

Truth Commissions and the Protection of International Human Rights

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I. Introduction

The effort to establish an effective international system for the protection of human rights has gone through various stages. It took almost fifty years after the Second World to establish the principle that states can be held responsible as a matter of international law for human rights violations committed against their nationals and for individuals to be able to assert their claims against states in various international fora. The systems that have been established are not perfect. They range from the highly developed European Convention of Human Rights to the weaker American Convention on Human Rights, and the even less effective mechanisms provided by the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

The important point at this stage, however, is not the effectiveness of these institutions but the fact that the international community and

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international law have accepted the proposition that individuals in one way or another have standing to hold states responsible for violations of human rights on the international plane. This is but another way of saying that today individuals are deemed to have rights under international law as far as the protection of their human rights are concerned and that they no longer need states to assert these rights on their behalf on the international plane. This conclusion, which seems obvious today, was strongly disputed and deemed quite revolutionary five decades ago. In that sense we have come a long way.

The next stage in the development is a lawmaking and institution-building process that is evolving before our very eyes. This is the effort to hold individuals internationally responsible for violations of human rights. It is true, of course, that the Nuremberg and Tokyo war crimes trials, which took place at the end of the Second World War, laid the normative foundation for an international legal system under which individuals could be tried by international courts for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. But it is only now, more than fifty years later, that the international community has embarked on a process that will result in the establishment of a permanent international criminal court. The *ad hoc* tribunals created by the United Nations Security Council to deal with the horrendous violations of human rights that were committed in Rwanda and Bosnia provided the impetus for the revival of the idea of a permanent international criminal court which, while already foreshadowed in the 1948 Genocide Convention, lay dormant for more than half a century because governments were afraid of opening what to many of them seemed a dangerous Pandora's box.

The need to hold individuals internationally responsible for serious violations of human rights has become increasingly more apparent in recent decades. As some nations have moved from dictatorial regimes to more democratic ones, they have found themselves being held internationally responsible for the large-scale violations of human rights that took place in their countries in the past. Legally, this is entirely proper because under traditional international law, it is the state rather than any one government that is responsible for the violations of international law committed by it. At the same time, though, what we have here is the anomalous situation that a government that had nothing to do with the past violations of

human rights is being held responsible for and at times has to pay compensation out of its state treasury, which was depleted by the very people who committed the offenses. Frequently, moreover, these same individuals are living in luxury abroad with moneys they obtained while in power. The irony in all of this is that the people of the country who were victimized by their oppressors now have the additional burden of paying in one form or another for the misdeeds of these individuals. None of this is very fair, nor is it an effective deterrent against future violations.

A good example of this problem is presented by the so-called *Honduran Disappearance Cases* the Inter-American Court of Human Rights decided while I was still a judge of this tribunal. In these cases, the Court found the State of Honduras responsible for the forced disappearance—a euphemism for torture and death—of two Hondurans and awarded damages to the next of kin in the amount of approximately one million U.S. dollars. These disappearances and some 150 more were committed in Honduras in the late 1970's and early 1980's, when the country was run by the military either directly or behind a civilian facade. The compensation was eventually paid in full by Honduras after President Carlos Roberto Reina came to power. The military officers responsible for these crimes have not been brought to justice, whereas many of their victims remain to be identified and their families compensated.

In other countries, the perpetrators have been amnestied, sometimes by themselves or by blackmailing the civilian authorities in return for agreeing to relinquish power. Few of these individuals have had to account for their wealth, often gained from the victims of their human rights violations, nor have they been held criminally responsible for their actions. This is the case in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay, for example. The past is thus buried together with the victims. One of the many consequences of this situation is that society in these countries has not been able, by punishing the perpetrators, to vindicate the principle of deterrence that might prevent others in the future from usurping political power and committing serious violations of human rights. It is thus clear that one way to deal with this problem for the time being is to reinforce international legal principles and establish institutions that will enable the international community to ensure that human rights violations don't go unpunished or, at least, that they are properly investigated, which in turn will serve to deter future violations.

II. International courts and truth commissions

International criminal courts are not the only international mechanisms for holding individuals responsible for large-scale violations of human rights. During the past decade there has emerged an institution, the so-called truth commission, that stands half way between international criminal courts, on the one hand, and the traditional international human rights tribunals, on the other. They are basically fact-finding bodies whose task it is to investigate what happened in a country during a given period of internal armed conflict or dictatorship. Frequently they are mandated to assign responsibility, either individual or group responsibility, and to propose methods for dealing with the alleged perpetrators of massive human rights violations. The commissions are often also empowered to make to make recommendations for measures capable of advancing the cause of national reconciliation.

Three different types of truth commissions have been created in recent years: national truth commissions, mixed commissions and international commissions. The best known national truth commission is the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which is still investigating Apartheid-era crimes. Similar bodies were established in Argentina and Chile for the investigation of the massive violations of human rights that were committed in those countries by their military regimes. These commissions owed their existence to national laws and were composed of their own nationals.

A mixed truth commission was created in Haiti with the assistance of the United Nations and the Organization of American States after the return of President Aristide. This commission consisted of three foreign nationals and four Haitians. The best known truly international commission to date was the United Nations Truth Commission for El Salvador. It was established in 1992 under the United Nations-brokered peace accords concluded between the Government of El Salvador and the FMLN, the Frente Farabundo Marti para la Liberacion Nacional, and consisted of three foreign nationals. The United Nations established a number of other international investigatory commissions of this type. Among these were the investigatory commissions for the Former Yugoslavia (1992-94) and Rwanda (1994), created to lay the foundation for the *ad hoc* international criminal tribunals for these conflicts, and a similar body for Burundi (1995).

Truth commissions, whether national, mixed or international, serve what I would call a macro fact-finding function in contradistinction to

courts, which establish the facts in a specific case and thus perform micro fact-finding functions. A truth commission, depending upon the context, can provide reliable information about serious violations of human rights, including genocide, widespread disappearances, extrajudicial executions, torture and rapes, about conditions in detention camps, about massacres and the different military units and commanders responsible for these criminal acts. It can also gather information about the political and other factors leading to these events and identify those who executed the crimes and those who incited others to commit them. In short, a truth commission can provide the world with an overall picture of what happened and make recommendations regarding measures it considers necessary to bring about national reconciliation, including public trials and amnesties.

International criminal courts can play a much more limited, albeit very important, role: they establish criminal responsibility and impose the corresponding punishment on individuals found to be guilty of the offense charged. As in a domestic context, this action has practical and symbolic value: it extracts retribution, stigmatizes the conduct that resulted in the punishment, and serves the goal of deterrence by warning potential offenders of the consequences of such action. It also sends a symbolic message that the international community considers the acts committed to be criminal and, hence, politically unacceptable and morally reprehensible.

Only in the rarest of cases, though, are courts able to provide the large picture of events that produced the crimes. Also, they are not in a position to try more than a limited number of offenders. In Rwanda, for example, between 20,000 to 50,000 individuals allegedly took part in the massacres. No international or for that matter national court could try that many people in any reasonable time span. Because the focus of courts is person-specific, their approach to the facts before them will be narrower than that of truth commissions whose mandate can be much broader and more general. Courts, of course, are not well equipped to make policy recommendations. Truth commission can be.

The real disadvantage of a truth commission is that it is not a judicial body and thus lacks the power that an international criminal court has, which is to convict the guilty persons and to impose a criminal sentence. A truth commission can make factual findings based on its investigations and, if given that power, it can also identify those individuals it finds to be responsible for various unlawful acts, but only a court can impose the requisite criminal sanctions. Sometimes,

though, a truth commission finding can settle political disputes regarding individual and group responsibility without which national reconciliation, particularly after a bloody civil war, is not possible and which the conviction of a few individuals will not achieve. In that sense, the findings of a truth commission on the subject of general responsibility can be as important as the judgment of a court on individual responsibility. For some situations it would make sense, moreover, to have a truth commission and an international court, that is, a thorough general investigation followed by the trial of the worst offenders or responsible leaders. That would be the proper approach, for example, in Cambodia.

Looking at truth commissions, particularly mixed and international ones, from the point of view of the role they play in advancing the cause of international human rights protection, it can be said that they provide the international community with an additional mechanism to deal with and, hopefully, also to prevent large-scale violations of human rights. In order to ensure that individuals around the world have their internationally guaranteed human rights respected, the international community must draw on the entire arsenal of available mechanisms, beginning with national laws that give effect to international human rights obligations and national courts willing and able to enforce these laws. When these methods fail, the next stage will consist of resort to international human rights norms and institutions that permit governments, non-governmental organizations and individuals to file complaints against the offending state. These steps can be followed by the establishment of a truth commission and/or resort to an international criminal court.

As pointed out before, a truth commission can play a particularly important role in investigating serious human rights violations committed during lengthy internal armed conflicts and in dealing with large-scale human rights violations by successive brutal or genocidal regimes. The experience of the United Nations Truth Commission for El Salvador on which I served demonstrates both the possibilities and limitations of such bodies.

III. The United Nations Truth Commission for El Salvador

The Truth Commission for El Salvador was established on July 15, 1992 and submitted its final report, entitled *From Madness to Hope (De la Locura a la Esperanza)* to Secretary-General of the United Nations on

March 15, 1993. It was created under the Salvadoran Peace Accords, a series of agreements negotiated between 1989 and 1992 under United Nations auspices by the Government of El Salvador and the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN). The actual mandate of the Truth Commission was spelled out in the so-called «Mexico Agreements» of April 27, 1991, which were subsequently incorporated by reference into the Chapultepec Agreement of January 16, 1992.

The mandate of the Commission was to investigate the «serious acts of violence» that occurred in El Salvador between 1980 and 1991 and «whose impact on society urgently required that the public should know the truth.» In discharging its responsibilities, the Commission was to take account of two principal considerations: first, «the exceptional importance» attaching «to the acts to be investigated, their characteristics and impact, and the social unrest to which they gave rise.» The second was «the need to create confidence in the positive changes» to be effected by the peace process and «to assist the transition to national reconciliation.» In other words, not all serious acts of violence were necessarily to be investigated. The main focus was to be on acts that had a special or broader impact on society in general. Moreover, in exercising its functions, the Commission was to be guided by the fact that the promotion of national reconciliation was an overarching aim of the investigation.

The Commission was to be composed of three individuals, not nationals of El Salvador, selected by the Secretary-General of the United Nations after consultation with the parties. He selected Belisario Betancur, the former President of Colombia, Reinaldo Figueredo, former Foreign Minister of Venezuela, and me, a former President of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

The decision to establish a truth commission consisting of foreign nationals had much to do with the nature of the conflict to be investigated. The Salvadoran civil war, which lasted some 12 years, had cost more than 75,000 civilian lives in a country with a population of only some 5 million. By the time the peace accords were signed, the country was so divided between the left and the right that neither side to the conflict believed that a commission consisting of Salvadorans would be able to carry out an objective investigation and have its findings accepted by the public.

To that extent, the situation in El Salvador was quite different from that in Argentina or Chile, for example, where the internal conflict had not, as in El Salvador, totally destroyed the possibility of finding

individuals whose personal integrity, impartiality and honesty would be generally accepted. In these countries it was therefore much easier to establish national commissions than in El Salvador, where this approach was deemed highly problematic. That, at any rate, was the conclusion of the Salvadorans who negotiated the peace accords.

Another element that motivated and justified the establishment of an international truth commission had to do with the peculiarities of the Salvadoran Peace Accords. They basically left the government which signed these agreements, the Government of President Cristiani, in power together with the entire military and security apparatus until future democratic elections could be held. And while provisions were made for the United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador —ONUSAL— to supervise the implementation of the peace settlement and police the country in the interim, which ONUSAL did very well indeed, the population felt, rightly or wrongly, that it was still at the mercy either of the Government or the FLMN in areas controlled by each of them. Most people would therefore have been very reluctant to provide needed information to a truth commission composed in whole or in part of Salvadorans, for fear that its members could not be trusted to keep the information and the names of witnesses confidential. Fear of retribution had been something Salvadorans had lived with for 12 years.

These considerations also explain why we, the members of the Salvadoran Truth Commission, decided not to have any Salvadorans on our staff. This decision and the fact that we ourselves were foreigners had both advantages and disadvantages. The advantages were that the Salvadoran public could more easily believe that we were not partisans of either side to the conflict and that we could therefore be more readily trusted to carry out an honest investigation. We had a serious disadvantage, however, because we knew little of the country, its history, traditions, and people, and therefore had much to learn. For that same reason, though, it was easier for us than it might have been for Salvadorans to approach the investigations without preconceived notions or biases.

A. *The Investigation*

The parties to the Salvadoran Peace Accords did not specify the cases we were to investigate. They limited themselves to telling us to focus on those serious acts of violence whose impact on society was of

such a pervasive or important character during the Salvadoran conflict that the truth about them had to be made known. The reason for this very general investigatory mandate had to do with the fact that the parties could not agree on a list of specific cases. Each side had its own group of cases it wanted investigated, mostly violations known to have been committed by the other side. Each new list presented by one side during the negotiations led the other side to submit a longer and more contentious list. Moreover, the parties agreed very early on in the negotiations that national reconciliation would have no chance of succeeding unless the truth was told as objectively as possible about those violations of human rights that had most shocked the country and remained in its consciousness. Eventually it was agreed that these objectives could not be achieved unless the task of selecting the cases to be investigated was left to the Commission.

The problem the Commission faced was that it was given a six months deadline, subsequently extended to eight months. That was not enough time to investigate the many serious violations of human rights that had been committed during those terrible 12 years. We therefore decided to approach our investigation in two parallel ways. First, we would assemble a list of cases that were paradigmatic of the type of serious violations that had been committed by both sides in large numbers, namely, extrajudicial executions, forced disappearances, tortures and massacres. By documenting these categories of cases, we would be in a position to provide an overall picture of the suffering to which the country had been subjected. Second, in addition to these cases, we decided also to focus on particularly notorious individual cases and events that had gained national and international attention.

Time does not permit me to describe in detail the manner in which we proceeded to gather evidence, how we obtained information and the difficulties we encountered. Let me here merely say that the Commission and staff interviewed some 7000 witnesses: victims, their next of kin, alleged perpetrators, government officials, FMLN commanders, military officers, church officials, and many others who could provide evidence concerning specific cases or events. We received an additional 7000 communications relating to various cases or events. We obtained documents from the Government of El Salvador and from the FMLN, and from non-governmental organizations as well as from various foreign governments, including the United States. Here I should note that some US agencies were better in providing us with important information than others. Suffice it here to say merely that in some cases

the information provided by the United States proved indispensable and that in others important material was withheld from us.

B. *The Commission Findings*

To summarize our findings, let me say that we were able to solve and allocate individual or group responsibility in a some 50 paradigmatic and notorious cases, involving hundreds of victims. This was particularly true of some of the famous cases, such as the murder of Archbishop Romero, the killings of the Jesuit fathers, the killings of mayors, the El Mozote and similar massacres, the killings of four American nuns, the Zona Rosa attacks.

Interestingly enough, none of our specific findings have been seriously challenged either by the Government side or the FLMN. Unfortunately, we were not very successful in identifying the people who funded the death squads, in part because we lacked the power to obtain bank documents and telephone records and because certain important intelligence information was withheld from us. In some cases, moreover, the FLMN was more successful than the government in covering up serious violations largely because it operated clandestinely. It should also be said that with more time, we would have come up with much more evidence. But if we had extended our investigations significantly beyond the eight months assigned to us, our report might well have had less of an impact in El Salvador than it had. It was issued shortly after the end of the hostilities and was therefore eagerly expected by all segments of the population. That suspense would probably have gradually subsided as more time elapsed.

While our mandate charged us with investigating «serious acts of violence,» it did not specify the legal norms by reference to which such acts were to be judged. Given the nature of the conflict in El Salvador—an internal armed conflict—the Commission decided that, in addition to Salvadoran law, the applicable legal standards for judging the violations of human rights to be investigated consisted of international humanitarian law—Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions and Protocol II thereto—as well as serious breaches of international human rights norms, particularly the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the American Convention on Human Rights, all instruments which Salvador had ratified.

An important doctrinal question the Commission had to resolve in determining the law applicable to its mandate concerned the question whether the insurgents, that is, the FMLN, could be charged with violations only of international humanitarian law or also with violations of international human rights law. This was an important question because the traditional view is that while both parties to an internal armed conflict are bound by humanitarian law, only governments are bound by international human rights law. The Commission rejected this proposition by concluding that «... when insurgents assume governmental powers in territories under their control, they too can be required to observe certain human rights obligations that are binding on the State under international law.» Given the inherent logic of this conclusion, it would surprise me if it were not generally accepted in a similar context.

A serious problem facing the Commission in gathering evidence had to do with the atmosphere of fear that continued to grip El Salvador even after the signing of the peace accords. As a result, very few people were willing to speak to us unless we could provide them with meaningful protection. But the only real protection we could offer to those who provided us with evidence was a guarantee that, if requested, we would keep their identity confidential. The vast majority of our witnesses made that request. Although the peace accords expressly authorized us to proceed in this fashion, the approach was not without its problems. While it protected the witnesses, it raised serious due process issues with regard to individuals the Commission would identify as perpetrators of human rights violations, since they who would not be able to confront the witnesses against them or cross-examine them. Such confrontation, particularly in the case of accused military leaders or guerilla commanders would have endangered the lives of the witnesses.

The interests of the witness had consequently be balanced against the interests of the alleged perpetrator. To effect that balance, the Commission decided to establish a rigorous evidentiary process. One element of that process was the adoption of a scale for the weighing of the evidence, which consisted of three categories of evidence —overwhelming evidence, substantial evidence and sufficient evidence. Serious charges against individuals had to be substantiated by overwhelming or at least substantial proof and required corroboration from multiple sources. The Commission also decided that no one would be found responsible for the commission of a serious act

of violence unless that person was given an opportunity to be heard and to rebut the charges. This was not a perfect process, but it was the best we could do under the circumstances, given the fear that prevailed in El Salvador and the fact-finding obligations our mandate imposed on us.

Of course, the ideal solution would have been to prepare a confidential report with our findings concerning alleged perpetrators and to turn it over to the courts for trials. That option was not open, however, because the Salvadoran justice system was both highly corrupt and still in the hands of only one side to the conflict. In fact, the then President of the Supreme Court was himself one of the persons whom the Commission identified as responsible for the cover-up of some violations. The Commission was therefore left with the choice of preparing a report that either identified or failed to identify alleged perpetrators by name. It chose the latter approach after concluding that the mandate given it by the parties to the peace accords—to tell the truth about the terrible violations of human rights that had taken place in El Salvador—required it to name names. Without names only some of the truth would have been told.

Among the specific recommendations the Commission made with regard to those individuals it identified as perpetrators of serious acts of violence was dismissal from government service and a bar to future service in certain governmental posts. Under the peace accords, these recommendations by the Commission were binding on the parties. The Commission made no recommendations regarding amnesties. Yet a few days after the Commission issued its report, the Government of President Cristiani issued a general amnesty for all crimes committed in connection with the prior armed conflict and ordered the release from jail even of individuals who had already been convicted for such crimes, including the officers who had been found guilty of the execution of the Jesuit priests. But while no one was therefore tried for the crimes the Commission had exposed in its report, its recommendations for the dismissal from public service was implemented by President Cristiani.

IV. Some reflections on the salvadoran experience

It will take years to fully assess the work and achievements of the United Nations Truth Commission for El Salvador, if only because its success and failure will have to be judged in the context of long-term developments in that country. At this point, therefore, it is only possible

to make some very tentative observations applicable to the Salvadoran Commission and to truth commissions generally.

The release of the Truth Commission's Report had a very significant psychological impact on the people of El Salvador. While the Peace Accords ended the armed conflict, the Report of the Truth Commission put the country on the road to healing the emotional wounds that had continued to divide it. The Report told the truth in a country that was not used to hearing it. To be restored to normalcy, El Salvador needed to hear the truth from a source that had national and international legitimacy and credibility.

The war in El Salvador did not only pit the combatants in the armed conflict against each other, it also totally polarized the population. It became a country in which there was no room for moderation or tolerance for peaceful political debate. Political opponents were treated as enemies and acts of violence against them rationalized as necessary or denied as propaganda. Political allegiance rather than basic human decency determined one's actions and reactions to the crimes that both sides committed. El Salvador was a country in which many lived in fear, and where few wished to know the truth. In this atmosphere the victims or their next of kin often did not dare to publicly denounce what had been done to them or even speak about it lest their claims expose them to further abuse. People kept their suffering to themselves, hoping for justice—a very human instinct—but not really expecting it.

The efforts of the Truth Commission to get at the truth and the release of its Report had a cathartic impact on the country. Many of the people who came to the Commission to tell what happened to them or to their relatives and friends had not done so before. For some, ten years or more had gone by in silence and pent up anger, and now finally they were listened to and there would be a record of what they had gone through. They came by the thousands, still afraid and not a little skeptical, and they talked, many for the first time. One could not listen to them without recognizing that the mere act of telling what had happened was a healing emotional release. They also appeared to be more interested in recounting their story and being heard than in retribution.

A particularly telling interview described by a Commission staff member involved two mothers, one Salvadoran, the other Scandinavian, who came to the Commission together to tell their story. The son of one and the daughter of the other had met in Europe and fallen in love. The couple traveled to Salvador, became active in leftist activities and were murdered by rightist death squads. The two mothers had not met

until they decided to tell their story together to the Truth Commission. They could barely communicate in a common language, but here they were in the Commission's offices in San Salvador sharing their grief and honoring the memory of their children by telling their truth.

The Truth Commission Report and its findings about many cases that had encumbered the nation's conscience had a dramatic effect. The findings confirmed what many suspected, some knew and others refused to believe. Before the release of the Report, few Salvadorans knew the whole story and many more could not separate the truth from the lies and rumors that were rampant even after the signing of the Peace Accords. The result was a never-ending acrimonious debates and the exchange of partisan charges and counter-charges by the former combatants and their allies. The Truth Commission Report put an end to this debate, and thus allowed the country to focus on the future rather than on the cruel and divisive past. It removed the biggest obstacle on the way to national reconciliation: the denial of a terrible truth that divided the nation and haunted its consciousness.

My own experience on the Truth Commission has convinced me that the most important function such a body can perform is to tell the truth. That may sound obvious and trite, but it needs to be said because it has tended to be lost in the discussion about truth commissions and national reconciliation. The assumption that bringing out the truth will rub salt into a nation's wounds and make national reconciliation more difficult to achieve has a certain superficial logic to it, but it is wrong. A nation has to confront its past by acknowledging the wrongs that have been committed in its name before it can successfully embark on the arduous task of cementing the trust between former adversaries and their respective sympathizers, which is a prerequisite for national reconciliation. That, of course, is the basic assumption underlying the approach adopted by the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and it makes a great deal of sense. One cannot hope to achieve national reconciliation by sweeping the truth under the rug of national consciousness, by telling the victims or their next of kin that nothing happened, or by asking them not to tell their particular story. The wounds begin to heal with the telling of the story and the national acknowledgment of its authenticity.

That is why blanket amnesties achieve the opposite result they are intended to achieve: instead of putting an end to the past, they create a climate that keeps the past alive and makes it much more difficult for the nation to reconcile and focus on a common future. Blanket amnesties

have the effect, moreover, of depersonalizing the crimes that were committed and undermining the principles of personal responsibility and deterrence, principles which, if respected, can make an important contribution to reducing future violations of human rights. The international community should therefore oppose such amnesties and formally declare them to be in conflict with international legal obligations to prevent, investigate and punish large-scale human rights violations.

Resumen

Se presenta la experiencia del autor como uno de los comisarios de las Naciones Unidas para El Salvador y las conclusiones que se sacaron de la Comisión de la Verdad, denunciando la situación que se produjo tras la guerra de El Salvador debido a la amnistía general que se dictó tres días después, ya que supuso una tragedia para el país y un obstáculo para el desarrollo de la pacificación al no conocerse la verdad.

Sería importante saber los nombres de los agresores, de ahí la trascendencia del informe de las Naciones Unidas que se realizó sobre El Salvador, ya que en él se mencionaron por primera vez nombres, aunque nunca se consiguió descifrar bien a los Escuadrones de la Muerte. Los agresores siguen siendo considerados hoy día criminales comunes, ya que sin saber la verdad no se puede lograr una reconciliación nacional, al no poder sancionar a los culpables.

No obstante, en este país existe actualmente una reconciliación nacional y la situación de El Salvador marcha bien. Mucho mejor que en países como Guatemala donde los problemas se agravan al existir conflictos raciales. Guatemala es un país más grande que El Salvador con 7 millones de habitantes, de los cuales 5 son de origen indio, 1 son mestizos y el resto blancos, que son quienes controlan el país. A ello hay que añadir el problema de la pobreza.

Un aspecto positivo de la política de Bill Clinton en relación con América Central y del Sur, es el reconocimiento, por primera vez, de la situación latinoamericana gracias a la democratización que se está llevando en todo el continente. Todavía no está instaurada en todos los lugares pero empieza ya a haber atisbos de democracia. Algo muy importante, si tenemos en cuenta que hasta hace poco había regímenes dictatoriales en la totalidad de países.

