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FMLN Announces Its Candidates for '09

On 11 Nov, the leftist Farabundo Martí Front for National Liberation (FMLN), formerly a revolutionary guerrilla organization that now is a legitimate political party, announced that Mauricio Funes and Salvador Sánchez Cerén would be its candidates for president and vice president, respectively, for the '09 national election. The FMLN's XXIII National Convention on 11 Nov was held on an historic date, marking the anniversary of the FMLN's Final Offensive of '89 in the nation's bloody civil war (see Vol. 8, No. 12).

In '80 the FMLN was formed as an umbrella group of four leftwing guerilla organizations and the Salvadoran Communist Party in an effort to overthrow the rightwing Salvadoran government, controlled for decades by despotic military leaders. After peace accords were signed in '92, all armed FMLN units were demobilized and their organization became a legal political party. The FMLN is now one of the two major political parties in the country.

Held in the Cuscatlán Stadium in San Salvador, the nation's largest soccer arena, the FLMN's XXIII National Convention received national and international attention with delegations hailing from Cuba, Brazil, Bolivia, Venezuela, and the US, as well as the participation of President-elect Alvaro Colom of Guatemala. More than 60,000 supporters attended the National Convention, and multiple television and radio stations broadcast the event throughout El Salvador and via the Internet.

Supporters of the FMLN have high hopes for an end to the rightwing National Republican Alliance's (ARENA) domination, which has maintained political control of El Salvador without interruption since '89. Sigfrido Reyes, the FMLN Secretary of Communications, stated: "We are ready to ratify the presidential candidacy of Mauricio Funes and our companion Salvador Sánchez as vice president. It is an event in which thousands of Salvadorans believe that there ought to be a change in this country.... We are going to commit ourselves to work so that this succeeds."

Funes began his presidential tour in the Soyapango municipality, where he asked supporters to "defeat ARENA's terror campaign" and to critically evaluate ARENA warnings that an FMLN victory would mean a turn towards communism and would harm the political ties between the US and El Salvador. Funes intends to visit 70 municipalities on his national tour, on which he will conduct an "Open Dialogue" forum to allow Salvadorans to provide feedback on the direction of the FMLN's political platform. The FMLN has stated its intentions to create alliances and coalitions

with other social organizations, and to pay special attention to the needs of the population, during its political campaign.

Funes, a well-known journalist and television analyst in El Salvador, and Sánchez, a former FMLN commander, also have received support from Salvadorans living abroad. Representatives of the Young People's Farabundo Martí Front from Los Angeles attended the conference in order to bring news of the event to their base community throughout California. Erny Rutilio, a representative of the group, commented that he hopes the Funes-Sánchez team will be "a force of change and hope for El Salvador." Other representatives from as far away as Sweden also attended the FMLN's National Convention to represent the international community in support of the FMLN and its candidates.

Smaller Lead for Ruling ARENA Party

The ruling Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) has lost public support over the course of the '07 but remains the most popular political organization in El Salvador, according to a mid-Nov poll by LPG Datos published in *La Prensa Gráfica*: 28.1% of respondents would support the conservative party in the next legislative election, down 33.9% in Feb.

The left-leaning FMLN is second with 25.5% (up from 17.1% in Feb), followed by the National Conciliation Party with 2.3%, the Christian Democrat Party with 1.9%, and Democratic Change with 0.2%.

Antonio Saca—a media businessman—was elected in Mar '04 as the candidate for ARENA, garnering 57.7% of the vote. ARENA candidates have won the last four presidential elections. Saca is ineligible for a consecutive term in office.

The next legislative election has been tentatively scheduled for Jan '09, with a presidential ballot following in Mar or Apr. According to the poll, 52.5% of respondents would like to see a change of government after the '09 election.

Martyred Catholic Priests and Nuns Remembered

The 18th anniversary of the murder of six Jesuit Priests by the Salvadoran military was commemorated on 16 Nov with calls for truth and justice to prevail in El Salvador. The date was marked by a memorial service for the priests, as well as the timely approval of a historic resolution passed by the US Senate in remembrance of the brutal rape and murder of four Catholic nuns (three Maryknoll and one Ursula) on 2 Dec '80 by the Salvadoran military.

The memorial service was held in honor of the six Jesuit priests and their housekeeper and her daughter, who were brutally murdered by the members of the Salvadoran Armed Forces in '89. The church service was attended by a gathering of members of the University of Central America and Catholic communities, and the Auxiliary Bishop of San Salvador, Monseñor Gregorio Rosa Chávez, officiated at the ceremony.

The event revisited painful memories, while calling for reconciliation and access to the truth about the murders. Emphasis was placed on remembering the lives and social vision of these individuals, who have become martyrs for many Salvadorans. During the homily of the Mass for the victims, Monseñor Rosa Chávez read for the first time from the diary of one of the priests, which describes the events on the day of his murder. Monseñor Rosa Chávez reflected on the pain caused by these murders, saying: "We are a country that is not reconciled because the wounds have not healed and

they cannot heal if they have not been thoroughly cured ... If access to the truth and justice is denied, the victims cannot accept the reparations, and this impedes the final product, which is the reconciliation that we can see.”

The event was part of a larger process of national healing, which is taking place on personal, social and judicial levels. Victoria Marina de Avilés, a magistrate of the Supreme Court of Justice, spoke of how the process of justice was lengthy, but that it would one day arrive in El Salvador. Marina de Avilés commented that, “The historical memory is important because only by remembering these painful facts can we try to never commit them again in this country.”

On a similar note, the US Senate on 15 Nov approved Senate Resolution 381, “Commemorating the lives of the four [Catholic nuns] murdered in El Salvador.” The resolution was sponsored by Sen. Russ Feingold of Wisconsin to remember the lives of Maura Clarke, Ita Ford, Dorothy Kazel and Jean Donovan, who were murdered on 27 years ago by members of a National Guard death squad while the nuns were participating a Catholic relief mission to provide food, shelter, transportation, medical care and burial to the poor during the early days of the Salvadoran civil war (’80-’92).

As the martyred Catholic priests and nuns are remembered, it is clear that their social vision and the memory of their work live on among the Salvadoran people today. As Jon Sobrino writes, in reference to the lives of the Jesuit priests, in his book, *Witnesses to the Kingdom: The Martyrs of El Salvador and the Crucified Peoples*, “I believe and hope their spirit remains, that they rise again, like Archbishop Romero, in the Salvadoran people, that they continue to be a light in this dark tunnel, and hope in this country of endless misfortunes.”

—Amelia Fiske