



United Nations
Security Council

Background paper

Committee: Human Rights

Topic A: Security Strategies in El Salvador and their Impact on Human Rights

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El Salvador is highly affected by violent crimes, especially crimes committed by gangs which makes it extremely difficult to govern, maintain order and protect human rights. As per World Bank, as of 2023, El Salvador has one of the highest rates of homicide in the world while also contending with the ever-emerging gang dominance of MS-13 and Barrio 18 (World Bank). This troubling situation calls for a more thorough and in-depth review of the security approaches including the extraordinary measures undertaken by the government of President Nayib Bukele. It is important to look deeper into these aspects of governance because they will determine the destiny of the state and the society as a whole.

The causes of violence in contemporary El Salvador are inextricably connected to the long-lasting civil war which occurred between 1980 and 1992 and splintered the social system of the nation and triggered the formation of violent street societies, primarily composed of repatriated refugees from gang neighborhoods in the United States. The end of the civil war created conditions conducive to the development of criminal organizations as these groups filled the power void and exercised control over certain territories (Baird, 2021). Through the years, such gangs have fostered an environment of terror and aggression, which have forced thousands of people to flee. The state, however, has always faced problems regarding this violence, as it has tried to enhance public order without giving up democratic limits and observing human rights.

As a result, tremendous violence leads to a huge number of casualties and bloodshed. And on top of that, their approach to counter-violence has raised questions about the respect for

human rights by the government. In the last few years, there have also been strategies on security that have included mass actions against the population, focusing police units on military operations, and infringing civil rights, which have been a cause of concern to the global human rights bodies and local activists (Human Rights Watch). In order to achieve and maintain peace and justice in El Salvador, there is an urgent need to provide security while at the same time respecting human rights.

The present security strategies in El Salvador are framed around extreme safeguards, which in some instances take the form of declaring a state of emergency that may lead to the abrogation of certain rights and freedoms enjoyed by citizens. The current government of Bukele has embraced a model of curtailing gang violence through excessive state repression that has entailed the imprisonment of large numbers of suspected gang associates and an enhanced militarization of the society. Although rates of homicide have decreased enormously since the introduction of these measures, it is reported that breaches of fundamental human rights such as arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances are on the increase (Amnesty International). It is reported that there are cases where people are arrested without any legal procedures, creating an atmosphere of intimidation among the general public (Broadband Commission, 2022).

The proactive measures taken on the international scene have received the condemnation of the United Nations, Amnesty International and other organizations, which of course is related to the human rights violations perpetrated in the name of these security policies, demanding that the Salvadoran authorities abide by their human rights obligations. There have been reforms proposed from monitoring police actions through independent committees, to ensuring that violence prevention programs are balanced with funding for other social services (UNHCR, 2018). Future strategies should advocate for and implement restorative justice reforms which are aimed at rehabilitation and integration of the former offenders back to the community rather than pursuing retributions that contravene the fundamental rights of individuals.

The debate should focus on how human rights and effective security measures that truly reduce violence can coexist. On the one hand, is trying aggressive security tactics the only way for the El Salvadoran government? Or can they incorporate more human initiatives gentle on violence yet insisting on human dignity? Achieving a balance between the need for protection of

human rights and the aspiration for peace and security in the long run is a necessity that begs articulation.

The case of El Salvador illustrates the depth and scope of the contradictions experienced by states in maintaining public order and protecting fundamental freedoms. And as the country continues to grapple with this challenge, it is of utmost importance that both the local and the global community participate actively and positively towards discourses related to the security rhetoric in El Salvador. Such a crime reduction strategy that includes protection of human rights is considerate to the building of a peaceful society and therefore it is the best approach.

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