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INTRODUCTION

After twelve years of devastating civil war, El Salvador is now faced with the daunting challenges of peace: rebuilding the country's political and social institutions based on democratic principles; addressing debilitating economic problems; and, at the foundation of the peace process, encouraging national reconciliation.

In an effort to contribute to the consolidation of the peace process through encouraging open dialogue among all sectors of Salvadoran society, an unprecedented conference on "Reconciliation in Times of Transition" was held in San Salvador on January 11 and 12, 1993. This extraordinary event brought together over 700 leading figures in Salvadoran society to discuss their concerns about their country's future. Representatives from other countries in Latin America, including Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala and Honduras, as well as from Eastern Europe and the United States, also came to share their experiences with national reconciliation. This unusual forum was jointly sponsored by Centro Demos, the Project on Justice in Times of Transition of the Charter 77 Foundation - New York (now the Foundation for a Civil Society), the Institute for Central American Studies, the North-South Center of the University of Miami and the Supreme Court of El Salvador.

The new Salvadoran nonprofit organization called Centro Demos, which was modelled on Guatemala's Centro ESTNA, hopes to employ dialogue as a means of contributing to the reduction and eventual eradication of sectorialism, confrontation, exclusion and violence in Salvadoran society. Centro Demos will serve as a contact point for the representative leaders of the forces of society, allowing them to deepen their reciprocal knowledge of each other and better understand the realities of the country. The Charter 77 Foundation - New York's Project on Justice in Times of Transition also provided an instrumental example to Centro Demos.

Mauricio Gutiérrez Castro, President of the Supreme Court of El Salvador, set the tone of the San Salvador Conference in his introductory remarks. The reason for the meeting, he said, was to build trust and encourage communication and the sharing of experiences and ideas among the various groups represented. This process of dialogue would serve as one means of encouraging Salvadoran leaders to work together to build lasting peace and reconciliation, rather than continuing the conflict by other means. Mr. Gutiérrez urged his compatriots to learn from El Salvador's history, as well as from the experiences of other countries that have undergone a process of national reconciliation, to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. He stressed that Salvadorans must recognize the validity of pluralism, and that the political system is the proper forum for competition.

THE SIGNIFICANCE AND CHALLENGES OF THE PEACE PROCESS IN EL SALVADOR

Despite Salvadoran society's very deep wounds and skepticism toward the peace process undertaken in 1989, El Salvador has successfully taken over the determination of its own destiny, according to Sonia Picado, Executive Director of the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights.

The consensus of Salvadorans on the need for peace and reconciliation has grown from a number of sources, according to Oscar Santamaria, Minister of the Presidency of El Salvador. He credited the late President Duarte's efforts to use the political process to achieve peace, though unsuccessful, as one important step. The end of the Cold War, as well as the efforts of external organizations, such as the Organization of American States (OAS), helped to foster democracy in El Salvador and allowed the country to seek assistance from international agencies in implementing the peace process. Mr. Santamaria also credited President Alfredo Cristiani with making the resolution of the conflict the nation's top priority and encouraging all Salvadorans to work to achieve peace. Successfully extending the offer of peace to the armed groups and establishing a mechanism for dialogue among all parties to the conflict were also critical steps. Their acceptance by the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) enabled the process to start.

El Salvador's armed conflict of 1980 to 1991 was preceded by a decade of political struggle that stemmed from the absence of democracy and inequitable systems of land tenure, according to Joaquin Villalobos, a leader of the FMLN. The conflict resulted in some 80,000 deaths and at least 5,000 "disappeared," he said, and the victims included leaders from both sides, individuals from all sectors of Salvadoran society and also foreigners. The war touched all parts of the country, many towns were destroyed and over one million Salvadorans emigrated. Cotton production ceased and coffee production was disrupted, forcing the country to depend more heavily on foreign aid and dramatically increasing poverty.

The conflict was prolonged for a number of reasons, Mr. Villalobos said, chief among them being that neither side was strong enough to win. Ultimately, the right had to face the challenges of democracy and its institutions, and the left had to agree to learn to work within a democratic framework. The end of the conflict was a victory for neither side, in his view, but it planted the seeds of real democracy and stopped the violence.

Although threats to stability remain, Mr. Villalobos believed that El Salvador can successfully build democracy. The peaceful participation of all sectors and the use of political dialogue as a way to resolve political and social conflicts will help to increase tolerance and demonstrate that it is possible to resolve contradictions peacefully. El Salvador, Mr. Villalobos concluded, had the first revolution without a counterrevolution; peace represented the victory of the center, and the real winner, he said, was civil society.

One Salvadoran participant responded to Mr. Santamaria's and Mr. Villalobos's presentation with the comment that most of the victims of the conflict belonged to neither the FMLN nor the right, and that although the two sides have been working together since 1983, the political system has not adequately represented the Salvadoran people, but instead has represented only the views of the political parties. He called for a revitalization of the political process that would truly represent the people and give them dignity. Otherwise, he warned, the conflict would continue and democracy and reconciliation would be lost. Both Mr. Villalobos and Mr. Santamaria agreed.

Bernard Aronson, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, said that the most critical challenge to the peace process in El Salvador would likely be the elections scheduled for 1994. He urged respect for the election process and for its outcome, and emphasized that violence must play no role in the political contest. The elections represent a competition among political views, but once the people have voted, this competition must end with a new government and the peaceful transfer of power.

Mr. Aronson maintained that it is important to recognize that the peace process is not over in El Salvador, and that all the stipulations of the 1991 peace accords must be implemented in full. He called on all sides to continue the process of dialogue, and recommended the further evolution of both the armed forces and the police into professional institutions fully subordinate to civilian authority and without political allegiance to any faction. El Salvador has the chance, he said, to make itself into a model democracy for Latin America, "where human rights are respected and protected, where tolerance and the rule of law reign, where differences are fought out in the political arena but ultimately compromise and consensus and the good of the nation prevail."

RECONCILIATION

Poland's Experience

After more than forty years of communist rule, Poland achieved a peaceful transfer of power in 1989 through negotiation. Although the experiences of Poland and El Salvador are very different, Aleksander

Kwasniewski and Zbigniew Bujak, both Members of the Polish parliament and one-time adversaries during the 1989 Roundtable Talks, offered some relevant insights based on the Polish transition.

Of the communist countries that were a part of the Soviet sphere of influence, Poland was one of the least repressive. After the Stalinist period ended in the 1950s, torture and violence virtually disappeared, and there were no guerrilla movements. The communist regime's main method of control was to attempt to draw all Poles into the system. Thus the lines of complicity in Poland, as in the other communist countries, were not black and white; everyone was implicated in some way.

By the late 1980s, Poland's economic situation was no longer tenable (due in large part to the collapse of the Soviet economy), and the communists had no effective solutions to offer. With the ascent of Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of *perestroika*, or restructuring, in the Soviet Union, the threat of Soviet invasion or other intervention in Polish affairs diminished significantly. In these circumstances, Poland's highly developed underground opposition was able to strike a deal with the communist leadership to begin a transfer of power through negotiation. The Catholic church, which had tremendous social support, was able to guarantee the roundtable agreement and assure the Polish people that this was the right step for the country to take. The army, which traditionally had been subordinate to the government in all communist societies, supported the negotiation process as well, and now represents one of the strongest democratic elements in Polish society.

Mr. Kwasniewski outlined the evolution of the political situation in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union in three phases. In the first, or as he termed it, "historical," phase, there was tremendous, unified popular resistance to the communists. In the second phase, once the communists lost their political dominance, this unified resistance fragmented and other interests emerged. This evolution was natural, Mr. Kwasniewski said, because the historical division (pro- and anti-communist) became less important as the immediate concerns of society grew more urgent. Political movements and parties began to differentiate and promote different policies and views. In the third phase, which he said Poland was likely to experience in the next five to seven years, political groups and parties connected with the economic interests of certain social groups would become established. He anticipated the consolidation of Poland's major political forces into five main parties: social democrats, Christian democrats, liberals, nationalists and peasants.

Mr. Bujak emphasized that including all sectors in the political process and attaining social consensus on how to achieve social and economic transformation were essential elements in the successful transition to democracy. Popular participation in political life is crucial, he said, and pointed out that before the transition, Solidarity and the communists each had the support of roughly 20 percent of Poland's population, leaving about 60 percent outside the political process. This void also contributed to the need for compromise, and now requires a greater effort to educate Polish society about democracy and its institutions and the rights and responsibilities of the citizens of a democracy.

Mr. Bujak also recommended paying careful attention to the economy because of the potential threat it poses to reconciliation and democratization. Entrepreneurs and capitalists, trade unions and social movements must play a role in forming economic and social policy as well as politicians, he said.

Mr. Kwasniewski's advice to El Salvador as it undertakes the transition to democracy included three caveats. First, the path to democracy is complicated, but of greatest importance along the way is adherence to the rule of law. Justice is important, he said, but justice must not be exploited in a search for revenge for past abuses. Those who can be found guilty of crimes should be punished, but in his view, categorical sanctions are neither helpful to the process of reconciliation nor just. Second, he agreed with Mr. Bujak that the economic situation is critical, for it can be either conducive or threatening to the construction of democracy. Mr. Kwasniewski noted that a weak economy can provide fertile ground for undemocratic political extremists. Finally, he warned that change takes time, and society must be encouraged to be patient.

Mr. Kwasniewski emphasized the importance of dialogue in facilitating the transition process, and underscored that compromise is not a sign of weakness, but of power and wisdom. He also asserted that society and its political forces should be very inquisitive, rather than passive.

In response to questions from the Salvadoran participants about the role of the church and the army during Poland's transition to democracy, Mr. Bujak said that today the Catholic church is very directly engaged in Polish politics, and in fact wields considerable influence. However, the church's authority within Polish society is slipping. Traditionally, the church has been viewed as the preserver of Poland's national identity, both during the communist era and in earlier periods when the Polish state did not exist. Under communism, 80 percent of the population considered the church the most respected institution of society. In contrast, today only 40 percent hold this view; in fact, the police now enjoy greater social support than the church. Mr. Bujak said that today in Poland the church comports itself as the church of victory, intervening in the political process. He said that he would prefer to see the church place greater emphasis on social service, working among the people to help resolve complicated social problems, but maintaining a low political profile.

The Polish army, Mr. Bujak said, is currently undergoing deep restructuring. It is moving away from its former role as a component within the Soviet-dominated security system of the now-defunct Warsaw Pact and developing into a national defense force. The army is subordinate to the president, and it is in the process of becoming a professional service.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Experiences of Chile and Czechoslovakia

Herman Schwartz, Professor of Law at the American University in Washington, DC, emphasized that although it is important to guarantee that the transition to democracy is not undermined or sabotaged, justice should not be ignored. He proposed three alternatives for dealing with past abuses: criminal punishment; lustration, or purging the old elites from important positions in government and society; and acknowledgement of the truth. Neither criminal trials nor lustration are effective means of discovering the truth, he said, and both approaches pose problems. Criminal trials are very difficult to carry out for a variety of reasons, including problems in ensuring fairness to the accused and justice to the victims. There is also the danger of victor's justice when the old elites are targeted, and the problem of judging people by present standards for acts that may have been legitimate when they were committed.

However, official commissions established to determine the truth about past abuses can be quite effective, Professor Schwartz asserted, as the experiences of Chile and Argentina demonstrated. He recommended that an outside authority like the United Nations, the Organization of American States or the Council of Europe establish the commission so that it cannot be accused of bias, and to ensure that the commission will have adequate financial, human and material resources. International sponsorship, by focusing international attention on the commission's works, also ensures that the commission's findings will not be ignored; such publicity also helps to protect the members of the commission.

Professor Schwartz also recommended that if truth commissions can provide sufficient proof, they should presume to name the perpetrators of past abuses. Since the names usually come out somehow, he said, it is better to have an official pronouncement than rumors. Naming names could also help to remove individuals who might be obstacles to democracy in the future, he said. However, he noted that this policy could also trigger intimidation of the commission members, which makes outside appointments all the more desirable to ensure the members' international protection.

Jose Zalaquett, a Member of the Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation, disagreed with Professor Schwartz's arguments, stating that while international appointments may be advisable, they are not necessary. Rather, he said, it is possible to create a balanced commission through careful selection of its members, as was the case in Chile and Argentina. Mr. Zalaquett also emphasized that a truth commission is not responsible for prosecution and therefore should not name perpetrators, though it can refer their names and crimes to the courts. He also maintained that punishment is not essential unless crimes against humanity have been committed. In that case, it is the obligation of international organizations to pursue the perpetrators. Other crimes, he said, can be forgiven--if social consensus on the need to forgive can be reached. Truth commissions have a restorative purpose: although people may know what happened in the

past, it is official recognition that returns dignity to the victims and gives some assurance that the abuses will not be repeated in the future.

Mr. Zalaquett said that there are three types of justice in the aftermath of a repressive regime: criminal justice; civil, compensatory justice; and vindicating the reputation of the victims of both sides. In Chile's case, criminal justice was not possible, which meant that the worst violators could not be convicted. However, Chile was able to provide compensatory justice and rehabilitate reputations.

Jan Urban, one of Czechoslovakia's foremost dissidents during the communist period, a Co-Founder of the Civic Forum movement in the Czech Republic and now a Freelance Journalist, discussed Czechoslovakia's approach to the abuses of its communist past. He maintained that Czechoslovakia's first postcommunist government was wrong to adopt the pretense that the new Czechoslovakia had no past. Without acknowledgment of past crimes, the victims of those crimes will become an obstacle to democracy. In Czechoslovakia, the postcommunist government did not address the atrocities committed by the communists in the Stalinist period. Eventually the victims of that era organized to protest this inattention. According to Mr. Urban, these victims were subsequently used as a political tool by extremists.

Mr. Urban went on to say that acknowledgement alone is not enough. Continued focus on the past does not help to build a better future. In Czechoslovakia, the postcommunist government was largely composed of former dissidents and other activists who relied too much on the legitimacy they had earned in the past as "brave fighters against communism." These leaders did not realize that what the people wanted were policies addressing their economic, political and social future. Without having a positive, forward-looking concept, Mr. Urban said, this government contributed to the rise of the nationalist and populist forces that eventually pulled the country apart.

In El Salvador, Mr. Urban predicted that if both the FMLN and the ARENA party regard the past as the only important issue in the 1994 elections, neither will be among the winners. When two adversaries legitimize each other through conflict, he said, if they do not have a positive, future-oriented concept when the conflict ends, they will disappear. After a conflict is over, the future quickly becomes much more important than the past. Mr. Urban warned that when obstacles arise during El Salvador's transition process, some may decide to return to violence as a solution.

Many Salvadoran participants reacted strongly to Mr. Urban's presentation, emphasizing that it is up to them to find their own way based on El Salvador's own unique experience. One Salvadoran agreed that truth is the basis of liberty and the hope of Salvadoran society. For years, he said, El Salvador's people have been victims because they have been afraid to speak the truth. The challenge of the history of El Salvador should be faced with the examples of others and respect for different realities, but ultimately must be based on its own unique experience. This sentiment was echoed by many other Salvadoran participants.

In response to a question about the role of the army in Eastern Europe, Mr. Urban explained that after several decades in power, the communist party was in fact the leading force in these societies, and controlled both the civilian government and the military. When the communist political structure was defeated, the military had no will of its own. In Czechoslovakia, some parts of the military wanted to use force against the demonstrators, but the military leadership rejected this option, and after the communists fell from power, the military was among the first groups willing and even eager to support the new regime. In Czechoslovakia, as in Poland, the military became a highly stabilizing factor during the transition to democracy.

THE REGIONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SALVADORAN PEACE PROCESS

Peace is more than an end to armed confrontation, according to President Jorge Serrano of Guatemala; peace must also overcome the problems of the past. Peace must bring with it the creation of a democratic society that allows everyone to participate in the political process. Furthermore, democracy must be viewed as a comprehensive process; its institutions, including the armed forces, must also be democratic.

President Serrano praised the example of Centro Demos, which is designed to serve as a place for all groups, from the military to the church, to come together to discuss their concerns and problems. In Guatemala, he said, it has been necessary to reach fundamental agreements among the various sectors of society based on common interests. Trying to force one particular model could endanger the peace process and even the democratic process.

The central role the military plays in society in many of the countries of the region stems not only from the military's control of the instruments of force, but also from its administrative capacity and doctrinaire role. In each political transition in Latin America, whether peaceful or traumatic, there has always been both a military and a civilian component, President Serrano said. Though an agreement between the military and the civilian government may seem grotesque in some cases, he asserted that such an agreement is necessary to achieve stability and create a strong foundation for democracy. Whenever there has been a civilian-military agreement in Latin America, it has been stable, he said. Whenever either the military or a civilian government has imposed a system, the situation has been highly unstable.

There are three basic elements central to achieving understanding between the military and civilian government, President Serrano said. First, the positions of both groups within a democratic society must be defined. Agreements are needed on how to deal with issues such as maintenance of national security and public order, the administration of justice, and meeting the basic needs of the population.

Second, both the military and the civilian government must agree to respect certain principles and institutions, such as popular will as expressed through elections, and the authority and jurisdiction of the three branches of government. Even if the military does not like some of the decisions of the court or disagrees with certain legislation, the armed forces must respect them.

Finally, political transition must offer a system that will not threaten either the military or the civilian government, or any other sectors of society. Power must be distributed, and each sector should receive the responsibilities that correspond to it. Once this breakdown of responsibilities is agreed upon, it must be respected by all. If any sort of power vacuum remains, it will leave an opening for anarchy or insurrection. The military must be induced to serve as society's protector; instituting a policy of demilitarization, as advocated by outsiders, threatens the military with marginalization, according to President Serrano, and that can threaten peace.

President Serrano concluded by underscoring that no one can build Central America's future but Central Americans. Although the interests of outsiders may not be detrimental, they do not necessarily coincide with the interests of Central Americans, who end up paying the price for outsiders' mistakes.

STRENGTHENING DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

Columbia, Guatemala and El Salvador

Twenty years ago, in Latin America the idea of reform was tainted by the belief that it would usher in socialism, according to Evereth Bustamante, a Senator in the Colombian legislature representing the Democratic Alliance/M-19. Today, however, reform is seen as bringing new political action and a new definition of politics. Civil society is being revitalized.

Although democracy has deep roots in Colombia and the country has not had a military dictatorship in three decades, militarism is a significant element in Colombian society. In January 1989, after a century of armed confrontations, the Colombian government and the M-19 guerrilla movement initiated a process of national reconciliation and the reintegration of guerrillas into civilian life. M-19 disarmed and became a political party. The National Assembly introduced a new constitution based on the principle of participatory democracy. Old political parties were revitalized, and new parties were formed. Colombia, Senator Bustamante said, began to move toward a new political order based on the principles of justice, freedom and the protection of human rights. Constitutional reform opened new avenues of political participation and helped the judicial system to begin to function again.

There is a paradox in this process, however; the development of democratic processes in Colombia is occurring in a society that has not yet freed itself from violence. This fact makes political participation all the more important, Senator Bustamante said; political participation gives citizens a stake in society through a new social-political pact. Political participation is a right, he said, but it is also a duty.

Democracy is still in its infancy in Guatemala, according to General Hector Gramajo, former Minister of Defense of Guatemala. Although democracy has formally existed there for seven years, there are not many Guatemalans who are happy with it, he asserted, and some say it is regressing.

In 1986, the Guatemalan military publicly rejected the doctrine of national security in favor of national stability. However, according to General Gramajo, despite the military's attempts to convince Guatemalan society of the benefits of democracy, the civilian government was resistant, and other groups within society were more concerned with protecting their own interests. Centro ESTNA, which is the model for El Salvador's Centro Demos, was established under the auspices of the Guatemalan military to facilitate open, constructive dialogue among the various sectors of society on the country's future.

General Gramajo suggested a four-part strategy for strengthening democracy in Latin America: open political activity to greater popular participation; introduce economic changes; effectively address social problems; and encourage political tolerance.

Democracy cannot exist without the rule of law, according to Mauricio Gutiérrez Castro, President of the Supreme Court of El Salvador. In a rule-of-law state, he said, the constitution must be the supreme judicial standard, and popular will as expressed through elections is the source of democratic legitimacy. The concept of limited sovereignty, in which no individual, group or branch of government has absolute power, must be enshrined in the constitution, and the division of powers among the branches of government must represent not only a division of responsibilities, but also a guarantee of rights and freedoms.

In El Salvador, Mr. Gutiérrez said, the rule of law exists in theory, but in reality is still very limited. Although the country has made considerable progress, much more needs to be done. The ability of institutions to function also depends on their credibility within society, Mr. Gutiérrez said. It is the responsibility of the government to respect the judiciary, the institution that interprets its laws. Justice must be defended completely, not just when it is beneficial or convenient.

Mr. Gutiérrez said that the question of human rights illuminated the deficiencies of El Salvador's judicial system, and offered an opportunity for improvement. Although it is healthy to universalize the whole problem of human rights, he said, many forget that the problems of administering justice are not the same in all countries. Justice is conditioned by possibilities, and reality must be taken into consideration. It is difficult to administer justice without sufficient resources, during wartime and in other difficult situations.

In response to the question of how to recover the role of sovereignty in El Salvador, Mr. Gutiérrez said that although many Salvadorans criticize foreigners for intervening in El Salvador's affairs, ultimately the Salvadorans have to take responsibility for themselves. They must work together to recover national unity, economic independence and sovereignty. General Gramajo added that the concept of sovereignty is more permeable today because of telecommunications and other technological advances, and he advised recognizing this new reality.

General Fred Woerner, former Commander in Chief of the U.S. Southern Command, emphasized that the civilian-military relationship poses one of the most compelling challenges to emerging democracies in Latin America. He asserted that democracy is compatible with a strong, professional military, but only if the military is subordinate to the civilian government and fully integrated into civilian society. Reducing the size of the armed forces will not achieve these aims, he said; nor will marginalizing the military within society. Instead, a change of attitudes is needed: mutual respect between the military and the civilian authorities must be cultivated.

Although he agreed that there is no particular model to follow, General Woerner maintained that the experiences of other countries can be instructive. For example, the recent coup attempt in Venezuela offered three lessons, he said. First, the fact that the attempt occurred signaled that there was residual

thinking among the military that it had the right to interfere with the democratic process when it thought it could act for the greater good of society. Second, that the coup failed signaled that democracy was on the ascent. Third, that the attempted coup was not overwhelmingly rejected by the Venezuelan people highlighted the power and longevity of authoritarianism.

General Woerner emphasized that the military and civilian sectors ought to recognize the need to improve their relations. Because civilians in Latin America usually know very little about the military and usually are not very deeply involved in forming military and strategic policy, there is a significant degree of distrust and suspicion of incompetence on both sides. This is much less so in a fully developed democracy. This lack of communication can begin to be addressed by defining the political powers attributed to the military and entering into dialogue on the professional interests of the military. The military should be allocated an adequate budget so as to be able to respond effectively and contribute to the quality of life among enlisted men.

General Woerner also suggested that the definition of the role and mission of the armed forces during peacetime should be jointly defined by the civilian government and the military. This also includes a common definition of the nation's security requirements, and the recognition that the military has a political role beyond pure defense. This political role should be defined within the political realm, he said, and must be credible to both sides. Finally, he said that until there is a cadre of civilians knowledgeable in national security issues, dialogue is extremely important. He suggested the possibility of including civilian education as a component of a military career, and allowing civilians to participate in certain aspects of military education. General Woerner also called for the legitimization of national security studies in civilian universities and research centers. All of this will contribute to greater understanding and trust between the military and civilians, which in turn will strengthen democracy.

BUILDING POLITICAL TOLERANCE

Brazil and Columbia

Reconciliation does not mean that there will be an end to conflicts of interest within society, according to Flora Lewis, Senior Columnist for *The New York Times*. The challenge is in how to deal with these conflicts.

In Brazil, the transition from an authoritarian regime to democracy has taken place without violence. Although this process has been difficult, according to Benedita Souza da Silva, a Federal Deputy for the Workers Party, Brazilians have learned that political discussion, tolerance and compromise are the keys to resolving conflicts within society. In Brazil, she said, citizenship has been rescued; citizens have learned to take responsibility.

The armed forces in Brazil have accepted the protection of public safety and national security as their role, and have agreed to their subordination to the civilian government. However, Ms. Souza underscored that this does not mean that politicians can turn to the military to resolve social problems. These problems, such as the need for agrarian reform, protection of the environment and feeding and educating the nation's children, have not yet been successfully addressed in Brazil, but must be.

In Colombia, a country that offers fertile ground for insurgency, symbols play an important role in demonstrating that national reconciliation is both necessary and possible, according to Antonio Navarro Wolff, President of Democratic Alliance/M-19 and Supreme Commander of M-19 between 1980 and 1990.

He said that by giving up their arms and leaving themselves totally vulnerable, the M-19 guerrillas demonstrated their commitment to peace. In his view, the ex-guerrillas continued to be agents of change by working through the political system; M-19's participation in the constitutional reform in 1991 gave the group legitimacy and helped to initiate its transformation to civilian status.

This sort of cooperation contributes to mutual trust between the military and former guerrillas, and enhances the rest of society's level of trust in the peace process. Transparency has helped build trust and achieve compliance with the peace agreements. The 1991 constitution represented the will of almost all of Colombian society; because so many sectors participated in its creation, Mr. Navarro said, everyone shares responsibility for guaranteeing its future.

Colombia's challenges for the future include developing political reforms that touch on the interests of various political groups and social sectors. Mr. Navarro urged the private sector to play a greater role in reintegrating former guerrillas into society by offering training and jobs, and remarked that often entrepreneurs have been much more sensitized by the war than politicians, recognizing the need for stability to promote economic development.

Despite Colombia's political reconciliation, violence remains widespread, transcending politics: in 1992, of nearly 24,000 assassinations, 22,000 were criminal rather than political in nature. Breaking with this culture of violence can give way to a culture of peace, collaboration and national unity. However, this requires courage, determination and risk-taking on the part of everyone involved.

In working together to build a new, more tolerant El Salvador, Michael Olson, an American attorney and representative of the Moral Rearmament movement, urged Salvadorans to accept the challenge and risk of putting the concepts of reconciliation and forgiveness into action. He urged them to be willing to forgive, as well as to apologize. Individuals must be prepared to take on new responsibilities and give the other side the opportunity to demonstrate a change in attitude. Moral standards of honesty should be at the basis of the new society, he said. The question should not be who is right, but what is right.

CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE OF PEACE IN EL SALVADOR

The conference participants agreed that the Salvadoran people share a culture, a future and responsibility for it. Building democracy and tolerance poses a personal challenge to each member of society; it is each individual's responsibility to contribute to this constructive process.

Now is the time for a new era of initiative and hope rather than retrospection and accusations, according to Roberto Cañas of the FMLN. However, he agreed with Jan Urban that without collectively resolving the past, the past will rot underground, eventually resurfacing and creating a crisis.

Mr. Cañas also asked how it is possible to achieve political stability in El Salvador when creating access to running water is a tremendous national challenge, when there is a vacuum from the absence of cultural policies, when most of the country's income comes from dollars sent back by Salvadorans living in the United States. All of these factors come into play in building democracy, he said, and he urged everyone to participate in the search for solutions to overcome poverty, environmental devastation and economic decline. Salvadorans must recognize that there are national interests that affect everyone, and that the nation's priorities must be agreed upon in order to determine which solutions are viable and achievable.

It was clear, Mr. Cañas said, that all these issues can only be effectively addressed through the construction of a permanent process of national dialogue. Salvadoran society's deep distrust stemming from the culture of violence must be overcome to establish such a dialogue. El Salvador has the bricks, the cement and the architect, he said, and now it must begin to build bridges. The San Salvador Conference on Reconciliation was an important step in this process, he asserted, since it provided an opportunity for dialogue among sectors of society that have not talked to each other for a very long time.

Pablo Tesak, a leading Salvadoran Industrialist who originally came from Czechoslovakia, remarked that despite the existence of profound resentments in Salvadoran society today, deep hatred like that manifested in the former Yugoslavia is absent. Mr. Tesak called on the ex-combatants of both sides to participate in the new society, and said that they should be helped with training programs, scholarships and loans. Without stability, he warned, investment will go elsewhere.

Cecilia Gallardo de Cano, Minister of Education, pointed out three variables that are fundamental to the peace process. First, there must be a clear understanding of the nature of the transition process, that the peace agreements are political, and that social agreements will be extracted from them. Consensus is needed not only among the political forces, but also within Salvadoran society. Second, the human dimension of the peace--national identity--must be recognized. In Ms. Gallardo de Cano's view, international organizations may assist El Salvador on the path to a successful future or may prepare to help the country should it fail, but international organizations should never take the lead in the transition process.

Finally, Ms. Gallardo de Cano emphasized that El Salvador can only go as far as its education allows, and therefore educational opportunities must be expanded significantly. She suggested opening public libraries in the main towns, promoting culture and developing policies that will more concretely dynamize the education process during the transition.

The conclusions of the San Salvador conference were likely to constitute reference points for reconciliation, according to General Rene Emilio Ponce, Minister of Defense of El Salvador. He hoped for a future without revenge, a future that will not be the sequel to the period of conflict and violence. He credited President Cristiani for placing the collective interests of society above particular interests, and urged all the new structures of power in Salvadoran society to recognize this priority and work to satisfy the needs of society as a whole.

During the transition period, General Ponce said, the Salvadoran military played a dual role: defending the state's institutions and the security of its citizens, and backing a clear change toward democracy. Even when the government pushed the peace process in a new direction, the military cooperated. The constitutional reform has subordinated the military to the civilian government, and this has been accepted by the military. The armed forces are prepared to accept the challenges of the transition period and work toward unifying Salvadoran society. However, he said, the military is waiting to see if the other sectors of Salvadoran society will accept these challenges, or if they will seek revenge. He urged all sectors to abandon their radical stances, and called on all Salvadorans to demonstrate their will to overcome the obstacles to reconciliation, to strengthen democracy and to satisfy the basic needs of society.

This report was written by Mary Albon.