

23 per day. One every hour. All day. All week. All month. All year.

That's the average number of "crimes" here (in El Salvador, the term "crime" is used interchangeably with "homicide" . . . as if there were no other type, at least not worth mentioning). Remember when it dropped miraculously to 5 / day (mid-March, 2012)? Well, now, those involved in that "truce" (truce has become a taboo term in El Salvador), are being investigated for their involvement in that "crime", its numerous foibles magnified many times, diverting our attention away from the daily massacres, more of which are attributed, ever more openly, to death squads and / or security forces (police and military).

IPAZ -- Pastoral Initiative for Life and Peace, an ecumenical organization promoting dialogue as a way of overcoming such social violence in El Salvador, continues to pursue our commitment, swimming against the current, seeking reconciliation and peace in all sectors and at all levels-- such unrealistic idealism. While *IPAZ* at times seems to be off in all directions, getting nowhere, we have made some visits to gang prisons (a group of 12-14), conducted some activities in at-risk communities, and held some meetings with government functionaries and ambassadors. I met with the Canadian ambassador to present *IPAZ* and its proposals.

Government / police / military / media / extermination groups / society follow a different route. They seem to be united, determined to eliminate, to exterminate the gangs, who are ever the scapegoats, blamed for all violence and insecurity in El Salvador. This week they are being blamed by officials for masquerading as the social-cleansing death squads, responsible for increasing numbers of massacres supposedly resulting from "confrontations" between gang members and police and / or military.

Do Salvadorans really suppose success in such a mission would result in peace? Has the societal exclusion (economic, social, familial) which drove gang youth to the creation of such a desperate, violent and criminal alternative life-style been overcome in any manner or measure? So would not their younger siblings and neighbours, waiting in the wings and eager to follow in their elders' footsteps, be likely to swell those gang ranks even more? And being witnesses to and victims of such repression in their homes, in their neighbourhoods and in the streets, would they be likely to roll over peacefully, with no inclination to repeat the incessant cycle of revenge, especially considering that no alternatives are being offered them?

Meanwhile, the assassins of the Jesuit priests in 1989, a crime against humanity, under extradition orders for trial in Spain, are being protected--politically, legally, militarily--from such "political persecution", by those same sectors named above. They themselves, along with numerous allies, have launched a persistent campaign to fight such extradition. They are given significant media time to justify their war crimes.

Neither this genocidal history, nor the memory of it, are going away. The ombudsman and many groups within civil society are ensuring that. One such group is our "*Fe y Esperanza*"

Historical Memory Association, which continues to bring former refugee residents together to recall the past, celebrate and accompany each other in the present, and build hope for the future.

While there is more talk and debate around tax evasion now than there was a year ago, responsible for relieving Salvadoran citizens of far more of their wealth and opportunities (and largely responsible for public insecurity, according to a recent book published by Pope Francis), there has yet to be one tax evader charged, tried or convicted. The more vocal debate is around pension funds, the government proposing taking over their management from not-so-trustworthy private agencies.

While 3 of our 26 *CRISPAZ* delegations have cancelled their plans to visit El Salvador this year, due to these high levels of insecurity (following school policy, in many cases), the Lutheran Church and others continue to receive delegations as usual, especially from Germany and the USA. I have met with a couple delegations from Ohio recently, as well as with friends from Washington, D.C., Chicago and Houston. I have enabled Don & Caroline to add a couple more worthwhile life-stories--those I accompany daily or weekly--to their ongoing project: <http://www.embracingelsalvador.org/>. As God does not abandon El Salvador and God's people here, faithful pilgrims can't be kept away from El Salvador, in spite of such violence.

Our household of displaced Salvadorans continues to challenge and entertain, with never a dull or solitary moment. One, unemployed for months, started a new job today, thanks to a lead from another housemate--a most hopeful event in his life, which we celebrate with him.

Of all the reporting and the many analyses of El Salvador being published these days, being in the spotlight, tragically, I offer one link which seems to me to be credible, comprehensive and current (7th in a series): <http://lawg.org/action-center/lawg-blog/69-general/1599-el-salvadors-security-strategy-in-2016-change-or-more-mano-dura->

Thank you for your ongoing concern, prayers and support, in whatever ways you are able. Accompaniment and solidarity help us all here to maintain hope and keep up the struggle for peace and justice.

Paz,
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