
EL SALVADOR



Capital: San Salvador
Area: 21,040 km²
Population: 6,485,000 (1990) (a)
Population density: 308.2/km²
Urban population: 48% (1990)
Per-capita GDP in USD: 1,070 (1989) (b)
Life expectancy at birth: 64.6 years (c)
Infant mortality rate: 59‰ live births (1991) (d)
Illiteracy 42% (1986) (e)
Population under poverty line: 71% (1990) (f)
Human Development Index 1992: 0.498 (96th) (g)¹

Democratization and economic and social development: toward a new historical era

On January 16, 1992, under United Nations supervision, the Government of El Salvador and the guerrilla organizations making up the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), signed peace agreements in a solemn ceremony at Chapultepec Castle in Mexico City ending a civil war that had lasted more than 12 years. The civil war, which dominated El Salvador's history during the 1980s, was the ultimate expression of a profound crisis that, in the political, economic, and social spheres, was born in the 1960s and 1970s and had its roots in a historical tradition of social exclusion and political violence. During those decades, vigorous economic growth rooted in industrialization and the Central American Common Market (MCCA) paradoxically accentuated the country's inequalities, social polarization,

and poverty. Modernization also made clear the obsolescence of a political system dominated by old oligarchies which could only be maintained through political exclusion, systematic recourse to violence, and consequent violations of human rights. Beyond these factors were the economic crisis, which since the end of the 1970s demonstrated the exhaustion of the growth strategy that had prevailed until then. The turning point in the development of the Salvadoran economy occurred in 1979 with a pronounced slowing of growth and a fall in domestic investment owing to an increase in inflation, the fiscal deficit and service on the external debt, decreases in external demand and the fall in prices of agricultural products for export, the collapse of the MCCA, and thus of markets for much of El Salvador's

industrial production. As a result of these phenomena, the per-capita gross domestic product (GDP) fell by a total of 12% between 1981 and 1991.² These factors contributed still more to the increase in poverty, which in 1986 affected 87% of the population and heightened social conflict.

From 1979 to 1981 the civil war widened in a context of political instability and massive violations of human rights, which were symbolized by the Sumpul River massacre and the assassination of Monsignor Oscar Arnulfo Romero. The country's economy and politics were completely subordinated to the war from that time. The conflict, fed by United States economic and military assistance, which exceeded a million dollars a day during the middle years of the decade, had extremely high human and material costs which the country may need years to surmount. The war left more than 75,000 dead, of whom 50,000 were civilians, and 8,000 disappearances. Military expenditure came to represent 28.2% of public spending in 1988,³ and the damage to the infrastructure, together with that caused by the San Salvador earthquake of 1986, totaled more than USD 3,150 million between 1980 and 1989, which was much higher than El Salvador's external debt.⁴ The war and political and military violence, together with the economic and social crisis, were also the cause of mass population movements in and outside the country, a population dislocation that affected more than 2 million Salvadorans, a third of the population, who left their places of origin in search of security and better living conditions, either as refugees and internally displaced persons or as emigrants abroad, especially to the United States.

The road to the peace agreements was long and tortuous, in spite of the fact that it was clear at mid-decade that neither of the two parties could achieve military victory over its adversary. The first efforts at negotiation, undertaken in 1984 as part of the reform policies of President Napoleón Duarte, failed. Nor were concrete advances in negotiation made in the framework of the Esquipulas Peace Plan, signed in 1987. In 1989, however, a change in the situation occurred. The elections brought a new Government

to power headed by Alfredo Cristiani, and the FMLN launched a powerful military offensive that enabled it to bring large parts of the country under its direct control. The conflict reached a new climax in which there were aerial bombardments of the urban areas under FMLN control, which caused more than 4,000 deaths and in which human rights violations again occurred, culminating in the assassination by elements of the Armed Forces of six Jesuit priests and two of their employees at the University of Central America (UCA), including the university's rector, Ignacio Ellacuría. Paradoxically, these events made still clearer the impossibility of a military conclusion by either party and helped hasten the process of dialogue and negotiation. Because of these events, U.S. aid, until then a key factor in sustaining the conflict, would become a crucially important factor in promoting a negotiated solution.

In April 1990, under the auspices and mediation of the Secretary General of the United Nations and with the support of the heads of state of Spain, Colombia, Mexico, and Venezuela, a new cycle of discussions began which this time were irreversible and culminated in the Chapultepec Agreements. These accords, in February 1992, included a cease-fire and creation of a National Commission to Consolidate Peace (COPAZ) to verify them. A timetable for executing the agreements began to take effect at that time, and it included demobilization of the FMLN and its conversion into a political party, reduction in the size of the Armed Forces, their purging, and the disbanding of counterinsurgent battalions; creation of a national police force under civilian control, which would include former FMLN combatants; changes in the agrarian ownership system and provision of land to peasants, especially in areas under guerrilla control; changes in the Constitution and especially in the judicial and electoral system; creation of a National Procurator for Human Rights, and the organization of a "Truth Commission" charged with investigating human rights violations. During 1992, most of the problems in carrying out the accords revolved around the demobilization timetable, the

land question, and human rights, as demonstrated by the extensive national debate caused by publication of the "Truth Commission's" report, which implicated members of the Armed Forces, including its highest officers, in human rights violations.

From the moment hostilities ceased, El Salvador has confronted a new stage in its history dominated by the challenges of peace, which is understood as something more than the absence of open warfare. Achieving peace will involve overcoming the profound causes of the crisis and, therefore, facing the challenges of democracy and development. Accordingly, the Chapultepec agreements should be viewed as something more than a simple armistice. They are the starting point for national reconciliation and reconstruction, reform of the political system in the sense of greater openness and participation, protection of human rights, economic renewal, and the organization of a more just and equitable society by overcoming the deep social inequalities and deficiencies in "human development" that have burdened Salvadoran society throughout its history.

The employment situation and the labor market

In 1985 the economically active population (EAP) numbered almost 1,654,000, of whom 37% were women. Agriculture continued to be the sector of the economy with the greatest capacity to absorb labor since it provided employment to 34% of the EAP. The manufacturing sector accounted for 21% and services for the remaining 44%. Forty-five percent of the total EAP were wage earners and 26% were self-employed.⁵

The crisis has accentuated one of the structural features of the Salvadoran economy, its inability to generate enough jobs to absorb growth in the work force. Phenomena such as unemployment, underemployment, informal work, and worker migration abroad, which were already common in the 1970s, increased strongly during the 1980s. According to data from ECLAC and

the Central American Monetary Council (CMC), open unemployment affected 10% of the economically active population (EAP) in 1970; in 1980, it was 16%. By 1985 the unemployment rate doubled, reaching 33%; between 1985 and 1989 it stabilized at around 25%.⁶ Official data indicate that from 1979 to 1988, underemployment increased from 29.8% to 55% of the EAP.⁷ Underemployment is more common in rural areas since there are a large number of workers who are landless or whose holdings are too small to feed a family, who work part time on large estates. These figures might be still larger if massive migration to the United States, mostly of working-age persons, had not occurred. In this context, the peace process may contribute strongly to an increase in unemployment if policies to reassimilate returnees and demobilized members of the FMLN and the Armed Forces occupationally are not adopted.

The urban labor market has also undergone extensive "informalization." Informal work, in self-employed occupations or small businesses which are predominantly nonproductive, have low productivity and income, and are on the periphery of regulation, accounted for 30% of jobs in the Metropolitan Area of San Salvador (AMSS) in 1971, while employment in the "formal" or "modern" sector accounted for the remaining 70%. In 1986, informal employment in the AMSS accounted for 33.2% of the total, and in 1988, 37%.⁸ At mid-decade it was estimated that the urban informal sector (UIS) represented 42% of the EAP in all of the country's urban centers.⁹ Although other studies have found a smaller incidence of informality, they agree that informalization is clearly perceptible.¹⁰

A closer examination of informal work shows that trade accounts for 49% of the informally employed, while the manufacturing industry accounts for 22% and other services for 17%. Informal workers are more common in peripheral urban areas and in medium-sized cities than in the AMSS. Also perceptible is a greater presence of women, especially in trade, and the fact that they receive lower wages than average pay in the formal sector, despite the fact that

their work days are often longer. In 1986, 45.7% of informal workers in San Salvador earned incomes lower than the minimum wage, 63.7% were below the average income of workers in the manufacturing sector, and 60% worked more than 46 hours a week. The proportions were still greater for self-employed workers and wage earners in small businesses.¹¹ All this clearly indicates that the informal sector is, above all, a sphere whose purpose is subsistence rather than a dynamic sector of the economy with a capacity for accumulation and growth.

The evolution of poverty and social policies

Together with Guatemala and Honduras, El Salvador is one of the main poles of poverty in the Central American isthmus and one of the Latin American countries where this phenomenon is most severe.¹² The high incidence of poverty and, especially, of extreme poverty, is the most visible manifestation of great polarization and inequality in income distribution, a historical characteristic of the Salvadoran social structure and not just a short-term effect of the crisis of the 1980s. In 1970, the richest 20% of the population received 60% of the income and the very wealthiest 5% received 27%.¹³ In 1980, as a result of a "concentrating and exclusive" development model, polarization was still more acute and 66% of income was in the hands of the wealthiest 20% of the population.

In 1980, before the social effects of the economic crisis and the armed conflict became visible, poverty already affected two in every three Salvadorans, or 68.1% of the population. When this figure is broken down, it is found that 50.6% were extremely poor in that their incomes did not allow them to meet family nutritional needs, and 17.5% could be considered poor in that their incomes did not meet all their basic needs. Poverty was a markedly rural phenomenon since the proportion was 76.4% of the population in rural areas, while in urban areas it was 57.6%.¹⁴

The high incidence of rural poverty is a direct result of the extreme concentration of land ownership in Salvadoran agriculture and, as we noted, translates into the existence of a large number of landless peasants and the fact that, according to 1983 census data, 95% of properties were small farms so tiny that their production could not guarantee a family's subsistence.¹⁵ To this fact must be added lack of access to basic health and education services, which is much more pronounced in the countryside. In 1980 the Salvadoran Government, with support from the Agency for International Development (USAID), launched an ambitious agrarian reform program to provide land to 300,000 peasants in order to overcome the deep-rooted causes of rural poverty and the serious political polarization of the peasant population. This program, in which only the initial phases were partially implemented, was a resounding failure because of opposition from landowners, and in 1987 it was finally abandoned, in many cases having had effects contrary to the objective that it was intended to achieve.¹⁶

The crisis and conflict made the pauperization of Salvadoran society more acute. In 1985 the national proportion was 87%, and 51% of the population lived in extreme poverty. Confirming the trend toward a greater concentration of poverty in the countryside, the poor rural population in that year was 92% of the total and the extremely poor segment, 60%. More recent data indicate that, even though the general index of poverty appears to have decreased in relation to 1985 to 71% of the population, the same is not true of extreme poverty figures, which have climbed to 52%. Although poverty in rural areas seems to have declined overall during the same period to 85% of the rural population, extreme rural poverty has continued to grow, until it affects 70% of the rural population.¹⁷ Despite this, urban poverty had the greatest increase during the 1980s.¹⁸

Among the many factors that explain the increase in poverty in rural areas are the deterioration of the peasant economy and, especially,

the uprooting of hundreds of thousands of peasants who, as displaced persons or refugees, have experienced drastic worsening in their living standards. In urban areas, the increase in poverty is due to growth in urban marginalization, exacerbated by a large migrant population, the growing difficulty family heads have in finding jobs,¹⁹ and, specifically, the growth of the informal economy and, especially, the deterioration in real wages, one of the most dramatic in Latin America and the largest in Central America except for Nicaragua. In 1991, the purchasing power of the urban minimum wage was only 34% of that of 1980.²⁰ For this reason, a large number of "new poor" come from the wage-earning sector of the formal economy, though in most poor urban households family incomes wholly or partly depend on the informal sector. Studies of urban poverty in El Salvador show that poverty affected 34% of workers in the formal sector and 64% of those in the informal sector, and that malnutrition existed in 89% of the households whose heads were crafts workers and in 85% of those whose income depended on street sales.²¹ These data make clear the close relationship between poverty and informal work, but also that not all poor are informal workers and not all informal workers are poor.²²

As already noted, the social policy of the 1980s was governed by the war in two ways. On one hand, it led to the destruction of part of the social infrastructure and reductions in health, education, and social assistance budgets and thus the ability of the Salvadoran state, already very small, to carry out a social policy to confront the social effects of the crisis. The intended "universalism" of the policies was thus voided of content, beyond uncoordinated and scattered initiatives that were short-term answers to emergency situations created by the war, such as the assistance provided to displaced persons.²³

On the other hand, the war led to a large flow of humanitarian aid from many countries and international agencies, much of which was channeled through NGOs or specialized governmental agencies, which enabled a large proportion of the population to be cared for despite the

growing weakness of the state. Activities against poverty were carried out by these agencies with flexibility and in direct contact with the affected population, though in many instances it was provided in an uncoordinated way, only in the short term, and with very clear political interests, using social action and humanitarian aid as yet another element in an armed conflict that, because it was domestic, involved the civilian population.

Since 1989 there have been significant changes in the orientation of social policy as part of the neoliberal ideology and limited concept of the role of the state in the 1989-1994 Development Plan launched by the new Government headed by Alfredo Cristiani. The structural adjustment policies demanded by international financial agencies have had a direct impact on this change in policy. According to this concept, economic growth would in itself solve social problems by creating productive jobs. Nevertheless, short-term compensatory measures have been established to lessen the social costs of adjustment; examples are the Emergency Social Program, sectoral social programs, and the Social Investment Fund (FIS). All are based on focused, decentralized strategies involving private-sector participation.²⁴

The Emergency Social Program promotes job creation through execution of infrastructural works in municipalities and some 200 marginal urban communities, as well as the granting of credits to small businesses. The sectoral social programs include those that specific institutions were conducting, such as the National Area Restoration Council (CONARA) in counterinsurgent pacification areas and the National Family Affairs Secretariat (SNF). One of the most innovative instruments, however, has been the Social Investment Fund (FIS). Created in 1990 as part of the structural adjustment program, it began operating in 1991 with a term lasting until 1994. The FIS finances social and productive infrastructure projects, improvements in urban areas, equipment for primary health care facilities, and USD 1,000 to USD 20,000 revolving credit funds.²⁵ The FIS's activities have focused

on the 78 municipalities with the greatest deficiencies on the basis of nutrition indicators, and on the 52 municipalities devastated by the conflict in Oriente and Chalatenango Departments. Forty-two percent of the FIS's projects have been carried out by NGOs. A new social-policy instrument, created as part of the peace process, is the National Reconstruction Plan (PNR), which is aimed at 99 municipalities affected by the war. NGOs may be still more important in this Plan inasmuch as donors have conditioned their commitments, valued at USD 1,500 million, on their execution by NGOs.²⁶

Population movements: migrants, refugees, and displaced persons

One of the best known aspects of the crisis has been the large migratory movements that occurred during the decade. El Salvador, for various reasons, has been a country that has traditionally exported population searching for work and better living conditions. In the 1980s, however, historical migrant levels were spectacularly exceeded, and the massive phenomenon of refugees and displaced persons also appeared. It was now not just a matter of individuals making personal decisions to leave the country, but of large numbers of people forced to leave their places of origin because of warfare and deterioration in their economic situation.

The figures are eloquent in themselves in illustrating the magnitude of the phenomenon. Ten percent of the population—between 500,000 and 600,000 people—were displaced inside the country; 5%—more than 250,000 people—sought refuge in other countries, and an additional 8% became illegal immigrants. It was estimated in 1989 that there were 500,000 refugees, 400,000 internally displaced persons, and 30,000 returnees.²⁷ It should be added that it has been calculated that around a million Salvadorans have migrated to the United States legally or illegally. It has been noted that Los Angeles is already the

second largest Salvadoran city in number of inhabitants.²⁸

Most recognized refugees cared for by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) numbering between 13,000 and 21,000 people, were in refugee camps in Honduras. The largest number, however, was Salvadorans who were in an irregular situation; they were estimated at 80,000 in Honduras and up to 250,000 in Mexico, without counting those in transit to the United States.²⁹ Their situation is very precarious since there is no precise legal framework for international protection of such persons, they lack documentation, and so are in an illegal situation that leads to their defenselessness in dealings with employers or security forces and impossibility of exercising any of their rights. They have often flooded marginal areas of cities. Individual repatriations began in 1984, though the first collective return movements from Honduras began only in October 1987. They were almost forced by the refugees themselves, with the help of UNHCR, despite the Government's opposition and the persistence of the lack of security and violence that had forced them to leave. In 1991 there were more than 26,600 returnees.

In 1987, almost 65% of domestically displaced persons were in six departments: San Salvador, with 18% of the total; Morazán, 17.4%; Usulután, 12%; San Miguel, 11%; San Vicente, 9.7%, and Chalatenango, 7.5%.³⁰ Many have subsisted in the informal economy, and in many instances their change of location has lessened the insecurity that led to their displacement, but it has not made it disappear. For the security forces, the problem of the internally displaced persons has often been a question of "national security" in which humanitarian considerations have been peripheral.³¹ In this sense, some of the displacements have been forced by the Government and the Armed Forces.³² One of the main problems this population has encountered is lack of identity documents. Assistance for this segment of the population was initially spearheaded by the Church, various NGOs, and the International Committee of the

Red Cross (ICRC). Various agencies such as the National Displaced Persons Commission (CONADES) and the National Area Restoration Commission (CONARA) were later formed that carried out a charitable and "pacification" policy that did not achieve the objective of motivating displaced persons to return to their places of origin. Other assistance programs, especially after the International Conference on Refugees in Central America (CIREFCA) was held, have been conducted by NGOs and United Nations agencies, such as the Program on Displaced Persons and Refugees (PRODERE) of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

In short, population movements have affected a third of the population, significantly changing the country's demographic dynamics. The pace and intensity of migration indicate that there is a basic, direct or indirect political component in reasons for departure, even in migration to the United States. The migratory waves of 1981, 1983, and 1984 were closely related to the renewal of the war. It has been established that 75% of migrants to the United States left El Salvador starting in 1979. The remittances migrants in the United States send home are very important as a "softening cushion" for the crisis in family economies since, according to 1987 studies, they amount to USD 1,300 million a year, a figure similar to all the revenues from exports plus the U.S. aid that the country received in that year.³³ There are now strong pressures from U.S. immigration authorities, who have threatened to deport 200,000 illegal Salvadorans, which could have serious effects on the economy and employment.

Health, environmental sanitation, nutrition, and food security

Vital data about the Salvadoran population show that long-term trends toward improvement did not basically change, though because of the crisis and conflict the pace of progress became slower, health and nutrition problems tended to concentrate in broad segments of the vulnerable

population, and the health services infrastructure suffered considerable deterioration. El Salvador's health profile is therefore still that of an underdeveloped country and still has very high indicators as to preventable causes of death, especially in childhood.

Life expectancy rose from 60 to 64.4 years between 1980 and 1990. General mortality fell from 11‰ in 1980 to 8.4‰ in 1990, even taking into account war deaths. In 1981, violent deaths represented 12% of the total, while in 1984 they were 21% and among the five leading causes of death in the country. The greatest mortality from this cause occurs among the youngest adults, who are members of the economically active population.³⁴ Accidents, malignant tumors, and pulmonary, cerebrovascular, and heart diseases were, in that order, the main causes of death in adulthood. More than 12 years of widespread violence have caused serious mental health problems and a large number of invalids and war-disabled, many because of land mines. Tuberculosis and dengue are also serious health problems. By June 1992, 333 cases of AIDS, with 105 deaths, had occurred. The transmission route in most cases is heterosexual.³⁵

Infant mortality declined from 84.8‰ live births in 1975-1980 to 75‰ live births in 1980-1985, and to 60‰ live births in 1990.³⁶ Although it has decreased significantly, child mortality is still extremely high. More than 60% of child morbidity and mortality is related to infectious diseases, among which diarrhea and amebic dysentery are noteworthy. Surveys among children under 5 years of age showed that 40% of them had diarrhea in the preceding month and only 14% received oral rehydration therapy (ORT). Differences in child mortality are very pronounced, and there are rural and marginal urban areas and communities of displaced persons where the child mortality rate was twice the national average. Immunopreventable diseases are no longer among the five leading causes of child mortality, in part because of the vaccination campaigns conducted up to 1988, which increased the immunization rate to 83%

for measles and 68% for poliomyelitis and DPT. Despite this, outbreaks of measles occurred in 1989.³⁷

Only 34% of births were in institutions, though the rate varied from 18% to 62%, depending on the part of the country and the population's access to health services.³⁸ The average number of children per woman—four—is still high, and only 47% of women used a family planning method in 1988.³⁹ Sexual activity begins early and a significant proportion of adolescents become pregnant before age 15.

Although per-capita caloric intake is 105%, enough to meet the population's requirements, nutrition among children and the poorest in the population is very deficient. Fifteen percent of births are low-weight, and the incidence of malnutrition in children under 5 years was 50% in 1988.⁴⁰ Fifteen percent are affected by moderate to severe malnutrition.⁴¹ A 1985 survey of the displaced population showed that malnutrition affected 71% of children under 5 years.⁴² The greatest food deficits are in rural areas, where 20% of families suffer from severe malnutrition and 50% show energy deficiencies. Hypovitaminosis also affects large numbers of children, pregnant women, and nursing mothers, and is the cause of nutritional anemias. Iodine deficiencies are the cause of much goiter.

The Ministry of Health is the agency constitutionally responsible for guaranteeing the health of all Salvadorans. Excluding the population covered by social security institutions, this means that the ministry is responsible for 85% of the country's population. This universalist mandate has not resulted in truly universal coverage because of the Salvadoran state's limited role in social policy and its inability to carry out an effective redistributive policy. For this reason, it was estimated in 1990 that the proportion of the population with access to some kind of health service was only 58% on average and 40% in rural areas. This means that around 2.2 million people have been deprived of care. There is a large number of folk medicine practitioners and traditional midwives who are the only available health workers in many rural areas.

The Salvadoran Social Security Institute (ISSS) covered only 13.7% of the EAP in 1976. Around 1986 there was still less coverage, 12.9% of the EAP, which at most equals 6% of the total population. This may be the lowest coverage in Latin America and the Caribbean. Almost 70% of insured persons are in the capital and the most "modern" and formal sectors of the labor market. Fifty percent of the ISSS's expenditure depends on governmental contributions, which means that the system's expenditure is markedly regressive. The Prevention Institute of the Armed Forces and Security Agencies covers all their members and direct dependents, a total of around 150,000 people.⁴³ There are also health care and social insurance institutions belonging to professional and labor groups. The proliferation of health care institutions, together with a large number of NGOs providing services in this area, means that coordination is one of the most important problems in the health sector. There are 342 health establishments, including 14 hospitals, 10 of which are in the three main cities.

Available data seem to indicate that the national health system's care capacity has been seriously affected by the economic crisis, war, and natural disasters.⁴⁴ The deterioration of the national health system's infrastructure is thus evident. This has been affected by the reduction in its budget as a proportion of the total governmental budget, which fell from 13% in 1970 to 9% in 1979 to 8.2% in 1988. This trend reversed itself only in 1990, when the proportion was 9%.⁴⁵ In addition, the 1986 earthquake affected 90% of the hospital infrastructure.

In the area of environmental sanitation, a small proportion of the population has potable water—52% in 1991. In the countryside it is 47%, and in urban areas, 76%. Fifty-two percent of the population lack adequate excreta disposal systems, though this proportion is larger in rural areas (61%).⁴⁶ Health and potable water supply deficiencies underlie the rapid spread of the cholera epidemic. By September 1992 there were 7,144 cases and 41 deaths.⁴⁷

Housing and urban marginalization

During the 1980s, the proportion of urban population rose from 42% to 48% because of the arrival of displaced persons and migrants in cities, which has led to greater social pressure on housing and the growth of marginal areas and *tugurios* in downtown areas. In 1990 the housing deficit was 473,500 units, two-thirds of which were rural dwellings. The deficit grows by about 13,000 units a year since only 15,000 dwellings are built each year compared with the 28,000 needed. It is estimated that 40% of households nationally and 30% in San Salvador are overcrowded. The 1986 earthquake worsened the deficit by expanding the capital's slum belts; 22,800 dwellings were destroyed and 225,000 more suffered severe damage. It was estimated in 1989 that San Salvador's marginalized population exceeded 700,000 people, who lived in 170 *tugurios*, 364 illegal settlements, and 55 camps.⁴⁸ All these data indicate that about 3 million Salvadorans lack adequate housing. The war aggravated the situation still more because of indiscriminate bombing in rural areas and especially San Salvador as a result of the guerrilla offensive of November 1989.⁴⁹

The situation of women

The changes that have taken place in women's role in Salvadoran society reflect the general trend in Latin American societies and are related to the impact of the crisis and war on El Salvador. In 1980, 53% of the population was female, basically young, poor, half urban and half rural, and largely illiterate. Women have many children and, as heads of household, are directly responsible for 26% of the families in the country and 31% in urban areas. In 1985 they made up 34.7% of the EAP and around 60% of informal sector workers, with a higher proportion among the self-employed—64% in the metropolitan area.⁵⁰ Women work primarily in the service sector, and then in industry, generally in un-

skilled and temporary jobs⁵¹ and in *maquilas*.⁵² The proportion is lower in agriculture, however, which shows that rural-urban migration is largely female. Unemployment is greater among women, and especially the youngest women. In 1985 the unemployment rate was 57% among the latter, almost three times the national average.⁵³ As in other countries in the area, there is significant wage discrimination and working conditions are generally unfavorable.

Women's illiteracy has worsened instead of improving. Fifty-six percent were illiterate in 1975; 59% in 1985. Female illiteracy is more common in rural areas.

In addition to discrimination stemming from legislation and the predominant patriarchal culture, women have borne more of the economic, social, and psychological costs of the conflict and attempts to survive the crisis. The climate of violence has aggravated traditional violence—especially sexual violence—against women.⁵⁴

Children and young people

Children have been directly affected by the war and conflict. The large number of orphans resulting from the war and violence is noteworthy. The war has also led to the destruction of the physical infrastructure intended to care for children (health centers, schools, day-care centers, etc.). Specifically, 447 schools were destroyed in war zones. In some places, schooling and access to education ceased for periods of up to five years. The result has been that in large areas there has been an irreversible increase in illiteracy and high rates of school dropout. At the same time, there are many children among the displaced, who are involuntary victims of the conflict. Fifty-seven percent of El Salvador's displaced, for example, are less than 15 years old.⁵⁵ Many children, often under 14 years old, are recruited and have taken part in combat. Many children have severe mental disorders as a result of witnessing or taking part in violent acts or combat. Various investigations have identi-

fied 300,000 children with some kind of problem or disability related to the war.⁵⁶

Moreover, the economic crisis has meant that most young people have to define their role through difficult survival strategies, especially through early entry into the work force. The crisis especially affects the job entry of young people. The "over-age" of students, which affects more than half of the urban school population and two-thirds of that in the countryside, the "nocturnalization" of secondary and university studies, and school dropout are educational problems warranting notice. A high proportion (around two-thirds) of children and adolescents who leave school do so for lack of financial means and because they have to work.⁵⁷

An interesting phenomenon is the appearance of specific youth subcultures such as San Salvador's *bandas*. Consumption of and addiction to drugs are another problem associated with young people. Although—especially from the Government's viewpoint—the problem tends to be confined to marijuana and cocaine, in reality the chief drug problem among young people is alcohol, though addiction to inhalants is more worrying among children. There is also widespread consumption of marijuana and amphetamines, and after alcohol the latter is the second drug among Salvadoran young people.⁵⁸ A final feature of the impact of the crisis on children is the large number of street children. According to UNICEF data, there are around 10,000 children in this situation in San Salvador.⁵⁹

Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law

As part of the Peace Agreements, significant steps have been taken to guarantee respect and enforcement of human rights, and to investigate and punish violations of them that took place during the civil war. A Division of Human Rights was created in the United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL), and the Government and FMLN agreed to create a "Truth Commission,"⁶⁰ whose mandate was to investigate

serious acts of violence which took place between January 1980 and July 1991 and draw up legal, political, and administrative recommendations to prevent repetition of such acts, overcome impunity, and contribute to national reconciliation. Although the Commission did not have juridical authority, both the Government and the FMLN committed themselves to fulfill its recommendations. During the six months that its investigation lasted, the Commission considered International Law on human rights and International Humanitarian Law as applicable seeing that El Salvador has been a party to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 since 1953 and the Additional Protocols I and II of 1977 to the Geneva Conventions since 1978, paying special attention to the provisions relating to protection of the civilian population in non-international armed conflicts.

The Report of the Truth Commission, entitled *From madness to hope: the twelve-year war in El Salvador*,⁶¹ was submitted in March 1993. It details 22,000 reports of violations of human rights and International Humanitarian Law, most of which are acts stemming from the widespread practice of physically eliminating opponents and the counterinsurgency tactics used by the army and security forces. Violations of human rights and, specifically, arbitrary detentions, torture, disappearances, and executions were widespread and systematic, according to the Commission's report. These acts were also promoted by impunity and ineffective judicial authority. Sixty percent of the reports were about extrajudicial executions and 25% about forced disappearances. Twenty percent of the cases investigated included torture. The Commission found that 60% of the acts it investigated had been committed by members of the Armed Forces. 25% by security agencies, 10% by death squads, and 5% by the FMLN. The Commission noted, however, that because of time constraints, the acts investigated did not cover the more than 75,000 victims of the conflict, most of whom were civilians.

The report enumerates four periods in the conflict. The first, from 1980 to 1983, represents the institutionalization of systematic and

widespread violence. Seventy-five percent of violations of human rights and International Humanitarian Law detailed in the report occurred during those first four years, which shows the great level of violence of the first phase of the war. Civilian victims in that period totaled 24,000. The activities of the death squads spread, and during 1982 alone there were between 300 and 400 political murders a month. That period also saw such well-known crimes as the assassination of Monsignor Oscar Arnulfo Romero and the killings of peasants on the Sumpul and Lempa Rivers and in the hamlet of El Mozote.

The second period, characterized by armed confrontation as the basis of violations, lasted from 1983 to 1987. The number of violent acts decreased, but their selectivity against labor, poor people's, and peasant leaders rose. Large-scale military operations, including aerial bombing, were conducted in densely populated areas and there were numerous attacks against civilians, among them peasants who had benefited from agrarian reform. Civilians, especially in rural areas, began to be victims of forced displacements and of land mines placed by both contending parties in violation of provisions of International Humanitarian Law. The third period lasted from 1987 to 1989. The armed conflict became an obstacle to achieving peace, as had been agreed on by the Central American Presidents at Esquipulas. Attempts were made by the international community to "humanize the conflict," though they were largely unsuccessful. Violations of International Humanitarian Law and human rights persisted from the earlier periods, and there were also recruitments of minors and assassinations of mayors and public officials by the FMLN. There were numerous obstacles to humanitarian activities at the same time. Health vehicles and workers were attacked and intimidated, or at times were prevented from carrying on their humanitarian efforts.

The fourth and final period lasted from November 1989, when the FMLN's general offensive began, to the signing of the Peace Agreements. The offensive carried combat into densely popu-

lated parts of San Salvador and other cities. Violations of human rights and International Humanitarian Law recurred in the form of indiscriminate bombing, attacks against civilians and ambulances, and new disappearances, torture, and extrajudicial executions, of which the most notorious were of six Jesuits at the University of Central America and their two employees, in which the participation of elements of the Armed Forces has been proved. In this case, strong international pressure contributed to holding a trial in which, despite certain irregularities, the jury convicted an army colonel.⁶²

The Commission, whose goal was to see that such situations never again occurred, included among its recommendations the purging of persons in the Armed Forces and public administration who had been implicated in crimes; disqualification from public positions of such persons and FMLN members implicated in violent acts; purging of the judiciary and reform of the judicial system and administration of justice, especially the Supreme Court; reforms in the human rights protection system, and material and moral reparation of victims or their closest kin.

The environment and vulnerability to natural disasters

El Salvador shows a high level of destruction of its natural resources, which compromises capacity for sustaining the country and so of achieving sustainable development at the same time that it makes the country and its population vulnerable to the effects of disasters. The country's small size and the great density of its population, together with irrational use of its resources and the environmental impact of the conflict, have led the country into this situation. The Armed Forces, for example, have employed napalm and defoliants such as Agent Orange in using deforestation as a weapon of war.

To a great extent, the poor use of natural resources is due to extreme inequality in land ownership and demographic pressure. Together

with poverty and illiteracy, they cause peasants to overexploit natural resources, especially forested hillside lands. But environmental degradation is also due to the industrialization of the preceding decades, which was conducted without consideration of its environmental impact, to expansion of large-scale livestock raising and crops for export, and to uncontrolled urbanization. All this has in turn caused high levels of contamination in urban areas and great use of toxic agricultural chemicals, with a resulting adverse effect on the health of the population. Extensive use of agricultural chemicals began in the 1950s with agricultural modernization and the expansion of cotton planting. Three decades later, high levels of organophosphate pesticides and DDT are found in fish and shellfish, and even in mothers' milk. During the 1980s there was significant growth in pesticide imports, some of which were prohibited in the countries producing them, as part of the expansion of "non-traditional" crops for export. To cite one example, El Salvador imported 20% of the world's production of parathion.⁶³

Destruction of primary forest is one of the most visible results of environmental destruction. Forest now covers between only 3% and 5% of the country, and the annual deforestation rate is 3.2%, the third highest in Latin America and the Caribbean behind Costa Rica and Haiti.⁶⁴ The loss of woodlands, which may be complete by the year 2000 if present trends continue, also means accelerated erosion and the loss of soil fertility and plant cover, which in turn leads to the use of agricultural chemicals and pesticides. Erosion affected 45% of the country in 1972. It also leads to water shortages, clogging of river basins, and a risk of flooding. The Lempa River basin, on which much of the electric energy that the country consumes depends, shows these problems vividly. Disasters such as the droughts in 1982 and 1987 are directly related to environmental deterioration. The former caused losses equalling 3% of the GDP in 1981. The latter led to the loss of 60% of the basic grain harvest, valued at USD 367 million.

El Salvador is also prone to earthquakes and volcanic eruptions because it is located in an area

where tectonic plates come together. There are seven "high periodicity" volcanoes: Santa Ana, whose last eruption was in 1920; Izalco, in 1966; San Salvador, in 1917, and San Miguel, in 1976. The other three active volcanoes—San Marcelino, Conchaguita, and Ilopango—last erupted before this century. The areas that have historically experienced the greatest seismic intensities have been Ahuachapán, Cuscatlán, La Libertad, western La Paz, and San Salvador.⁶⁵ The 1986 earthquake that hit San Salvador caused 1,100 deaths and left 500,000 people affected, and had a very severe impact on the national economy by causing damage amounting to 23% of that year's GDP, or USD 1,030 million, of which USD 232 million was attributable to destruction of housing, USD 91 million to direct damage, USD 6 million to indirect damage to health care infrastructure, and USD 61 million to educational infrastructure. Small and medium-sized businesses were especially affected, and the unemployment rate rose from 26% to 35%.⁶⁶

The impact of development aid and cooperation policies

In the 1980s, El Salvador became one of the principal recipients in the world of official development aid (ODA) for both humanitarian and politico-strategic reasons, in both cases associated with the armed conflict. Between 1987 and 1989, according to OECD data, the country received from USD 420 million to USD 440 million a year. There was a significant decrease in 1990, when it received USD 344 million.⁶⁷

Through its Agency for International Development (USAID), the United States was by far the largest donor during the decade. Between 1980 and 1985 its aid grew enormously, from USD 63 million to USD 570 million a year, and El Salvador became the fourth largest recipient of USAID funds in the world. In all, USAID provided El Salvador with USD 3,891 million, including military aid, between 1980 and 1990, which from 1983 to 1987 represented 10% of the Salvadoran GDP. Economic Support Funds

(ESF), which are designed to stabilize the balance of payments, represented 45.5% and were largely for maintaining the state budget. In 1987, almost a third of the Salvadoran state's budget came from USAID.⁶⁸ Much of the aid was intended for Salvadoran agrarian reform, which was aimed at overcoming the deep-rooted causes of the civil war. The failure of this reform became evident in 1987, and USAID's interest turned toward promoting exports, economic reform, and the application of structural adjustment programs. "Pacification" has been an important goal of the aid, reaching 34% in 1987,⁶⁹ in support of the governmental institutions that, in coordination with the army, relocated persons displaced by the war to safe areas. Assistance to projects was also used to promote exports through the Salvadoran Development Foundation (FUSADES) and other organizations, especially during the second half of the decade. Many NGOs carried out their activity with USAID funds on behalf of the displaced.⁷⁰ As noted above, U.S. aid after 1990 was oriented toward facilitating negotiation of the Peace accords and was decisive in achieving their conclusion.

With respect to humanitarian aid up to 1987, and as part of the Esquipulas peace process begun

in that year, El Salvador received increasing amounts of aid from other donors, such as the European Community and its member states, Canada, and the Nordic countries. A significant proportion went to reconstruction programs after the San Salvador earthquake, refugee and displaced-person projects such as PRODERE, and other development activities, especially in the fields of health care and education. A special feature of the assistance provided by these donors has been the channeling of a significant part of it through NGOs. ODA has also been important in implementing new social programs. The Social Investment Fund (FIS) has received USD 33 million from the IDB, USD 8.6 million from the European Community, and USD 500,000 from UNICEF and UNDP.⁷¹

Following the conclusion of the Peace accords, large amounts of bilateral, multilateral, and NGDO aid and cooperation were promised which ranged from financing ONUSAL and the new civilian police force to productive projects to facilitate the reassimilation of former combatants. Contributions totaling USD 1,500 million are anticipated for the National Reconstruction Plan (PNR).