
Interview: Oscar Alfredo Santamaría

The United Nations' Salvadoran peace model

Oscar Alfredo Santamaría was El Salvador's foreign affairs minister in the government of President Alfredo Cristiani, and is currently a member of the UN observer mission for the Nicaraguan elections. On Aug. 28, Santamaría spoke at the Peace Assembly held in Bogotá, Colombia, which was jointly convened by the Office of the High Commission for Peace of the Colombian Presidency, the state oil company Ecopetrol, and the Ecopetrol trade union. While he was staying in Bogotá, he granted this interview to EIR's Colombian correspondent, Javier Almarío.

EIR: I once heard a Colombian ambassador to El Salvador say that the UN began as a peace mediator in El Salvador and ended up controlling everything, the whole nation.

Santamaría: This evaluation is not correct. What happened is that the UN started the peace mediation at the request of the Salvadoran government and the FMLN [Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front], and to the extent to which the accords were going forward, at the request of the parties, little by little it began to assume greater responsibility, responsibility which was fundamental in the verification of the human rights accords, the truce accords, the demobilization accords, and later the surrender of weapons by the FMLN, the reduction of the military estate. With all these responsibilities, the UN ended up having as many as 3,500 observers, who were part of the UN Organization for Peace in El Salvador (Onusal), and of course, the UN presence was massive, it was big. But to the degree that the accords were fulfilled, the UN personnel were cut back in the country, and now the UN mission in El Salvador is only five people. At no time was the UN presence an imposition from the outside. The peace accords in El Salvador were done Salvadoran-style. There was never any formula dictated by the United Nations.

EIR: Before the peace process, there was major interference by the United States in El Salvador. Did the UN come to fulfill the role of interference which the United States had had before?

Santamaría: Well, the truth is that the United States had appeared publicly as promoters of a peace accord or a peace process, but they would not have had any credibility, because public opinion in El Salvador viewed the United States as supporting the Salvadoran military. If the United States had

been the mediator, the mediation would not have succeeded. But the UN, on the other hand, as a multilateral, impartial organization made up of all the nations in the world, could be the mediator of this conflict. After the UN mediation, the United States took part in the final part of the process, when it joined the group of friends, but this was already at a very different level.

EIR: It would seem that the great objective achieved in the El Salvador process was that of having, excuse the expression, tamed the military—

Santamaría: In the military area, the accords established a reduction of the Armed Forces from 60,000 to 17,000 on active duty, a purge of the Armed Forces to get rid of the military forces suspected of having violated human rights. The accords achieved the handing over of effective control of power from the military to civilians, a professionalization of the Armed Forces. Now the military school is directed by six persons, of whom three are military men and three are civilians, and of the civilians one of them is from the FMLN. . . .

Interview: Roberto Alvarado

We studied Colombia's 1991 Constitution

Roberto Alvarado is a member of the negotiating commission of the Mexican government with the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN). Alvarado participated in the Peace Assembly initiated in Bogotá, Colombia on Aug. 27. Below is part of the interview he gave to EIR correspondent Javier Almarío.

EIR: How indigenous is the EZLN?

Alvarado: It's quite indigenous. Not at the level of its leadership, but at the level of the base. . . . Now, for example, at the negotiation table we only have native interlocutors. The only accord which has been achieved with them is on rights and indigenous culture. And, even to reach an accord, we found the study of the Colombian Constitution of 1991 very helpful.

EIR: But there are foreign hands in all of this.

Alvarado: Yes, sure; especially, the Europeans are very involved with all their non-governmental organizations (NGOs), their human rights organizations, their humanitarian aid organizations, their charity organizations.