Barrio 18 are arrested this morning in [Panchimalco](#), charged with seven homicides during 2010-2011. The operation was conducted jointly between the PNC Special Homicide Unit led by Oscar Torres, and the Attorney General’s office.

Twenty-two men from MS are arrested in [San Miguel](#), charged with extorting local businesses. Also in San Miguel, two lawyers and three police agents are arrested as collaborators of “*Coronados Locos Salvatruchos*,” charged with bribery and illegal association. The lawyers allegedly revealed the name of a protected witness who was then killed.

“We are no longer the second most violent country in the world,” [Mungu a Pay s](#) declares.... “A year ago no one would have believed that we would reduce the violence.” The homicide rate has been reduced from 68/100,000 to 24/100,000, from 14 per day to 5.3, a 60% reduction. The Minister repeats and emphasizes that “sanctuary” does not mean no police: “The PNC is not going to stop operating for one moment.” He reports 50,000 arrests so far in 2012, with 300 gang members arrested just this week.

## **December 20**

The Attorney Generals’ [Anti-Organized Crime Unit](#) reports 583 arrests in 2012, a 26% increase over 2011. Of the 583, 514 were gang members charged with membership in an illegal organization, and 69 were arrested on kidnapping charges.

## **December 26**

The [anti-narcotics unit](#) of the PNC has made 592 arrests of gang members this year, most charged with marijuana possession and sales, according to director Marco Tulio Lima.

[Ilopango Mayor Salvador Ruano](#) of ARENA meets separately with the leaders of two gangs in Colonia Las Ca as. The gangs sign non-aggression agreements guaranteeing freedom of movement of both gangs in the Colonia, and an end to crimes including extortion. Gang members participate in cleaning up the neighborhood and roadwork, and have even been standing guard to protect road building equipment at night, according to the mayor.

## December 28

[Minister of Security Munguía Payés](#) reiterates his support for the second phase of the peace agreement. He says the plan, if successful, will be to implement violence-free cities in all 262 municipalities.

## December 29

In an opinion piece for the Christian Science Monitor, [U.S. Representative Mike Honda](#) (CA-15) suggests the Obama Administration should “take a cue” from El Salvador and implement a less confrontational approach to gangs. “The truce in El Salvador may be unusual, but it is most certainly benefitting the people of that nation,” Honda writes, “and may serve as an interim solution to a very real and dangerous epidemic.” The Salvadoran government “negotiated a groundbreaking deal”.... “In a bold move mediators -essentially extended the framework of humanitarian engagement to gang warfare, brokering a truce.” As Rep. Honda explains, the level of gang violence met the criteria of war-related deaths to...under the ICRC’s definition of international humanitarian law.

## December 30

[Attorney General Luís Martínez](#) confirms a reduction in homicides and extortions. He reports 2,517 homicides as of December 19- 1,728 fewer than the same period in 2011. Extortions are down 10%.

# 2013

## January 3

The [homicide rate](#) dropped by 41% from 2011 to 2012, according to end-of-year data, from 4,371 murders in 2011 to 2,576 in 2012, making 2012 the least violent year since 2003. When he was appointed Minister of Security in November 2011, David Munguía Payés promised a 30% reduction in homicides by the end of his first year. Now, that commitment has been surpassed. The vast majority of victims were young men (18-30); 63% of murders were committed using firearms. The most violent communities in 2012 were Tonacatepeque, Soyapango, Apopa, Ilopango, and San Martín.

An ecumenical service is held in [Apopa](#), to be one of the first sanctuary cities, with the Del Camino and Betania Evangelical churches participating.

Truce mediator [Raúl Mijango](#) says the goal is to reduce homicides to two or three per day. Not all murders are gang-related, he adds, citing an incident two days earlier involving a domestic violence case in which a policeman killed his domestic partner. Mijango also calls for an end to large police operations “where, in order to arrest one individual they capture 20 suspects, abuse the families...and damage the houses...We want the police to act in a civilized manner.”



## January 4

[Sanctuary cities](#), also known as violence-free cities or peace zones, will be increased from 10 to 18 zones within months, according to Raúl Mijango. This “second phase” of the peace process has already been initiated in Apopa, Aguilares and Cuscatancingo.

Today, Apopa becomes the first unofficial violence-free city. Members of four gangs (MS, 18, *Mao Mao* and *Máquina*) meet in an [Apopa](#) (population 131,000) park and make a commitment to zero homicides, extortions, rapes, and harassment in schools.

Apopa has been one of the most violent communities, but “today a new Apopa is born,” Pastor David Rivas of Betania Church declares, “from the ashes of violence it will arise as a desirable city.” Following a concert, the gang members leave in vans to different areas of the community to erase graffiti.

In the [Valle del Sol barrio of Apopa](#), Barrio 18 members paint over “18” graffiti. “It hurts for us to erase [our graffiti] but it is in order to do something good for our city, for the country,” says Emerson Morales (“Sniper”) of Barrio 18. *La Máquina* members paint over graffiti in their territories today also. One member explains how the promise to end all criminal activity will be enforced: if anyone breaks the agreement, the gang he belongs to “will react immediately and will punish him according to its rules.”

## January 6

[Pastor Carlos Rivas of the Avivamiento International Tabernacle](#), a strong critic of the truce for its lack of transparency, says the government is providing “more questions than answers.” His church will not support the process and he warns that the “medicine could be more expensive than the illness.” The causes of violence, he contends are “the system we have, the lack of values, lack of opportunities, promotion of violence by the media, and family disintegration.” He fears the gangs will eventually want to form a political party, “and that would be a bad precedent.” And, he suggests, if the next government does not want to continue the truce, “we could have an anarchic, directionless country.”

## January 8

The [Institute of Legal Medicine](#) (IML) releases its final data on homicides for 2012, differing slightly from the Minister of Security. The IML reports 2,641 homicides compared to the Ministry’s total of 2,571.

## January 14

Raúl Mijango visits the [Ilobasco detention center](#), accompanied by the top leaders of Barrio 18 and MS. The 96 young men incarcerated in Ilobasco were convicted of crimes as minors, but are now ages 18-20 and are members of both gangs. The purpose of the visit is “to convert them into workers in the peace process,” Mijango says. The two leaders, who are prisoners in Quezaltepeque and Cojutepeque prisons, speak to the inmates as one united gang. Carlos Mojica (“Viejo Lin” of Barrio 18) says, “I invite you in the name of the gang to join this process. If you cannot accompany us, at least do not be obstacles.” César Renderos of MS adds, “Join and abandon violence.”

Members of the Technical Committee and the Humanitarian Foundation are scheduled to meet this week, according to [Raúl Mijango](#) and may announce the names of the first “sanctuary cities.” The Committee (OAS, Minister of Security and facilitators) and the Foundation (comprised of businessmen, civil society, and non-governmental organizations) were formed to support the process. The international community has “assimilated the value of what we are doing more easily than the Salvadoran community,” Mijango remarks, because “Salvadorans have suffered and paid the price of the violence.” The OAS, ICRC, and Interpeace are all collaborating with the peace process.

Mijango admits the process is “complicated” and “imperfect” and says, “We continue having problems.” About 50% of the homicides now are gang-related, committed by people who “jumped the bar.” Asked about the fate of women as “war booty” and “cannon fodder,” Mijango explains that the phenomenon of women’s participation is more complicated than that: “They are part of the criminal structure...of support and collecting extortions.”

El Faro publishes an [extensive timeline of the evolution of Salvadoran gangs](#): from the formation of the first Los Angeles street gangs after World War II, to the development of Salvadoran gangs in LA, the intra-gang violence that led to divisions, the growth of gangs in El Salvador and events leading up to the March 2012 truce.

### **January 15**

The [mayors](#) of Santa Tecla, Ilopango, Quezaltepeque, and Sonsonate meet privately with Minister of Security Munguía Payés, PNC Director Francisco Salinas, and Raúl Mijango.

### **January 16**

Eighteen local or global companies and private foundations are now participating in [violence-prevention initiatives](#) in El Salvador, according to the Council of the Americas, including the Maryland-based Rio Grande Foods, which employs 450 people, including ex-gang members. Company president Josué Alvarado says he works with local churches to provide faith-based rehabilitation.

### **January 17**

Legislators consider passage of a temporary law that will allow gang members to surrender weapons voluntarily without fear of prosecution for illegal possession. Proposed by PCN, the legislation will not provide immunity for any crimes committed. [The law passes this afternoon](#) with 57 votes and will be in effect for 90 days. It will be implemented by the Ministry of Defense; the Ministry will determine the dates and locations of handovers and final destination of the weapons.

The two leaders of MS and Barrio 18 appear in a short video from Mariona Prison where they are meeting with members of the Technical Committee and Humanitarian Foundation, as well as journalist Pablo Lüers. The purpose of the video is to denounce a mysterious communique issued yesterday in their name but from “unknown enemies of the truce.” The communique alleges that Pablo Lüers, a former guerrilla turned conservative journalist who has been working with the truce facilitators is the contact for Mexican cartels and is pressuring the gang leaders to abandon the peace process and to cooperate in exchange for financial rewards. According to the communique the gangs are also asked to attack FMLN activists during the election campaign. In the video, the leaders appear standing on either side of Lüers.



## January 18

The peace process must go beyond a collection of weapons, insists [Adam Blackwell](#), OAS Secretary of Multidimensional Security. He calls for a political pact in order to prevent the politicizing of the process during the election campaign. “Perfect or not, like any agreement, [the process] is a road map that perhaps El Salvador and other countries can follow.”

[Sonsonate, Ilopango, Santa Tecla, and Quezaltepeque](#) will be the first four official “violence-free municipalities.” The announcement is made today during a press conference with the facilitators, the mayors, and members of both the Technical Committee and the Humanitarian Foundation. “This is a very good process,” Santa Tecla Mayor Óscar Cruz says, “we feel optimistic.” The second phase of the peace process will begin January 19<sup>th</sup> with a handover of weapons in the Plaza Barrios. The cities will be incorporated as “violence-free municipalities” on a schedule: Ilopango on January 22<sup>nd</sup>, Santa Tecla on January 25<sup>th</sup>, and Quezaltepeque on January 31<sup>st</sup>. The date for Sonsonate was not announced, and eight more cities including Apopa, Aguilares and Cuscatancingo will incorporate “soon.” Raúl Mijango warns that changes won’t happen overnight and asks the press to be patient. There is no “magic wand” to eradicate violence, he declares.

Ilopango Mayor Salvador Ruano declares that any gang member who commits a crime within the city will be arrested: “The full weight of the law will fall on anyone who makes a mistake.” Ruano has been meeting with local gang members for many months and is convinced they want to work and to participate in “normal life,” in a “peaceful, productive and legal” manner. They want “an opportunity to get ahead.”

In [Mariona Prison](#), the leaders of MS, Barrio 13, *Mao Mao*, *Mirada Loca*, and *Máquina* reaffirm their commitment to violence-free municipalities (MLV). Asael Castro of *Mao Mao* asks that churches, community leaders, and government officials support the process: “If we all do our part the MLV will succeed.” For MS leader Borromeo Henríquez, this is a “key moment.” [Henríquez](#) explains that anyone will be able to walk freely in the MLVs as long as they do not disturb public order and “as long as they don’t generate violence, provoke, kill, rob or extort.”

The official name of the peace process, according to the Technical Committee is “[Process of the Reduction of Crime and Violence in El Salvador](#).”

## January 19

The truce has been embraced by both the FMLN and ARENA, [El Faro reports](#). Eighteen municipalities will participate in the process: eight with FMLN mayors, eight with ARENA mayors, and two held by coalition governments. The participation of local governments is the first sign that the process is becoming institutionalized. The ARENA mayor of Quezaltepeque, Carlos Figueroa, calls on his fellow mayors to join and “put the general interest above party interests.” FMLN mayor of Santa Tecla and vice-presidential candidate Óscar Ortiz says “we are going to persuade all the municipalities of the country.” ARENA’s Jorge Velado adds, “In ARENA we want to be part of the solution.”

[Santa Tecla Mayor Óscar Ortiz and the mayor of Ilopango, Salvador Ruano](#), have both been meeting with the gangs in their communities since before the truce. Mayor Ruano has funded a bakery run by the “Tiny Locos” clique of Barrio 18. The mayor and local police commander meet regularly at city hall with gang members.

[Santa Tecla](#) has been “a pioneer and a model of violence prevention for the past eight years,” according to Mayor Ortiz, who credits “coherent public policies,” the recovery of public spaces, and the cooperation of local churches and the business community. He credits the Catholic Church, evangelical churches, and Raúl Mijango for the success of the truce; Ortiz promises, if elected vice-president, that he will promote public policies “that create conditions for social inclusion and cohesion.”

Adam Blackwell, OAS Secretary of Multidimensional Security, promises that the [OAS](#) will work with the mayors to determine budgets and will look for international funding.

“I don’t see why this cannot be a national (project),” [Blackwell](#) says, “but it is necessary to begin slowly. I hope that we can go municipality by municipality, mayor by mayor, without politics and without differences because for me this is above any government, any ideology.”

The [surrender of weapons](#) scheduled for today has been postponed until the law exempting participants from prosecution goes into effect.

### **January 21**

With the election just a year away, [El Faro](#) extols the endorsement of the truce by ARENA and the FMLN, as well as the creation of MLVs: the truce finally has “an official face,” and the process is “more mature, more institutional.” The de-politicization of the process, the creation of a “zone clear of politics,” writes [El Faro](#), is “extraordinary... something rarely seen in El Salvador in particular and in Latin America in general.” Ilopango Mayor Ruano says the victims of gang violence must also participate in the process, and the authorities must be transparent about negotiations with gang leaders; there also must be a public debate “for a more open and more democratic process.” He suggests that those “who have led [the peace process] erratically” should step aside and open the process to more “democratic and institutional representation.”

MS leader [Dionisio Umanzor](#) (“El Sirra”) meets with the 297 inmates at the Tonacatepeque Intermediate Center to encourage them to leave criminal life. He tells his personal story, which includes 12 years in solitary confinement, part of his 100-year sentence. “You are the new generation... We hope you will help us to straighten what we have derailed,” he says.

### **January 22**

[Minister of Security Munguía Payés](#) confirms an increase in homicides so far this month, from 5.4 to 6.5 per day. About 35% of recent homicides are related to “quarrels” between local structures and recently deported gang members from the U.S.

[Ilopango](#) becomes the first official MLV this afternoon. Hundreds of residents, local gang members, the Mayor, Minister of Security, and facilitators participate in a ceremony in the central plaza. Minister Munguía Payés asks the community to “have faith in the process,” saying the second phase is “hopeful for the country.” Mayor Ruano laments, “too much blood has been shed in Ilopango,” and one gang member says residents can now go out of their homes at night “without danger.” [The Minister](#), the Mayor, and gang leaders sign the agreement creating an “Ilopango Free of Violence.” Minister Munguía Payés declares, “This is no longer just a truce between gangs but a true peace process.”

Two [leaders from MS \(Borromeo Henríquez\) and Barrio 18](#) (Juan Carlos Campos) meet with reporters in the Ilopango Women’s Prison to discuss the process and their hopes for the future:

**Borromeo Henríquez of MS:** “This is an historic process and although many people are uncertain and others stay on the sidelines, with the support we have received from some religious leaders, mayors, businessmen and other non-governmental organizations we believe we are going to make Ilopango a national and international example.”

“The most important thing is that we are going to struggle to eradicate all types of violence...extortion, robbery, kidnappings...everything that is illegal.”

“The gang is the cost El Salvador had to pay for the war. Our families had to emigrate.”

“The profound roots of the phenomenon of the gangs are social and economic conditions that the country has had and has not overcome.”

“I prefer the word ‘inclusion’ to ‘reinsertion’ because we have been excluded from everything.”

Henríquez calls for opportunities for all youth, not just gang members, lauds the work of the Mayor of Ilopango, and describes as “stupid” a plan that was instituted years ago under the administration of former president Tony Saca. The strategy, called “plan amigo,” was to convert gang members into informers. The MS leader says this “stupid and false” plan resulted in 90% of the participants being executed by gangs as traitors.

Asked about the problem of extortion, the MS leader states that in Ilopango the small shops, street vendors, *pupuserias* do not have to worry any longer about paying: “The issue of extortions is finished in Ilopango.” But, adds Henríquez, there must be opportunities for work. He describes a “*plan padrino*” to be presented, that will look for sponsors to provide assistance for educational and medical expenses for youth. He also explains the importance of private enterprise participation, but acknowledges that gang members “must be taught about honesty, respect for their bosses and a different discipline than that to which we are accustomed.”

**Juan Carlos Campo of Barrio 18:** “We are part of the change...day by day we are going to stay calm in order to maintain the peace in the communities so that the Salvadoran people can see that the change is occurring now....My family is very happy. Now they can see a positive future for our sons and our daughters.”

Also today, the [Humanitarian Foundation](#) is formally constituted, and will be seeking \$70 million from international donors for the process. The Foundation will be responsible for the coordination of all efforts with the Technical Committee. Antonio Cabrales of FUSADES is appointed president of the Foundation, and the signing ceremony takes place in the FUSADES office, with Munguía Payés, Bishop Colindres, Human Rights Ombudsman Oscar Luna, and Papal Representative Luigi Pezzuto present. “This is an historic and unprecedented opportunity to resolve one of the principal problems of the country: the bleeding of society,” Antonio Cabrales notes.

For Luigi Pezzuto, the process will become sustainable when it is institutionalized: “The institutionalism will create transparency.” The Papal Representative, said to be a close ally of Bishop Fabio Colindres and a supporter of the truce and peace process, is leaving the country to return to Europe.

## January 23

The U.S. Department of State unexpectedly issues an [El Salvador Travel Warning](#), informing U.S. citizens of the security situation in the country. Based on pre-truce data, the detailed document lists an array of crimes and possible threats to U.S. visitors, a group which would presumably include potential investors. Visitors are advised to be “vigilant” and travel in “groups of two or more.” The document acknowledges that the truce has “contributed to a decline in the homicide rate,” but questions its sustainability and says it has had “little impact on robbery, assaults and other violent crimes.”

## January 24

The [Travel Warning](#) “surprised me,” declares Minister of Defense Munguía Payés. “It is strange that in the two previous years when we had 12-14 homicides per day the United States did not issue any alert.” [La Prensa Gráfica](#) notes that other countries with similar alerts include Mexico, Honduras, Iraq, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Algeria, the Philippines and Pakistan. [The Minister](#) also says the warning is based on old data from 2010 and 2012, and adds that some of the U.S. citizens murdered during that period were naturalized Salvadorans who had problems with gangs and were deported or returned to El Salvador.

The [Minister of Security](#) suggests the U.S. is using outdated information and relates a “bad experience” he had with U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton during a regional security conference last year: “I was surprised when she talked about violence statistics in El Salvador that did not correspond to our reality. I had to correct her.” He adds, “[The U.S. is not involved](#), we Salvadorans are... This is not their priority, their priority is drug trafficking.” Attorney General Luis Martínez says he respects statements of the U.S., but insists that El Salvador’s security cabinet is “on a good path.”

[U.S. Ambassador Mari Carmen Aponte](#) affirms that the U.S. has nothing to do with the truce, and “does not have the authority or any role in financing [the truce,] but is committed to continue support for long-term programs for at-risk youth” through the Partnership for Growth.

In an incident allegedly linked to recent massacres, 47 members of [Barrio 18](#) are arrested this morning in Sonsonate and La Libertad.

[Santa Tecla is the second city to be declared “violence-free municipality.”](#) City officials, truce facilitators, the Minister of Security, gang members of MS and Barrio 18, and residents participate in a ceremony in the violence-ridden *barrio* of El Piño. “We are going to make every effort for the continuation of the process despite the difficulties, the fear and uncertainty,” declares the mayor’s assistant Franklin Martínez. Mayor Óscar Ortiz lauds the “historic process” and calls on everyone to “lend a hand.” One gang member asks for forgiveness “for all we have done,” and promises an end to all homicides, robberies, extortion and theft.

## January 25

In the words of [Morena Herrera](#) of the Feminist Collective, “There is no peace or truce for women.” Assaults by relatives, partners, ex-boyfriends--some of them gang members-- are on the rise.

The Ministry of Security is seeking \$74 million to fully implement “sanctuary cities,” according to Vice-Minister of Justice [Douglas Moreno](#). Moreno says the government already has a commitment for 50% of the financing from credits approved by international institutions two years ago for generic violence prevention programs- the credits must still be approved by the legislature. The funds will be used for jobs and to “rescue” the children of gang members, using scholarships and government services. The [Vice-Minister](#) explains the development of “labor parks,” which will be similar to free trade zones, but owned and run by the state and located in violence-free cities. The U.S. and Germany are supporting the project, he discloses, which is officially named “special parks for labor reinsertion and the culture of peace.”

## January 26

The Central American Integration Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank have approved credits of \$91 million for [prison improvements](#) to reduce the current 332% overcrowding. The funds will be used to construct one new facility, expand existing ones, and build a third prison farm. About 4,000 prisoners will be paroled with electronic GPS-equipped bracelets. Currently the 19 existing prisons hold 27,084 prisoners, with a total capacity of only 8,500.

## January 27

[Norman Quijano](#), Mayor of San Salvador and ARENA presidential candidate, considers the U.S. travel alert “valid,” and says the capital city will not participate in “violence-free municipalities” because “we have our own prevention programs.”

“This does not please us,” [Archbishop José Luis Escobar Alas](#) remarks in response to the travel alert, noting that “the solution to the violence is not easy.”

## January 28

Homicides in the [Soyapango](#) district dropped by 44% between 2011 and 2012, according to PNC data; the district includes Ilopango, San Martín and Tonacatepeque.

## January 29

The leaders of five gangs are moved from their respective prisons to Mariona Prison for a press conference in response to the U.S. security alert. [Facilitator Raúl Mijango](#) expresses regret that the U.S. is questioning the truce instead of contributing to it. “It leaves El Salvador in a very difficult situation, it is not true,” he insists, “because the country has been advancing in the area of violence.” A leader of Barrio 18 questions the outdated data used in the warning that creates a “terrifying image” of the country to “frighten tourists...We invite all the North American and European people who want to visit...Salvadorans welcome them with open arms.” [Gang leaders](#) say they respect the sovereignty of the United States not to support the process, but ask that the U.S. not create obstacles. The leaders also inform the press that they have instructed all members to respect the integrity of visitors.

### **January 30**

Ministry of Security officials meet with the mayors of 22 metropolitan municipalities and announce the formation of a “[metropolitan cabinet](#)” to coordinate all violence prevention programs in the area surrounding the capital city. Santa Tecla Mayor Óscar Ortiz says the purpose is to “promote, encourage and strengthen” the work, “to create a platform for inclusion, cohesion and public policies.” The majority of crimes committed in El Salvador occur in these 22 cities.

### **February 1**

The third “Violence-Free Municipality” is inaugurated in [Quezaltepeque](#), with the signing of an agreement between the ARENA mayor and representatives of MS and Barrio 18. “We are committed to maintaining the peace,” says César of Barrio 18, “and we are going to demonstrate that with our acts... The word of a gang member means something.” The gangs guarantee free movement in their territories and promise not to recruit youth. Ilopango was declared a violence-free municipality on January 22<sup>nd</sup>. Santa Tecla was declared a violence-free municipality on January 24<sup>th</sup>.

### **February 3**

A gang member is killed in the first violence-free city, [Ilopango](#).

### **February 4**

[Minister of Security Munguía Payés](#) says the Ilopango murder will be solved within 72 hours. “It is a process,” he comments, “and we know things like this are going to happen.”

[Soldiers](#) will no longer be deployed in the “sanctuary” cities if the project shows results, according to Minister of Defense Atilio Benítez: “If there are no crimes we are going to move to where there are crimes.” Since 2009, troops have been deployed on joint patrols with the National Civil Police (PNC). They have been deployed in 33 zones with 19 high-crime municipalities, in seven departments. Since the truce, soldiers have also been withdrawn from duty inside the prisons following many complaints of invasive searches performed on visitors.

Steve Vigil, of the Transnational Advisory Group in Support of the Salvadoran Peace Process tells [El Faro](#) the truce will break, citing “the law of gravity and the volatility of the gangs.” The country should be thinking about what to do when that happens: El Salvador “cannot place its tradition of violence on the shoulders of two groups of marginalized people...and hope that they are going to solve it.” He says the gangs deserve a lot of credit for holding the truce for a year without much support, and calls on the government to “abandon its timidity and publicly assume the leadership of the truce.” Vigil warns that the 1993 truce in Los Angeles between the Crips and the Bloods eventually collapsed because promises of aid never arrived.

Other international supporters interviewed by [El Faro](#), including Roberto Valent of the United Nations and Adam Blackwell of the OAS, both also strongly suggest greater government involvement in the process, “not just to sustain the truce but to lead (the country) to a national dialogue and public policies.” Valent cites the case of Ilopango Mayor Salvador Ruano, who has invested his own resources in the truce. Ruano is still waiting for government funding and has said: “This is my life that is at stake.” Papal Nunciature Luigi Pezzuto, recently recalled to Rome, has been a supporter of the peace process from the beginning: “We know about its fragility...I have informed Rome...but when something is fragile (it must be) strengthened.” He believes the process is viable if it is institutionalized and transparent.



Some diplomats tell [El Faro](#) they are worried that the truce “could explode in their faces,” others say it is politically impossible to support negotiations with gangs or a truce, but all agree that assistance will be easier when the government fully assumes ownership of the process. For its part, the U.S. has been sending “contradictory messages” this past year, (including the Treasury Department announcement and the recent travel warning) according to one government official, “but has not presented obstacles.”

Douglas Moreno, the Vice-Minister of Justice, describes the current situation to [El Faro](#) as one of “containment measures” until “greater solutions” are in place. Roberto Rubio, Executive Director of FUNDE, calls for a “mini Marshall Plan” of investment to create jobs. Jaime Miranda, Vice-Minister of International Cooperation for the Foreign Ministry, acknowledges that the truce “took most of the government by surprise” and says plans for assistance are still not defined.

The Humanitarian Commission was first announced last May, but has not been a huge success, according to [El Faro](#). On January 23<sup>rd</sup>, the “Humanitarian Foundation” was formalized - led by the conservative think tank FUSADES and its former president Antonio Cabrales, an old friend of truce facilitator Bishop Fabio Colindres. Despite support from FUSADES, the Salvadoran right is still reluctant to support the initiative. According to [El Faro](#), this may be either for ideological reasons or stubborn refusal to give any credit to the Funes administration.

Despite continuing problems and criticisms of the lack of transparency, the OAS representative [Adam Blackwell](#) is emphatic in his support: “Would I put my prestige and that of the Secretary General on the line if I weren’t completely certain that there is nothing hidden behind the truce?”

The first “[labor park](#)” will be established in Distrito Italia, Tonacatepeque, according to Vice-Minister of Justice Douglas Moreno. It will be like “a small free trade zone,” funded with a long-term, no-interest Italian loan of \$5.5 million. Moreno expects the project to create 1,000 jobs for gang members, youth, and adults in the impoverished community. He also explains the provenance of the promised \$74 million for at-risk youth/crime prevention and for the peace process:

- \$25 million from USAID over next five years;
- \$25 million from the Inter- American Development Bank;
- \$22 million from Germany;
- \$ 7 million from Italian Cooperation;
- \$ 1 million from the European Union;
- \$ 1.5 million from the World Bank.

## **February 5**

Legislators have yet to approve the temporary law that would allow the [voluntary handover of weapons](#) without fear of prosecution.

## February 6

[El Faro](#) reports on various gang truces that have taken place in Guatemala, Honduras, Spain and Ecuador, concluding that success depends on:

- Serious study of gangs and youth
- Participation of a variety of social actors
- Committed, appropriate people to work directly with the gangs
- Mutual trust
- Good will on the part of police, academics and the media, and support from the international community
- A policy of respect for human rights in the prisons
- Finally, most important, time.

## February 7

The U.S. “is not collaborating in economic terms with the so-called peace zones,” [Ambassador Mari Carmen Aponte](#) tells reporters. The truce “is an internal process.” The Ambassador also explains that the travel warning “is part of the duty of the State Department” to inform U.S. citizens and says “it does not affect the bilateral relationship...which is strong and will stay that way.”

[January](#) closed with 190 homicides, a 54<sup>0</sup>% reduction according to the Minister of Security, due to the truce and to police operations.

Elite police units are deployed in [Ilopango](#), following the homicide on February 3<sup>rd</sup>. “We don’t want the balance that we have in this moment to be broken,” Minister of Security Munguía Payés says, “We want to avoid the chain of revenge.”

## February 8

[Sonsonate](#) becomes the 4<sup>th</sup> violence-free municipality, in a ceremony led by Mayor Roberto Aquino, Minister of Security Munguía Payés, Adam Blackwell of the OAS and Bishop Colindres. Dorian Ramírez, a gang representative, thanks the community “for the opportunity that we are given ...to live a normal life like every human being, with feelings, with family, with pain and happiness, successes and failures.” [Homicides](#) have been reduced by 60% since 2011, according to local officials. With its strategic location for drug trafficking, Sonsonate was the third most violent department in the country. As the “pact for life and peace” is signed, Munguía Payés predicts that 54 cities will join the process by the end of the year.

## February 9

[FUSADES](#) analyst Marjorie Chorro says the truce has resulted in “a significant reduction in homicides,” saying 1,725 fewer lives have been lost due to the truce.



## February 10

[Archbishop José Luis Escobar Alas](#) clarifies once again that the institutional Church has not been participating in the truce and peace process. Bishop Colindres “continues helping with good will but we as the Church are not in the process.” He acknowledges the reduction in homicides but says he has no “concrete” knowledge about the truce and calls for “a new peace accord.”

A second homicide is reported in [Ilopango](#) since the municipality joined the peace process. Mayor Ruano and representatives of the gangs deny involvement and call on the police to be “professional” in their investigations. The mayor is forming a local commission to oversee and verify compliance with the process.

## February 11

[Deportations](#) from the U.S. continue to rise, with a 16.5% increase in 2012 over 2011, and a 28.3% increase in January 2013. Four or five flights arrive each week, with 120 deportees per flight. Salvadoran authorities report 16,899 deportees arrived in 2011 and 19,685 arrived in 2012. Of those deported in 2012, 35.3% had criminal records.

## February 12

[USAID](#) announces the creation of a \$42 million violence prevention project, in a “public-private partnership” with four non-governmental organizations: FUSADES, FUNDE, FEDAPE and Glasswing. USAID describes the project as the “largest partnership in USAID history with the private sector in one country.” The program, “[SolucionEs](#)”, will concentrate on youth with no criminal history. According to Michelle Parker of the U.S. Embassy, it has no links to the truce, and will concentrate projects in Ciudad Arce and San Martín, but will include five municipalities and 50 communities over a five-year period. The goal is to have a “political impact” with work at the local level.

[La Prensa Gráfica](#) clarifies that the U.S. will donate \$20 million and the local non-governmental organizations are expected to collect the additional \$22 million. The project will include violence prevention training, after-school programs, leadership and job training and psychological counseling for youth 10-15 years old.

Mark Feierstein of [USAID](#) describes SolucionEs as “the largest alliance in the history of USAID in Latin America.” The donation will not be in support of “sanctuary cities,” Ambassador Aponte reiterates, but is a part of the Partnership for Growth initiative. Alex Segovia, the President’s Chief of Staff adds that the project must be seen as complementary to the truce: “They have a common objective: violence prevention.” The project “is part of the good relationship with the U.S.,” Segovia says.

## February 13

In an extensive interview with La Página, [Carlos Lechuga Mojica](#) (“Viejo Lin”), leader of Barrio 18, insists gang members are not common criminals: “This is a social phenomenon that has profound structural roots,” that cannot be eliminated by incarcerating more young men under inhumane conditions. “We are part of the people; I have been all over every corner of (this country) where the gangs are; I have walked on my own feet, I have lived, I have eaten, I have slept (with them) and we are a large part of the population. I am not just talking about five or six thousand; there are complete communities that are ours.” Despite allegations that the gangs have large sums of money from illicit activities, “the vast majority of us live in precarious conditions.” There have been no economic benefits negotiated with the government: “They have given us nothing, (the idea) is laughable.”

According to a [CID-Gallup poll](#) of Central Americans, 67% of Salvadorans believe the gangs are responsible for the majority of the violence. The number for Guatemalans is 43%, Hondurans 34%, Nicaraguans 30% and Panamanians 41%. Asked what the priority of law enforcement should be, 79% of Salvadorans responded gangs with only 18% citing drug traffickers.

#### **February 14**

Legislature approves the “[Temporary Law for the Voluntary Handover of Firearms, Explosives and Ammunition](#).” The 90-day law can be renewed, and the handover will begin within the next ten days according to the Minister of Security. The handovers will occur in 18 municipalities; 300 weapons are anticipated at the first event and all will be inspected to determine if they were used during criminal acts.

#### **February 16**

The third homicide is reported in [Ilopango](#) since the municipality was declared “violence-free.” Munguía Payés says that PNC anti-gang, elite and intelligence units are all working in the community.

A [former member of the U.S. military](#) is killed in a rural area of Izalco, Sonsonate. Michael James Brown, 55, is shot at close range in a vehicle he is driving, accompanied by a 24-year old Salvadoran woman who is wounded. The crime is first thought to be gang-related, but is later described as a crime of passion perhaps committed by gang members hired as hit men.

#### **February 18**

The [International Committee of the Red Cross](#) (ICRC) has been working in the country since November 2012, inspecting all prison facilities. ICRC representative Derek Spangler says the first task has been to evaluate basic conditions of hygiene and access to potable water. He notes improvements in Quezaltepeque Prison. Authorities recognize the serious deficiencies and overcrowding. Prison Director Nelson Rauda has been a strong advocate for reforms and dignified living conditions for all inmates but lacks resources: “We are doing the best we can.” The ICRC will soon begin a medical evaluation of all prisoners.

Nearly 600 gang members occupy a space designed for 150 in Sector 1 of the [Cojutepeque Prison](#). The roofing is plastic, hammocks are strung from the roof and walls, there is no air and little light, and there is a lack of adequate sewage and potable drinking water. The smell, humidity and heat overwhelm visitors. “People think we live well,” one prisoner says, but “we live in the middle of rats and cockroaches and we can barely move around.”

#### **February 19**

An [Anti-gang unit](#) will be inaugurated February 21<sup>st</sup> by Attorney General Luis Martínez. Oscar Torres will direct the unit’s investigations.

## February 20

Two members of MS are charged with the murder of [Major Edgardo Carrillo Arias](#), which occurred last weekend. Apparently a dispute broke out after the military officer damaged the vehicle of the alleged gang members. The perpetrators were arrested in the act.

[U.S. Ambassador Aponte](#) has “complete confidence” in the investigation of the murder of U.S. citizen Michael James Brown on February 16<sup>th</sup>. Brown, 55, served in Iraq and Afghanistan and was married to a 24-year old Salvadoran. He arrived in El Salvador on February 12<sup>th</sup> and was in a vehicle with her when he was shot. Minister of Security Munguía Payés says Brown was not an ordinary tourist, but the motive for the crime is still not known.

## February 21

The Minister of Security Munguía Payés now says the murder of the U.S. military veteran was a premeditated crime of passion, and predicts arrests in the coming days. [Ambassador Aponte](#) assures reporters that the crime will not affect the travel alert “one way or the other...The relationship between El Salvador and the United States is solid, strong, El Salvador is a reliable partner and we are working together on the issue of security and crime prevention.”

The cost of living has surpassed violence as the main concern for Salvadorans, according to a [CID-Gallup poll](#): 39% of respondents cited cost of living with just 22% stating violence as the main concern.

The number of [sanctuary cities](#) will soon reach sixty, not 18 as planned. This reportedly is because an “avalanche” of mayors has requested to participate in the violence-free cities project in recent weeks. The original strategy was to incorporate 18 but, the Minister of Security Munguía Payés explains, local authorities report an “urgent” need to reach agreements with gangs. Munguía Payés explains the difficulty of integrating all at once, “because we aren’t going to have the resources for the reinsertion programs,” but the mayors insist on participating despite lack of funding.

## February 23

A job fair for youth held is in the central plaza of [Ilopango](#) with some 300 businesses participating, according to reports. This is the second fair in three months with opportunities in sales, industry, restaurants, security and more. Local officials say 350 people were hired as a result of both fairs.

[Ilopango Mayor Salvador Ruano](#) decries the refusal of the U.S. Embassy to grant him a visa, saying he is the only mayor in the metropolitan area who has not been granted a visa, because “I am dealing with an issue the United States does not approve of.” Ruano insists he has not been “negotiating” with the gangs but rather developing a process of peace. Asked about the denial, Ambassador Aponte responds that she is not aware of the case and that it is a consular affair.

## February 25

Among the [small businesses](#) for gang members funded by the Ilopango city government is a chicken hatchery, under construction and scheduled to receive 700 chicks on February 26<sup>th</sup>. Sixty gang members will receive training and assistance from the non-governmental organizations FESPAD and CORDES. The grocery chain Super Selectos will buy the products. Two bakeries and a tailor shop are up and running and gang members hope to find funding for a cyber café.

## February 26

[Panchimalco](#) is on the list of the 25 most violent communities, but today a peace agreement is signed between some 400 members of MS and Barrio 18 that live in the area of Panchimalco and Rosario del Mora. Mayor Mario Melendez and the local priest are in attendance as the treaty is signed. One gang member says, “We are initiating this process so that both the 18 and MS gangs are part of the dialogue that will change the future of Panchimalco.” Gang members immediately begin to clean up the graffiti on the road between the two towns.

## February 27

[Puerto La Libertad](#) will incorporate as a “Violence-Free Municipality” on March 1<sup>st</sup>, according to Raúl Mijango, with gang members, Bishop Colindres and representatives of other churches. This will be the 5<sup>th</sup> official community to join.

Celebrations of the [first anniversary](#) of the truce will begin on March 4<sup>th</sup> with an ecumenical caravan visiting prisons. Mijango says 2,957 lives “have been saved” due to the truce and that there has been a 60% reduction in homicides since the same period one year ago.

The Minister of Security will present a proposal to the legislature to [reform the anti-gang law](#); the reform will allow gang members to participate in the peace process and in reinsertion projects.

## March 1

The ARENA mayor of [Mejicanos](#), Juana Lemus, reports that violence has decreased “a lot” since the truce. She has met with the gangs and says they “just want the opportunity to work,” but expresses concern that the peace process must not just be part of a “political campaign.” Mejicanos will officially join as a “Violence-Free Municipality” in May.

[Puerto La Libertad](#), a popular tourist destination for Salvadorans, incorporates today as the fifth “Violence-Free Municipality.” Local MS and Barrio 18 leaders sign a non-aggression pact and an agreement to end all criminal activity in the municipality. The Minister of Security and truce facilitators attended the ceremony. Mayor Carlos Farabundo Molina says citizens can now feel more secure and “we can even close the police station!”

Antonio Cabrales, President of the Humanitarian Foundation, an organization established to support the peace process, says he believes in the sincerity of the gangs. During the event in [La Libertad](#), Cabrales calls on Salvadorans to give “the benefit of the doubt” to the process: “I firmly believe that they don’t want to continue living the life that they have been living for many years,” Cabrales comments, and the country cannot continue “in the pool of blood we have all been swimming in.” José Raúl Chela of Barrio 18 says residents “can now feel free to walk on the beaches and in the barrios without any fear.” The next three cities to join as “Violence-Free Municipalities” will be Panchimalco, Rosario de Mora, and Apopa.

Mario Alejandro Reyes, a 23-year-old member of Barrio 18, is [murdered](#) in his jail cell, shot 28 times by men wearing hoods. Reyes was under arrest in the Panchimalco jail, on charges of double homicide. Mauricio Landaverde, Assistant Director of the National Civilian Police (PNC), says 14 police agents are under investigation for this “unprecedented act.”

### March 3

[Ilopango](#) was the first city to incorporate in the violence-free municipalities project, on January 22<sup>nd</sup>. Since his election in March 2012, ARENA Mayor Salvador Ruano has promoted the peace process in his city, investing funds in employment projects for gang members including two bakeries, a metal-works shop, and a chicken hatchery. Ruano decries the lack of cooperation from some government officials, especially local police officers. “I am being threatened by some officers,” he says, who have accused him of violating the anti-gang law: “If they want to arrest me for this then they have to arrest the Minister of Security also... This is an issue that the government must define once and for all... either it is white or it is black.”

Maintaining the truce and the ongoing peace process is very difficult, Ruano explains, “when the government doesn’t define its position.” The mayor alleges that “dark forces” want to tarnish the process, “perhaps because I am from ARENA or because the gringos don’t agree.” Mayor Ruano says he understands that U.S. policy prohibits any support for “terrorist groups,” but wrote a letter to U.S. Ambassador Mari Carmen Aponte explaining that Salvadoran law permits rehabilitation and reinsertion. Meanwhile, funds are needed to develop more job-creating projects. “I have told the kids that I don’t have money, we are going one-by-one... that they have to give me a chance, it is something they understand.”

### March 4

Longtime critic of the truce [Padre Antonio Rodríguez](#) describes the process as “worthless without the human dimension.” Padre “Toño,” as he is known, has been working with gangs at his parish in Mejicanos for 12 years and says the truce is merely a “political strategy.” What is needed, he writes, is the “human dimension,” including spiritual, psychological, and social assistance, training, and dialogue with the victims.

**The 365<sup>th</sup> day of the truce is celebrated** with [ecumenical services](#) in the Ciudad Barrios and Gotera prisons. “Any effort for peace is valid,” Bishop Fabio Colindres says, “and what if it doesn’t work? We will have lost a little effort and illusions. But if it works? The country will have won peace.”

The celebration in [Ciudad Barrios](#) prison includes religious songs, a performance by the Vencedores theater group, rap music asking Salvadorans not to discriminate against gang members, and poetry readings, all taking place with a strong smell of sewage due to inadequate sanitation. Many of the prisoners wear shirts and ties. MS leader Aristides Umanzor “El Sirra” asks Salvadorans to support the truce: “It has many opponents but we are not going back on it.” Another MS leader, Borrromeo Henríquez, thanks facilitators Raúl Mijango and Bishop Colindres: “We know that you are risking a lot by helping us and that you are being heavily criticized by different groups that don’t believe in this effort, but we are going to demonstrate to the critics that we can do things better and have a country at peace.”

## March 5

Giovanni Morales, 33, an ex-gang member who has been working with Padre Antonio Rodríguez, is murdered outside the [San Francisco Parish](#) in Mejicanos. Padre “Toño” believes the killing is related to his criticism of the truce, and tells reporters that if anything happens to him, “I hold Señor Mijango and Señor Colindres responsible for my death.”

The Minister of Security later confirms that Morales was a former member of MS and was murdered by members of Barrio 18. He had worked with Padre Toño for four years, and was a signer of the peace agreement in Quezaltepeque. Munguía Payés stated of him, “Giovanni gave great support to the process, he was a person who believed in the process. We don’t know the motives for his assassination.”

Anti-gang units will intervene “to avoid the chain of revenge that can occur” following the murder of a gang-member. [Raúl Mijango](#) meets with gang leaders in prison to halt any possible revenge killings, after learning of the murder of Morales in Mejicanos and a shoot-out later that day in Ayutuxtepeque between some gang members and police.

## March 6

Attorney General Luis Martínez denounces “[massive manipulation of data](#)” under the previous Attorney General Romeo Barahona’s “repressive and tyrannical system.” Every prosecutor was ordered to generate between 300-400 arrest warrants per month; presumably the vast majority were alleged gang members. Martínez also says the data bank is out of date or inaccurate, the computers are obsolete, and 60% of the institution’s vehicles don’t function.

[President Funes](#) speaks out on the truce, calling Padre Antonio Rodríguez’s remarks “irresponsible” and “paranoid.” Responding to criticisms of the truce, the President insists the government has never been “extorted” or “blackmailed” by the gangs. “We have intervened in the process but we have not negotiated with them or exchanged tangible benefits for them or their families...The truce has contributed to a climate of citizen security and tranquility....We are convinced that the state must give an institutional response ...and create an institutional and social climate that generates jobs.”

[Provisional detention](#) is ordered for ten PNC agents who were on duty at the Panchimalco substation when a gang member was murdered last weekend. According to Óscar Torres of the State Prosecutor’s anti-gang unit, the agents allowed a masked man to enter the jail, kill the prisoner, and leave. The jail commander is charged with aggravated homicide, the others with dereliction of duty.

In a paper written for the International Assessment and Strategy Center published on February 24<sup>th</sup>, U.S. journalist [Douglas Farah](#) claims that the truce is part of a strategy by the gangs to consolidate power. MS “could become or already has become a much more formal TCO (Transnational Criminal Organization),” he believes, with close relations to the Los Perrones and Cartel de Taxis organized crime groups. Minister of Security Munguía Payés says the charge is “fiction” and simply not true.



## March 7

The dispute between Raúl Mijango and Padre Toño continues, as the two trade accusations. Mijango says Padre Toño's words following the murder of ex-gang member Giovanni Morales "provoked" other incidents. The priest has received funding for 12 years for his rehabilitation programs "with only pyrrhic results," Mijango says, and Mejicanos has been the most difficult municipality to incorporate into the peace process "because of his attitude." For his part, the priest responds, "Mijango's project does not rehabilitate or reinsert, it is a political negotiation, to build political power...Mine is a project of human and social transformation."

President Funes emphatically disputes Doug Farah's allegations that Salvadoran gangs are collaborating with cartels, saying "we have no evidence of this, not even enough to open an investigation." In the president's judgment, the truce "has created a favorable scenario to put the problems in their proper dimension; those who think that the government has promoted the truce as a solution to the entire criminal problem in the country are mistaken."

[Minister of Security](#) David Munguía Payés confirms that the murder of Giovanni Morales was gang-related. "We have always respected Padre Toño although we don't share his strategy or vision." The priest has not asked for protection but Munguía Payés states that "if he wishes, we will provide protection."

Munguía Payés reports that the number of homicides between January and February of this year show a [53% reduction](#) from the same period last year. The total for the two months in 2012 was 815, compared to 381 in 2013. The 2013 statistic includes 196 homicides recorded in January, and 185 in February. Thirty of the murder victims in this period were women, and 475 cases of sexual abuse were reported during January and February. Currently, reports Munguía Payés, of every five homicides, three or four are [gang-related](#): "There are still many differences between [the gangs] and they attack...Some cliques don't agree [with the truce.]"

The minister also announces that Apopa will formally become the sixth violence-free community on March 9<sup>th</sup>.

Padre Toño reports that the [San Francisco parish clinic was robbed](#). Computers and other electronic equipment were stolen, but he says he will not report the crime to the police.

[Padre Toño](#) tells a La Página reporter that he will be silent from now on "in order not to lose my life." He complains that the people linked to the truce "have not valued my program, have not been interested, have not supported it or have come to know it...We can accept the reality and be obedient to the truce...I understood the language, I promise that I will be silent in order not to lose my life and I wish them the best on their journey."

A funeral is held today for Giovanni Morales. Padre Toño and Raúl Mijango meet during the funeral and apparently mend fences. Mijango says he answered all of the priest's questions and concerns about the origins of the truce, and the two men realized they have "[complementary visions](#)."

## March 8

The [Women's prison in Ilopango](#) holds an event celebrating the first anniversary of the gang truce. Padre Toño attends the celebration and announces he is joining the process. He says he was not “bribed or blackmailed,” and publicly asks Raúl Mijango and Bishop Colindres to forgive him for accusing them of threats. Facilitators are optimistic that Mejicanos, the site of the priest's parish, will now incorporate into the peace process as a violence-free municipality.

Asked about Doug Farah's article on gangs, [Raúl Mijango](#) says Padre Toño was a source for the research, though the priest now insists he doesn't agree with Farah's report. Mijango also met with Farah: “I thought he was a journalist but now I understand that he is a novelist...In this report there is a lot of science fiction, I don't know who his sources were...It is part of the actions of those who want to sabotage the process.”

## March 9

The truce went into effect one year ago today, and Apopa is declared the sixth violence-free city. Bishop Colindres reads the list of [267 weapons voluntarily handed in](#), including rocket launchers, Molotov cocktails, revolvers, and rifles. OAS representative Carlos Orozco reads a letter of support from [Secretary-General José Manuel Insulza](#).

The [FMLN](#) will propose new legislation to facilitate reinsertion of gang members. Deputy Benito Lara says the process has to extend beyond a truce in order to succeed; a comprehensive policy is needed that involves the government, private sector, schools, universities, and so on. “The truce is positive to a certain point ...but this is the moment to go deeper...so that it will be sustainable...The structural causes must be attacked...Prevention is key.”

Divisions exist among [ARENA](#) party officials in terms of support for the truce and peace process. San Salvador Mayor and presidential candidate Norman Quijano believes the truce “is a mistake” and “empowers the gangs,” whereas the ARENA mayors of Ilopango, Apopa and Mejicanos support the process, as does the new president of ARENA's National Executive Council (COENA), Jorge Velado.

## March 10

In an interview with El Faro, [Ilopango Mayor Salvador Ruano](#) says he is aware of the risks involved in his work with the gangs: “In this situation there are no clear guidelines.” Asked if he is “legitimizing” them, he responds, “I don't see them as gangs but as neighborhood kids.” Ruano says Mauricio Arriaza Chicas of the PNC has been threatening to arrest him for violating the law prohibiting gangs. “If I am in violation by bringing peace, by reducing the violence, then President Funes and Munguía Payés are also in violation.”

He says the law must be changed and also criticizes the Minister and the President for a lack of support, calling on President Funes to be courageous “and not be afraid of the gringos...If the gringos had said ‘we are going to give the benefit of the doubt,’ (to the truce) Mauricio would be saying, ‘I invented this with Munguía! They have to be courageous!’”

## March 11

PNC reports [500 fewer homicides](#) between January and March compared to the same period last year, an average now of 6.5 per day. This figure is up from 5.3 homicides per day at the end of 2012.



### **March 12**

Barrio 18 leader Carlos Barahona (Chino Tres Colas) says his group has never pressured Padre Toño and doesn't know anything about the murder of Giovanni Morales. "There are [obscure and strong groups](#) that move in different sectors with the objective of hindering all the good activities taking place within the non-aggression pact between gangs." He admits there are members who refuse to join the process, but adds there is nothing the leaders can do: "We can't force them to join."

### **March 13**

Police round up nineteen Barrio 18 members in [Ilopango and Soyapango](#), including some who are participating in the peace process, according to Raúl Mijango, who says this endangers the process and reflects the need to reform the anti-gang law.

The PNC reports that 40% of persons reported [disappeared](#) are found alive. Of 165 cases reported this year, 10 have been found dead.

### **March 14**

The [FBI](#) has included a member of MS, Edwin Ernesto Rivera Gracias, on its Most Wanted list with a \$100,000 reward. He is accused of murder in the U.S. and is alleged to be in El Salvador.

The gang truce alone is not enough, insists FMLN presidential candidate Salvador Sánchez Cerén. The process must include an [end to extortions](#) and spaces for reintegration. The candidate also opposes the privatization of prisons.

During a conference on the truce, Munguía Payés suggests El Salvador should issue a [travel warning](#) for visitors to the U.S. following the State Department's travel warning released on January 23<sup>rd</sup>. Five U.S. cities rank higher than San Salvador on the list of most violent cities, according to a study by a Mexican NGO. Baltimore, New Orleans, St. Louis, Detroit and Oakland are all higher on the list than San Salvador, which is listed as the 44<sup>th</sup> most violent city. San Pedro Sula in Honduras tops the list.

Between [1996 and 2012](#), 48,723 people were murdered in El Salvador, Munguía Payés says during the conference. Homicides have been reduced by 52% since the truce. Raúl Mijango expresses his concern that politicizing the process could endanger the truce. He highlights the past year's achievements in the truce and peace process, including stabilization in the prisons ("12 months with no provocative actions by prisoners"), initiation of weapons handovers, and support from the churches.

### **March 15**

Police conduct another [round-up of gang members](#) in Mejicanos, Ayutuxtepeque, Ciudad Delgado and Cuscatancingo. Forty-seven MS members are arrested, and face charges of homicide and extortion.

In [Washington](#), Minister of Security Munguía meets with think tanks and academics to discuss the truce and security strategy, accompanied by Ambassador Francisco Altschul. He also meets with Salvadoran community groups, U.S. Representative James McGovern (MA) and Roberta Jacobson, Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs. In his meeting with Jacobson, the Minister presents updated homicide rate statistics and his analysis, to refute the U.S. travel alert issued in January. The Assistant Secretary says the U.S. will “review and analyze U.S. measures related to public security.”

“What is true is that his process is the [most successful in the entire hemisphere](#) in reducing historic violence,” the Minister of Security says during his presentation at the Salvadoran Embassy in Washington. The Ministry estimates that in El Salvador, there are 67,000 gang members, with some 500,000 family members: “We can’t put them all in prison.”

### **March 16**

Despite efforts to improve jail and prison conditions during the past year, problems of overcrowding and sanitation are deplorable. Over 200 prisoners are crammed inside the [Montserrat jail](#), with overflowing toilets in the cells. Many prisoners are barefoot, and 90% have fungal infections. Some prisoners must sleep standing up, while others have hammocks and plastic sheets. Police Commander Javier Hernández says one problem is the constant flow of arrests, but the major issue is the inability of the judicial system to process prisoners. He also reports that at least 16 prisoners are seriously ill, but the Ministry of Health has not responded to his requests for help to provide treatment. One female prisoner has active HIV/AIDS; another is about to give birth inside the jail.

### **March 17**

[Auxiliary Bishop Rosa Chávez](#) criticizes the facilitators of the peace process for only working with the leadership, saying that the process of rehabilitation of ex-gang members has so far been ignored. He also insists that dialogue regarding the process “must be on the national agenda.”

### **March 18**

Back in January, Ilopango became the first community to sign the “Violence-Free Municipality” agreement. In a lengthy, descriptive piece, El Faro [journalist Carlos Martínez](#) explores developments and reactions in Ilopango, the “invisible walls” that still exist between gang territories, and the dilemma for the gangs “of reinventing themselves while preserving their essence.”

The [ARENA mayor of Apopa](#), Elías Martínez is meeting every day with the three gangs (MS, Barrio 18 and *Máquina*), local church officials and the prosecutor’s office. The gangs have been painting over graffiti, and promise to end extortions. Apopa incorporated into the process on March 9<sup>th</sup>.

### **March 19**

Police conduct a round-up of [37 MS members](#) in La Libertad. Incarcerated gang-members are charged with homicides and extortion, and one police agent is accused of collaboration.

In Sonsonate, [eleven gang members are arrested](#) and charged with extortion.

A [USAID contract](#) to Creative Associates International is approved today. It is a three-year grant of \$24 million, to support crime prevention efforts in El Salvador.

### **March 20**

The new [USAID contract](#) is formally announced in El Salvador at an event attended by U.S. Ambassador Mari Carmen Aponte. The “Project for Children and Youth” is designated to provide safe learning environments for children and youth in high-crime communities, and will benefit 100,000 students in 750 schools. Part of the Partnership for Growth initiative, the contract will continue through December 2018.

### **March 23**

Citing one recent incident, Assistant Police Chief [Mauricio Ramírez Landaverde](#) accuses gang members of using the truce as a pretext to avoid arrest. Last week, three gang members were arrested in a vehicle in La Libertad; police found marijuana in the car. One of the detainees had a letter signed by Raúl Mijango attesting to the fact that he is collaborating with the peace process. [Mijango](#) affirms that he issues letters to collaborators “to facilitate their work in the communities.” The documents, in the name of his non-governmental organization “Economic and Social Action Foundation” (FUNAES) “are not safe conduct passes,” he says, and states clearly that anyone involved in illegal activities is not exempt from arrest.

### **March 26**

Police conduct another early morning round-up of gang-members. The round-up includes house searches in [three Apopa neighborhoods](#). Twenty-two members of two Barrio 18 cliques are arrested and charged with multiple homicides, said to be internal purges, committed between 2009 and 2012.

### **March 27**

Edwin Ernesto Rivera Gracias, an MS member placed on the FBI’s Most Wanted list on March 14, is [arrested](#) after voluntarily returning to the United States, where he will face charges for a murder committed in Denver, Colorado, in August of 2011. The [FBI reports](#) that Rivera Gracias had been in San Salvador, but has now been flown back to Denver, where he is now in the custody of local law enforcement authorities.

### **March 31**

[Forty-four homicides](#) are reported during the Easter vacation, a 17% reduction over the same period last year. Twelve of those were due to fights between gangs, 32 due to social violence and other causes.