

## EL SALVADOR

# "An Indian With Land Is An Indian With Title"

*Adrian Esquino (Nahuat) from El Salvador was interviewed by SAIIC during a recent visit to Washington, D.C.*

**SAIIC:** What region in El Salvador are you from?

**Adrian:** The Nahuat are located in the western part of the country. The Lencas live towards the east, and the Mayas occupy a part of Chalatenango, in the north.

**SAIIC:** So there are three Indian groups in El Salvador?

**Adrian:** Yes. Thirty-six per cent of the Salvadorean people are Indian.

**SAIIC:** What is the general situation presently?

**Adrian:** Well, brother, the current situation in El Salvador has deteriorated, especially for us Indian people. Violence has come again. Well, why not say it. Since 1932 [when 35,000 people were killed] until the 80's, even up to today, the population that has been repressed the most, that has been massacred the most, has been Indian. On February 22 [1983], 74 Indians from a single cooperative in Las Hojas were assassinated [see *SAIIC Newsletter*, Spring, 1985, pp. 4-5]. In 1982 in another community, 36 people were killed. Generally speaking, it is the Indian people who are in the worst situation.

**SAIIC:** Who are the assassins?

**Adrian:** Generally our brothers are killed by members of the armed forces.

**SAIIC:** Is the government involved in this?

**Adrian:** Yes, and that's why we have come to Washington. During the electoral campaign, Duarte [the president of El Salvador] promised to prosecute Col. Elmer Gonzalez Araujo, who was responsible for the Las Hojas massacre.

**SAIIC:** And what happened to the colonel? Has he been prosecuted?

**Adrian:** No, the opposite has occurred. As a reward, he has been appointed chief of logistics of the armed forces.

**SAIIC:** What are the claims of Indian people?

**Adrian:** The principal claim is to the land. Most of us do not have professions. We live off the land. We say that an Indian with land is an Indian with title, and an Indian without land is an Indian without title. So our main objective is to keep our land. We also have other claims. Most of us do not have houses. There is no education, no schools, no medicine or clinics for us, no work. We have many problems in El Salvador.

**SAIIC:** How do you feel that your people will overcome



this situation? Are you in contact with non-Indian people who can assist you?

*Adrian:* Yes, the National Association of Indigenous Salvadoreans (ANIS), as we call our organization, has joined the Salvadorean National Workers Unity (UNTS). UNTS is a coalition of all grassroots organizations, including unions, cooperatives, farmer organizations, Indians, and other. We are convinced that the only way to face this situation is to unite. UNTS is the strongest organization in the nation.

*SAIIC:* You talked earlier about your land claims. Do you function as cooperatives?

*Adrian:* We have about 28 or 29 cooperatives throughout the country. Some of our cooperatives already have their own land. In other cases we have negotiated with individuals who have gradually given us some land. But we are not benefiting from the famous agrarian reform, since in our country it is an arbitrary one, and eventually the land will be returned to the large landowners.

*SAIIC:* What crops do you grow?

*Adrian:* We grow rice, beans, maize, choca, camote, and Jicama. We also make crafts. We make clothes, hats, baskets, and other things. As you know, we Indians can live anywhere on earth. If we do not do one thing, we do another.

*SAIIC:* Are you in contact with other Indian organizations internationally?

*Adrian:* Yes, we are in touch with non-governmental organizations in Canada, the United States, and with the World Council of Indigenous Peoples. Here I have had meetings with Indian organizations, Apache and others, and yesterday they sent telegrams to the Duarte government and to the armed forces.

*SAIIC:* Do you have contacts with Indian people in Mexico, Guatemala, or Nicaragua?

*Adrian:* Yes. Today, especially, we know that international Indian solidarity will help us find a way out, and to get recognition of the rights of Indian people.

*SAIIC:* What can we do here to help Indian people in El Salvador?

*Adrian:* Indians and non-Indians are sending telegrams and letters in response to our appeal, asking that respect be given to the Indian people, and also that Gonzalez Araujo be prosecuted. After the massacre we insisted that he should be brought to trial. Because of our demands, we have been robbed of our land, and even of our offices, so we have come to Washington to be heard.

*SAIIC:* Would you like to send a message to Indian people in the United States?

*Adrian:* I urge you to unite in solidarity with the Nahuat, Lenca, and Maya people of El Salvador during this war situation. We believe that your support, moral or financial, will help us solve our problems and ultimately achieve peace.

I would like to invite all brothers and sisters to visit us in Sonsonate on December 21 and 22, when we have our traditional celebration. We Indians need to be strongly united and to help each other. We especially need your support with the difficult situation in El Salvador.

