

Global Peacebuilding Association of Japan (GPAJ) presents

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presents

Ambassador Martha Lidia Zelayandia Cisneros

on

**El Salvador's Case: Civil War and Post Peace Agreements from
the Civilian Point of View**

Friday, August 26, 2022 8 p.m.-9:30 p.m. (Tokyo)

Report compiled by: Maciej Witek

Part I: Presentation



**Ms. Martha Lidia Zelayandia Cisneros
Former Ambassador of El Salvador to Japan**

Ambassador Zelayandia started her speech by noting that we have to understand that civil war in El Salvador was not like a separate case from the world. The causes were of course national, internal, but we need to see a global context of development of this civil war, especially regarding the peace process. El Salvador case is famous for successful peace agreement through dialogue, which was very difficult to achieve. When the war itself started, there were several opinions. However the incident that opened people's eyes and let them understand that they cannot live like that any longer was the assassination of the archbishop Óscar Romero in March 1980. Unfortunately it was a big reason for many people to go to the arms. Two armies were present in El Salvador at the time, government and non-government.

The two sides of the conflict did not want to be at war too long. Therefore there were many efforts to stop. For example in Chalatenango in October in 1984, there was the first meeting between the leaders. The second one in November of the same year, third in Saint Miguel, September 1986, the fourth in San Salvador in October 1987. Unfortunately none of these efforts to establish peace was successful. It was in 1989 when the government in Mexico City

through a joint communication requested the mediation addressed to the United Nations Secretary General, Javier Perez, who appointed Alvaro de Soto as a special representative.

In November 1989 Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) launched general offensive to demonstrate its military strength. This offensive was contained by the armed forces of the government, and after this, many analysts recognized the impossibility of military victory for any of the sides of the conflict. Both sides were forced to sit down and talk. There was the 1st agreement, the Geneva agreement in 1990, historical because it was the first under the auspicious of the UNSG to get the peace agreement between the countries. After this agreement, initiatives like that were imitated in other cases, countries. Then in Caracas in May 1990, Mexico 1991, New York 1991 it was considered the final agreement, final round where the act of New York was dictated later the same year in November. The peace agreement was signed in Mexico in 1992 in January. As a result of the civil war, 80000 people lost their lives, and not only that, 40% of homes were destroyed, 25% were in need of major repairs. The death squad activities escalated in 1990 despite the UN agreement on human rights signed in July of the same year by president and FMLN. The peace agreement was signed, and this was an important achievement military and politically speaking. The military agreement success is because both armies were dissolved and they created new police formed by members of the armies from both sides, the government forces and the FMLN forces, in El Salvador. It is called the Policía Nacional Civil PNC, or National Civil Police in English. The political achievement was because the FMLN was accepted as a political party to enable its members to participate in the political democratic process of decision making. There is no doubt that the sign of the peace agreements was a huge step for El Salvador putting and end to the civil war.

However in the peace agreement, unfortunately, some very important and necessary facts were not included or should have been included. We can say that the peace agreement to end the war was relevant, and it is important to recognize the cooperation between both sides and the follow by the international community. The peace agreements team had mainly in their minds the ending of the armed conflict, the ceasefire. However, what was also important is the post ceasefire, in order to construct a new country, inclusive with education and health opportunities for all, reactivate the economy, give psychological and economic care to the victims, and so on. All these aspects were not included in the agreement. Even now the people of El Salvador are suffering because it was not followed.

In El Salvador many people live near the borders, near Honduras or Guatemala. People from those areas escaped to the nearest towns in the neighbor country, they got the permission to stay but in not good conditions, many people were suffering. The UNHCR helped them to come back to El Salvador. The fact is that the economic, educational, and sociological aspects of this situation were not really treated seriously enough as they should. A lot of people continued migration to the US, many young people lost their parents. They were brought by other relatives. But the social fabric of the country was destroyed, with many families separated. The result was that people started to seek a way to leave in the US in a non-legal way, to cross the border without visa. Many did that successfully. They studied and worked there. At the moment there are 2.3 million El Salvadorians in the US. That is important labor force for the US because they work there. They send money to their families - this is good and bad at the same time. Good because money enters the country, but this is not the money produced in the country. It is not

really the way it should be. Many people entered the US, many were successful, but also many were not. The children, young people were involved in non-legal acts, they learned bad things in the US. For example in Los Angeles, many Salvadorians were living there, but they were not included in the society and suffered from other immigrants. Salvadorians decided to join forces and defend themselves, they started to fight with other nationality groups. The immigration policy arrested many Salvadorians in illegal migration status, including people working just for their US. The policy is sending people in daily flights deported from the US. In this group of people there are many that just wanted to work and have means to live, but on the other hand, they are criminals. Now, when they are deported they do illegal things in El Salvador, and this is becoming a vicious circle.

I recalled also a conversation with the police chief in El Salvador who said unfortunately they are working hard for the peace in the country, but when they arrest 20 people the next day another 20 comes from the US. In a way, people of El Salvador did not finish the civil war.



Mr. Tadanori Inomata
Strategic Advisor for Global Relations and Visiting Professor
of Nagasaki University

Mr. Inomata at the start of his speech mentioned the period of 3 years when he served as an ambassador to Costa Rica, stating that therefore central America is the region he became familiarized with. Then he asked a question, how has people's way of thinking about safety and security changed since the peace agreement in this region? United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL) launched in 1991, and this is noteworthy. Why it succeeded? Principal causes were the common desire for peace shared by both sides of conflict. In 1987, 83% of the national population supported the end to the war through negotiated settlement. Ceasefire has never been broken once. Citizens of El Salvador are conscious about judicial independence and human rights. Additionally, military situation had convinced both parties that outright victory was impossible. Both sides agreed that maintaining human rights, documenting abuses, and providing aid to victims were the first steps to sustained peace. The leadership of special representative of the Secretary General, Alvaro de Soto was notable. In summary, respect of human rights, culture of peace, and democratic decision-making process prevailed. Mr. Inomata also noted sound leadership by politicians, based on El Salvador democratic tradition, as well as sound and strong United Nations intervention pact by the Security Council. However, what is happening now? Trump administration and immigrant policy, left many refugees disarray in the region. Global challenges such as climate change and COVID-19 pandemic, high cost of energy and food affected citizens of the region. People fleeing from countries like El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua, where the persecution and violence by criminal organizations is rampant. Central America has continue to increase the number of refugees. There are now more than 100 million refugees in the world, that is more than 1% of world population. Number of people displaced due to conflict and persecution is at the high record. Among them, central American refugees account for 18%. Mr. Inomata stated it amazes him that the world is in such a state, and provokes to reconsider what security means in XXI century. Security is currently enjoyed

by most of the UN population, who are not refugees. Their security is maintained by the balance of power, technical constellation, it is far from lofty human security that means “leave no one behind” represented by the Sustainable Development Goals.

Increasing the number of refugees is a common problem, that also Japan shares. As we can see, the consequences of the Fukushima nuclear power plant caused people to flee from the affected area. Now, the government is very proud to see the reconstruction of place, but not the reconstruction of people. In the event, aftermath of the situation in Ukraine, government decided to reopen many nuclear reactors, taking advantage of the crisis to please the industrial interest. Only 13.3% of nearly half million of refugees nationwide after the Fukushima crisis said that they will never give up to return to their home. The return population to the affected area is only 20% of the population. What prevents them? Lack of human centered approach, to rehabilitation and recovery of the community. Now Mr. Inomata supposes that many politicians are not looking into the real need of people. They are very jealous about keeping winning in the election, keeping their status. They are not so much interested in achieving repopulation, anything that is going beyond the national interest. This is a situation what he witnessed these days.

Mr. Inomata also noted that the internal war can be settled by the national unity, but there are so many elements which have impact on this situation and effort. Situation in Ukraine, climate change, food crisis, problems with supply chains, all prevent people from uniting. We are now at the age that the global issues have to be tackled systemically. We cannot focus only on specific aspects of human security, not only on military or physical security but also on other conditions. How can we protect lives and livelihood of people?

Part II: Open Discussion

During the open discussion Ms. Zelayandia was asked about the importance of the end of Cold War for ceasefire process, and any suggestions for the government or international society for actions that can help El Salvador move forward. In response she stated that globally speaking, the fall of Berlin wall, dissolution of Soviet Union, had an influence, it accelerated the process of peace agreement in El Salvador. There was a situation that started after the dissolution of USSR, a war in Yugoslavia just around same time when Salvador had the peace agreement. All the attention went from El Salvador to that region, that was also a reason why the follow up for El Salvador was not completed. Regarding the actions to move country forward, first of all it is crucial to stop the violence. The solution is to have opportunities in the country, so people do not have to emigrate. If they have education and jobs there is no need to move out of the country. Ms. Zelayandia stated that only education can change the country. She also noted that the local conflict was a part of the bigger clash between US and USSR. Archbishop Romero during the mass, he asked directly to US please do not support the government of El Salvador, because they are killing out people. Few days later he was killed. At that time the FMLN had links with other socialist countries. The US were nervous about having another Cuba in Central America, they could not allow that. CIA was involved in many countries. Unfortunately, that is why we need to see the conflict globally.

Referring to the adaption of the bitcoin as an authorized currency, Ms. Zelayandia stated that the current government is trying to do new things, the president has a very high acceptability from the people. However now the power is too centralized, so many people are worried. If you want to do good things it is good because you have the approval, but when you get too much power it is something people can be worried about. Speaking about the currency, the government tried to do something that might invite investment from other countries. There is a bitcoin city, where it has special opportunities to conduct business.

Other countries also utilize it. One thing that many people like about cryptocurrency is that it is very convenient. You can send money without using a bank, without a charge. El Salvador used to have relationship with Taiwan. In 1980, the former government switched from Taiwan to China, and if you have relation with China you have to give up Taiwan. The current president of El Salvador came to Japan just one year before the pandemic and took in advance this opportunity to visit China and Qatar. The visit to China marked a period of closer relations with that country. Currently here are several iconic projects now in El Salvador supported by China cooperation such as the construction of the new building for the National Library, projects in the Surf City among others.

Mr. Inomata also commented on this aspect, by stating that Chinese government has never utilized the role of private platform for cryptocurrency. What is adopted by El Salvador government is going differently from what is happening with cryptocurrency in China and two cases must be distinguished. Use of cryptocurrency is taken advantage by rich people. However he noted that what is worrying him, is introducing such a solution without any social consensus. The aspect he is worried about is absence of public accountability.

Ambassador Zelayandia was also asked about similarities between the situation in El Salvador and current crisis in Ukraine, but noted that in El Salvador it was internal situation. Both sides were willing to end the war because it was not good for anyone to continue. The current situation in Ukraine is different because the conflict happens between two countries. She noted that one thing she is worried about is too much power in hands of one person, similarly as we can see in case of president of Russia. In El Salvador, the president has too much power, and this can also be worrying, especially when people do not realize it can be dangerous. We do not know it yet, but some years later it might be too late. Ms. Zelayandia however hopes that power can be utilized for good of the Salvadorian people.

Speaking about the importance of religion, Ms. Zelayandia stated that in the case of El Salvador, people are catholic. Archbishop Romero during his homilies, he was not talking about abstracts, he was openly talking about suffering of people, and that is why he was so loved. He said he is the voice of those who have no voice. He had nothing to do with politics. She compared Romero to someone like an emperor for Japan, if something happens to the emperor it is terrible for the citizens of the country. After the assassination of Romero something changed in people, they understood that those who killed him, they could killed their mothers and everyone else, they have no heart.