



National Lawyers Guild

Task Force on the Americas

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION MONITORING DELEGATION TO EL SALVADOR VOICES PRE-ELECTION CONCERNS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE TO THE PRESS

March 13, 2009

San Salvador, El Salvador

A delegation of twenty lawyers from the National Lawyers Guild* arrived March 10 in El Salvador to begin serving as accredited international observers in the presidential election taking place this Sunday, March 15, 2009. As observers of the electoral process in the United States we have seen incidences of fraud in our own country. We are convinced of the importance of a citizenry committed to free and transparent elections. Democracy is strengthened only with governability and a civil society which is able to hold political parties accountable.

In particular we will be monitoring issues identified by the OAS before and during their electoral observation mission to El Salvador in January 2009 as well as concerns of other national and international organizations.

We have met with representatives of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal of El Salvador, Congresspersons of both the ARENA and FMLN political parties, and attorneys and judges who have actively participated in the defense of political rights of the Salvadoran population. Our principal concerns are the following: (1) the allegations of fraud in the distribution of Salvadoran National Identification Cards (known as "DUIs") and the lack of transparency in the Electoral Registry, including the lack of access to this Registry by all the major actors in enough time prior to the elections to confirm its legitimacy; (2) an environment of insecurity and acts of intimidation and violence; (3) a false public campaign which alleges that the government of the United States will take retaliatory actions if the FMLN wins the election.

We have been reading distortions in the Salvadoran press about potential threats to US El Salvador relations. As US citizens we feel confident that it is the current will of Congress, as well as that of the Obama administration, to continue to work closely with the government of El Salvador if the FMLN were to win, and that there would in fact be no negative repercussions for the Salvadoran people. The US Embassy in El Salvador has stated that the US will remain impartial in this election and that they will work with whichever party wins the election. However, we are concerned that the Salvadoran press has not made this position clear. We have asked the acting ambassador Robert Blau to publicly reiterate the official position of neutrality of the Department of State and to state as well there will be no reprisals against the Salvadoran people should the FMLN prevail in the election. (See letter to Robert Blau).

*Founded in 1937, the National Lawyers Guild is the oldest and largest public interest/human rights bar organization in the United States. Its headquarters are in New York and it has chapters in every state.

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