

With the signing of the Salvadoran peace accord at Chapultepec Castle in Mexico City, on January 16, the world witnessed a historic event that put an end to eleven years of bloody civil war. It left a total of 75,000 dead, an enormous number of missing, and an economically and socially devastated country.

The signing of the peace agreement closes a bitter chapter in the history of El Salvador, marked by bloodshed and armed confrontation caused by a broad sector of El Salvador's population searching for political and social space.

The signing ceremony was singular in the light of its meaning for the Salvadoran people. In a single forum, President Alfredo Cristiani and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), who with hundreds of Salvadorans were part of the opposition for years, finally signed a political pact. It was witnessed by eight heads of state and government, including representatives of Cuba, the U.S., and the Secretaries General of the U.N. and O.A.S.

The accord envisioned broad-reaching compromises and reforms. Noteworthy were: new plans for constitutional, non-political armed forces; separation of the National Civil Police from the armed forces; strengthening the judicial system, and making it independent from other organs of state and political parties.

In the economic and social spheres, a minimum platform of commitments was established, especially in the agrarian sector. Mechanisms for the political participation of the FMLN were envisioned, guaranteeing it the full exercise of its rights. An end finally came to armed confrontation.

January 16 also marked the end of sensitive, far-reaching negotiations, bringing together many diverse efforts and participation in an intent to provide a solution to the Salvadoran

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conflict. The process dates back to the controversial Franco-Mexican declaration of 1981, which recognized the FMLN as a representative political force and suggested a negotiated settlement to the conflict.

Next were the efforts of the Contadora Group to open new spaces for negotiation. They served as the basis for what might be called the "Central-Americanization" of peace, with the Esquipulas I and II accords in 1986 and 1987, respectively. In them, Central American governments took the pacification of the region into their own hands.

The process came to an end with the twenty meetings following the agreements reached at the Geneva Meeting between representatives of the Salvadoran government and the FMLN in April 1990, including the participation of then UN Secretary General Javier Pérez de Cuellar. These were supported by a group of the Secretary General's friends, consisting of Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela and Spain. The final meeting, held in New York in December 1991, led to the signing of the New York Document, with all parties agreeing to sign the final accords in Mexico City.

The selection of Mexico City for the signing was not due merely to chance. It reflects a recognition of Mexico's decisive efforts to solve these problems from the very beginning of the armed conflict. It constituted recognition of Mexico's active and effective diplomatic efforts. This continuity of endeavor, in different

ways and nuances, opened spaces and formulas favoring dialogue and compromise between government and insurgents.

This historic period through which the Salvadoran people are living is not without its difficulties. They will have to overcome many obstacles, ranging from the challenges of inequality and injustice that led to their armed uprising, to tendencies underlying each of the opposing parties. This includes the interests of the Salvadoran far-right, as well as the FMLN's real chances of becoming a political force able to achieve its goals peacefully under the rules of democracy.

Peace has been won, but for it to be a lasting victory, enormous effort will be required from all of El Salvador's social sectors, as well as from the international community, which must offer its continuing support and cooperation.

This commitment, formalized by the Salvadoran government and the FMLN with the signing of the peace accord, has profound implications for all Central America. The gradual solution of armed conflicts encourages one to believe that the region may focus its efforts on striving for the economic, social and political development that may consolidate the integration currently underway.

Finally, the pacification of El Salvador points to new ways of problem solving: the preeminence of reason and democratic exchange rather than armed solutions, in a search for equitable development. **M**

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