

## PALO ALTO FRIENDS MEETING

# EL SALVADOR PROJECTS

May 2022 Newsletter

WWW.PAFMELSALVADORPROJECTS.ORG

### The Clerk's letter, by Hulda Muaka

Greetings to you all,

In this Newsletter, the project Director, Robert Broz, highlights the current political situation and changes that the new government is implementing in El Salvador.

Through the stories of the students, we see hope and the positive changes made possible by our loan program. If you are a donor, thank you very much. If not, please consider making a donation. The dream of Carmen Broz, the founder of the program was to educate one person and then domino effect occurs: The education of one student leads to improve one's self and then on to family, community, municipality and country and even the world at large. Yes, we can change the world in small ways. Your contributions go a long way.

The Wind Beneath our Wings section highlights the dedication and support of Arlene Schaupp to our program and El Salvador at large. Her leadership illustrates some ways each of us can contribute to changing the world. Be a donor of \$1,200 and sponsor a student or partner with another donor and be a co-sponsor of a student or give whatever you have and we will combine it and make it work. You can also serve as a committee member and steer the work of the program or take part in the visits we organize for the youth or young adults when it is safe to return to El Salvador post-COVID. This will give a firsthand glimpse into the achievements of the program, the beauty of El Salvador and most of all, the hospitality of the people. The trips have been great eye openers to those that have undertaken them.

Last but not least, I am sad to report that one of our students, Amilcar Montoya who we featured in our last newsletter passed away. His story of resiliency further illustrates how determined students become and how the program develops their character. Many students came together on their own volition and helped with the care of one of their own when he was sick and unable to move. This is a clear indication that the program indeed helps mold students into persons beyond school. They are very responsible members of their community by caring for each other, values that we continue to nurture. Thank you!

### Director's report



Robert Broz  
Project Director

Dear Friends and supporters,

The pandemic continues to take lives and mold us into what most refer to as the "new normal." We now have a raging and unjust war in Ukraine, which seems to fill our news streams, with secondary world problems caused by increased gas

prices and lack of ability to get many basic supply chains up and running. I meditate to center and compose my thoughts, hoping to write content worthy of our supporters, some of whom have been providing financial support since we started working in El Salvador in 1989 and many others for over a decade. *Thank you!*

I find myself contemplating how our programs can operate effectively on an annual budget of \$40,000 to \$50,000 a year in this small country with what I sometimes refer to as soap opera politics. Unimaginable tragedies in other parts of the world can make our efforts seem insignificant. But I remember the conviction of my mother, Carmen Broz, that if we work with one person at a time to provide a decent education, in the future that person will make needed changes for his/her family, community, municipality, and country, and if time permits, for the world. That positive hope in each person and community we have supported keeps me going every day, despite the huge problems of El

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Salvador and the world. In this short report, I hope to show you some of the ways that tiny El Salvador continues to hold true to one of its nicknames, “The Tom Thumb of the Americas,” as a small country that is always under the world’s eye. I will of course bring you up to date with our project work, as well as our current students and some past beneficiaries. With all that is going on around the world, I hope you will enjoy and find of interest the recent and frequent changes in El Salvador’s politics, economy, and social problems, contrasted to encouraging news of the lives of some of our students and their communities. I’ll start with a close look at what is happening in El Salvador right now, as I write this report (in April, 2022).

Saturday, March 26<sup>th</sup>, marked the most violent day of the last 30 years in El Salvador, with 62 murders reported. On Friday night, an additional 14 murders brought the weekend total to 76, close to the monthly total of 79 murders in February. Unlike past surges in killings that have historically involved gangs killing each other’s members, most of these murders were people with no gang affiliation. This is most concerning to the Salvadoran people. To most analysts, the killings were a sign of the power the gangs now have in the country, and that gang leaders are unhappy with the suspected behind-the-scenes negotiations earlier by President Nayib Bukele’s administration. Bukele and the Congress controlled by his *New Ideas* party instantly approved



State of Exception actions

a State of Exception and the removal of Constitutional rights for 30 days, an act that would normally occur only if war was being declared. The State of Exception was renewed for an additional 30

days now effective through May 27<sup>th</sup>. Political opponents and local and international human rights groups have opposed the extreme measures, declaring that basic human rights have not only been removed, but have been violated in several instances. Inmates have been under full lock down, with food rations reduced and even access to sunlight restricted. A gathering of three or more can be considered illegal, and on Saturday, April 10<sup>th</sup>, four young men in the uniforms of a well-known coffee house on the touristic San Salvador volcano were stopped, searched, and arrested after police found they had a decent amount of cash and cell phones,



Coffee shop workers arrested

and accused the four as extortionists. Fortunately, their employer and hundreds on social media put pressure on the police and judges, and the following morning they were released. One of those arrested had won a national barista competition and is well known around the country. They had tried to explain to the police that the cash they had was from tips after a normal and very busy Saturday afternoon/evening shift, they were wearing the business’s uniform, and none had tattoos or any past records of involvement with gangs. There were worries by many that the four would not be released, as President Bukele threatened a judge who was trying one of the first cases of a man who was arrested with no evidence of being a gang member. Along with the suspension of constitutional rights for now 60 days, reforms to the judicial system added increased prison times (up to 25 years for just being a member of a gang), made it legal to prosecute twelve-year olds as adults in murder cases, and introduced laws to prosecute public workers who help criminals in any way. This was the threat Bukele

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used with the judge, tweeting that “if the Judge didn't prosecute the case, he too could be considered a criminal.” Our president, much like U.S. ex-president Trump, likes to use social media and especially Twitter to get his message out. With the new judicial laws and removal of constitutional rights he initially tweeted “If you don't have anything to hide you will be fine, but if you're a gang member we will hunt you down.” These recent cases surely show that even if you don't have something to hide you are at risk of being detained and prosecuted. Gustavo Villatoro, Minister of Security and Justice, said in late April that over 16,500 gang members had been arrested under the State of Exception but that 30 days was not enough and to consider how many more criminals will be detained before the end of the now 60 day period. In mid-May, the number of arrests climbed to 28,000, of which there are over 400 cases of Salvadorans detained with no evidence of criminal activity. This is not all bad, according to President Bukele's supporters, and he remains popular with many. So let us take a quick look at what many of his followers consider positive changes for El Salvador.

With the war in Ukraine and world gas prices soaring, El Salvador hopes to keep the country running and the poor and working class Salvadorans out of another economic crisis with temporary laws pushed through by President Bukele and the New Ideas Congress. By temporarily removing the added value tax on gas and diesel and import taxes on thousands of products that are used commonly as well as in local production chains, President Bukele hopes to aid the poor in El Salvador who have already been hit hard by a declining economy due to the pandemic. Political opponents focus on the lack of financial transparency, with the gross national debt above 90% since 2021 and concern about how El Salvador will ever pay its foreign debt or get federal spending in line with the national budget. Perhaps President Bukele is betting on foreign investors using the popular cyber currency, Bitcoin, to save El Salvador financially.

In the last newsletter, I referred incorrectly to an investment of \$40 million for what I believe is the

world's first national pet hospital. The actual investment used to build, equip, and open **Chivo Pets**, the catchy name given to the recently inaugurated pet hospital, was only \$4 million. The opening of the hospital again showed how the central government wants to push the use of Bitcoin on the population through the official government Chivo

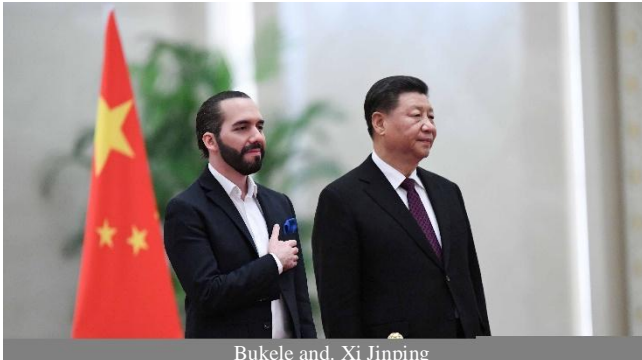


wallet. All of the veterinary services are subsidized, again making those who oppose the Bukele regime question how it will operate, and where in the national budget the funds will be coming from. Will funding come from the limited funds allocated to the National Health system, where decent health care and even basic medicines for humans are not always available? The ultra-modern installation, which opened its doors in March, boasts a dog and cat park to reduce stress to the animals, grooming, bathing, and full veterinary health care at a symbolic cost of just \$0.25/service. The Chivo catch is that this can be paid only by using the Chivo wallet, with no exceptions. There has already been one animal death – a dog that was not admitted and died in the parking lot because the owner did not have the Chivo wallet. President Bukele may also be hoping that the \$500 million promised by China will get El Salvador on the Chinese “Belt and Road” program, and that perhaps El Salvador will see some economic benefit – a hope many see as doubtful from the experiences of other countries who are official Belt and Road participants.



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Bukele's followers see infrastructure after projects with an estimated value of \$500 million promised by China's Xi Jinping as a way to shape little El Salvador into the Dubai of Central America, and a



country they can be proud of. The projects currently include a new fishing pier, a sewage treatment plant, and a small amusement park in the touristic city La Libertad. An ultra-modern National Library is already also under way in the historic downtown of San Salvador, and a proposed \$50 million soccer stadium is slated to be started in 2022. New Ideas supporters see only a new and modern El Salvador. They don't see the unilateral benefit to China, where Chinese materials, machinery, and even labor are being used in El Salvador. Although this support from China is not part of their Belt and Road Program, it does look like that might be part of a larger plan. The port in La Union, built with Japanese funding several years ago and still to be concessioned, may get El Salvador officially on China's Belt and Road program. Rumors of Chinese investors buying half of an island in the Gulf of Fonseca and large parcels of land around the port suggest that China has its eye on little El Salvador, with a perfect geographical location to set up production of Chinese products made with Chinese materials and labor for sale in the region. This all could provide some needed income from sales and import taxes, but it would not be anything close to the huge economic benefits for Chinese corporations working in the country.

Perhaps my description of life in El Salvador as resembling a soap opera is a bit of an exaggeration, but 25 years living here I do find myself pondering with concern whether life here can get any stranger for me and the Salvadoran people. I do hope

reading about current events in El Salvador does not make you feel that I have fallen out of love with this country I call home. It has not, and I continue to feel happier and more useful here than I think I could anywhere else in this mixed up world. Much of my joy comes from my work as the Director of the Palo Alto



Friends Meeting El Salvador Projects, even when problems arise in the communities we have worked in.

I was recently invited to a meeting with communal board members and founders of the village of El Barío. The invitation mentioned no agenda, which was worrisome. I arrived to find many of the founding members whom I had met back in 1994, as well as some of the younger generation who are now active Board members. This was the first of two meetings of which I think will be several more. These meetings, first with the Community Board alone and then with members of the Agricultural Coop as well, were to discuss and resolve some issues about communal land and that of the El Barío Agricultural Coop. I feel privileged, knowing that I was the first person to be trusted by all parties to aid in the resolution of this dispute. My training years ago in Alternatives to Violence, as well as having my loving wife Tita by my side, made it easier to keep tension levels down and unfounded accusations to a minimum. Before becoming involved with the Palo Alto Programs, I had worked in El Barío in conflict resolution. At that time similar land disputes, as well as ownership of vehicles and tractors, were causing tension between the founding Agricultural Cooperative and the budding Communal Association,

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two legal figures used commonly here in El Salvador. Although outside my work for Palo Alto Friends Meeting, it does overlap with our work with the Communal Association, El Barío Youth Group, and K-12 public school there. These talks have also made my visits under COVID-19 a bit more frequent than over the last two years.

After the second meeting in April, I took advantage of the opportunity to meet with members of the youth group. The El Barío youth group continues to be increasingly active as life returns to



Robert meets with El Barío youth group

normal. I left funds for the elders program, where youth visit and help with local needs of those who are older and on their own. This is generally one visit per month. The youth are planning another soccer tournament, which is a new form for raising needed funds for their other work. Besides funding, we also provided some new soccer balls. With recent visits to the school in El Barío, we have now started weekend classes and are looking to purchase needed sports equipment for the physical education program.

Our Saturday classes in Math, Science, Social Science, and Spanish Language started in March. This year's classes are open to junior and senior high school students that meet every two weeks. We have two new teachers for Math and Language, as the ones we used in 2021 were not available this year. We have also changed the classes so that each

session students will receive two classes, first Math and Science, and then two weeks later Social Science and Language. These are voluntary classes, but right now after just a few classes around 18 students are attending. Besides the extra classes, many of our university students from El Barío are doing their social hours at the school. These social projects include classes in English, basic computer skills, physical education, accounting, and statistics. Other university students are carrying out similar projects in two other rural schools in Suchitoto.

Our 18 university students seem to be doing well, nearly finishing up with the first semester of the 2022 academic year. We reopened our coed student house in January, and generally have about 8 students in residence, with the number going up to 12 for weeks when they

have testing or in-person labs. As the in-country Director, I always worry more about our new students. This year is no different, and three of our four new students have adapted and are doing well. One of these, Yuleime Merary Morales Moya, I will highlight below. I had been very worried about one of our new students who was struggling in every aspect, both academically and within our program. I paired her up with some other students and connected her with technical support from our graduate, Wilson Olmedo, who works and lives in El Barío. After meeting with Ingrid Raquel in late April, I now feel that she will overcome these problems and finish her studies under our program. Over the past 2½ years, I have become very flexible regarding our program requirements and even basic academics,

*(continued on page 7)*

# The Wind Beneath our Wings

## Arlene Schaupp South Bay Sanctuary Covenant

- *Trudy Reagan*, the El Salvador Projects

Arlene Schaupp's family made a hasty departure from Japan in 1942 where her father had been a Presbyterian missionary. Later she and her equally-dedicated young husband, Jack Schaupp, served as hosts at the Presbyterian Rossner House in San Francisco's Chinatown. Arlene, in a warm and lighthearted way, was deeply and energetically engaged with people in need all her life.

In 1982 she met Carmen Broz while helping a large family of frightened Salvadoran refugees in a house bursting at the seams in Mountain View. As many more asylum seekers needing help arrived, eight local churches, Palo Alto Friends Meeting among them, banded together to provide them Sanctuary from arrest. The refugees' ghastly war sufferings tore at our hearts, all the more because our own government was aiding El Salvador that was killing many innocent civilians.

South Bay Sanctuary Covenant (SBSC) and the refugees' committee formed and met together for all the tasks of social work and shining a light on oppression in El Salvador. (US censorship: news of El Salvador was absent from the media!)

The Salvadorans wanted SBSC to send people down there to bring aid and to witness the oppression. Not an easy request! But Arlene volunteered and was joined by Trudy Reagan and Paul Engstrom of Palo Alto Friends and two others. For all of us the 1988 trip was our first visit, and very sobering.

To our amazement, Arlene wanted to go back. In 1990 she joined the board of the aid group, Voices on the Border working near the Honduran border. (And Carmen, who was from El Salvador, went in 1989 to establish a nursery school for marginalized people).

For 35 years, Arlene and First Presbyterian Church spearheaded SBSC's efforts to send aid. Owing to the 1992 Peace Accords, many Voices on the Border communities were granted new land near the coast. SBSC partnered with Comunidad Octavio Ortiz, sending annual delegations led by Arlene to experience life there as well as raising money for it.



Milton and Arlene Schaupp

In 1994, Arlene supported her first Friends El Salvador Projects student, which she has done ever since. In 2005, her family sheltered a refugee, "Toño," who fled violence in El Salvador in the new exodus fueled by ruthless postwar gangs. As she had done before, she not only offered a roof, found jobs, but found legal help. She even welcomed his wife and child who managed to escape.

Now in assisted living, Arlene looks back on an adventurous life, full of deep friendships in both countries. One of the students she supported, Milton Palma, is in his 8th year of medical school, about to graduate and become a doctor!



Sketch of Arlene Schaupp by Trudy Reagan



*(continued from page 5)*

due to the difficult and new conditions caused by virtual studies resulting from COVID-19 since early 2020. I will continue to help as I can.

Now let me tell you about Merary, who started the year with some problems but has been able to overcome them with a little effort. Yuleime Merary Morales Moya, who prefers just "Merary," is a recent high school graduate from the school in El Barío. She entered easily in the first round of testing at the National University (UES), which was accomplished by only about 8% of those tested in 2021. I ask all students to send in class signups as a final requirement to make sure they are enrolled full time. Merary sent hers very late, which is common for most students at the UES. Looking over her classes, I saw that she had enrolled in only four of the five classes her study program in Psychology requires. I



Merary with her mother

contacted her immediately, to find that she had only signed up for the four classes because another new student had told her she could take the ones she wanted. I explained

that at the National University each study program has a set curriculum, and that if she did not sign up, dropped, or failed a class it would mean at least one extra year. We both were upset and uneasy about her situation, starting her first semester on a very wrong foot. I contacted another student, Deysi, who is in her last year in the same program. Within minutes, we found that Merary could still sign up for the

class, even after missing the first two weeks of classes. Not the best situation, but at least back on track to finish the course work in the planned five years! I told her to try to do her best, and that with her good study habits she would pass all five classes. When I spoke with her in April after her first exams, she said she was doing well in all her classes. When I asked specifically about the one she had missed two weeks of, she said she got a B+ on the first test and an A in the first lab. I congratulated her and she thanked me for helping straighten things out in time. She and Deysi are now friends, and Deysi has offered to help if needed at any time. I smile as I think of how two young women of different ages, from two different communities and who went to different schools, were united and are now friends because they are both supported by our program. These secondary, but very important, ties are common among the youth we have supported since 1999.

This is similar to the case of Amilcar Montoya whose graduating high school class came together to help him and his family out under difficult circumstances. It is with great sorrow that I tell you that Amilcar passed away peacefully on February 14th, 2022. The physical, emotional, and economic support provided by several former scholarship students, as well as other classmates from his high school promotion of 2000, made his last months of life as a paraplegic and the funeral easier for his wife Aracely and daughter Ariana.

I'll finish my report by telling about a past scholarship student, Milton Palma. Knowing that the *Wind Beneath our Wings* article was to be dedicated to a longtime friend and program supporter, Arlene Schaupp, I thought an update on just one of the students Arlene has supported would be appropriate. Milton Wilmer Palma Serrano studied medicine for 5 of his 8 years in the program. He is now in his eighth and last year, doing rounds at different National hospitals in El Salvador. In 2019 he told me he no longer needed our support, as in his sixth through eighth year he would receive the new stipend given to students in the public health system for their

social work hours as well as professional practice within the national health system. Milton said that he hoped his scholarship would open up a spot for another worthy student from rural Suchitoto. Milton has always been a very mature and responsible person, even recently sending a



Michelle & Milton

letter and photo to Arlene although he has not received financial support for over two years. Milton has been in a romantic relationship with Michelle Leiva, a nursing student not

in our program whom he met while they both lived in our student house. Michelle graduated several years ago as a registered nurse, taught for one year at the National University, and was working as a dental assistant in a private clinic. She enjoyed dentistry so much that this year she has returned to school, where she is currently

studying Odontology and doing well in her first semester. Milton was one of a very few students who actually met his sponsors on three occasions. Both were active with other groups working in El Salvador for decades. It is heartening when like-minded groups and people let their work overlap, as has been the case with both Voices on the Border and South Bay Sanctuary Covenant, who through Arlene Schaupp on numerous occasions asked me to meet and speak with members from their delegations. Many times students including Milton joined me to meet and talk in person to their sponsors as well as other delegation members. I will end my report on this note of encouragement, that different groups working with different people around El Salvador can share the joy that comes from knowing we each do needed work in our own special ways. The work of each of these groups is made possible by dedicated supporters. Together, you are a powerful life force, a network of kindred spirits who sustain caring outreach to people far away, generously opening opportunities to create pathways to a promising future for them and their families. Again, thank you!

— Robert Broz, Project Director

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**Dear friends/supporters:**

*You've just read Robert Broz's account of his current experiences as our in-country Field Director, so you know that the great challenges of life in much of the world are felt with special impact in tiny El Salvador. A legacy of poverty and domination by elites has nourished a powerful organized crime network. A recent surge of murders evoked a harsh government response that sweeps in and victimizes innocent people along with presumed gang members. Democratic institutions and civil liberties are among the casualties of this conflict. Now, more than ever, sources of hope and empowerment are vital. Robert's report illustrates the*

*resiliency and determination of the students who gain access to education, with promising life opportunities and positive influence in their communities, through the El Salvador Projects that your donations support.*

*So... How important is your contribution? You may be surprised to learn how small a number of people sustain these Projects. Together, each giving what we can, our donations accomplish a great deal.*

- *The 2022 budget of the El Salvador Projects is just \$47,000. That covers modest compensation to our Director, Robert Broz, enables 18 gifted students from poor rural communities to study at the university level, and assists elementary*



education and youth activities to enrich the lives of elderly people.

- Less than 5% of our budget is used for fundraising (this newsletter, and notes of appreciation). The other 95% is carefully allocated to education and our other program costs in El Salvador.
- Our most recent newsletter (November 2021) was sent to 457 recipients. We received 93 donations. That number represents one fifth of the recipients, a very high response rate for any direct mailing seeking financial support. We can all celebrate this level of commitment – and we

can also imagine what could be accomplished if two fifths were to donate in 2022!

- Half of all donations received were under \$150. That fact confirms what we often say: No donation is too small to matter! (It's also true, of course, that no donation is too large to be welcomed.)

Thank you for the support and encouragement many of you have given through the years to brighten lives in El Salvador. Thank you for whatever you can do now, in this present, to sustain this visionary work. Together, we lift individuals, families, and whole communities.

Jamie Newton, Bill Bauriedel, and Dave Hinson, for the El Salvador Projects Committee

YES! I WANT TO HELP SALVADORANS IMPROVE THEIR LIVES!

Mail donations to:

Palo Alto Friends Meeting–El Salvador Projects, 957 Colorado Avenue, Palo Alto, CA 94303

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\$25    \$50    \$75    \$100    \$250    \$500    \$1000    Other \_\_\_\_\_

Check here if you want your gift to support a college student.  
(Please specify on your check memo line “college loans”)

All donations are used for education programs. Most donations are used for our university student loans, and some smaller donations are used for other educational purposes such as high school tutors or supplies.

Contribution checks should be made to **PAFM – E.S. Projects**. Your contribution is tax-deductible.

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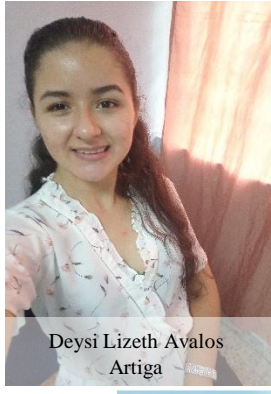
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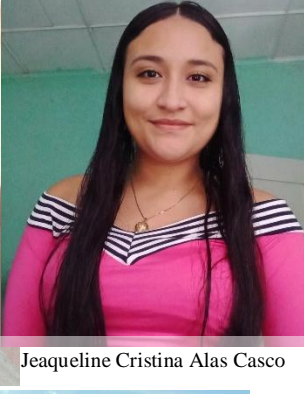
Palo Alto Friends Meeting - El Salvador Projects



Daniel Eduardo Rivas  
Mejía



Deysi Lizeth Avalos  
Artiga



Jaqueline Cristina Alas Casco



Edenilson Antonio  
Olmedo Velásquez



Ingrid Raquel Auceda  
Alvarado



Giovanni Alfredo Chevez Ramírez



Esmeralda del Carmen Alas Castillo

Our  
2022  
Students!

& Merary  
(seen inside)



Pablo Antonio Castillo León



Jeisi Anai Pacas Barrera



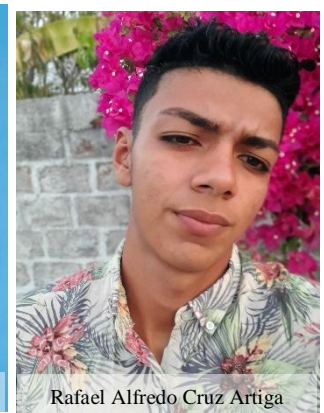
Karla Yesenia Aguilar  
Mejía



Keilyn Estefani Gómez Rauda



Keira Julissa Aguilar Pineda



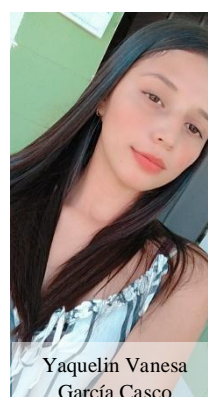
Rafael Alfredo Cruz Artiga



Luis Antonio Menjivar González



Miguel Alexander Martínez Alas



Yaquelin Vanesa  
García Casco



Wilson Antonio Casco Lizcano

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