

## The Transnational Advisory Group in Support of the Peace Process in El Salvador



*Rapping For Peace – “Ganster Fury” & Catholic Church, El Salvador (photo credits p.6)*

### A Gang Peace Process Drops El Salvador from the Top of the List of the World’s Most Violent Countries

#### Media Information

## The Transnational Advisory Group in Support of the Peace Process in El Salvador

Luis Cardona		Gathering for Justice (Washington, D.C.)
Juan Pacheco	Director	Barrios Unidos, Justice for Gathering (W.DC)
Luis Rodríguez	Author	The Tia Chucha Press (Los Angeles)
Silvia Beltran		Civil Society representative (Los Angeles)
Fr. Michael Kennedy	Jesuit priest	Jesuit Restorative Justice Initiative (LA)
Javier Stauring		Office of Restorative Justice (Los Angeles)
Nane Alejandrez	Executive Director	Barrios Unidos (Northern Virginia)
Carmen Perez		Gathering for Justice (Washington, D.C.)
Rebecca Schaeffer		Human Rights Attorney
Penny Griffith Shaw	Executive Director	Colombia Heights Collaborative (W.DC)
Marian Urquilla,		Civic Society representative
Steve Vigil,		Civic Society representative (W.DC)
Diego Uriburu &		Civic Society representatives
Candace Kattar		
Aqeela Sherrills	Director	Resources for Human Development California
Paule Cruz Takash	President	City of L.A. Human Relations Commission
Aquil Basheer	Executive Director	Maximum Force Enterprise, PCITI (LA)
Hector Verdugo	Assoc. Ex. Director	Homeboy Industries (Los Angeles)
Fr. Greg Boyle	Executive Director	Homeboy Industries (Los Angeles)
Angela Sambrano,	Board Member	Centro Cultural Techantit & CARECEN (LA).
Enrique Hurtado	Executive Director	Aztecs Rising (Los Angeles)
Alex Sanchez	Executive Director	Homies Unidos
Julia Sabory,		
George Galvis,	Executive Director	Communities United for Restorative Youth Justice (Oakland)
Roberto Alfaro, MA,	Director	Homies Organizing the Mission to Empower Youth (San Francisco)
Manuel La Fontaine	Organizer,	All of Us or None, A Project of Legal Services for Prisoners with Children (SF)

## **About The Transnational Advisory Group in Support of the Peace Process in El Salvador**

In January 2012 El Salvador celebrated the 20th year anniversary of its Peace Accords, which formally ended a devastating civil war that lasted more than a decade. Negotiated and signed between the El Salvador government and Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), the country looked forward to peace, rebuilding and prospering.

The transnational nature of gang-related activities and violence requires a transnational body of supporters comprised of faith-based communities, civilian populations, governments and the private sector committed to transnational strategies for economic justice and peace.

The Transnational Advisory Group for the Peace Process in El Salvador (TAPPES) has formed to serve as an international observer to this process and to bring together resources to help in the short and long term goals of the peace process. Made up of groups in cities across the United States, the Advisory Group invites all individuals and groups to stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters who have begun this Peace process critical for the wellbeing and prosperity for all in El Salvador.

In addition, the collective will support the priorities set by the individuals that have led this process in El Salvador by:

1. Ensuring the safety of all of the local stakeholders in El Salvador involved in this process (specifically Raul Mijango, Monsignor Colindres, and the leadership of both gangs that have stepped forward public ally in support of the peace process);
2. Examining the gang members and their families' public health and economic needs, resources for which are critical to support this process;
3. Evaluating how to best to assist in establishing "formal" agreements to better strengthen and sustain this process (civil society, government, gangs, etc.);
4. Examining how to support efforts to disseminate, nurture and promote this community-led process to bring peace to El Salvador, especially for the country's most marginalized communities

## Questions and Answers

### **When did the Peace Truce take place?**

On Thursday March 9, 2012, some thirty prisoners were relocated from the segregated housing units of “Zacatras,” the super maximum security prison in Zacatecoluca, El Salvador to high security prisons. There they are permitted contact visits with family and friends and allowed more freedom within the prisons. This was achieved by an important agreement negotiated by Mara Salvatrucha (MS13) and 18<sup>th</sup> Street gang members to stop the violence between them and to quell the violence in the communities from which they come and where their families still live. After several meeting with Minister of Justice and Security David Munguia then gave permission for these transfers.

### **Who is involved in the peace process?**

On the evening of Tuesday March 20, 2012, Catholic Bishop Fabio Colindres, head chaplain of the Armed Forces of El Salvador (FAES) and the National Civilian Police (PNC), and former El Salvador Congressman Raul Mijango confirmed that they were the mediators in this peace truce between the gangs.

### **What was the process of this truce between 18th St. and MS13?**

The gangs themselves realized that they were part of the problem but could also be part of the solution. On the same day that the representatives of Mara Salvatrucha and 18th Street were moved from a maximum-security detention, gang members came together to initiate a treaty. Orders were given from the Zacatecoluca prison where some of the main representatives of Mara Salvarucha and 18<sup>th</sup> Street were being held. These orders, directed to their members inside and outside of prison, were to “calm down,” meaning they were to not to fight other gangs because a truce had been agreed on.

### **Are the gangs in Los Angeles and other states taking part of this?**

No, the peace process with in the gangs in El Salvador came about independently from gang clicks in other countries.

### **What have the gangs committed to in this peace truce?**

MS 13 and 18<sup>th</sup> Street gangs have agreed to declare school zones (public and private) as Peace Zones and have stopped the forced recruitment of new members. They have also agreed to not attack one another and suspend other criminal activities towards civil society.

The gangs continue to find ways in which they can show the government and civil society they are serious about the truce and want their involvement in the process.

### **What has been the consequence of this peace truce?**

All violence in El Salvador is not committed by gang members but the representatives of this Peace Truce have publically taken responsibility for their actions and all the hurt their have caused individuals and the country at large. Following the truce agreement, the murder rate in El Salvador has dropped from 14 homicides in February 2012 to 5; and on Saturday April 14, no murders were reported in El Salvador. Since the 11 weeks truce started

close to 700 deaths have been prevented. Other prisons where non gang member prisoners are incarcerated have expressed interest in participating in these peace efforts as well.

Many Salvadorans have expressed great relief that they have not felt in a long time. They have come to realize that the humanitarian approach by the church and civil society is the way to move forward; and that suppression alone aggravates rather than prevents crime and does little to dismantle the gangs or reduce violence. Public opinion has also taken public security off as their number one concern in the country and now say that poverty is their number one concern.

According to the Salvadoran Secretary of Public Security, El Salvador is no longer on the top of the list of the world's most dangerous countries. High level authorities in security, sworn to uphold the law, have taken note, and at this time support the Catholic Church's leadership in its humanitarian approach to reducing gang-related violence.

Hospitals in El Salvador have reported 60% a reduction of violence related cases.

These outcomes have also captured the attention of many domestic and international organizations committed to building Peace. Organizations of American States (OAS) Secretary General José Miguel Insulza will visit El Salvador in June 2012 as an observer of the peace process, meet with those involved and together identify ways to support peace building and identify resources necessary to sustain the peace in El Salvador. The United Nations and the European Union are also in plans to visit El Salvador.

#### **What are the gangs asking in return?**

Truce leaders have identified immediate and long term needs. These include:

New mattresses for family visits

Basic mental and physical health services, the latter including prosthesis

Good conduct sentence reduction.

Academic and vocational Training in prison with job placement upon their release

Adequate housing and nutrition

Job training and assisted job placement for non-incarcerated gang members who are maintaining the truce.

#### **Most importantly they want:**

That the National Civil Police (PNC) and Armed Forces control their soldiers and police who continue to violate human rights.

To ensuring the safety of the gang representatives involved in this peace process.

Female gang members are asking for the involvement of the National Secretary of Family of El Salvador and other women organizations (i.e. Cemujer and Las Dignas). to address the needs of women incarcerated with their families .

#### **What if the peace truce breaks?**

Both gangs have agreed that they are involved in this peace process for the long run; they are not backing out no matter the challenges. As long as there is involvement by the church and civil society, they will continue to move forward.

The 1992 and 1993 peace truces in Los Angeles were short-lived due to the lack of adequate governmental agency involvement and substantive resources needed to provide alternatives to violence.

Nonetheless, there remain individuals and organizations who took part of these earlier truces who have continued to work for peace and economic justice, among them former gang members now Gang Interventionists. With continued domestic and international peace building and investment in economic opportunities for our Salvadoran brothers and sisters, this truce can be sustained.

**What are the next steps?**

Send a delegation of observers to El Salvador; identify needed resources and potential funds.

**Contact Information**

**Los Angeles**

**Dr. Paule Cruz-Takash City of Los Angeles Human Relations Commission:**  
310-849-4092 Email: [pctakash@aol.com](mailto:pctakash@aol.com)

**Alex Sanchez, Homies Unidos**  
213-383-7484 Email: [asanchez@homiesunidos.org](mailto:asanchez@homiesunidos.org)

**Washington D.C.**

**Luis Cardona, Civil Society**  
249-372-3829 Email: [LuisCardo@hotmail.com](mailto:LuisCardo@hotmail.com)

**Juan Pacheco, Director Barrios Unidos**  
703-401-2265 Email: [Peacewarrior703@gmail.com](mailto:Peacewarrior703@gmail.com)

**Cover Photo Credits:**

*Lt Photo: The tattooed prison music trio calls themselves "Gangster Fury," but the fierce name belies their true mission: to rap about peace. Three members of the feared Mara 18 gang imprisoned at El Salvador's Quezaltepeque prison formed the musical group following a truce in March with their arch-enemies, the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) gang. From Kuwait Times, <http://news.kuwaittimes.net/2012/05/08/jailed-salvadoran-gangsters-rap-for-peace/>*

*Rt. Photo: Mass is given to members MS-13 and 18, Source: [www.elsalvador.com](http://www.elsalvador.com)*

## Archbishop urges peace in El Salvador amid rival gangs

---

<http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/archbishop-urges-peace-in-el-salvador-amid-rival-gangs/>

May 27, 2012

San Salvador, El Salvador, May 23, 2012 / 04:03 pm (CNA/EWTN News).– Archbishop Jose Luis Escobar Alas of San Salvador supports efforts to mediate a local truce between two rival gangs, stressing that the country must work together to achieve peace.

“We are now at a stage in which society as a whole needs to take action in order to guarantee that the progress achieved with the gangs is not frustrated,” Archbishop Escobar Alas said.

The two gangs, known as Mara Salvatrucha and Mara-18, are considered the main instigators behind the violence that has plagued El Salvador in recent years. With 65 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants, El Salvador has become the second most violent country in Latin America.

In recent comments to reporters, Archbishop Escobar Alas praised the work being carried out by Archbishop Fabio Colindres of the Military Archdiocese, who worked with former guerilla leader Raul Mijango on March 9 to achieve a truce between the gangs.

However, while the rate of violence in the country has declined, he said, this does not mean that both gangs have disappeared.

“The efforts of Archbishop Colindres, with all due respect, were only an act of mediation,” Archbishop Escobar Alas added.

“I sincerely don’t think the solution to the problem of gangs is in the Church’s hands. Society as a whole and the government, with the support of various social sectors, have the responsibility.”

## How The Seed of Peace Was Planted

—Luis J. Rodriguez

May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2012

For at least twenty years there have been homies from MS-13 and 18th Street who wanted peace. In 1992, gestures of peace between the two gangs first happened during the time of the Los Angeles riots, linked also to a peace process between the mostly African American Crips and Bloods gangs and peace efforts between Chicano gangs. In 1993, both MS-13 and 18th Street took part in the so-called Eme (Mexican Mafia) declarations against drive-by shootings.

I was at the large gathering at Elysian Park in which various gangs, including long-time enemies, met to discuss the parameters of the peace. I talked to many MS and 18th Street members in the streets during and after this and other meetings--they indicated there was truly a change in the level of violence. "For once, we can walk the streets without being attacked," one young person told me. This peace involved mostly Chicano gangs from throughout the L.A. area (including Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, and San Bernardino counties) but also Central Americans. In some places, like the Northeast San Fernando Valley, violence went down 73 percent. Unfortunately, government anti-gang efforts escalated during this time--including the growth of gang injunctions (that isolated certain gang neighborhoods with curfews, breaking up of more than two alleged gang youth in the streets, the development of a gang data base, and gang enhancements to convictions from ten to more years in prison, among other restrictions--there are now more than 40 gang injunctions in Los Angeles).

Anti-gang efforts also included vast numbers of deportations to Mexico and Central America in 1992 and later nationally in 1996 with changes in the immigration laws of the U.S. Racketeering federal cases were also instituted against the Mexican Mafia for the first time, although they had been in existence since the late 1950s. The 1993 peace couldn't hold. Also other barrio gangs were targeted for state and federal prosecutions, including in 2009 with the arrest of Alex Sanchez (a well-known gang interventionist) when federal prosecutors indicted 23 alleged Mara Salvatrucha members with violations of the federal RICO Act. Despite this, peace activists from gangs were born and became experienced in gang prevention and intervention.

A gang truce also happened in the early 1970s when Chicano gang truces led to the End Barrio Warfare Coalition, which even though they were also undermined and sabotaged, helped create Barrio Unidos, now based in Santa Cruz, CA, and a major player in gang peace summits over the past twenty years. During this time, I also emerged out of these peace efforts from a barrio gang in the San Gabriel Valley to begin my 40-year long work as an urban peace advocate and gang interventionist.

Other developments for peace include the formation of Homies Unidos in 1996 in El Salvador then the Los Angeles chapter in 1998 with Salvadoran and other Central American gang youth in El Salvador and later in Los Angeles. In 1993, I also visited throughout El Salvador to interview and speak with MS and 18th Street gang members, including in two prisons, for a research project of the Center for Documentary Studies of Duke University. I talked to many youth who wanted peace, including leaders



who would later be part of Homies Unidos there. Unfortunately, a policy of "social cleansing" including death squads targeted large numbers of deportees to El Salvador and other Central American countries. Former gang members, now working for peace, were also swept up and many killed during these years.

In 1996, I was invited again to El Salvador to take part in a conference called "Salvadoran Youth Confronting Violence." Sponsored by Medical Service Corporation/Procipotes with support from Radda Barnen, (Save the Children-Sweden), I was a keynote speaker and lead facilitator to a dialogue between various sectors of society, including non-governmental agencies, churches, mayors of various cities, members of the new National Police, as well as members of both MS and 18. The first day there were 100 participants. The next day some 110 took part. A tentative peace plan and agreements were created, signed by some of the mayors and other participants. Members of both gangs said they'd also work for peace (although they didn't sign due to safety concerns). But unfortunately, as in the United States, anti-gang efforts escalated with government "Mano Dura" policies, more prisons, mass arrests, more death squads, and instead of peace, the level of violence reached levels of the civil war in El Salvador that took 75,000 lives from 1980 to 1992. But peace continues to be a major concern for all involved.

Now after more than 20 years of existence for MS-13 and 18th Street gangs in El Salvador, leaders of the two gangs have created another truce in 2012. This time formal agreements between gang leaders, churches, schools, private sector, police, and the government must come to bear to align with the possibility of complete and lasting peace by providing an economic base of jobs and training; mental, drug, and trauma treatment; increased educational opportunities; healthy and clean prison facilities that allow proper links to families and rehabilitation; and more. As was stated in the 1996 peace efforts, it's time to fully and adequately integrate Salvadoran youth, in and out of gangs, to help rebuild the country, to have dignity with jobs and education, and to have access to real resources for the short and long term.

—Luis J. Rodriguez, author and activist, cofounder of Tia Chucha's Centro Cultural and author of "Always Running, La Vida Loca, Gang Days in L.A."