

# Global Youth Connect

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## El Salvador Program Report

*Human Rights Delegation for Young Leaders*

*January 2, 2007 – January 17, 2007*

*Organized in Collaboration with the Centro de Intercambio y Solidaridad (CIS)*



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**"But hope is not resignation; it is a commitment to continue to struggle even when things seem to warrant surrender, when hope flares, it allows human beings to overcome monstrous difficulties. It allows people to defy common sense and confound strategists. Hope experienced in the extreme, like faith and love, is miraculous."**

**--Daniel Santiago, *Harvest of Justice***

## **Human Rights in El Salvador**

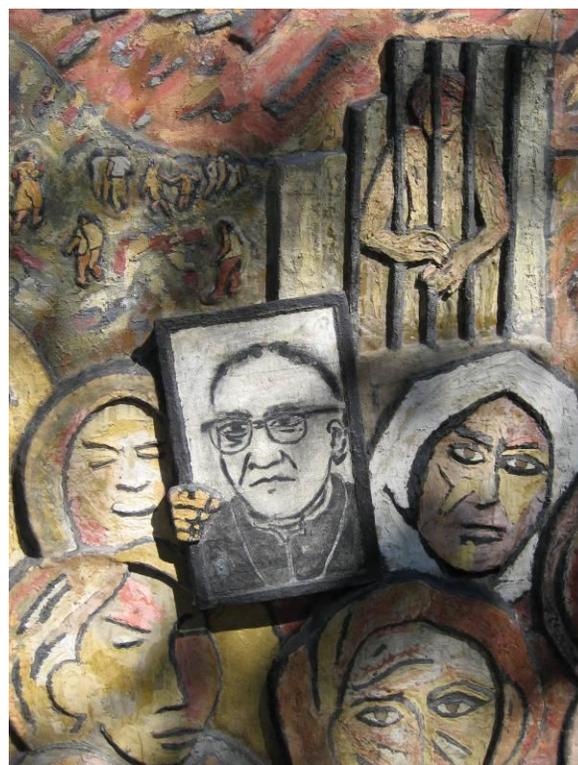
From 1980-1992, El Salvador suffered a civil war that left over 75,000 people dead, thousands more wounded, and caused hundreds of thousands to flee the country as refugees. The armed conflict, preceded by centuries of extreme economic and social inequality, has given rise to many of the problems faced in Salvadoran society today, including widespread poverty, very high levels of inequity, urban violence, and violence against women.

Since its inception this tiny nation has suffered from deeply entrenched economic inequity and extreme social stratification. Until very recently, El Salvador was notoriously controlled politically and economically by 14 powerful landowning families that had accumulated the lion's share of the wealth generated by the country's agricultural exports, most notably coffee. Throughout most of the 19th and 20th centuries, the landowning elite allied with the military to maintain political control and ensure their economic dominance, despite popular uprisings that continually challenged elite rule.

The 1970s saw a growth in the emergence of leftist organizations, both civilian-political

organizations and underground guerilla groups, which ultimately led to the formation of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), named for the hero of a failed popular uprising in 1932. Following a military takeover of the government in 1972, violence and repression escalated to unprecedented levels as thousands were killed by military-backed death squads. A military-civilian junta ousted this government in 1979 but violations of human rights continued unabated and anti-government guerilla activities intensified as a result.

The 1980 assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero, who was known for publicly urging an end to the military's violence against the Salvadoran people, was a major catalyst in the onset of full-blown civil war.



***A tribute to Archbishop Romero at the war memorial in San Salvador's Cuzcatlán Park***

This same year, four American women -- three Catholic nuns and one lay missionary -- were kidnapped, raped, and murdered, tragedies that brought widespread international attention to the brutality of the Salvadoran military.

Despite the notorious excesses of the military, fear of the spread of communism led the Reagan administration to increase aid to the Salvadoran government. Years of political instability, economic devastation, and violence ensued, including the infamous massacre of 900 civilians in El Mozote by military death squads and the assassination of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper, and her daughter.

Influenced partly by international pressure and largely by the will of the Salvadoran people to see an end to the violence and devastation, the government and the FMLN signed Peace Accords on January 16, 1992, legitimizing the FMLN as a political party and initiating a downscaling of military forces.

Since the signing of the Peace Accords, El Salvador has struggled with ongoing social unrest, economic devastation resulting from the war, and growing gang violence (fueled by deportations of Salvadoran gang members from major U.S. cities). El Salvador has also been hard-hit recently by natural disasters, including Hurricane Mitch in 1998 and two successive earthquakes in early 2001. The restructuring of the Salvadoran economy has also led to a decline in the agriculture sector, causing a rise in rural unemployment and increased migration to cities and to the U.S. Current estimates say approximately one out of six Salvadorans lives in the U.S. and remittances sent back to El Salvador exceed \$2.5 billion a year.

Despite widespread popular protest, El Salvador became the first country to ratify the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). Many human rights defenders

believe that CAFTA will exacerbate the gap between the rich and the poor in El Salvador by further undermining subsistence agriculture and negatively affecting labor conditions for garment industry and other factory workers.

There has been a recent surge in popular mobilizations related to CAFTA, health care reform, and resistance to the privatization of public services and natural resources, most notably water. Undoubtedly, a burgeoning civil society and the proliferation of non-governmental organizations, has had a significant impact in shaping the human rights movement in El Salvador. After so many years of conflict, many Salvadorans -- especially young people -- remain hopeful and actively involved in working toward building a more equitable and just society.



***“There is no peace without social justice”  
Marching in the streets of San Salvador on  
the anniversary of the Peace Accords***

Global Youth Connect's first human rights delegation program to El Salvador coincided with the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of Peace Accords. The purpose of the delegation was both to explore the roots of El Salvador's civil war and the long term impact of this violence on Salvadoran society. As we discovered, many Salvadorans question the nature of the "peace" their country is currently experiencing. Our delegation, too, was faced with the question of what it means for a society to truly achieve peace.

While the Peace Accords have achieved the incorporation of former rebel fighters as formal actors in El Salvador's political process, life for many Salvadorans continues to be shaped by the same injustices that gave rise to the armed conflict. Meanwhile, many of promises enshrined in the much-celebrated Peace Accords have failed to come to fruition under the current government.

And still, despite the obstacles, Salvadorans continue to struggle in pursuit of a lasting peace, a just society, free from violence and exploitation.



*GYC delegation members attend the official ceremony commemorating 15 years of peace.*

## **Centro de Intercambio y Solidaridad (CIS)**

*Center for Exchange and Solidarity*

Global Youth Connect chose to work with Centro de Intercambio y Solidaridad (CIS), or Center for Exchange and Solidarity CIS, as its partner organization in El Salvador because of the organization's strong commitment to peace-building, human rights and sustainable economic development—and because of its strong relationship with young human rights activists in communities throughout El Salvador.



CIS was founded in 1993 after the signing of the Peace Accords in El Salvador. The vision of the organization is to promote continued international accompaniment and solidarity with grassroots movements for social and economic justice and participatory democracy. Such movements are critical to achieving structural changes in the post war period. Utilizing a variety of strategies, CIS seeks to address the root causes of the war -- economic and social injustice together with a lack of democratic openings to make change -- which are still present today in El Salvador.

Through its Human Rights Network, CIS actively participates in campaigns to promote respect for human rights in El Salvador and works to engage the international community in standing up for important human rights issues. CIS issues regular action alerts and publishes a quarterly bulletin on current events, politics, and the economy of El Salvador.

CIS has two programs that support integrated development and grassroots organizing. Through its Solidarity Partners program, CIS facilitates international accompaniment of organizations and communities working for economic and social justice, providing support for communities where there is little support by other NGOs or the government. Through their Grassroots Organizer program, solidarity organizations and individuals contribute to pay part of the salaries of grassroots organizers in order to strengthen civic participation and the defense of citizens' rights. Both programs specifically focus on empowering women and youth.



*Delegation participants together with young Salvadoran human rights activists at the CIS*

The Solidarity Crafts program works with women, ex-combatants, returned refugees, single mothers, and marginalized communities who have formed artisan cooperatives founded on the principles of fair wages, communal ownership, humane working conditions, and

democratic participation. By selling and distributing crafts made by these local cooperatives, the CIS encourages both integrated economic development and the empowerment of local communities.

CIS also runs the Mélida Anaya Montes Language School, providing English and Spanish instruction using popular education techniques and highlighting social justice issues and human rights themes.

In addition, CIS has facilitated six international elections observation missions designed to contribute to free and fair elections, generate a safe environment to stimulate democratic participation; support organizing for social and economic justice; deepen understanding of social and economic structures that govern the country and their impact and to promote people-to-people solidarity.

To learn more about the CIS and how to get involved in their work, visit:

[www.cis-elsalvador.org](http://www.cis-elsalvador.org).

## Human Rights Learning Community

During the delegation's first week in El Salvador, we gathered together for three days with young Salvadoran human rights defenders to explore issues of violence, its connection with human rights and of the role of youth in creating a lasting peace.

As with all of Global Youth Connect's delegation programs, the "Learning Community" is a space where young people come together in an interactive workshop to build community, explore issues, and work together toward creative solutions.

The overall goal of the workshop was to develop a participatory analysis of violence, in its many forms, as a violation of basic human rights and to engage youth in formulating specific grassroots strategies for change. As part of this process, participants were asked to draw on their own experiences of violence as a starting point for understanding both the root causes of violence and the manifestations of violence on an interpersonal and societal level.

Participants were then asked to analyze their lived experiences and understanding of violence in relation to the basic tenets laid forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and under existing international human rights law. What emerged was an expression of the complex relationship between theoretical ideas and the reality of a world mired in violence.



Over the course of the workshop, participants came to understand the perpetuation of violence as a historical process with a direct relationship to issues of social and economic justice. Rather than interpreting violence in narrow terms, participants came to a collective understanding of violence as the absence of conditions of peace. Participants were then challenged to define for themselves a vision of peace that would guide their strategies.



## Reflections from Workshop Participants

**“If human rights are not respected, at least they are beginning to be recognized and are generating consciousness. This has to do with structural violence, social violence, and the violence of the State.”**

**“The notion of human rights consists of collection of ideas for the promotion of peace, so as such it has to do with violence. However, there are those that use “human rights” in the promotion of violence, for example the US with Iraq.”**

**“The importance of human rights is that they serve as a foundation. At least it recognized that they exist, but now we need the power of the law and of institutions to enforce them.”**

**“There is violence because of the lack of respect for human rights. If one doesn’t have access to the resources to eat and to have an education, it’s probable that violence will be a part of life.”**

Taking El Salvador as a case study, workshop participants worked in groups to identify specific manifestations of violence, analyze root causes, and to propose concrete solutions for peacebuilding. Through this process, social and economic justice emerged as central to achieving a lasting peace.

Based on these conclusions, participants sought to promote peace through the promotion of social and economic justice. In small groups, they designed short, medium and long-term goals for addressing each problem.

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## Workshop Case Studies

### VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

A type of violence fueled by lack of legal protections for women and the widespread acceptance of *machismo* values.

### MIGRATION

A manifestation of the economic violence of poverty and exclusion that contributes to a cycle of social and familial disintegration.

### GANGS

An expression of violence rooted in economic exclusion, the aftermath of war, family disintegration and the criminalization of youth.

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## What was the most important thing that you learned from this workshop?

**“Youth from the U.S. and El Salvador share the same ideas about human rights and we share similar ideas about how to realize human rights.”**

**“Although it is difficult to come to a conclusion on a big problem and with people who think differently, but working together is easier and results in a more profound solution.”**

**“Peacebuilding is something permanent and collective”**

**“That many topics that seem taboo don’t have to be because we have the power to begin these important conversations.”**

**“That is we are able to resolve the problems that affect us, even though they seem very big, if we work with people from other cultures. In fact, it is the only way in which we can change society, the system and everything else.”**

**“I learned that young people from the U.S. are very intelligent and have a spirit of solidarity. Before, I did not have this idea. If young people can change human rights and the world, then there is hope.”**

## Cinquera

After concluding the workshop, the delegation had the opportunity to visit Cinquera, a community deeply transformed by El Salvador's violent past and which is now struggling to build a lasting peace.

Upon arriving in Cinquera, the delegation was greeted by leaders of the **Association of Reconstruction and Municipal Development (ARDM)**, a citizen's initiative that emerged as a coordinated effort to rebuild the community after the war. We were also greeted by a group of university students, studying on scholarships facilitated through our partner organization, CIS, who spoke to us of their lives and hopes for the future. It wasn't until later in the evening that we began to understand the depths of the community's struggle through the remarkable and devastating testimony of Cinquera's oral historian, Pablo Alvarenga.

Typical of many of El Salvador's rural villages, Cinquera's residents had lived for many generations in unthinkable poverty, subject to extreme exploitation and abuse by the country's landowning elite and their military allies. In the 1970s, when liberation theology began to awaken the consciousness of Cinquera's poor, the community was subject to brutal repression that eventually drove many families into hiding in the surrounding mountainside. Under rebel control during much of the armed conflict, the village of Cinquera was for many years entirely abandoned by civilians and at one point used by the Salvadoran military for target practice. When residents began to repopulate Cinquera in the early 1990s, nothing was left of the town's infrastructure. In addition, families had been divided and dispersed, and hundreds of people had been killed.



*A local monument to Cinquera's fallen heroes*

Cinquera's current population is now a mix of native-born residents and newer residents resettled from other conflict zones after the signing of the Peace Accords. The community is still struggling to recover psychologically, physically and economically from the devastation of war.

Ecotourism is one of the many sustainable economic development efforts promoted by the ARDM, which manages a private ecological preserve and historic site. On our visit, the delegation was led on a guided tour of the Cinquera forest where we saw the vestiges of a pre-war indigo processing system and the site of a former guerilla encampment. We enjoyed the beautiful view of Lake Suchitlán and a refreshing swim in one of the park's pristine waterfalls.

## Site Visits: San Salvador

During our stay in San Salvador, the delegation visited several organizations engaged in building a more just and peaceful society in El Salvador today.

## “Las Mélidas”

### *Mélida Anaya Montes Women’s Movement*

Known throughout El Salvador as “Las Mélidas,” the Asociación Movimiento de Mujeres “Mélida Anaya Montes” is a feminist organization committed to promoting the rights and interests of women. Founded after the signing of the Peace Accords, “Las Mélidas” works to strengthen the participation of women in diverse sectors of society, particularly in the construction of democracy. Their programs focus on feminist education, health and non-violence, political participation and citizen initiatives, and women’s social and economic development.



While visiting Las Mélidas, our delegation met with two women who work in El Salvador’s garment industry in one of the few factories where workers are represented by an independent labor union. They shared with us the reality of so many women working in *maquilas*, or sweatshops, where exploitation, discrimination and sexual harassment are all too common.

[www.lasmelidas.org](http://www.lasmelidas.org)

## Nueva Generación XXI

### *New Generation XXI*

NGXXI is a youth organization located in the marginal urban municipality of Mejicanos bordering San Salvador. In a community plagued with poverty and violence, NGXXI is one of the few spaces providing young people an opportunity for creative expression and self-development.



The centerpiece of the organization is the group’s all-volunteer run community library, the only library serving the 150,000 residents of Mejicanos. With the library serving as their home base, NGXXI sponsors educational and artistic workshops for other youth, school children and community members. In addition, the youth of NGXXI have formed both traditional and contemporary dance groups that have performed throughout El Salvador and Central America.

<http://ngxxi.loyola.edu/index.htm>

## Equipo Maíz

Equipo Maíz is a center for popular education that strives to contribute to a more democratic society in El Salvador. In addition to providing trainings for community organizations and social justice activists, the group publishes leaflets, books, and cassettes designed to facilitate a dialogue around important issues in present-day El Salvador. Through its publications, Equipo Maíz provides educational tools dealing with themes of history, sustainable agriculture, genetically modified foods, sexuality, gender equality, economic development, fair trade and community organizing.

[www.equipomaiz.org.sv](http://www.equipomaiz.org.sv)

## Museo de la Palabra y La Imagen *Museum of the Word and the Image*

The Museo de la Palabra y La Imagen is a non-profit citizen's initiative dedicated to investigating, rescuing, preserving and publicly exhibiting elements of El Salvador's culture and history.

[www.museo.com.sv](http://www.museo.com.sv)



## Centro Monseñor Oscar Romero

*Mons. Oscar Romero Center*

Named for El Salvador's most widely revered martyr, the Mons. Oscar Romero Center is housed at the Jesuit University of Central America (UCA) in San Salvador. The UCA is one of El Salvador's preeminent universities, with a strong tradition of promoting social justice and respect for human rights. In 1989, six Jesuit priests, along with their housekeeper and her daughter, were assassinated on the campus by government security forces in an effort to silence their outspoken criticism of government abuses and their promotion of liberation theology. Today the center is the site of a monument to the murdered Jesuits and houses a museum honoring their lives and that of Archbishop Romero.

[www.uca.edu.sv](http://www.uca.edu.sv)



*American-born Jesuit Fr. Dean Brackley discusses the role of the Jesuit community in defending human rights in El Salvador*

## Fieldwork: San Rafael Cedros

The delegation conducted its fieldwork in the municipality of San Rafael Cedros, one of the communities in which CIS, our partner organization, works to support community organization and economic development through its grassroots organizer program. The

*Mesa Ciudadana*, or “Citizens’ Roundtable” of San Rafael Cedros coordinates the efforts local steering committees dedicated to promoting sustainable economic development, women’s empowerment, and awareness around economic and environmental issues on both a local and a global scale. The group is also committed to encouraging youth participation in community projects and administers a scholarship program for local high school students.

During our visit to San Rafael Cedros, we were hosted by local families. It was an experience that allowed participants to form close relationships with their Salvadoran host families and to therefore gain a deeper understanding of ways in which issues such economic inequality, migration, and social injustice continue to hamper El Salvador’s development in the post-conflict period.

As part of the fieldwork project, delegation participants organized and facilitated a one-day human rights workshop with local high school students. Building on the skills and knowledge gained in the learning community, this fieldwork project served as an opportunity for delegation participants to put new skills to practice. It was also a unique space for youth leaders of San Rafael Cedros to give creative expression to their own experiences and relate local issues to global human rights concerns.



During the second portion of our visit to San Rafael Cedros, participants assisted the women’s committee of Cocobano in breaking ground on construction of a new chicken coop. The chicken coop will become part of collectively-operated *microempresa*, or small business, which will provide women a source of local employment. Many of the women in Cocobano (a rural hamlet of San Rafael Cedros) have little choice but to travel long distances to work in *maquilas* to support their families. Local small business cooperatives contribute to building a strong and sustainable local economy in which women are empowered as business-owners rather than subject to the abuses so common in factory work.



*Community member and delegation participants work together to lay the foundation for a sustainable local economy*

## Delegation Participants

### **Bethany Berman-Brady**

Bethany attends Colorado College where she is studying anthropology. Last year, she spent seven months working at a children's hospital in Ecuador while studying at a local university. She later returned to Ecuador to continue volunteering and conduct research. Back home in Hawaii, Bethany has worked as a counselor to special needs children, served as a mentor, volunteered at a homeless shelter and served as a volunteer mediator. She also co-founded the Imua Lokani Book Project, dedicated to helping fight illiteracy abroad. As a student at Colorado College, she has become very involved in activism, which she plans to continue throughout her career. In the future, Bethany plans to practice naturopathic medicine and serve as advocate for traditional and alternative medicine in public health.

### **Camille D'Andrea**

Camille is currently pursuing a Bachelor's Degree in international studies at The College of New Jersey. She spent a semester studying abroad at the Latin American University of Science and Technology in Costa Rica, where she also volunteered at the Center for the Friends of Peace. In addition, she has traveled throughout Latin American and Europe. Camille has worked as an intern with the National Organization for Women and for the United Way of Greater Mercer County and has volunteered with the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen and the National Kidney Foundation. She currently serves as chapter president of Phi Sigma Sigma Sorority International. She is very interested in human rights and social justice, as well as international relations. In the future, Camille plans to attend graduate school and would like to work for a non-profit organization dedicated to human rights or social services.



### **Ja'Shaun DeShazor**

Ja'Shaun is a graduating senior at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University of Virginia Tech where she is double-majoring in Spanish language and literature and international studies with a foreign policy concentration. During high school she attended Virginia Girl's State and has been interested in issues of government and foreign relations ever since. At Virginia Tech, she is involved in both the International Relations Organization and Virginia Tech Young Democrats. Ja'Shaun is active in promoting women's issues on campus through participation in a variety of activities of the VA Tech's Women's Center. She is also a founder of EMPOWER, a mentoring organization dedicated to working with high-school aged minority women. She has volunteered as a relief worker in post-Katrina New Orleans and as an English as a Second Language tutor. Ja'Shaun is planning to attend graduate school where she intends to pursue a Master's in either Public Administration or Diplomacy. She ultimately hopes to work at an international level to promote peace-building and economic development.

### **Suzanne Firestone**

Suzy is a senior at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, majoring in political science with a minor in social and economic justice. She recently spent a semester abroad

studying at the Pontifica Universidad Católica de Valparaíso in Chile, and also spent a summer studying Spanish in Guatemala. Suzy has interned with the Democratic Party at both her school and in her home community of Cincinnati, experiences which have led her to pursue greater involvement in issues on a grassroots level. She is considering a career in law and hopes to work as a human rights advocate in the U.S. or Latin America. Suzy is particularly interested in reproductive rights and issues affecting women, sexual minorities, and immigrants.



### **Bayley Lawrence**

Bayley is a senior at Colby College, majoring in Latin American Studies with a minor in anthropology. She recently spent a semester abroad studying at the Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City. Previously, she spent a month volunteering at an orphanage and school for street children in Quito, Ecuador, where she developed a particular interest in the rights of children and indigenous people in Latin America. She has also volunteered for Habitat for Humanity and Volunteer Vermont. Bayley is an avid athlete and loves the outdoors. She has worked throughout Vermont as a member of the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps and, at Colby, she has led several trips for the Outing Club and Freshman Orientation.

### **Sarah Lucas**

Sarah recently earned her Associate's Degree in liberal arts at Monroe Community College, where she was very involved in a variety of student clubs. She served as Vice President of the Global Union International Student Association, as a Model United Nations delegate, and as Treasurer of the Spanish Club. She is now a junior transfer student at SUNY Geneseo College. Sarah has also been involved in the Holocaust and Genocide Studies Project, dedicated to raising awareness and funds to stop genocide in the Sudan. She is very interested in humanitarian issues and in promoting cross-cultural understanding. Sarah also has a great love of languages and aspires to learn Arabic. In the future, she hopes to spend time abroad learning more languages and perhaps volunteering with the Peace Corps.



### **Raquel Nunes**

Raquel is an international student from Brazil who was awarded a scholarship to study for a semester at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. In Brazil, she studies law at the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais where she is a member of the International Law and Human Rights Study Group; two articles written by the group on the Inter-American Court of Human Rights have recently been accepted for publication. Currently at Baylor, Raquel is a member of the Model Organization of

American States. At home in Brazil, she has worked with her university's Department of Advocacy for the Poor, at the Brazilian Mediation Courts, at the International Law Center, and the Brazilian Federal Prosecutor's Office. Before obtaining her undergraduate law degree, Raquel hopes to intern at the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in Costa Rica. She plans to pursue graduate work in the field of human rights law and is particularly interested in promoting human rights in Latin America.

### **Kathya Orellana**

Kathya is a political science and Latin American studies major at St. Mary's College of Maryland, where she is very involved in a variety of campus activities. She is a member of Raices Hispanas, the Soccer Club, and the Student Government Association. She also is on the staff of her college's Admissions Office and has worked for the Office of International Education. In addition, she works as an Office Assistant for the Food and Drug Administration. Kathya was born in El Salvador and has traveled back on several occasions to visit family; she has also traveled throughout Europe. She is very passionate about working with children and spent three years coaching a children's soccer team of 3-5 year-olds. Kathya plans to attend law school and is most interested in working with youth to create positive change in the world.



### **Kendra Penry**

Kendra is currently pursuing a Master's Degree in international affairs with a concentration in conflict resolution at the Elliot School of International Affairs at The George Washington University in Washington, DC. Before beginning graduate school, she worked as an Americorps volunteer with the Colorado I Have a Dream Foundation, where she was responsible for developing and running an after-school program for a primarily Hispanic group of fourth graders in Denver. Kendra has also spent several summers working impoverished regions of Appalachia, coordinating volunteers and home repair projects for local families. As an undergraduate at Hollins University, she studied abroad in Spain. After graduating with a degree in international affairs and a minor in Spanish, she spent a year in Puerto Rico as a Rotary Club Ambassadorial Scholar where she studied at the Universidad Interamericana and volunteered as an English teacher in a local orphanage. Kendra is very interested in human rights and international travel and hopes to someday work for an international organization dedicated to human rights education and/or advocacy.

### **Samantha Vance**

Samantha is a senior at Tulane University in New Orleans planning to graduate with a Bachelor's Degree in Latin American studies with a minor in Spanish. She also attended Montreat College on a temporary basis after being evacuated from New Orleans due to Hurricane Katrina, an experience that deeply affected her and has inspired her to learn more about displacement in a global context. Upon returning to New Orleans, Samantha began volunteering with the Hispanic Apostolate as a teacher of English as a Second or Other Language, where she works with recent immigrants to post-Katrina New Orleans.

Samantha has a variety of other work and volunteer experience. In her native Florida, she has worked as a sales representative, make-up artist, administrative intern, and as a server in a local café; she has also volunteered at the Brevard Zoo and the Daily Bread Soup Kitchen. Samantha has also traveled to France and several countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, and has a great interest in photography. In the future, Samantha hopes to work in the field of international human rights law.

## **Salvadoran Workshop Participants**

Delmy Elizabeth Martinez Martinez  
Carlos Ernesto Huezo Flores  
Jose Santos Martinez Viscarra  
Carolina Beatriz Hernandez Melendez  
Mayra Lourdes Deras  
Omar Efrain Calderon Perez  
Lucinda Margarita Quintanilla Ayala  
Ana Celia Flores Portillo  
Roberto Enrique Vargas Estrada  
Xiomara Natali Sanchez Maravilla  
Maira Del Pilar Romero

## **Program Staff**

### **Emma Kreyche**

*Latin America Program Director  
Global Youth Connect*

Emma comes to GYC with a history of activism and community organizing experience. As a child, her family's involvement in the Sanctuary Movement exposed her to the painful realities faced by Central American war refugees, an experience that deeply impacted the course of her life. In high school and college, she volunteered with Amigos de las Américas for three consecutive summers in Mexico and Bolivia, and has since traveled extensively in Latin America. While

pursuing her BA in Latin American Studies at Bard College, Emma became involved in the global justice movement and co-founded the Migrant Labor Project, promoting student involvement in direct service, research and advocacy around the issues faced by local migrant workers. After graduating, Emma settled in the Hudson Valley to continue her work with farm workers and low-wage immigrant workers. She now calls the Hudson Valley home and remains actively involved in local economic justice issues and anti-racist activism. In addition to her work with GYC, Emma conducts training workshops for organizations, schools, and individuals around the themes of racism, white privilege and community organizing. She is also a community mediator for the Mediation Center of Dutchess County. As Latin America Program Director, Emma oversees GYC's programs in Guatemala, El Salvador and Venezuela.

### **Christen Dobson**

*Special Project Assistant  
Global Youth Connect*

Prior to traveling to El Salvador as the Special Project Assistant for the delegation, Christen was working as a volunteer with Khemara, a grassroots human rights organization promoting the development of women and children in Cambodia. She is an alumna of the August 2005 GYC Guatemala delegation and also served as Program Assistant for GYC's 2006 delegation to Guatemala. From 2005-2006, Christen served as the Program Assistant for Global Youth Connect, where she provided administrative support to all of GYC's delegation programs. Through her academic studies and practical experiences she has focused specifically on Asia and Latin America. In addition to her time in Guatemala with GYC, she volunteered with a health organization based in Santa Ana, El Salvador,

working with the construction of latrines in rural communities and has also spent time in Mexico. She has a BA from Mount Union College with a double major in international studies and Japanese and a minor in Spanish. During her undergraduate studies she served as the student representative on the Faculty Subcommittee for International Education, advocated study abroad and involvement in internationally focused and social justice organizations on campus, and held study sessions for religion and English as a second language classes. She also spent one year studying Japanese language, international politics, and human rights at Kansai Gaidai University in Osaka, Japan, and traveling in Asia. Christen has advanced language skills in both Japanese and Spanish.

**Dora Alicia Alas (Iris)**

*Grassroots Organizer & Health Promoter  
Citizen's Roundtable, San Rafael Cedros,  
Cuscatlan*

Iris works as a grassroots organizer with the aim of building women's and youth participation in community development. Iris has worked for the development of a *Citizen's Roundtable* for community decision-making. She, along with members of the *Citizen's Roundtable*, have focused on grassroots organization and training for village steering committees. They have also opened spaces for youth to participate in development. Iris gives trainings in three communities on themes including leadership, self-esteem, the environment, women's rights, and free trade agreements. She has also developed a women's group of 28 women with a small sewing workshop. Iris also serves as a coordinator for various housing projects in the municipality and is fighting along with residents for land titles and property rights.