



## *A Note from **Martin Sheen** Celebrating a long-time Solidarity Organizer*

Spring 2007

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Are you as disgusted as I am by the constant stream of inconsequential and soon-to-be-forgotten heroes and "celebrities" foisted on us by the corporate media?

Real heroes DO exist – you just won't see them on Fox News.

And I want to tell you about one – not some flash in the pan who's famous for being famous. But rather, someone you've probably never heard of: Don White. Don is a CISPES leader from Los Angeles who is 70 years young this month and celebrating nearly five decades as an organizer. **Don's steadfast loyalty, no matter how tough the going gets has been an inspiration to LA activists young and old and typifies the determination that has kept CISPES in the forefront of the solidarity movement for twenty-seven years.**



*Los Angeles CISPES activists **Don White** speaks to a delegation in El Salvador*

Don't just take my word for it! In 2005, thousands of Salvadorans gathered to celebrate the FMLN's 25 years of struggle to free their country from military dictatorship, corporate control and US domination. The FMLN, in turn, honored a few special organizations and individuals for the solidarity they had given to the people of El Salvador and their revolutionary work over a quarter century. You'll recognize the names of some of the honorees – Hugo Chavez, Fidel Castro, the Sandinistas of Nicaragua.

And right beside those leaders, the ones who are molding Latin America into a force capable of throwing off the centuries of subservience to the colossus of the North, stood... Don White.

Don's road to that remarkable honor began in 1980. Back then, he and I first met in Los Angeles during an upsurge by literally hundreds of thousands of people opposed to Reagan's criminal funding of El Salvador's death squad regime.

**In that year, CISPES was founded and Don became a key organizer in LA. We marched together often and Don always seemed to be at the head of the procession helping with security. I particularly remember his support when I and 140 others were arrested in 1989 protesting the army's murder of six Jesuits and two of their staff.**

I'd like to share with you a few on Don's most vivid memories from those times.

In 1989 he joined an occupation of the San Salvador Cathedral to support 35 "lisiados" (FMLN war wounded) who were demanding their rights under the Geneva Convention to be evacuated to Cuba for medical treatment Explains Don:

***If you're in L.A. join us  
at Don's birthday party!  
go to [www.cispes.org](http://www.cispes.org)  
for details***

"Because we knew what was going to happen, CISPES sent a delegation to San Salvador to provide accompaniment. Many of the lisiados were in bad condition. A large banner announcing that they were FMLN combatants demanding rights under the Geneva Conventions electrified the city...the war was still going on and it was the first time an FMLN banner had been hoisted up in downtown San Salvador... we took turns at night on guard making sure the army did not invade the church.

"The most emotional moments came at night when we would all gather at Monseñor Romero's tomb [which was upstairs at that time] and sing revolutionary and political songs. Through international pressure, the  
*(over, please!)*

lisiados DID get evacuated.”

The inspiration he draws from courage and creativity of the people comes up again and again in his recollections.

"I remember being part of a large caravan of buses and trucks, carrying refugees back to their community way out in the countryside. They were forced out by the military early in the war and now demanded their right to return to their communities of origin.

"But we were stopped at an army checkpoint the situation grew very tense. A young mother came over to the internationals and handed her baby to a young U.S. woman. 'Please protect my child; there may be trouble here,' she said. Eventually a call to the Archbishop and some other strategies worked and the military allowed the caravan to proceed."

After the historic Peace Accords ended the war in 1992, many people moved on, but Don stayed in the struggle. "The war ended the military dictatorship and the FMLN and popular movement brought the struggle into the political mainstream--that was a tremendous victory" Don told me. "But peace didn't bring justice. The right still controlled the economy and US intervention did not end either."

Don White and CISPES stood by the movement in El Salvador. According to Don:

"The struggle for social justice continued and the FMLN still asked for our solidarity. The Salvadoran people never gave up, so how could I?

"Here in Los Angeles many of us bonded with the Salvadorans – we sort of become 'Salvadorans in spirit' – so leaving the movement and the struggle seems a bit like walking away from your family in a time of need.

"And, as veteranos of CISPES know, once you bond with the Salvadoran people, you're hooked as a solidarity person for life...once you have been to El Salvador and witnessed the courage, sacrifice, dedication, savvy, and total revolutionary spirit of the people, it's quite hard to ever walk away. And that continues today with the fight against CAFTA, the ILEA police training school, and other forms of US intervention in El Salvador."



CISPES marches on May Day '07 in El Salvador

Summing up his years in the movement Don told me that **"standing with CISPES and El Salvador has been a privilege, joining with others to create social justice."**

And now, after many difficult years, the tide is turning.

"I'm looking forward to 2009! By then we'll have closed the SOA and hopefully, the ILEA too. That will send a message that people in the US won't stand for the blatant intervention of the past. And that could give the FMLN a boost to win the presidency.

"I'll only be 72 so I definitely plan to be there at the inauguration. I want to hear the cheers when the CISPES delegation is introduced. That will be the proudest day of my life."

Now that's keeping the faith! I know that the solidarity Don and CISPES have given El Salvador for 27 years has been invaluable.

**Do you agree? If so, you can play your part as well. Give CISPES, and Don, the resources to continue taking on their essential role in the struggle. Please send in your gift today.**

In solidarity,

**Martin Sheen**

P.S. This May Day a CISPES delegation took to the streets of San Salvador in solidarity with thousands of people marching to celebrate International Workers Day. Please send your gift today and ensure that CISPES can continue that amazing support for the Salvadoran movement!