

EL SALVADOR

New attacks against Association for More Just Society (ASJ)

RRN letter: July 15, 2007

Last July, RRN members wrote with concern for the safety of and due legal process for 14 peaceful protesters who were violently arrested in Suchitoto, Cuscatlán Department, on July 2.

President Saca was scheduled to arrive in Suchitoto on July 2 to announce the new "National Policy for Water Decentralization," the first step in water privatization. CRIPDES (Association for Development of Rural Communities), SETA (water workers union) and other groups organized a protest, which included street blockades that prevented the president from arriving. He was forced to return to San Salvador and announce the decentralization plan via press conference.

After the National Civilian Police (PCN) arrested some of the leaders, they called in the riot police to disperse the crowd. In total, 25 people were injured with rubber bullets, 18 suffered serious effects of tear gas, 2 were hospitalized, and an undetermined number were beaten by police officers.

Thirteen of the fourteen arrested were sentenced on July 7 to three months of provisional detention; they could have received up to 60 year sentences under new "anti-terrorism" legislation.

February 19, 2008:

The case of the Suchitoto 13 and the Citizens Not Terrorists campaign achieved a major victory today when a judge dropped all charges and set the 14 defendants free!

Preliminary reports describe that the Attorney General's office neglected to present official accusations and sufficient evidence, and district attorneys were not present at the hearing on time. The Judge then decided to waive the charges, and decree definitive liberty for the defendants.

This hearing was scheduled after Special Tribunal Judge Ana Lucila Fuentes de Paz recused herself on February 11 and declared the Special Tribunal incompetent to hear the case; the building was surrounded by hundreds of community members who had marched over the previous three days from Suchitoto. Judge Fuentes de Paz's resolution sent the case back to the conventional court system in Suchitoto, and the local judge scheduled the initial hearing.

This is a major victory for the Suchitoto 13 and for the CRIPDES communities as well as for international solidarity. Rosa Valle, Vice-President of CRIPDES said:

"This is proof that our organizing work gets results and has great power. The government responded to our organizing with repression, and now they must recognize their mistake, as they see communities and leaders around the world uniting their voices with the strength of the Salvadoran people to call for justice, dignity, and our own human rights."

Thank you for all your work and continued attention, support, and action that has been so important over the last 7 months. Please stay tuned for a more in-depth report in the coming hours that will orient our continuing work and strategy to stand with our brothers and sisters in El Salvador to defend human rights!