

**QUESTION AND ANSWER SERIES**

**EL SALVADOR**

**HARDSHIP CONSIDERATIONS**

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## I. Introduction

El Salvador is the most densely populated country in Latin America, with about 5.8 million people living in an area roughly the size of Massachusetts. Its society is characterized by extreme social and economic inequality. According to a 1998 study by the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), Latin America has the greatest disparities in income distribution in the world. In gauging the relative levels of disparity among Latin American countries, the IADB study found that El Salvador fell about midway between Brazil, the country with highest level of inequality, and Uruguay, the country with the lowest.<sup>1</sup>

The Human Development Index (HDI) produced by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) provides a broad assessment of relative levels of development in the world. The HDI considers three basic dimensions—longevity, knowledge and standard of living—and measures life expectancy, educational attainment and literacy, and income. In the 1999 HDI, El Salvador rated 107<sup>th</sup> out of 174 countries, while the United States rated third, Costa Rica 45<sup>th</sup>, Honduras 114<sup>th</sup>, and Nicaragua 121<sup>st</sup>.<sup>2</sup> Overall, countries fall into one of three categories—high, medium and low development. At number 107, El Salvador is near the low end of medium development.<sup>3</sup>

According to a UNDP study of El Salvador published in 1997, there are significant disparities in levels of development between the country's fourteen administrative departments. Only two of the country's departments, San Salvador and La Libertad, have a higher HDI rating than the national average. The twelve others have lower HDI ratings, with the lowest ratings found in the most rural departments. Three of those departments have HDI ratings which place them in the low-development category. They are, in descending order, La Unión, Cabañas and Morazán.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Inter-American Development Bank. *Facing Up to Inequality: Economic and Social Progress in Latin America, 1998-1999 Report* (Washington DC: IADB and Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), pp. 12, 25.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Human Development Report 1999* (New York: UNDP and Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 134-137.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Human Development Report 1999* (New York: UNDP and Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 134-137.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Informe sobre Indices de Desarrollo Humano en El Salvador (San Salvador: UNDP and the Government of El Salvador, 1997)*, p. 48.

## II. General Conditions

### A. Poverty

According to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the national poverty rate was 47.5 percent in 1995.<sup>5</sup> The U.S. State Department reported that approximately 52 percent of the population lived below the poverty line in 1997.<sup>6</sup> The poverty rate is nearly 100 percent among the country's approximately 600,000 indigenous people, the majority of whom live in rural areas. PAHO, in a report on the health of indigenous communities presented in San Salvador in May 1999, concluded that 61.1 percent of the indigenous population live in poverty, 38.3 percent in extreme poverty, while only 0.6 percent are able to cover the basic necessities of life.<sup>7</sup>

El Salvador is densely populated, with about 358 inhabitants per square kilometer.<sup>8</sup> According to an academic study conducted in the mid-1990s, landlessness and poor quality land remained "the principal source of endemic poverty for the 73 percent of the Salvadoran population living outside the San Salvador metropolitan area."<sup>9</sup> According to World Bank data, in 1997 more than a quarter of rural households lived in extreme poverty.<sup>10</sup>

According to reports issued by UNICEF in 1994 and 1997, nearly half of El Salvador's population is under the age of 18, and three quarters of Salvadoran children live below the poverty line.<sup>11</sup>

### B. Income

Real per capita income was \$2,653 in 1996, according to a study by the United Nations Development Program.<sup>12</sup> The U.S. Department of State, however, estimated the

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<sup>5</sup> Pan American Health Organization. *Health in the Americas, 1998 Edition, Volume II* (Washington DC: PAHO [1999]), p. 259.

<sup>6</sup> US Department of State. "El Salvador," *Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1997* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, March 1998), p. 513.

<sup>7</sup> Joma, Susana. "Indígenas: la semilla marginada," *El Diario de Hoy* (San Salvador: 17 May 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Ferrufino, Mayuly. "Intoxicación es sombra en El Salvador," *Associated Press* (San Salvador), published in *El Nuevo Herald* (Miami: 6 October 1998).

<sup>9</sup> Spence, Jack, et al. *Chapultepec: Five Years Later: El Salvador's Political Reality and Uncertain Future* (Cambridge MA: Hemisphere Initiatives and Washington DC: Washington Office on Latin America, 1997), p. 35.

<sup>10</sup> Foley, Michael W. *Land, Peace, and Participation: The Development of Post-War Agricultural Policy in El Salvador and the Role of the World Bank* (Washington DC: Washington Office on Latin America, 12 June 1997), p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> UNICEF. *The State of the World's Children 1997*, (New York: UNICEF and Oxford University Press, 1997. UNICEF. (UNICEF: San Salvador, 1994). Cited in Donna DeCesare, "The Children of War: Street Gangs in El Salvador," *Report on the Americas* (NACLA: July/August 1998), p. 24.

figure at \$1,930 in 1997.<sup>13</sup> In either case, the figures are skewed upward because of the wide disparity in income distribution. In a recent study by María Dolores Albiac, a Spanish journalist and long-time resident of El Salvador, it was found that 700,000 families—3.5 million of the country's 5.8 million people—lived on \$1 a day or less, while 518 families earned \$10,000 a month or more.<sup>14</sup>

Up to one-third of Salvadoran households receive remittances from abroad, mostly from family members living in the United States, and those remittances provide a substantial portion of their income. In 1995, remittances were estimated at \$1.1 billion, making them El Salvador's largest source of hard currency, without which the nation's poverty levels would be substantially higher.<sup>15</sup>

### C. Employment

According to a report by the Central American Monetary Council, the rate of open unemployment rose from 7.7 percent in 1994 to 10 percent in 1996 as national economic growth slowed.<sup>16</sup> The rate of underemployment, including people toiling in the informal sector, is substantially greater, possibly four times higher than the open unemployment rate. The 1998 IADB study showed that 46 percent of men between ages 25 and 45 worked in the informal sector, while the figure was 55 percent for women in the same age group.<sup>17</sup>

For people working in the formal sector, the minimum wage, effective July 1995, was \$4.40 per day for commercial, industrial and service workers and \$3.30 per day for agro-industrial workers. According to the U.S. Department of State, the minimum wage was insufficient to provide a decent standard of living for a worker and family. In 1997, for the third consecutive year, minimum wages did not keep up with the Ministry of Economy's estimate of the increase in the cost of living.<sup>18</sup> Overall, according to the

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<sup>12</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Informe sobre Indices de Desarrollo Humano en El Salvador* (San Salvador: UNDP and the Government of El Salvador, 1997), p. 47.

<sup>13</sup> US Department of State. "El Salvador," *Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1997* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, March 1998), p. 513.

<sup>14</sup> Darling, Juanita. "Book Reveals Identities of El Salvador's Richest Families," *Los Angeles Times* (San Salvador: 21 August 1998).

<sup>15</sup> Waller Meyers, Deborah. *Migrant Remittances to Latin America: Reviewing the Literature* (Washington DC: Inter-American Dialogue and Tomás Rivera Policy Institute, 1998), p. 5, 9, 11.

<sup>16</sup> Pan American Health Organization. *Health in the Americas, 1998 Edition, Volume II* (Washington DC: PAHO [1999]), p. 258.

<sup>17</sup> Inter-American Development Bank. *Facing Up to Inequality: Economic and Social Progress in Latin America, 1998-1999 Report* (Washington DC: IADB and Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. 28.

<sup>18</sup> US Department of State. "El Salvador," *Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1997* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, March 1998), p. 523.

IADB, real wages in the formal sector declined every year but one between 1988 and 1997.<sup>19</sup>

In 1997, the office of the *Procurador de Derechos Humanos* (PDDH), El Salvador's official human rights ombudsman, estimated that 270,000 children under the age of fifteen worked, mostly as street vendors in the informal economy, and noted that besides losing their opportunity for education, these children frequently fell victim to sexual abuse and were exploited as prostitutes.<sup>20</sup>

#### **D. Housing**

The housing situation for a majority of Salvadorans is poor, particularly in rural areas where "families face a chronic shortage of adequate housing."<sup>21</sup> Although PAHO provides no statistics in its 1998 report, it states that in the country generally, "There is a serious problem of overcrowding in makeshift shacks and rural shanties. The most common types of housing are the single-family dwelling, rural shanties, and makeshift urban shacks." In 1995, government expenditures on housing were 0.5 percent of total public spending, down from almost 6 percent in 1985.<sup>22</sup>

#### **E. Health**

In 1995 El Salvador spent 2.4 percent of GDP on health care, compared to 6.5 percent in the United States and 6.9 percent in Canada for the same year.<sup>23</sup> According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), during the years 1990-1995, 60 percent of the population was without access to health services,<sup>24</sup> while during the years 1990-1996, 31 percent of the population was without access to safe water and 19 percent was without access to sanitation.<sup>25</sup> According to PAHO, 53 percent of the population had

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<sup>19</sup> Inter-American Development Bank. *Facing Up to Inequality: Economic and Social Progress in Latin America, 1998-1999 Report* (Washington DC: IADB and Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. 266.

<sup>20</sup> US Department of State. "El Salvador," *Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1997* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, March 1998), p. 520.

<sup>21</sup> *United Nations: Partners in the Reconstruction and Transformation of Central America* (Stockholm, Sweden: 25-28 May 1999), p. 41. Paper produced at the Second Consultative Group Meeting for the Reconstruction and Transformation of Central America.

<sup>22</sup> Pan American Health Organization. *Health in the Americas, 1998 Edition, Volume II* (Washington DC: PAHO, [1999]), p. 259.

<sup>23</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Human Development Report 1999* (New York: UNDP and Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 188, 190.

<sup>24</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Human Development Report 1998* (New York: UNDP and Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 147.

<sup>25</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Human Development Report 1998* (New York: UNDP and Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 147.

access to the public water supply in 1995, while excreta disposal was available to 69 percent of the population.<sup>26</sup>

High rates of cholera in the early 1990s—a peak of 15,280 cases in 1994—tailed off substantially in 1996.<sup>27</sup> However, there were renewed outbreaks—55 confirmed cases and two deaths in the first six weeks of 1999—in the wake of severe flooding caused by Hurricane Mitch.<sup>28</sup>

In the metropolitan areas of San Salvador, which has 13 municipal districts and a population of about 1.5 million, garbage is collected at only about 60 percent of households, and 600 tons of refuse pile up uncollected every day. In the rest of the country's 250 or so municipalities the situation is worse.<sup>29</sup> Because collection is inadequate, many people dispose of trash by burning it, which further pollutes the air already fouled by the proliferation of automobiles over the last decade. In March 1999, the Ministry of Health released figures showing that the rate of respiratory illnesses is high, with an average of nearly 1.3 million cases reported annually in recent years. The impact on children is particularly severe, with an estimated 11,000 dying each year from respiratory illnesses.<sup>30</sup>

According to PAHO, the infant mortality rate in 1993 was 41 per 1,000, compared to 7.5 per 1,000 in the United States in 1995.<sup>31</sup> The estimated life expectancy increased from 63.4 years during 1985-1990 to 67.1 years in 1990-1995, compared to 75.8 years in the United States in 1995.<sup>32</sup>

According to the Salvadoran Ministry of Health, 50 percent of children under the age of five had some nutritional deficiency in 1997, and 11 percent suffered from serious malnutrition.<sup>33</sup> According to PAHO, a study conducted in 1993 showed that the national

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<sup>26</sup> Pan American Health Organization. *Health in the Americas, 1998 Edition, Volume II* (Washington DC: PAHO [1999]), p. 259.

<sup>27</sup> Pan American Health Organization. *Health in the Americas, 1998 Edition, Volume II* (Washington DC: PAHO [1999]), p. 262.

<sup>28</sup> *Associated Press* (San Salvador: 20 February 1999).

<sup>29</sup> Pan American Health Organization. *Health in the Americas, 1998 Edition, Volume II* (Washington DC: PAHO [1999]), p. 264.

<sup>30</sup> Kovaleski, Serge F. "Salvador's River of Poison: Cash-Poor Nation Grapples With Health Crisis," *Washington Post* (San Salvador: 18 March 1999).

<sup>31</sup> Pan American Health Organization. *Health in the Americas, 1998 Edition, Volume II* (Washington DC: PAHO [1999]), p. 260, 508.

<sup>32</sup> Pan American Health Organization. *Health in the Americas, 1998 Edition, Volume II* (Washington DC: PAHO [1999]), p. 259, 507.

<sup>33</sup> US Department of State. "El Salvador," *Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1997* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, March 1998), p. 520.



malnutrition rate was 11.2 percent, with rates twice as high in rural compared to urban areas. A 1994 study conducted in 78 municipalities indicated that the national rate of malnutrition was 14.9 percent.<sup>34</sup>

In December 1997, the National Council of Disabled People in El Salvador (established in 1994) estimated that there were 500,000 people with disabilities, about nine percent of the population, of which 12,500 were directly attributed to the civil war. Other contributing factors were lack of prenatal care, misuse of pesticides in food production, malnutrition, criminal violence and auto accidents. As of the end of 1997, there was no provision of government services for the physically disabled.<sup>35</sup>

## **F. Environmental Degradation**

According to studies by governmental and non-governmental environmental agencies, in 1998 at least 90 percent of El Salvador's rivers, streams and lakes were contaminated by organic waste, agrochemicals including pesticides, and industrial waste. Large numbers of wells and aquifers also were tainted. Because nearly a third of the population depends on surface water for daily use, there were frequent reports of severe intoxication and occasional deaths from chemical and waste ingestion.<sup>36</sup> In 1999, international experts described contamination in El Salvador as "the most serious environmental crisis in Central America."<sup>37</sup>

A study by the *Fundación Salvadoreña para el Desarrollo Económico y Social* (FUSADES), Salvadoran Foundation for Economic and Social Development, published in February 1999, indicated high levels of mercury, arsenic and other metals in the Río Lempa. The Río Lempa, the country's largest river, winds southward from the Honduran border, slicing the country in half before emptying into the Pacific about 75 kilometers southeast of San Salvador.<sup>38</sup> The Río Acelhuate, which flows north from San Salvador and feeds into the Río Lempa, is fouled by 1,600 tons of raw sewage per day, constant

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<sup>34</sup> Pan American Health Organization. *Health in the Americas, 1998 Edition, Volume II* (Washington DC: PAHO [1999]), p. 259.

<sup>35</sup> US Department of State. "El Salvador," *Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1997* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, March 1998), p. 521.

<sup>36</sup> Pan American Health Organization. *Health in the Americas, 1998 Edition, Volume II* (Washington DC: PAHO [1999]), p. 264. Ferrufino, Mayuly. "Intoxicación es sombra en El Salvador," *El Nuevo Herald* (Miami: 6 October 1998) - from the Associated Press (San Salvador). Kovaleski, Serge F. "Salvador's River of Poison: Cash-Poor Nation Grapples With Health Crisis," *Washington Post* (San Salvador: 18 March 1999).

<sup>37</sup> Kovaleski, Serge F. "Salvador's River of Poison: Cash-Poor Nation Grapples With Health Crisis," *Washington Post* (San Salvador: 18 March 1999).

<sup>38</sup> Cañas, Gladys. "Lempa envenenado con mercurio," *La Prensa Gráfica* (San Salvador: 12 February 1999).

flows of industrial waste and heaps of garbage dumped into its opaque waters.<sup>39</sup> In rural areas lack of access to clean water is a principal cause of death, particularly among children.<sup>40</sup>

Advancing deforestation has transformed large swaths of land into dusty, desert-like terrain, exacerbating water shortages and raising temperatures in some areas. El Salvador retains only two percent of its original forest cover and in the Western Hemisphere is second only to Haiti in terms of tree loss. Environmental experts warn that the continued degradation of natural resources—especially drinking water in rural areas, where only 13 percent of households have access to piped water—could spark social unrest.<sup>41</sup>

An environmental ministry was only recently created. Its budget is the smallest of any government ministry and environmental monitors say that enforcement of environmental laws is generally lax.<sup>42</sup>

## **G. Education**

According to the 1998 IADB report, the average level of education in El Salvador for 25-year-olds is 4.88 years of schooling, a level which is the third lowest in Latin America, with only Nicaragua and Honduras being lower. For the poorest half of the population, the average is 2.44 years of schooling, the lowest such level in Latin America. Nearly a quarter of Salvadorans 25 years or older have had no schooling whatsoever.<sup>43</sup>

Based on a survey conducted in 1995, UNICEF estimated that of the 800,000 adolescents between the ages of 13 and 18, 40 percent attended school and 29 percent worked. How the remaining 31 percent occupied their time was not determined, but

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<sup>39</sup> Kovaleski, Serge F. "Salvador's River of Poison: Cash-Poor Nation Grapples With Health Crisis," *Washington Post* (San Salvador: 18 March 1999).

<sup>40</sup> Spence, Jack, et. al., *Chapúltepec: Five Years Later: El Salvador's Political Reality and Uncertain Future* (Cambridge MA: Hemisphere Initiatives and Washington DC: Washington Office on Latin America, 1997), p. 42.

<sup>41</sup> Kovaleski, Serge F. "Salvador's River of Poison: Cash-Poor Nation Grapples With Health Crisis," *Washington Post* (San Salvador: 18 March 1999).

<sup>42</sup> Kovaleski, Serge F. "Salvador's River of Poison: Cash-Poor Nation Grapples With Health Crisis," *Washington Post* (San Salvador: 18 March 1999).

<sup>43</sup> Inter-American Development Bank. *Facing Up to Inequality: Economic and Social Progress in Latin America, 1998-1999 Report* (Washington DC: IADB and Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), pp. 27, 46.

studies by Salvadoran youth specialists suggested that as many as 30,000 young people belonged to street gangs, more than three times the estimates of Salvadoran authorities.<sup>44</sup>

According to statements by the Ministry of Education in July 1999, following Hurricane Mitch at least half of the country's school buildings had structural problems and were badly in need of repair or rebuilding.<sup>45</sup> Access to basic education for disabled people is limited due to lack of facilities and appropriate transportation.<sup>46</sup>

## H. Personal Security

Since the end of the civil war in 1992, El Salvador has experienced an unprecedented wave of violent crime during which it surpassed Colombia as the country with the highest homicide rate in Latin America—between 120 and 140 murders per 100,000 inhabitants annually—putting it just behind South Africa as the global leader in 1997.<sup>47</sup> Heavily armed criminal gang members, many of them former combatants from both sides, total as many as 12,000, more than the approximately 10,000 guerrillas who fought in the war.<sup>48</sup> In 1998 the homicide rate declined to about 90 murders per 100,000 inhabitants, still the highest homicide rate in Latin America and still one of the highest in the world.<sup>49</sup>

According to a report by the Spanish newspaper *El País* in June 1999, the country remains inundated with hundreds of thousands of legal and illegal arms, many of them high-caliber automatic weapons left over from the civil war.<sup>50</sup> Kidnapping for ransom by

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<sup>44</sup> UNICEF. "A Proposal Addressing the Issue of Youth at Social Risk: Youth and Violence Project," (San Salvador: UNICEF, 1997). Cited in Donna DeCesare, "The Children of War: Street Gangs in El Salvador," *Report on the Americas* (NACLA: July/August 1998), p. 24. Cearley, Anna. "Churches are reaching out to Salvadoran gang members," *Dallas Morning News* (San Salvador: 16 February 1997).

<sup>45</sup> Escobar, Iván. "MINED evalúa situación de escuelas en el área rural," *Diario CoLatino* (San Salvador: 3 July 1999).

<sup>46</sup> US Department of State. "El Salvador," *Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1997* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, March 1998), p. 520-521.

<sup>47</sup> Kovaleski, Serge F. "Murders Soar in El Salvador Since Devastating War's End," *Washington Post* (1 October 1997). Garvin, Glenn. "Civil war over, but violence goes on," *Miami Herald* (4 August 1997).

<sup>48</sup> Kovaleski, Serge F. "Murders Soar in El Salvador Since Devastating War's End," *Washington Post* (1 October 1997).

<sup>49</sup> Concha-Eastman, Alberto. Regional Advisor, Pan American Health Organization, telephone interview, 10 January 2000.

<sup>50</sup> Dalton, Juan José. "La proliferación de armas sin control agrava la elevada tasa de violencia en El Salvador," *El País* (San Salvador: 30 June 1999).

organized criminal bands has become an “industry” in many departments, particularly in San Miguel, Usulután and La Libertad.<sup>51</sup>

Since the mid-1990s, more Salvadorans have died annually due to violence than during the war.<sup>52</sup> At the same time, members of the poorly trained police force have been killed and wounded at one of the highest rates of any law enforcement agency in the world. In 1998, 115 Salvadoran police officers were killed in the line of duty, compared with 156 federal, state and local law enforcement officers in all of the United States, whose population is more than 45 times greater than El Salvador’s.<sup>53</sup>

Interneine warfare between youth gangs adds to the overall insecurity. Throughout the country, there are at least 10,000 and possibly three times that many mostly teenage gang members, the majority of whom belong to approximately 400 subdivisions of two major gangs founded originally in Los Angeles. The largest is the *Mara Salvatrucha* (MS), while the other is *Calle 18*, named for a street in East Los Angeles. Violent turf battles between sub-groups of the two are frequent, members are often armed with guns and even grenades, and many are involved in criminal activities such as drug-dealing, robbery and extortion.<sup>54</sup>

According to a 1997 study cited by the *Miami Herald*, nearly one in three Salvadorans reported being assaulted or robbed within the previous four months.<sup>55</sup> In an opinion poll by San Salvador’s Central American University (UCA) published in January 1999, crime was the primary concern of 44 percent of those surveyed.<sup>56</sup> A study by FUSADES published in February 1999 found that a majority of Salvadorans surveyed felt less safe than during the war.<sup>57</sup> In mid-summer 1999, the government deployed at least 800 soldiers and more than a dozen tanks with high-caliber, mounted machine guns in

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<sup>51</sup> Alvarado, Balmore. “Industria del secuestro da buenas ganancias en oriente,” *El Diario de Hoy* (San Salvador: 23 July 1999). Lizama, Wilmer. “Vuelve la industria del secuestro,” *La Prensa Gráfica* (San Salvador: 23 July 1999).

<sup>52</sup> Guggenheim, Ken. “Ola delictiva ahoga paz salvadoreña,” *El Nuevo Herald* (Miami: 31 August 1998) - from the Associated Press (San Salvador).

<sup>53</sup> Kovaleski, Serge F. “Violence Targets Salvadoran Police,” *Washington Post* (San Salvador: 10 June 1999).

<sup>54</sup> Cearly, Anna. “Churches are reaching out to Salvadoran gang members,” *Dallas Morning News* (16 February 1997). DeCesare, Donna. “The Children of War: Street Gangs in El Salvador,” *NACLA Report on the Americas* (New York: North American Congress on Latin America, July/August 1998), p. 21-29. Indyke, Dottie. “The wound of war,” *Santa Fe New Mexican* (Santa Fe: 4 July 1997).

<sup>55</sup> Garvin, Glenn. “Civil war over, but violence goes on,” *Miami Herald* (4 August 1997).

<sup>56</sup> *Central America Report* (Guatemala City: 23 January 1999).

<sup>57</sup> Ramos, Carlos. “El Salvador con el más alto índice de homicidios en A.L.,” *La Prensa Gráfica* (San Salvador: 9 February 1999).

metropolitan San Salvador's highest crime areas as part of a so-called *Ciudad Segura*, Safe City, program.<sup>58</sup>

### III. Hurricane Mitch

#### A. Losses

Mitch entered El Salvador on October 30, 1998 through its eastern region, where what was by then a tropical storm exacted the most damage. The worst effects were felt in the southeastern department of Usulután where the highly polluted Río Lempa overflowed its banks, destroying or making uninhabitable nearly 3,000 homes and leaving almost 30,000 people without shelter in the *Bajo Lempa*, Lower Lempa Valley. Also hit hard were the department of San Miguel, just east of Usulután, where the Río Grande de San Miguel overflowed its banks, as well as parts of La Unión, San Vicente, La Paz, La Libertad, Sonsonate, Santa Ana, and Ahuachapán departments.<sup>59</sup> The storm had the greatest impact in predominantly poor rural areas, and damage to roads, bridges and other infrastructure caused by flooding and mud slides left much of the eastern region cut off from the rest of the country.<sup>60</sup>

Overall, Mitch left 240 people dead, 19 missing and up to 85,000 homeless.<sup>61</sup> Material losses were estimated at around US\$400 million, principally due to direct and indirect losses in production. Twenty-two health centers and 326 schools reported substantial damage to their facilities.<sup>62</sup> More than three-quarters of agricultural losses, or about US\$50million, were incurred by small, basic-grain producing farmers in poor rural areas.<sup>63</sup> Thousands of farm animals were killed, with many feed and water sources

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<sup>58</sup> Martínez, Salvador and Marroquín, David. "Ofensiva policial contra el crimen," *La Prensa Gráfica* (San Salvador: 16 July 1999).

<sup>59</sup> Naciones Unidas Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe. *El Salvador. Evaluación De Los Daños Ocasionados Por El Huracán Mitch, 1998* (Mexico City: UN, 15 February 1999), p. 13, 19. Oxfam America. *El Salvador, Key Findings: Mitch's Impact on Vulnerable Sectors and their Proposals for Reconstruction*, (Washington DC: OA, 20 May 1999), p. 2.

<sup>60</sup> Inter-American Development Bank. *Central America after Hurricane Mitch: The Challenge of Turning a Disaster into an Opportunity* (Stockholm: IADB, 25-28 May 1999), p. 21-22. Document presented to the Consultative Group Meeting for the Reconstruction and Transformation of Central America.

<sup>61</sup> Oxfam America. *El Salvador, Key Findings: Mitch's Impact on Vulnerable Sectors and their Proposals for Reconstruction* (Washington DC: OA, 20 May 1999), p. 2.

<sup>62</sup> Inter-American Development Bank. *Central America after Hurricane Mitch: The Challenge of Turning a Disaster into an Opportunity* (Stockholm: IADB, 25-28 May 1999), p. 21-22. Document presented to the Consultative Group Meeting for the Reconstruction and Transformation of Central America.

<sup>63</sup> Barraclough, Solon and Moss, Daniel. "Toward Greater Food Security in Central America Following Hurricane Mitch," (Washington DC: Oxfam America, May 1999), p. 7.

destroyed and contaminated.<sup>64</sup> The magnitude of the country's environmental crisis was brought into sharp relief by the storm, as the substantial loss of soil caused by flooding aggravated the problem of already highly-eroded, deforested hillsides and created new gullies and ravines which pose ever greater threats to human habitation as well as agricultural endeavors.<sup>65</sup>

## **B. Prospects for Reconstruction**

By July 1999, very few government reconstruction efforts were underway. In some high flood-risk areas temporary earthen dikes had been erected, but many had already been washed away with the start of the new rainy season in May. Government officials stated that permanent works of reconstruction would have to wait until 2000 and, because the government lacked resources, would depend on the size of pending international loans and donations.<sup>66</sup>

Meanwhile, Salvadorans in hard-hit rural areas continued to suffer economically even as they braced for renewed flooding. It was expected that growth in the agricultural sector in 1999 would be near zero, compared with pre-Mitch projections of 3.9 percent. Public and private banks as well as non-governmental loan funds with rural portfolios faced massive defaults and, with small farmers struggling to get back on their feet, national basic-grain stocks diminished, undermining the already meager diets of poor rural families.<sup>67</sup>

Soon after the onset of the winter rains in May, it was evident that because of further environmental damage caused by Mitch, rural dwellers were more at risk than ever from renewed flooding. By early July 1999, rains had caused the Río Paz to overflow its banks twice in the department of Ahuachapán, inundating large stretches of agricultural land and destroying harvests.<sup>68</sup> In a number of municipalities in the department, sanitation systems either still damaged or clogged from Mitch overflowed,

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<sup>64</sup> Oxfam America. *El Salvador, Key Findings: Mitch's Impact on Vulnerable Sectors and their Proposals for Reconstruction* (Washington DC: OA, 20 May 1999), p. 2.

<sup>65</sup> *United Nations: Partners in the Reconstruction and Transformation of Central America* (Stockholm, Sweden: UN, 25-28 May 1999), p. 41. Paper produced at the Second Consultative Group Meeting for the Reconstruction and Transformation of Central America.

<sup>66</sup> Méndez, Lourdes. "Gobierno no tiene fondos para iniciar obras de reconstrucción," *El Diario de Hoy* (San Salvador: 5 July 1999).

<sup>67</sup> Oxfam America. *El Salvador, Key Findings: Mitch's Impact on Vulnerable Sectors and their Proposals for Reconstruction* (Washington DC: OA, 20 May 1999), p. 2.

<sup>68</sup> Sanz, José Luís and Zambrano, Roberto. "Río Paz desborda otra vez," *El Diario de Hoy* (San Salvador: 2 July 1999). Gómez, Elder. "Miles de manzanas cultivadas destruidas por inundaciones," *El Diario de Hoy* (San Salvador: 6 July 1999).

sending raw sewage into streets and food markets.<sup>69</sup> One government official estimated that the overall damage in Ahuachapán was “similar or possibly worse” than that caused by Mitch.<sup>70</sup> In June and July, there also was extensive flooding and substantial damage in the departments of La Libertad, San Miguel and Usulután.<sup>71</sup> In a number of communities in Usulután, pipes left clogged by Mitch ruptured and spewed raw sewage into streams and rivers used by residents for drinking water.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Morán, Omar. “Aguas negras inundan mercados,” *La Prensa Gráfica* (San Salvador: 9 July 1999).

<sup>70</sup> Morán, Omar. “Comunidades del sur de Ahuachapán sufren inundación,” *La Prensa Gráfica* (San Salvador: 1 July 1999).

<sup>71</sup> Torres, Carlos. “Inundaciones y daños deja tormenta en La Libertad,” *El Diario de Hoy* (San Salvador: 2 July 1999). Alvarado, Balmore and Reyes, Ruth and Mejía, Julio. “Río Grande inunda,” *El Diario de Hoy* (San Salvador: 2 July 1999).

<sup>72</sup> Montes, Carlos. “3 mil familias afectadas por contaminación de río,” *La Prensa Gráfica* (San Salvador: 16 June 1999).