

Open letter in Solidarity with Salvadoran Cardinal Gregorio Rosa Chávez

The Salvadoran and Interfaith communities in the United States stand in solidarity with Cardinal Gregorio Rosa Chávez, and firmly reject recent attempts to impugn his reputation in public statements and on social media in response to the Cardinal's call for greater transparency and accountability by Salvadoran President Bukele as El Salvador confronts the crisis of the Coronavirus.

Over our nearly 40-year history, the SHARE Foundation has worked with Cardinal Rosa Chavez in the pursuit of serving the poor, building peace with justice, and authentic reconciliation in El Salvador. During the war years, the SHARE Foundation worked closely with the Archdiocese of San Salvador and the Cardinal to accompany the displaced victims of the war and to seek a peaceful resolution to the conflict through political dialogue. After the war, the SHARE Foundation continued our work rebuilding communities, providing scholarships to youth and women, encouraging food security and ecological justice, supporting the law against mining, advocating for water as a human right, and supporting civic participation. Most recently, the SHARE Foundation joined the Cardinal in organizing one of the largest delegations from the U.S. and El Salvador to Rome for the Canonization of Monseñor Romero.

Cardinal Rosa Chávez enjoys our highest esteem and appreciation for his personal integrity, his internationally recognized leadership and the innumerable and invaluable contributions he has given and continues to give to the Salvadoran community at home and abroad.

During his many visits to the United States, the Cardinal has testified before the United States Congress, participated in meetings with officials at the US State Department and the Inter-American Bank, and has been hosted by the US Catholic Bishops and higher educational institutions to advance a vision of the Common Good. He has faithfully met with the Salvadoran community during each of these visits, celebrating Mass, listening to his compatriots' stories, and supporting their efforts for immigrant rights.

During one of his four visits to Kansas City, Cardinal Rosa Chavez addressed students at Cristo Rey High School. After looking into the faces of the students, he put away his prepared notes and spoke from the heart. He encouraged the students to change themselves, and then to change the world. He challenged the students to learn to be people living in solidarity and to change the reality around them. He said, "*Solidarity is the deep belief in which we feel responsible for one another*" and ended by sharing these words: "*Archbishop Romero listened — carefully — to the people, especially the poor, and then responded, not just with words but with his actions.*"

We support the Cardinal's insistence that President Bukele give a serious, complete and credible report on the management of the funds used during the multiple crises affecting El Salvador. We deplore the attacks on his character and reputation.

The recent attacks to which the Cardinal has been subjected are all too reminiscent of the sad history lived in El Salvador in the 1970s and 1980s, when the church suffered repeated verbal

attacks, followed by violent attacks on priests, sisters, and laypeople, culminating with the murder Monseñor Romero, the four US Church women, the Jesuits, and so many thousands of Salvadoran men and women.

Together with the International Community, we are deeply concerned by President Bukele's growing disregard for the rule of law and the preservation of democratic institutions. We are alarmed by his disrespect for the separation of powers, the closure of spaces for access to public information and his seemingly permanent confrontation with the National Assembly, the Supreme Court and all the sectors of society when they raise questions about his actions and decisions or seek to hold him accountable.

Article 168, numeral three of the Salvadoran Constitution states that the president of the republic must "*seek social harmony and preserve the inner peace and tranquility and security of the human person as a member of society,*" President Bukele's constant incitement of hatred and confrontation with the other branches of government and with any sector that questions his actions violate the spirit and letter of the Constitution.

International human rights organizations have monitored and registered particular concern regarding the government's disrespect for human rights, including the use of the Salvadoran Armed Forces and the National Police for matters that do not concern them, and the use of the pandemic to violate the basic human and civil rights of the population.

In the context of the pandemic emergency, President Bukele has issued a series of executive decrees which have been declared unconstitutional by the Constitutional Chamber. He has vetoed the laws created by the National Assembly and sought to impose his decisions, leading to confusion and an increase in COVID-19 infections and deaths. He has failed to give precise and transparent information re: the management of funds approved for the response to the pandemic, as evidenced by the mass resignation of the governmental commission created to provide oversight to the expenditure of the \$3 billion approved by the legislature in protest. This committee was comprised of diverse bodies including the National Association of Private Business, (ANEP), The Salvadoran Foundation for Economic & Social Development, (FUSADES), the Jose Simeon Cañas Central American University (UCA), the ESEN University and the Chamber of Commerce of El Salvador.

By pointing out the errors and excesses of the Government, Cardinal Rosa Chávez has exercised responsible leadership as a faithful pastor and steward of social justice. We appreciate his courage and integrity and reiterate his words: "*If the Government does not correct its course, the country will suffer more than it is already suffering.*"

We demand that the attacks on Cardinal Rosa Chávez stop.

We call upon President Bukele to respect the other branches of government and Civil Society and to seek an authentic dialogue for the good of the Salvadoran people.

We pray to Saint Romero to alleviate the suffering of the Salvadoran family and to inspire the leaders of El Salvador to work together for the Common Good.

We pledge our support to the Salvadoran people and stand ready to continue in solidarity.