

September 11, 2023 marks 50 years since the armed forces of Chile violently deposed the democratic government of Salvador Allende. EPES was born in the midst of the dictatorship and its initial focus was to respond to that harsh reality. This Update reflects on EPES' legacy today and seeks to address the denial and historical revisionism that many use to justify the violent destruction of democracy. This is simply wrong. Today, EPES reaffirms its commitment to keeping alive the memory of those years, as a necessary element for healing Chilean society.

LITTLE DID I KNOW, SEPTEMBER 11, 1973 WOULD CHANGE MY LIFE

BY KAREN ANDERSON

ELCA GLOBAL MISSION PERSONNEL IN CHILE

On September 11, 1973, the day of the military coup in Chile, I was starting school at St. Olaf College in Minnesota. I knew nothing about Chile at the time, and little did I know that day would eventually change my life.

Growing up in a loving, socially conscious and globally concerned Lutheran family was the foundation from which I began my life journey. In 1976, I spent the summer in NYC volunteering with a Lutheran ministry working with Chilean exiles. I was heartbroken and enraged to learn about the US government's role in overthrowing the democratically elected government of Allende and the brutality that followed. I ended up moving back to NYC to be a part of this ministry.

In 1981, I felt called to be on what I considered the frontlines of the struggle for justice, and moved to Chile to work in a clinic for children whose parents had disappeared under the dictatorship. There was enormous fear in those days: people disappeared, were tortured, exiled and killed by the military and secret police. I heard personal stories of torture and repression, but I also witnessed courage and solidarity. I knew I had to do something.

After a year, I wrote the proposal for what was to become EPES and presented it to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile (IELCH), a small church deeply committed to human rights, inspired by Bishop Helmut Frenz (see p 4). IELCH leaders embraced the project and sent it to the



▲ Circle photo: Karen Anderson with Amanda Cáceres, first health team 1982. Above: EPES original team members Rosario Castillo, Karen Anderson and María Eugenia Calvín in women's march, 2018.

Lutheran Church in America (LCA) for support. I was 26 years old when the LCA hired me as a missionary to lead EPES. With three amazing women, Rosario Castillo, María Eugenia Calvín and Christina Mills, we formed the first EPES team in 1982. Since then, our work has expanded in ways we never imagined.

Reflecting on my own life during the dictatorship, I have often thought of the words of Sister Ita Ford who worked in Chile before going to El Salvador, where she was brutally murdered by the military in 1980: *Am I willing to suffer with these people here, to share the suffering of the powerless, the sense of impotence? Can I say to my neighbors: I have no solution to this situation, I have no answers, but I want to go with you. Can I seize the opportunity to evangelize myself?*

It has been the privilege of my life to have taken this path.

REFLECTIONS ON THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE COUP

BY LAUTARO LÓPEZ, M.D.
DIRECTOR, EPES CONCEPCIÓN

In this month that marks 50 years since the brutal coup d'état against the Chilean people, their organizations and the rights they had won in the course of a long grassroots struggle, I am thinking about friends who gave their lives to achieve a more just world. Two notable young people from the coal district are on my mind. Mario was murdered in an explosion; Maria was detained and remains disappeared to this day. I also remember Luciano, who was killed in full view of people on a street in the town of Hualpén on August 23, 1984.

I also remember my parents and neighbors with whom I grew up in community, where they instilled values and a commitment to a more just society. In our small apartment, my father taught children and young people to read and analyze history. After the coup in 1973, he was imprisoned on Quiriquina Island, a former naval base that was converted into a concentration camp. Two years later, when I was 20, I was imprisoned at the Morro detention and torture center in Talcahuano. So many friends were affected by the criminal repression unleashed by the armed forces.

Under such circumstances, I learned from the people's generosity when I was hungry; I learned from their solidarity when we organized to confront the dictatorship, and their strength when fighting for a more dignified society. And under such circumstances, I went to medical school and formed a family. The people came together to build the road to recover democracy. Overcoming fear and mistrust, they organized to protest



▲ Lautaro López with Andrea Quiero and Ricardo Barro, EPES Concepción team members 1992.



▲ Photos of Lautaro López visiting health promoters after the 2010 earthquake; with the EPES Concepción staff (1994); and talking with participants of the International School in an emergency camp (2011).

against the regime. Today we face a crucial dilemma. We must draft a new Constitution that incorporates as its central tenet a constitutional state that guarantees the social welfare of its people, promoting, respecting and integrally exercising human rights.

In these 50 years I am grateful to human rights institutions and organizations, including the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile and the ELCA, that protected and accompanied communities' struggles for life and dignity. I am grateful to EPES, which in 41 of those 50 years has stood together with communities, learning from humble people. And I thank everyone who has supported us along this long road.



MEMORIES ETCHED ON HEARTS AND SOULS REFLECTIONS 50 YEARS LATER

BY ROSARIO CASTILLO

MEMBER, ORIGINAL EPES TEAM AND FORMER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

It's 7 a.m. My 14-year-old brother comes running, shouting that the military have taken over. Fear and uncertainty engulf us. What will we do? Where can we go? How to resist? As of that day, my life and the lives of every member of my family- my husband, two young daughters, another on the way, as well as my parents and six siblings – changed forever. Never again did we get together to celebrate Christmas or birthdays.

Three of my brothers were persecuted, jailed and tortured. When they were released, the dictatorship expelled them from the country. The third was already in exile in another country and the military didn't let him return until 1983. My parents passed away while their three sons were far away in exile. My sister was arrested with all her family, and then subjected to constant harassment after their release. My husband Edmundo too was arrested.

What can ever justify such punishment for simply dreaming of a better country and working to achieve social justice?

The first few months after the coup were sheer terror. But in 1982, EPES was founded and I started working there and my son Daniel was born. My mood turned optimistic.

It was a tremendous challenge to work in those years, when public health was dismantled and no longer a right. And the military presence was notorious. Once the EPES



▲ EPES original team members María Eugenia Calvín, Rosario Castillo and Karen Anderson at the graduation of the San Bernardo health promoters in 1985.

team had to flee because soldiers were raiding the place where we worked. Another time, a health promoter's home was raided and all our educational material was confiscated.

While the dictatorship trampled on freedom, EPES emphasized that everyone had rights. The hope we transmitted was very important to lift everyone's spirits, including our own.

After 41 years working for the right to health and helping to empower women, my commitment to all human rights is stronger than ever.



EPES was created in 1982 to promote health with dignity for the poor through empowerment, mobilization and collective action. It began as a program of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile (IELCH) and maintains close ties nationally and internationally with the Lutheran church and is an ELCA Global Mission supported ministry. EPES became an independent, non-profit Chilean foundation in 2002.

SUPPORT EPES

To contribute to EPES, make a tax-deductible donation online at www.actionforhealth.org, or mail your contribution to:

Action for Health in the Americas
c/o Prince of Peace Lutheran Church
4 Northcrest Drive
Clifton Park, NY 12065-2744 USA

Make checks payable to: "Action for Health in the Americas" (AHA) a non-profit North American partner of EPES.

USE THRIVENT CHOICE DOLLARS!

To designate your Thrivent Choice Dollars to AHA go to www.thrivent.com/thriventchoice or call 1-800-847-4836.

LEARN MORE

www.epes.cl • www.actionforhealth.org
On Facebook: EPES Fundación
Action for Health in the Americas



Thank you for donating—your contribution changes lives! Mail your check in the enclosed remittance envelope, or donate online at: www.actionforhealth.org

REMEMBERING BISHOP HELMUT FRENZ

On the 50th anniversary, we remember Bishop Helmut Frenz (1933–2011), head of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile at the time of the coup and a courageous champion of human rights. His leadership in defense of human rights in Chile led the dictatorship to expel him from the country in 1975, whereupon he was appointed Executive Director of Amnesty International Germany. His example was a touchstone and inspiration for the founding of EPES.



▲ Bishop Frenz visits EPES in 2010.



Action for Health in the Americas

c/o Prince of Peace Lutheran Church
4 Northcrest Drive
Clifton Park, NY 12065-2744

PRESORTED
FIRST CLASS MAIL
US POSTAGE PAID
OWATONNA MN
PERMIT NO 41

ACTIVITIES RELATED TO THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE COUP



Manuel Guerrero, a scholar whose father was murdered by the dictatorship, came to EPES to share reflections gleaned from his book "*Sociología de la masacre*," which explores the mechanisms of different forms of violence exercised by the dictatorship and its effect on the population. For the sake of survival, people find ways to accommodate to the new context: some try to lay low and avoid drawing attention, others resist, and still others become collaborators. He posits that a massacre is not an act of madness but has its own logic and structure that needs to be better understood.

On July 22, 119 women and men who were disappeared during the dictatorship re-appeared in Santiago, accompanied by 3000 people, who carried their larger-than-life images on the streets in a procession called *Memory and Resistance*. The rainy, chilly day did not dampen spirits as the marchers proceeded along a route that began at the Museum of Memory and concluded four hours later at the Fine Arts Museum. The activity commemorated a hoax organized by the dictatorship in 1975 known as Operation Colombo that claimed disappeared detainees had actually killed each other in battle in Argentina. Members of EPES actively participated in this moving procession.

