Information about the FMLN in El Salvador

Current Status of the FMLN

The FMLN (Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front, or *Frente Farabundo Marti para la Liberacion Nacional*) is now one of the two major political parties in El Salvador, along with ARENA (Nationalist Republican Alliance, or *Alianza Republicana Nacionalista*). Since 2000, the FMLN has gone back and forth with the ARENA in controlling the largest number of Legislative Assembly seats.

In the legislative elections, held on March 16, 2003, the FMLN won 34.0% of the popular votes and 31 out of 84 seats in the Legislative Assembly of El Salvador, becoming the political party with the largest number of seats in the assembly. The FMLN's candidate in the March 21, 2004 presidential election, Schafik Handal, won 35.6% of the vote, but was defeated by Antonio Saca of the ARENA.

In the March 12, 2006 legislative elections, the FMLN won 39.7% of the popular votes and 32 out of 84 seats in the legislative assembly. The FMLN also retained the mayor's seats in the largest cities of El Salvador, including San Salvador and Santa Tecla as well as hundreds of other municipalities throughout the country.

At the January 18, 2009 legislative elections, the FMLN won 42.6% of the votes and 35 seats in the assembly. The FMLN is still the largest party in the Salvadoran legislature, though it does not have a governing majority. It also won the majority of the mayoralties in the country, though lost the mayoralty of the capital city, San Salvador.

On March 15, 2009, the FMLN's candidate, Mauricio Funes, a former journalist, won the presidential election. He was inaugurated in June 2009 as the first president coming from the FMLN.

Brief History of the FMLN

The FMLN was formed on October 10, 1980 as an umbrella group from the five left wing guerilla organizations: the *Fuerzas Populares de Liberación Farabundo Martí* (FPL), *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo* (ERP), the *Resistencia Nacional* (RN), the *Partido Comunista Salvadoreño* (PCS) and the *Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores Centroamericanos* (PRTC). The FMLN was named after the rebel leader Farabundo Martí, who led workers and peasants in an uprising to transform Salvadoran society after the devastation caused by the eruption of the volcano Izalco in 1932.

On December 17, 1979, in period of national crisis, the three dominant organizations (FPL, RN and PCS) of the Salvadoran left had formed the *Coordinadora Político-Militar* (CPM). The CPM's first manifesto was released on January 10, 1980, and the day afterwards the *Coordinadora Revolucionaria de Masas* (CRM) was formed as a union of revolutionary mass organizations. The CRM later merged with the *Frente Democrático Salvadoreño* to form the *Frente Democrático Revolucionario*.

It is alleged that some credit for the unity of the five organizations that formed the FMLN may belong to Cuba's Fidel Castro, who facilitated negotiation between the groups in Havana

in December 1979. While all five groups called themselves revolutionaries and socialists, they had serious ideological and practical differences, and there had been serious conflicts, even including in some cases bloodshed, between some of the groups during the 1970s.

On May 22, 1980 the success of negotiations led to the union of the major guerrilla forces under one flag. The DRU (Unified Revolutionary Directorate, or *Dirección Revolucionaria Unificada*) was created by the FPL, RN, ERP and PCS. The DRU consisted of three Political Commission members from each of these four organizations. The DRU manifesto declared, "There will be only one leadership, only one military plan and only one command, only one political line." Despite continued infighting, the DRU succeeded in coordinating the groups' efforts and equipped forces.

After the formation of the FMLN, they organized to launch their first major military offensive on January 10, 1981. During this offensive, the FMLN established operational control over large sections of the departments of Morazán and Chalatenango, which remained largely under guerrilla control throughout the rest of the civil war. Revolutionaries ranged from children to the elderly, both male and female, and most were trained in FMLN camps in the mountains and jungles of El Salvador to learn military techniques.

Another FMLN largest offensive was in November 1989. In that offensive, the FMLN caught Salvadoran government and military off guard by taking control of large sections of the country and even entering the capital of San Salvador. In San Salvador, the FMLN quickly took control of many of the poor neighborhoods. One of the most famous battles in San Salvador took place in the Sheraton Hotel (*Sheraton Presidente San Salvador Hotel*), where guerrillas and army soldiers battled floor-by-floor. .The FMLN's November 1989 offensive did not succeed in its stated aim of overthrowing the government. But many analysts pointed to the FMLN's show of strength in the 1989 offensive as the turning point in the war, where it became clear that the government would not be able to militarily defeat the FMLN.

Soon after the November 1989 offensive, the U.S. government started to support a negotiated solution to the civil war. Since the U.S. government was the major funder of the Salvadoran government and military, they exercised considerable influence over the course of events. So when the U.S. began to advocate negotiations instead of a military solution, a negotiated peace accord between the FMLN and the Salvadoran government was reached in fairly short order in 1992.

After the ceasefire established by signing of the Chapultepec Peace Accords in 1992, the FMLN became a legal political party and all armed FMLN units were demobilized. The FMLN has now participated in elections since 1994.

After the end of the war, it became clear that there were serious divisions within the FMLN, some of which had existed during the war but had been somewhat hidden from the general public. During the civil war, and continuing in the post-war period, people did not directly join the FMLN per-se, but joined one of the five component groups. But after the 1994 elections, momentum grew to unify the FMLN into a single organization without separate internal groups. In 1995, the five groups that had formed the FMLN dissolved themselves. It is at that point that the FPL, CP, ERP, RN and PRTC ceased to exist, and what remained was a unified FMLN. Then people could join the FMLN directly instead of having to join

one of its component groups. While this decision liquidated the parallel organizational structures inside the FMLN, there still remained strong loyalties along historic organizational lines, some of which can still be seen today.

In the 1999 presidential election, the FMLN ran Facundo Guardado as their candidate. This was a contentious decision, and many in the FMLN did not support Guardado, as they believed that his politics were moving to the right. Out of this internal conflict, two organized tendencies emerged in the FMLN, the *Renovadores* ("Renovators" or "Renewal Movement") and the *Coriente Revolucionario y Socialista* (CRS - Revolutionary Socialist Current). The CRS, led by the two historic FMLN leaders, Schafik Handal and Salvador Sanchez Ceren, criticized the *Renovadores* for advocating social democratic politics and for not being clearly against neoliberalism. The *Renovadores*, led by Facundo Guardado, a charismatic former FPL commander, criticized the historic leadership as being too communist and called for a renovated ideology. After a couple years of internal turmoil, the CRS won the majority of the internal elections in the organization. The frustrated *Renovadores* publicly attacked the FMLN leaders and tried to form their own political party, but they received negligible support in the 2003 election and then ceased to exist as a party.

In 2004 and 2005, the FMLN experienced another split. Five FMLN Legislative Assembly members, along with a number of their supporters, left the FMLN to form a new political party, the FDR (Democratic Revolutionary Front, or *Frente Democratico Revolucionario*). In the 2006 elections, however, no FDR candidates won office, except for the incumbent mayor of Nejapa.