

# METROPOLITAN

## Salvadorans shed new light on Central America

by Robert Lothian

A Salvadoran woman who is organizing support for Central American refugee women in Mexico City and two Salvadoran students offered Portland last week some seldom heard information about the problems south of the border.

Angela Concepcion Mendoza de Pena, 63, visited Portland Nov. 7 representing a group of Salvadoran women in exile who have organized a school, a sewing workshop and other projects to help refugees in the Mexico City area.

Rodolfo Rosales, 26, and Antino Quezada, 29, students at the National University of El Salvador in San Salvador, said the university is now open once again after being closed for four years and nearly destroyed by the Salvadoran military. Students desperately need supplies, they said. The students and Mendoza de Pena appealed for aid from groups in the United States.

According to Mendoza de Pena, of the estimated 200,000 refugees from the violence in El Salvador and Guatemala living in Mexico, nearly 80 percent are women. While men often have the resources to come to the United States and Canada, the women get stuck in Mexico. There, they suffer from culture shock and health problems, not to mention the psychological scars from witnessing the violence and losing loved ones. They have trouble finding jobs, housing and getting their children into school, she continued.



ANGELA CONCEPCION MENDOZA DE PENIA (Photo: Richard J. Brown)

Just reaching the relative safety of Mexico involves an almost superhuman effort, said Mendoza de Pena. The refugees' migrations are fraught with starvation, miscarriages, rape and hassles with security forces and government functionaries in Guatemala. Some women killed their babies to escape detection and other children have been lost in river crossings, she said.

"The situation of the refugee women is extremely painful. They have been terrorized," Mendoza de Pena said.

The poorest refugees, including many Guatemalan Indians, stay close

to the Guatemalan border in camps set up by the Mexican government. Those refugees are the most inaccessible and difficult to help, she said.

Women who make their way to Mexico City risk being kidnapped and forced into prostitution, or being sexually abused while in jail, she continued.

Because they can't legally work, the women are forced to take sub-minimum wage jobs and leave their children home alone. Children are faced with enormous adjustment problems: they can't go to school or be admitted to a hospital without difficult-to-obtain refugee papers, and

some are attracted to the street life in poor *barrios*. Landlords require several months' rent in advance, a character witness and refugee papers. Mendoza de Pena described refugee families living under bridges.

"These people need peace... a peace that, because of all the things I have mentioned, is very difficult to obtain," she said.

Mendoza de Pena is contacting women's groups in the United States to raise their awareness and to ask for sewing materials and other aid so the refugee women can start workshops. In addition to the small school and the sewing workshop, Mendoza de Pena said her group has organized support groups, a refugee women's shelter, and day care centers.

Formerly a commercial secretary, Mendoza de Pena lost two of her children in the Salvadoran civil war, and her husband was jailed, tortured and exiled for his political views, she said.

Speaking at Portland State University (PSU) Nov. 8, the two students said that even though their names appeared on a death list, they were willing to continue speaking out for *AGEUS*, the General Union of Salvadoran University Students.

Quezada, an agronomy student from the city of Santa Ana, said the National University in San Salvador has been a historical center of unrest and opposition directed at El Salvador's dictatorships. The university was invaded in 1960, 1972 and 1980, when 60 students and faculty were killed and buildings were destroyed.

The school was shut down for four years until it reopened in May. While the university has the vocal support of President Napoleon Duarte, he has denied the budget because he says the money is needed to fight the civil war, Quezada said. The university is seeking international support to continue operating, but another invasion could happen at almost any time.

Quezada said that a demonstration of 20,000 paraded to the presidential palace in the capital to demand funds—just the kind of activity that could provoke the military. "The military considers the university not only an opposition source, but also a direct enemy," he said.

According to Quezada, Duarte only provides a thin cover for the military and the death squads. "Duarte said he would capture the death squads, but a year and six months later not one of these people has been brought to trial."

Rosales, a medical student from San Salvador, said the students are organizing a health clinic for peasants with personnel that can travel to rural areas. He urged PSU students to form a solidarity group to support Salvadoran students.



(Left to right) Jim Russell, Rodolfo Rosales, Susan Westby, and Antonio Quezada.

(Photo: Richard J. Brown)

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### American Violence & Policy editor to speak in Portland

Dr. Lynn Curtis, President of the Eisenhower Foundation and editor of *American Violence and Public Policy*, will be in Portland Nov. 21 and 22 at the invitation of the Office of Neighborhood Associations, the Office of the Mayor, Multnomah County Justice Services and the Center for Urban Education.

*American Violence and Public Policy*, released by Yale University Press this spring, is a 15-year update of the 1969 report by the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence.

The book, which has been hailed as the "current definitive statement" by David Ginsburg of the National Commission on Civil Disorders, was the subject of a two-part series on the CBS evening news. In addition, Dr. Curtis has held several urban forums to discuss *American Violence and Public Policy* including one at the John F. Kennedy School for Public Policy. Dr. Curtis appeared before

the Manhattan Citizens Crime Commission along with New York Police Commissioner Benjamin Ward and Hubert Williams, Director of Police in Newark, New Jersey.

Dr. Curtis formerly served as the Urban Policy Advisor to the Secretary of HUD and was director of the Federal Interagency Urban Initiatives Anti-Crime Program. He was also co-director of the Violence Commission Task Force.

While in Portland, Dr. Curtis will meet with City and County officials including Mayor Clark and Chief Harrington, and criminal justice professionals.

On Thursday, Nov. 21, Dr. Curtis will meet with neighborhood leaders and participants in the Neighborhood Crime Prevention Program. That meeting will be held at the King Neighborhood Facility, 4815 N.E. Seventh, at 7:30 p.m. Dr. Curtis will address the City Club on Friday, Nov. 22 at noon.

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**FACT:** The United States Geological Survey pinpoints sources of contamination in every state.

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