

National Lawyers Guild, Task Force on the Americas 2013 El Salvador Presidential Election Monitoring Delegation

The National Lawyers Guild (through the Task Force on the Americas) is sponsoring an election monitoring delegation to El Salvador from Tuesday, January 28 to Tuesday, February 4, 2014. This election is critical for the FMLN to continue carrying out its social programs and to move forward on its policies started under the Funes presidency. Opposition parties are clamoring to take back the presidency.

The election, to be held on Sunday, February 2, is expected to be close. If no candidate receives more than 50% of the vote a runoff will be held in March. After the 2009 FMLN presidential victory with their “moderate” candidate Mauricio Funes, the FMLN has now put forth the current Vice President, Salvador Sánchez Cerén, a former FMLN comandante, as their presidential candidate. Meanwhile the right is splintered. Former ARENA president from 2004 to 2009, Tony Saca, is now the presidential candidate for the break-off Unity coalition (UNIDAD). The old-school right-wing ARENA party is running current San Salvador Mayor Norman Quijano as its candidate.

Changes to the electoral process by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal under the leadership of its FMLN president to increase voter participation were rolled out for the 2012 municipal and mayoral elections. But various challenges to different parts of the process have been brought to the conservative Supreme Court, and the current rules and regulations continue to evolve. One major change is that Salvadorans living outside the country can vote without returning home, if they're able to comply with the registration requirements.

Delegation members will meet with election officials and democracy and human rights defenders from civil society to develop an understanding of the electoral context and process and to hear their concerns about obstacles to free and fair elections. Members will also participate in a comprehensive training on the electoral process and how to be an effective observer. They will receive official accreditation from El Salvador's electoral authority as International Elections Observers.

Delegation coordinators will select strategic municipalities and voting centers for delegates to observe at based on consultation with electoral authorities and social movement allies. In the past, delegations have split into several groups to observe both rural and urban voting centers throughout the country. The day before the elections, delegates will travel to observation sites and meet with local contacts to learn about local issues. On Election Day, delegates will be present at the polls from the time they open until they close.

The delegation will be organized in coordination with CISPES (Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador), but there will be some separate meetings, and NLG delegates will likely hold their own press conference. The NLG group will write its own report and delegates will be expected to actively participate in writing this report. The NLG has had relations with Salvadoran lawyers and activists going back to the '80s. We will be meeting with lawyers currently involved in the struggles to fight impunity that has lasted for decades.

The group will stay in a modest but safe guest house in San Salvador. Some delegation members may stay outside of San Salvador the night before and the night after Election Day.

The approximate cost of the delegation is \$900 plus airfare to San Salvador. There may be some partial scholarships available. For information and to request an application, contact Judy Somberg, judy_somberg@igc.org, 617-497-5364. Applications are due on December 1, 2013. PLEASE CONSIDER SUPPORTING THIS DELEGATION FINANCIALLY EVEN IF YOU ARE UNABLE TO PARTICIPATE YOURSELF.