

Salvadoran American National Network (SANN)

PRE-PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION DELEGATION REPORT February, 2009

For a Strong & Democratic El Salvador



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February 16-20, 2009**

INTRODUCTION

The Salvadoran American National Network, SANN organized a delegation of four leaders from important cities in the U.S. to El Salvador between February 14 and February 20, 2008. In addition to setting in-country meetings with all key players, each delegate involved their local US Congressional leaders to maximize the political impact of the delegation. The national delegation was led by Ana Perez, President of SANN and Executive Director of Central American Resources Center, CARECEN in San Francisco, CA; Guillermo Chacon, Board member of SANN and Vice chair of the New York immigration Coalition in New York, NY; Abel Nuñez, Board member of SANN and Deputy Director of Centro Romero in Chicago, ILL and Aquiles Magaña, Board member of CARECEN Los Angeles, CA and member of SANN.

Since 1992 the Salvadoran American National Network works to improve the lives of Salvadorans, Central Americans and immigrant communities in our home countries and in the US. SANN is made up of 15 immigrant-led community-based organizations (some members of SANN were founded in 1980) and individuals in the U.S. During our last national meeting in Washington DC, our membership developed our network's strategic direction for the next two years. Increasing Salvadoran American's ability to participate and influence the outcome of elections was a key goal identified. To have most optimal impact in the next Salvadoran Administration, our network put forward a three-prong approach: pre-election, election, and post-election observation and engagement initiatives. This report includes the findings of the pre-elections observation delegation concluded this week.

DELEGATIONS' DESIRED OUTCOMES:

1. Share SANN's analysis and initiatives with both electoral campaigns and the public at large;
2. Raise the issue of immigrants in the U.S. and SANN's community development work;
3. Strengthen relations with key organizations and individuals working on migration issues in El Salvador and Central America;
4. Understand the role of the U.S. Embassy, their views on the current political situation and
5. Support and promote the joint transnational work of SANN, the National Alliance of Latin American-Caribbean Communities, NALACC and the Foundation for the Development of El Salvador (FUNDE)

BACKGROUND

The recent visit of the Salvadoran American National Network to El Salvador happened during one of the most crucial political moments since the signing of the Peace Accords in 1992. This is a decisive year for the future of El Salvador because the municipal, legislative and presidential elections present an opportunity to evaluate the impact of the twenty-year rule of the Republican Nationalistic Alliance Party ARENA and it also enables Salvadorans to elect a different political path.

Why Salvadoran Americans Should Care:

While most Salvadorans came to the US in the eighties to escape the war, today migration has become the only alternative for economic survival for thousands of Salvadorans.¹ Recent estimates indicate that about

¹ El Salvador has 37% poverty and according to the United Nations Human Development Program, the sub-utilization of the Salvadoran labor force has reached 50%. This combined with unemployment, underemployment for insufficiency of hours, and underemployment for insufficiency of income. Additionally the Ministry of Economy reports that the official minimum wage per month is about \$160 and the domestic food basket is about \$140, this does not include public transportation--\$2 per day—and

72,000 Salvadorans leave the country every year in search of job opportunities and a better quality of life. In spite of the annual injection of over 3 billion dollars in family remittances, the country continues to struggle with social and economic underdevelopment.

SANN's Delegation Meetings and Activities

In order to build an assessment of the political climate in the weeks before the presidential elections SANN's delegation met with Mauricio Funes, presidential candidate of the FMLN and Arturo Zablah, vicepresidential candidate of ARENA. The delegation held additional meetings with Mario Roger from the United Nations Program for Development (UNPD), the U.S. Embassy Political Division, Oscar Ortiz, Mayor of Santa Tecla City, Dr. Roberto Rubio from FUNDE, college professors from UCA (Central American University), media outlets and activists and supporters of both parties.

Our Findings

1. A key element of the current electoral climate is the aggressive tone of campaign and increasing fear in the population. TV and radio ads are charged with anti-communist rhetoric and the Salvadoran branch of Fuerza Solidaria (Solidarity Force), a very conservative organization founded in Venezuela, repeatedly states the link between the FMLN and Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and claims that an FMLN victory would make El Salvador an enemy of the United States. Several campaign ads, TV and talk shows are still heavily charged with civil war images and cold war rhetoric.
2. There is almost no public discussion on key issues like the current economic crisis and the public security problems in the country. Only 30% of political ads actually outline the parties' proposals and both candidates have refused to engage in a presidential debate. First, Rodrigo Avila rejected an invitation from CNN alleging a veiled sympathy for candidate Funes. The FMLN candidate in turn rejected an invitation from TCS, the main Salvadoran TV network, and also alleged some bias favoring ARENA.
3. The platforms that both the FMLN and ARENA have made public fall short on migration policy in the following ways:
 - a. The proposals do not deal with the specifics of defending and protecting the well-being of Salvadorans living overseas. Many of the items listed in the documents are administrative adjustments to consulates or related to entrepreneurial and nostalgia market activities.
 - b. There is an absolute absence of the migration issue in both the presidential campaigns. Remittances are discussed as a side topic in interviews and talk shows. Salvadoran migrants are still perceived only as remittance senders and occasional tourists.
 - c. Although in our conversations the candidates formally acknowledged the importance of the migrants' contributions, the presidential proposals do not address the integration of Salvadoran migrants in the economic, political and social spheres of the country, much less the urgent need to defend them from human rights abuses and criminal attacks along the route crossing Guatemala and Mexico and the ICE raids and Minuteman attacks once they have crossed the U.S. border.
 - d. During our visit, the Legislative Assembly approved legislation that would allow 39,000 Salvadorans residing in the U.S. to cast their vote in El Salvador using a special DUI—a Salvadoran National ID card. This legislation was passed so late, making it extremely

utilities. This week over 10,000 maquiladora workers were fired and 13 factories were shut down.

difficult for Salvadorans to travel in March to vote.

- e. There is little publicity on the efforts made by Salvadoran immigrants to directly participate as candidates in the Salvadoran elections.²
4. The U.S. Embassy stated that they are neutral in the elections process and reported that they have not made any public claims stating that if a left political party wins, the U.S. government will end formal relations between the U.S. and El Salvador. The U.S. Embassy has, however, publicly criticized the use of images of President Barack Obama in an FMLN TV ad that compares the accusations faced by the Obama and Funes candidacies. Additionally, immigration is not a top priority for the American Embassy. The Embassy's representative mentioned that public security and drug trafficking are the topics getting their attention and resources.
5. Both major parties have launched a strategy to broaden their political alliances and support base, which consists in directly approaching the regional and local leadership of political parties and most importantly inviting the non-affiliated segment of the population to join them.
 - a. Mauricio Funes has developed a wide network called "Mauricio's Friends" and has successfully brought together people from different ideological, social, and economic backgrounds, including Social Democrats, Christian Democrats, former ARENA leaders, current Christian Democrats Party, PDC and the National Conciliation Party, PCN mayors, and professional and business representatives. An outstanding gain has been the unification of several women organizations.
 - b. By the same token, some leaders of the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR), the Santaneco Social Integration Movement, and former mayors from the PCN, FDR and PDC have joined the cause of the "Alliance for Change", a movement led by Arturo Zablah, ARENA's VP candidate.
 - c. Important political figures are publically expressing their support for either candidate. Héctor Silva, who left the FMLN a few years ago, is actively supporting Funes' campaign. He was later joined by prominent social democrat leaders Hector Dada Hirezi and Christian Democrat Morales Erlich. Wil Salgado, PDC mayor of San Miguel has joined Avilas' campaign and has offered to add 100,000 votes to ARENA's candidate.

Conclusions

Salvadoran Americans have an important role to play in national politics in El Salvador and in our new home in the U.S: we the biggest investors in our nation and have much else to contribute. There is an urgent need to promote the development of a national immigration policy in the next Salvadoran administration. We will monitor the presidential campaign developments and the elections on March 15th.

We can contribute to keep our immigrant families informed and educated about the different presidential proposals and other important events of the Presidential election. Media coverage of our visit generated a lot of interest in different communities. People want to be informed about what is going on in the U.S. There is a need for a more systematic presence of Salvadoran immigrant organizations in El Salvador in order to promote our work and to present our demands, concerns and initiatives.

² Hugo Salinas who run with the PCN and won the mayoral elections in Intipucá city, La Union province. Salinas has been residing and doing community work in the Washington DC-Arlington, VA area for 17 years. And Salvador Gochez Gomez and immigrant from Los Angeles who run with the FMLN in the municipality of Atiquizaya, Ahuachapan province.

SANN's priority is to actively participate in addressing the causes of migration in El Salvador and Central America. We also believe that it is equally important to maintain our active role in promoting an immigration reform in the US to fix the broken system and ensure an orderly immigration program to secure family unity, fairness and civil and human rights for all.

Attachment 1

SANN's Recommendations for the First 100 days of a new President of El Salvador

1. To declare Salvadoran migration a top priority issue in the national agenda.
2. To call for an inclusive migration round-table that will include representatives from various Salvadoran immigrant organizations in the U.S.
3. To instruct the Salvadoran Ambassador in Washington, DC, to establish a task force for designing and coordinating strategies and efforts to achieve a comprehensive immigration reform that will benefit thousands of Salvadoran migrants and their families.
4. To organize a Presidential visit to the 10 main U.S. cities where Salvadorans are demographically concentrated and establish direct contact with them.
5. To include the voting rights of Salvadorans living abroad as part of a broad electoral reform
6. To design and implement national policy for the productive use of remittances at the local level.

Attachment 2

Key outcomes from the past Mayoral and Legislative elections

Salvadorans went to the polls on January 18th to elect mayors and council members for the country's 262 municipalities as well as 84 deputies for the National Assembly, the unicameral legislature. The Supreme Electoral Tribunal has reported that 2,264,778 votes were cast. The vote breakdown is as follows: Republican Nationalistic Alliance (ARENA) 852,458, Farabundo Marti Front for National Liberation (FMLN) 943,288, (CD) 46,964, (FDR) 25,737, National Conciliation Party (PCN) 193,891, and Christian Democrat Party (PDC) 153,604.

- FMLN continues to hold a slight advantage, of about 5 points, over ARENA on a daily basis. The presidential elections are going to be a close and polarized race. Media outlets are saturated with campaign ads promoting proposals and mutual accusations. The fear theme dominates the content of all political advertisement.
- ARENA's political power diminished yet it did not lose its political influence. ARENA now holds 120 municipalities and 32 legislators in the Salvadoran Congress. Winning the capital city of San Salvador by Dr. Norman Quijano became an important political push back for the troubled presidential campaign.
- The Conservative right legislative alliance between ARENA and the PCN gives them 45 seats and the majority in the Legislative Assembly.
- FMLN recovered from a setback three years ago and retained several key municipalities, including Santa Ana and La Union. It won for the first time the historical town of Izalco. An additional 19 municipalities were won in coalition with other parties, giving the FMLN a total of 94 municipalities. The FMLN has 35 seats in the Legislative Assembly.
- PDC and PCN have dropped out of the March 15th presidential election, leaving the two major parties—ARENA and the FMLN—as the only competitors for the presidency.

Attachment 3
Congressional letter of support

JANICE D. SCHAKOWSKY
9TH DISTRICT, ILLINOIS

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

HOUSE PERMANENT SELECT
COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE

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February 13, 2009

Ana Perez, President
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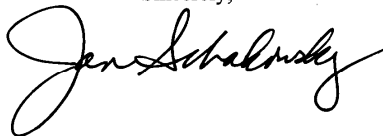
Dear Ms. Perez:

I am writing in support of the efforts of Centro Romero and the Salvadoran American National Network (SANN) in your pre-election delegation trip to El Salvador. I understand that the delegation is planning to meet with the presidential candidates running in the upcoming election in March, members of the legislature, civil society organizations and the United States Embassy.

I understand that SANN is an organization dedicated to the development and advancement of Salvadorans, Central Americans, and other immigrants living in the United States. I have a close working relationship with SANN's member organization Centro Romero, which has a 17-year history of serving the community and working on efforts that strengthen the civic engagement of Salvadoran nationals in the United States and strengthen El Salvador's democracy.

I am hopeful that the next presidential elections in El Salvador will be peaceful, transparent and democratic. I look forward to hearing the delegates' report upon their return.

Sincerely,



Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress