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**POLICY STATEMENT OF CENTRO DE INTERCAMBIO Y SOLIDARIDAD – CIS- REGARDING SECURITY SITUATION IN EL SALVADOR.**

The Centro de Intercambio y Solidaridad – CIS - has organized over 400 international delegations of U.S. based University and Church organizations for over 25 years, has hosted 13 International Election Observer Missions, and has a year round Spanish School for Internationals and annually hosts international volunteers who stay for three months and who teach English or contribute to other grassroots development programs.

The CIS mission is to walk with the poor who are always at risk in El Salvador. Nonetheless through the organization of our program and our long-term relationships with numerous communities, governmental and non- governmental organizations, we are able to provide a safe environment for visitors during their stay. We hold as a high priority that visitors have a safe visit so they can contribute and be in solidarity with the majority of Salvadorans who are working for a democratic country with social and economic justice as the basis for security and so that they will return again. The CIS has not had any major security problems in over 25 years having hosted over 3,525 people in delegations; over 2,973 Spanish students from 35 countries; over 700 long term volunteers (10 weeks plus); over 1,907 international election observers.

The CIS provides security information in our orientation packet as well as an orientation we give to each visitor when they arrive in the country. If people follow the guidelines, their security risks will be minimal. Street robberies are common in El Salvador and delegates will be oriented and prepared not to resist in this event.

The U.S. State department issued a travel advisory consecutively since 2013 which is to be taken seriously. None-the-less, due to the new administration and security policy of President Nayib Bukele, and the significant drop in crime, the state department lowered the risk to level 2, the level of most European countries.

Most of the violence and homicides reported reflects conflicts between and within gangs, and between gangs and police and military. A similar situation has existed in the country for the past 25 years since the end of the civil war. Much of the violence is due to U.S. militarization of El Salvador in the 1980s and 90s, migration policy which breaks up families and since 1994 deports Salvadorans who have joined gangs in the United States, as well as U.S. media and neo-liberal economic policies which foment violence and consumerism in a country where people have little economic independence. The Gangs that currently exist in El Salvador originated in Los Angeles in the early 1980s.

**CIS RELATIONSHIPS**

CIS has a wide array of relationships in the country and is well respected. CIS delegations meet with a broad array of the political, social, and economic sectors of the country. CIS has widespread respect for our work from the marginalized to people in power. For example, CIS regularly visits and has relationships with communities in high risk in urban areas as well as rural communities which are economically marginalized but considered low crime areas. We have never had an incident in either of these communities. Additionally, CIS has relationships with the U.S. Embassy, the President of the Republic, the Legislative Assembly, the National Civilian Police, and the Procurators office in Defense of Human Rights, the Supreme Elections Tribunal, local municipal governments, and other institutions.

CIS prepares our work well in advance of visiting delegations and meets with all actors in the communities we visit, which are long term relationships. A CIS guide accompanies the delegation at all times during the program. No one is surprised when a CIS delegation arrives and, in fact, we are welcomed across the political and social spectrum in the areas where we visit. Salvadorans go out of their way to guide and protect us during our stay. CIS also has relationships with local parishes, churches, and community organizations in rural areas and in high risk zones, which allows the CIS to go into even the most dangerous neighborhoods with protection and respect.

**CIS LOGISITICAL ORGANIZATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL DELEGATIONS**

CIS carefully plans out logistics which also contribute to a safe visit. CIS works with reliable licensed chauffeurs and licensed transportation companies to take the delegates to and from all destinations. Most crime in El Salvador takes place on public transportation. During the visit, delegates do not take public transportation. The CIS agenda is planned out well in advance to make sure we are welcome, and all actors are aware and in agreement with our presence. CIS guides and translators are trained and are familiar with and known in the communities. CIS houses people in hotels or guest house with legal license to operate and with security guards and in safe neighborhoods.

**CIS BASIC SECURITY GUIDELINES**

* Do not bring anything that you cannot bear to part with.
* Do not wear flashy jewelry that will draw attention, even if it is not monetarily worth anything.
* Do not carry large amounts of cash or take out large amounts of cash in public.
* Do not resist in the event of a robbery, nothing is worth your physical safety.
* Do not go out at night unless it is part of the group activity, with organized transportation.
* Do not separate yourself from the group; of if you do so do not go alone and notify group coordinators.
* When carrying a camera, take your pictures, and then put your camera away immediately.
* Do not open the door at a place where you are staying. If you are expecting someone, do not open the door before asking first who it is. If you know the person and are expecting them, you can open the door.
* Respect the orientation and direction by the coordinator of the delegation.

**CIS MEASURES IN THE EVENT OF A SECURITY SITUATION**

* Call and report immediately to the Civilian National Police
* Cancel any cell phones that may have been stolen (even if they are not worth anything)
* Cancel credit cards and/or bank cards
* Notify the Embassy if warranted.

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**San Salvador, November 16, 2019**