

## **Human Rights-Based Organizing: A Faith-Informed Response to Violence and Immigration**

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Umrath Lounge at Washington University in St. Louis

Speakers: Mike Angell, Noah Bullock, Marie Griffith, David Morales, Maharat Rori Picker Neiss, Travis Winckler, Dietra Wise-Baker

### **Prof. Marie Griffith:**

Welcome, my name is Marie Griffith, I'm the director of the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics here at Washington University in St. Louis and we're thrilled to have all of you here for tonight's event on Human Rights-Based Organizing: A Faith-Informed Response to Violence and Immigration with some very distinguished people here. Before I introduce our moderator, I would like to mention a couple of other events that we have this fall and if you'd like to be informed about our events, I invite you also to sign the email list that we have at the back. There's a table and some students and some staff back there who can help you do that. On December 5, we are bringing in Stuart Eizenstat who was, well, he's had a long political career and a legal career and he worked in the Carter administration, among other things, and just published a major book on his years there with Carter and beyond, and he's speaking to us on December 5 on the topic of A Fresh View of a Historic Presidency, so I invite all of you to put that on your calendar. And then, in the new year, February 12, we're bringing in Peter Wehner, who's best known, I guess, now as a *New York Times* columnist and a very thoughtful conservative in the wider world. He's going to be in public conversation with Melissa Rogers, who's worked in the Obama administration and is somewhat on the other side, trying to talk about our polarized times and tribalism and various issues of that kind. So, that is February 12, and finally, on April 7 of next year, we are hosting the first, for us, of the Boniuk-Tanzman Memorial Lectures in Jewish medical ethics, and we're bringing in Dr. David Pelcovitz. This is an event co-sponsored with the Jewish Federation of St. Louis. So, we'll have other things along the way, but I just mentioned those as highlights of some of our bigger events for any of you who might be interested.

And now, I want to introduce tonight's, really the person who organized this event and to whom I'm deeply grateful for, the Rev. Mike Angell. Mike Angell is director of the Episcopal Church of the Holy Communion, right here in St. Louis, over in University City. He began his tenure there in March of 2015, and before he came here, Mike served on the presiding bishop's staff as the churchwide missionary for young adult and campus ministries. For three years after seminary, Mike was Assistant Director at St. John's Church in Lafayette Square in Washington D.C. and while he was at St. John's, Mike led justice and outreach ministries, a large young adult ministry, and also served as primary priest for the Spanish-speaking congregation of that church. Mike graduated from the University of San Diego, with a degree in theology in 2005. He received his Master's in Divinity from the Virginia Theological Seminary in 2011 and between college and seminary, Mike served a year with the Young Adult Service Corp of the Episcopal church at a boy's foster home and school in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, and he worked also to reestablish an Episcopal campus ministry at the University of California in San Diego, and, by the way, you can find him and some of his writings online at [angellmike.com](http://angellmike.com), which I love. It is 'Angell' with two L's though, so don't be fooled. [angellmike.com](http://angellmike.com), and just some very very thoughtful writing that I enjoyed very much there. And, to you, Mike, I'm just really grateful to you for coming to

us with this idea for tonight's program and organizing such a wonderful panel. So, please, all of you join me in welcoming Mike Angell.

**Rev. Mike Angell:**

Thanks so much, I think that's one of the most generous introductions I've ever had, so, thank you to Marie and thank you to everyone from Washington University and the Danforth Center for hosting us. I met Noah Bullock a little over a decade ago, and I'm going to steal a joke that he told in our pulpit yesterday. We met in El Salvador and we were both much younger a decade ago, while we were down there, we participated in what you sort of would expect, this was when I was working at the University of California – San Diego, at UCSD, doing campus ministry and the Episcopal Bishop of San Diego asked me if I would help him reestablish the relationship between his diocese and El Salvador and so I got to go a number of different times and I met Noah and it was what you would expect of a relationship from a church in North America, in the United States, and a church partner in Central America, in the developing world. We brought groups down and we dug wells, we helped construct a bridge one time and more than anything we brought volunteers that were not very useful to come and do labor and we felt good about that. And, I'll say what happened around the edges of those trips was always the most important, the relationships that were formed with people in El Salvador, the stories we heard, the chance to go and pray at the tomb and the site of the martyrdom of Bishop Óscar Romero, who will be named a saint this week, or rather the beginning of next week, by the Roman Catholic church. He's been a saint in the Episcopal church for about 20 years. But, we got to have this experience around the edges of hearing stories and of learning about how the Salvadorian people have lived a spirituality and have lived a way of life so different from ours, but that took the same teachings, the same ideas and really asked them to do some work on behalf of their beliefs.

Zoom forward a few years, I went off to seminary and Noah and I didn't see each other as much because I was busy studying, and I went back down, for the first time, just a few years ago to El Salvador and the work that his organization, Cristosal, had been doing in the meantime had been totally transformed. Groups did not come down anymore to build walls or to paint murals or even to build bridges in the literal sense. Groups came down to learn about the human rights work that was being done in El Salvador, to study alongside Salvadorans. Those of us that went last year received a certificate in community organizing and more than anything, we learned about the incredible work that this organization, Cristosal, is doing. I'm going to let Noah and David tell you more about it but, suffice it to say, I don't know another example of a church-initiated organization that has grown legs on its own and had successfully sued the government of its country to force the government to recognize the human rights of its own citizens. What we do now in our relationship with Cristosal, more than anything, is learn from people who have taken the meaning of their faith and pushed it into the public realm and said that what we believe had consequences and those stories that we were hearing on the edges, stories of people who were marginalized, can be brought to the center of the public attention. I'm so grateful for the work that Cristosal is doing. I'm grateful that it came up out of the Anglican Episcopal Church of El Salvador and that that gives me an excuse to be in relationship with such pioneering work and so, I'm really grateful that Noah could be here. He's been a driving force around the development of this organization, but I was also really excited, as part of the advertising for this event, we didn't know that David Morales was going to be able to come. Noah is the Executive Director, but David is the Strategic Litigation Director for Cristosal. He has been leading the

prosecution on some major cases, including the case won in the Salvadoran Supreme Court this summer. I'll let Noah and David tell you more about the cases they're working on at the moment, but it is an honor to have such a distinguished worker for human rights. Before joining the staff at Cristosal, David was the Ombudsman for the Salvadoran government for human rights, and it was from that work that he came into relationship with the organization and when his term ended, decided to come work with Cristosal. So, if you would, please help me welcome Noah and David Morales.

**Noah Bullock, Executive Director of Cristosal:**

Just to add my thanks to all of you, my gratitude for coming out, I think today's even like a holiday. Is that true? So, I appreciate your free time that you're giving to me, I don't expect it, very grateful to you all. I want to be true to our advertising, which means we have a lot of work to do in a short amount of time. We have to cover a lot of ground, so David and I have made a division of labor, and I'm going to begin by talking about immigration, and trying to explain a little bit what a human rights framework around immigration and refugee issues means and how we apply a rights-based approach in El Salvador to address internal displacement. Then, I'm going to pass it off to David and he's going to talk a bit more about a human rights framework as it relates to the goals of reducing violence in one of the most violent regions in the world. So, that's our plan and hopefully we'll be able to do it before they start throwing red cards at us.

The issue of immigration is one that is, obviously, a very hot button issue in the United States. It's top three, four, political issues of our day, but I think it's important to remember something or assess more carefully why that might be and if you were only to make this assessment based on the news reports you hear, you might believe the United States is suffering an unprecedented influx of immigration to our country, which statistically isn't true. The historic immigration trends peaked 18 years ago, and we're really at kind of a low point in terms of immigration into our country annually. What's changed about immigration, or specifically immigration on our southern border is the demographics. We've made a transition from a typical profile of an immigrant detained at our southern border being a Mexican looking for jobs, a Mexican male, primarily, looking for a job in the U.S., to the point where now the primary profile of migrants detained on the U.S. southern border are Central American families and unaccompanied children, many of those families and children fleeing violence and desperate situations in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. And so, this is an important reflection to make because there's a different dynamic about trying to manage migration when people are fleeing, when they're being expelled from their homes to how you might approach migration management when people are being actually attracted and trying to find a better opportunity, but even maybe more importantly, when we're able to recognize the way that violence, persecution, is an underlying cause driving migration out of the northern triangle of Central America, we also have to recognize the new responsibilities that that assessment puts on governments in the country of origin, transit, and destinations. So, I'm going to try and focus my comments now on that responsibility.

When people are internally displaced in a country, that means they haven't crossed an international border, they're called internally displaced people, and their protection is the responsibility, because of sovereignty, of the state, the government in that country. When they cross an international border, because of the international human rights frameworks, that

responsibility for the rights and wellbeing of that person is transferred onto the host country, and that's something that's established in the 1951 Refugee Convention. It's this idea that no person can be denied a place on planet Earth where they can be free from persecution and the threat of death. And so, that means that states, that that primary responsibility of the state in the country of origin when a person crosses an international border, is transferred onto another country, and when we look at this displacement continuum from the northern triangle of Central America and Mexico and the United States, we have three different types of countries that have to assume those responsibilities, if we're willing to recognize that people are ultimately fleeing violence and persecution, which has been ironically one of the most challenging advocacy pieces for Cristosal over the last 5 years. I've been in the situation where, in El Salvador, we have a government that has denied for at least six years the existence of internal displacement by violence and then when we talk about displacement in the northern triangle at the international stage, we have to advocate for the protection of people who are fleeing some of the most violent countries in the world. In these three countries that I've mentioned, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, last year there were over 12,000 violent deaths. In the past few years, that's ranged between 12,000 and 15,000 violent deaths annually. Those rates of violent death compare to any armed conflict going on in the world, yet we have to prove that people fleeing those conditions have humanitarian need and are worthy of protection in the countries of origin, transit, and destination. And so, when we apply a rights-based approach to this violation of rights, the violation of right here being the right to protection, we have to understand the primacy of the state as being the responsible party for people's protection. So, a rights-based approach, in this sense, and I'm going to focus now on internal displacement in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, means that our role as a human rights organization is not to substitute the state and its responsibilities by limiting our actions to assistance to internally displaced people, rather to find ways to activate the state in its duties. And when we look at this failure or noncompliance with human rights standards on the part of the Salvadoran government, we have to understand two parts, that in order for there to be compliance of a right, that means that, on the one hand, there's a victim group that has the capacity to claim a right, and on the other hand, there's a state or an organization able to assume their responsibilities to fulfill and in El Salvador, we are—our point of departure is that our victim groups, our internally displaced people, are afraid to report to the state the crimes that are committed against them. We have a victim group that has a weak capacity to claim a right because they fear reprisals. They think the state is infiltrated or fundamentally unable to help them anyways. And on the other hand, we have a state that denies that there's even a problem, it's to say they deny that there's a group of people that have specific needs and they have an obligation to assist them. So, that's our point of departure in terms of trying to generate a national response to displacement.

Cristosal, what we've done is develop programs where we try and enhance the capacity of victims to activate justice, to hold the state accountable for their failures to protect their families. And we do that, and you can see in some of the photos, they look like insignificant photos of houses, these are safe houses. We create protection spaces where we're able to provide integrated assistance to victims so that they might be able to move from a moment of only thinking of survival, to thinking about how they might repair their lives in the country and activate justice. We provide legal assistance, psychosocial assistance, and humanitarian assistance directly to victims. And the other photos that you'll see are paintings. These are paintings of people who, as part of the psychosocial assistance process in safe houses, have expressed the things that they're

feeling. So, that's a little explanation of these random photos we're showing you all. But, the point that I wanted to make is that if we are not able to help the victims make a claim on a right, there's no obligation put on the state to fulfill their duties, and, at the same time, we have to understand a structural element. The state has had weak capacities to assist victims historically in El Salvador because of scarcity, because of specific approaches to security, and so, we also have to work cooperatively with different state institutions to build capacity. So, the learning that we do in directly assisting victims become models that we can then transfer to state institutions as they begin to build specialized programs to assist. So, on the one hand, we work with the victims to be able to generate a pressure, a claim on a right, and, on the other hand, trying to build the capacity of the state to fulfill. That's a rights-based approach, not substituting the responsibilities of the state or the duty-bearers, and not substituting the victims themselves as they put claims on rights, rather trying to activate both parts to get greater compliance. One of the big examples of how we've been able to do this was what Mike mentioned. Last year, Cristosal accompanied six families internally displaced by violence as they brought claims before the Salvadoran Supreme Court for violation of constitutional rights in failing to protect them. The families were suing the Attorney General, the director of the police, the director of the National Security Council, and the legislature for failing to create specific programs to assist victims in one of the most violent countries in the world. And in July 13<sup>th</sup>, we won a landmark and historic ruling in which we used the judicial system to create that obligation, to magnify that claim on a right by the internally displaced people. The court ordered the Salvadoran government to recognize forced displacement, to create a specific legislative framework and policy framework, and even a budget priority to fund programs to assist internally displaced people. And so, when we go back to immigration and we look at this continuum that I described, we're trying to address the original failure to protect people before they're forced to cross an international border. I'm gonna leave it at that and pass the baton off to my colleague David who will talk a little bit about it's important to protect victims, but we also need to address the root cause. What have been the approaches to reduce violence in El Salvador and how have those approaches either reduced internal displacement and forced migration across border movements or exacerbated it? David, come on up.

**David Morales:**

Good evening, everyone, it's a pleasure for me to be here at this prestigious university to meet with you. Please excuse me because my English is not good, but Noah will help me with the translation. I'll do my speech in Spanish. Mi país El Salvador es un país marcado por una historia de violaciones a los derechos humanos.

**Bullock:**

My country, El Salvador, is a country that's marked by a history of human rights violations.

**Morales:**

Pero esta dolorosa historia también ha generado una histórica lucha por la defensa de la dignidad.

**Bullock:**

This painful history has also developed a history of struggle for human dignity in the country.

**Morales:**

Las injusticias estructurales y la concentración de la riqueza en pocas manos...

**Bullock:**

The structural injustices and the concentration of wealth in few hands...

**Morales:**

Sumado a regímenes autoritarios y la violación de los derechos civiles y políticos...

**Bullock:**

Added to authoritarian regimes and violations of human rights...

**Morales:**

Dio lugar a una guerra civil que duró doce años en la década de 1980.

**Bullock:**

Gave place to a civil war that took place between 1980 and 1992.

**Morales:**

En 1992, escribimos los acuerdos de paz con la mediación de las Naciones Unidas.

**Bullock:**

In 1992, we signed a peace accord with the support of the United Nations.

**Morales:**

El proceso de paz es considerado muy exitoso a una hora al nivel nacional.

**Bullock:**

The peace process, even now, has been considered very successful at the international level.

**Morales:**

Pero la agenda de los acuerdos de paz del Salvador no se limitaba finalizar y desmontar un conflicto armado.

**Bullock:**

But the agenda that was developed around the peace accords wasn't limited to signing the political piece.

**Morales:**

Planteaba una agenda de construcción democrática que incluía la construcción de un nuevo modelo y gestión de la seguridad pública.

**Bullock:**

The signing of the peace accords proposed a new agenda of building democracy and consolidating—and reforming the way that we did public security.

**Morales:**

Una gestión de la seguridad pública respetuosa de los derechos humanos.

**Bullock:**

The idea was to develop an approach to public security that would be respectful of human rights.

**Morales:**

No militarizada y sometida al poder civil.

**Bullock:**

As opposed to the militarized models that had been predominant in the country, they looked to have a security approach that was subjected to civilian authority.

**Morales:**

Por diferentes intereses de poder de grupos tradicionales en El Salvador, muchos de estas reformas democráticas fueron afectadas o disminuidas.

**Bullock:**

Because of the interests of different powerful groups in El Salvador, many of these democratic reforms were reduced in their scope and achievements.

**Morales:**

Y también fue afectada en cierta medida la reforma de la administración de la seguridad pública.

**Bullock:**

Specifically, the reforms of the administration of public security were significantly truncated.

**Morales:**

Hubo un avance importante porque no tuvimos más crímenes contra la humanidad ni violaciones masivas desde el propio estado hacia los derechos humanos.

**Bullock:**

There were advancements in the sense that we no longer were suffering crimes against humanity or massive human rights violations.

**Morales:**

Pero nuevamente ciertos modelos de autoritarismo se reprodujeron en el ejercicio de la política de seguridad.

**Bullock:**

But, again we find ourselves reproducing models of authoritarianism in the exercise of public security.

**Morales:**

Sumado a la implicación en la década de los años noventa a políticas económicas neoliberales.

**Bullock:**

This authoritarian tendency added to the implementation of neoliberal economic strategies in the 1990s.

**Morales:**

Generando la continuidad de la exclusión social de las grandes mayorías.

**Bullock:**

Generated and exasperated the situation of social exclusion of the grand majority of the Salvadoran people.

**Morales:**

Esta exclusión sumada a la violencia del posconflicto armado

**Bullock:**

This exclusion, social-economic exclusion added to the violence in the post-war period

**Morales:**

Y la recomposición del escenario del crimen organizado en Central América

**Bullock:**

And the recomposition of organized criminal structures in Central America.

**Morales:**

Fueron catalizadores de una nueva ola migratoria en la década de los años noventa.

**Bullock:**

Were catalyzers of a new wave of migration in the 1990s.

**Morales:**

La gran mayoría hacia los Estados Unidos.

**Bullock:**

The majority towards the United States.

**Morales:**

La migración masiva siguió la criminalización de las personas migrantes en países de tránsito y destino.

**Bullock:**

The mass migration was followed by the criminalization of the migrant in the countries of transit and destination.

**Morales:**

Y también vino la deportación masiva de los migrantes indocumentados.



**Bullock:**

And then came, of course, the massive deportation of undocumented migrants.

**Morales:**

Al mismo tiempo, se posicionaron las políticas de guerra contra las drogas de corte militar en Colombia y México.

**Bullock:**

At the same time, at an international level, they were implementing the war against drugs from Colombia to the countries towards the north.

**Morales:**

Este escenario de migración y deportación masiva.

**Bullock:**

This scenario of migration and massive deportation

**Morales:**

Violencia de posguerra y débil institucionalidad en el sistema de justicia

**Bullock:**

Post-war violence and weakness in the justice system

**Morales:**

Políticas económicas excluyentes

**Bullock:**

Economic policies that were exclusionary

**Morales:**

Y reposicionamiento del crimen organizado en Central América

**Bullock:**

The repositioning of organized crime in Central America

**Morales:**

Fueron generando un profundo y fuerte escenario de inseguridad en los países del Triángulo Norte de Centroamérica.

**Bullock:**

Produced a strong scenario of insecurity in the three countries of the Northern Triangle.

**Morales:**

La respuesta de los estados de Triángulo Norte, especialmente en El Salvador, fueron las políticas conocidas como Mano Dura.

**Bullock:**

The response of the states in the Northern Triangle, specifically in El Salvador, were called Iron Fist approaches.

**Morales:**

Contrario a lo que planteaban nuestros acuerdos de paz, la mano dura lanzó un enfoque de intervenciones policiales y militarización.

**Bullock:**

Contrary to the spirit of the peace accords, the Iron Fist security approaches proposed, again in the communities, militarization of a security strategy.

**Morales:**

Especialmente hacia las comunidades más pobres que sufrían la mayor violencia y donde iniciaba el surgimiento del fenómeno de las pandillas.

**Bullock:**

Especially directed at the most poor communities, where the phenomenon of gangs was emerging.

**Morales:**

Era un modelo complicaba una inversión relativamente baja en recursos para el estado.

**Bullock:**

It's a strategy that implies an investment on the part of the state that's relatively low.

**Morales:**

Que lanzaba un mensaje de guerra o confrontación interna hacia la "delincuencia."

**Bullock:**

That launches a message of internal war in the country towards organized crime.

**Morales:**

Sin inversión en política social de prevención

**Bullock:**

Without investment in social policies for prevention of crime

**Morales:**

Sin inversión en políticas de protección a la niñez y la juventud

**Bullock:**

Without investment in policies of protection for the children and youth

**Morales:**

Sin invertir en la protección y asistencia de las miles de víctimas de la violencia

**Bullock:**

Without investing in protection and assistance to thousands of victims of violence

**Morales:**

Y, por supuesto, sin invertir en la rehabilitación de los infractores convirtiendo el sistema carcelario en un escenario de tratos crueles inhumanos permanentes.

**Bullock:**

And, of course, without investment in the penal system which became centers of cruel and inhumane treatment of people who were convicted of crimes.

**Morales:**

En una medida importante este enfoque de la gestión de la seguridad ha prevalecido hasta la actualidad.

**Bullock:**

To the greatest degree, this is the approach that's prevailed up until today.

**Morales:**

Y es un profundo fracaso.

**Bullock:**

It's a deep failure.

**Morales:**

Los países del Triángulo Norte de Centroamérica que lo aplicamos sufrimos las condiciones más graves de la violencia y la seguridad.

**Bullock:**

The three countries that are the Northern Triangle countries suffer the most grave acts of violence.

**Morales:**

Y somos los países donde la víctimas encuentran más abandonadas.

**Bullock:**

And it's the three countries where victims find themselves the most abandoned.

**Morales:**

También estas políticas permitieron que se reprodujeran prácticas de violación a los derechos humanos.

**Bullock:**

And these policies also produced practices of grave violations of human rights.

**Morales:**

Entre ellas las ejecuciones extrajudiciales de personas jóvenes cometidas por la policía.

**Bullock:**

Among them the extrajudicial killings of young people in communities associated with gang activity.

**Morales:**

Promoviendo que se legitimara y se justificara socialmente una criminal práctica de limpieza social.

**Bullock:**

Always promoting and normalizing a practice of social cleansing.

**Morales:**

En los últimos años, hemos tenido caso de desaparición a forzadas de personas.

**Bullock:**

In recent years, we've had the practice of forced disappearances of people.

**Morales:**

Cometidas por la policía o el ejército.

**Bullock:**

Committed by the police or the army.

**Morales:**

Son pocos casos, pero no observamos este tipo de crímenes desde la época de la Guerra Civil.

**Bullock:**

There are few in numbers in some senses, but it's the first time that we've seen these practices return after the armed conflict.

**Morales:**

Existe también denuncias fundadas de práctica de tortura.

**Bullock:**

There's also founded denouncements of the practices of torture.

**Morales:**

No negamos algunos esfuerzos de las autoridades para tratar de abordar esta problemática.

**Bullock:**

We're not denying some of the efforts of authorities to try and mitigate these actions.

**Morales:**

Pero no son suficientes.

**Bullock:**

But they're insufficient.

**Morales:**

Porque hay un escenario de impunidad institucionalizada.

**Bullock:**

Because there is also a scenario of institutionalized impunity.

**Morales:**

Los controles de la policía internos no son eficientes.

**Bullock:**

The internal controls on the police are insufficient.

**Morales:**

Y si la víctima sufre o pertenecía a una comunidad con estigma social, los abusos no son investigados.

**Bullock:**

And if the person who is a victim of those crimes belongs to a community that's been stigmatized because of the presence of gangs, those crimes are often not investigated.

**Morales:**

Sin pruebas judiciales, se le considera pandillero o familiar de pandillero.

**Bullock:**

Without any evidence, young people are convicted of crimes just because they are assumed to be associated with gangs.

**Morales:**

Y policías o militares que les ejecutaron, les torturaron o les detuvieron ilegalmente, son protegidos.

**Bullock:**

And the police or military officers or soldiers who execute, torture, or arbitrarily detain people are left free in impunity.

**Morales:**

La Fiscalía General y muchos jueces suelen actuar también con esta lógica de impunidad ante este tipo de violación de los derechos humanos.

**Bullock:**

The Attorney General of the country, as well as many judges, are complicit in these attitudes of impunity in these types of human rights cases.

**Morales:**

Esta impunidad en El Salvador también tiene un origen en un hilo histórico de protección a responsables de abusos.

**Bullock:**

And this pattern of violations of rights has a connecting thread in its historical origin.

**Morales:**

Crímenes de la Guerra Civil, incluso matanzas de población civil, de cientos de personas, fueron protegidas... fueron protegidos sus responsables con impunidad.

**Bullock:**

War crimes from the Civil War period, massacres of hundreds of people, were protected legally from prosecution.

**Morales:**

Y a una hora se lucha por la justicia en este tipo de casos.

**Bullock:**

But even today, we're struggling for justice in these types of cases.

**Morales:**

Por eso, es importante reflexionar la gestión de las políticas de seguridad desde una perspectiva de derechos humanos.

**Bullock:**

Which is why it's important to reflect on these patterns of public security from a perspective of human rights.

**Morales:**

Los estándares internacionales y constitucionales a nivel mundial nos dan las herramientas para este análisis.

**Bullock:**

The standards, international human rights standards and constitutional standards in the country give us a framework for analysis about how to change these things.

**Morales:**

Todos los poderes instituciones públicas tienen la obligación de respetar los derechos humanos.

**Bullock:**

All of the public authorities and institutions have the responsibility to protect human rights.

**Morales:**

Es decir, no violentar derechos ni por acción ni por omisión.

**Bullock:**

It's to say, not violate rights by actions or by omissions.

**Morales:**

Pero también tienen el deber de garantizar los derechos humanos.

**Bullock:**

They also have the duty to guarantee human rights.

**Morales:**

Esto implica desarrollar acciones y políticas de prevención a las violaciones de derechos humanos.

**Bullock:**

That implies developing actions and policies to prevent human rights violations.

**Morales:**

Fortalecer y articular las estructuras y la organización del estado con ese fin de proteger.

**Bullock:**

To strengthen the structures and institutions of the state towards those ends.

**Morales:**

Y en caso de producirse violaciones o abusos, estos deben ser investigados.

**Bullock:**

In the case that the state produces these types of human rights violations, they should be investigated and prosecuted.

**Morales:**

Y los presuntos responsables deben ser juzgados conforme a la ley.

**Bullock:**

The presumed responsible parties should be judged before the law.

**Morales:**

Y en caso de ser... de encontrarse pruebas suficientes deben ser condenados.

**Bullock:**

In the case of presenting sufficient evidence, they should be sentenced before the law.

**Morales:**

Y estas obligaciones de los estados en derechos humanos deben ejercerse sin ningún tipo de discriminación.

**Bullock:**

And these types of obligations of the state on human rights should be exercised without any type of discrimination... (whispers) cinco minutos

**Morales:**

Sin atender a la etnia o la religión a la que pertenece la víctima.

**Bullock:**

Without discriminating on the basis of ethnicity or social class.

**Morales:**

Sin distinguir en base a su edad o a su identidad de género.

**Bullock:**

Without distinguishing on the basis of your age or gender identity.

**Morales:**

O a su condición social.

**Bullock:**

Or your social condition.

**Morales:**

Y deben respetarse estos procesos de la infiltración de la corrupción.

**Bullock:**

And they should respect... (to David) ¿Debe respetar los procesos?

**Morales:**

Sí, se debe proteger y evitar que estos procesos...

**Bullock:**

Oh, they should also try to avoid the process of infiltration of organized criminal groups within the state.

**Morales:**

Porque desde la perspectiva de la garantía de los derechos humanos.



**Bullock:**

Because of... from the perspective of the guarantee of human rights.

**Morales:**

El ejercicio de poder siempre tendrá límites.

**Bullock:**

The exercise of power should always have limits.

**Morales:**

Y el límite más importante es el que establece la dignidad humana.

**Bullock:**

And the most important is the one that establishes human dignity.

**Morales:**

Y la dignidad humana y los derechos humanos son universales.

**Bullock:**

And human dignity, as are human rights, are universal.

**Morales:**

Esto quiere decir que son de todas y todos, en todas partes.

**Bullock:**

It's to say that they're of everyone, men and women, in all parts.

**Morales:**

Sin importar su estatus migratorio, su raza, su religión y ninguna otra condición como dije.

**Bullock:**

Independent of their immigration status, their gender, or any other condition as I was saying.

**Morales:**

La dignidad humana es el límite supremo al ejercicio de poder.

**Bullock:**

The human dignity is the supreme limit on the exercise of power.

**Morales:**

Y ésta es la perspectiva desde la cual buscamos analizar y incidir en las políticas públicas en Centroamérica como Cristosal.

**Bullock:**

And this is the perspective from which we try and advocate and provoke change in public policy as Cristosal, a human rights organization.

**Morales:**

Ante la ausencia de política de protección a la víctima de la violencia y la víctima de los abusos del estado.

**Bullock:**

Before the absence of policies to protect victims of violence and abuses of the state.

**Morales:**

Generamos experiencias de protección y acompañamiento a estas víctimas.

**Bullock:**

We have been able to generate experiences of accompaniment and assistance of these victims.

**Morales:**

Y buscamos incidir para que las autoridades adopten esta experiencia y busquen de esta manera modificar sus políticas públicas.

**Bullock:**

And we seek to try and get institutions of the state to adopt these models from our experiences as at the public policy level.

**Morales:**

Y usamos el litigio estratégico para tener una mayor capacidad incidencia.

**Bullock:**

We use the strategic litigation to have a greater capacity to advocate.

**Morales:**

Y entendiendo que tiene un origen histórico esta impunidad y este abandono a las víctimas.

**Bullock:**

And understanding that there's a historical origin of this impunity and violence against victims.

**Morales:**

Es que estamos acompañando también víctimas de crímenes de lesa humanidad ocurridos en la Guerra Civil.

**Bullock:**

We are also working to accompany victims of crimes against humanity from the Civil War period.

**Morales:**

Y que se encuentran a un hoyo en impunidad.

**Bullock:**

And trying to find justice for crimes that are still left in impunity.

**Morales:**

Esperamos impactar estructuras de justicia y esperamos impactar en la conciencia de tomadores de decisión política.

**Bullock:**

We hope to have an impact in the judicial system and also in the hearts and minds of decision-makers.

**Morales:**

Ese es nuestro propósito y agradezco mucho su interés esta tarde por escucharnos.

**Bullock:**

That is our purpose, and I thank you again for your interest in listening to us this afternoon.

**Morales:**

Muchas gracias.

**Angell:**

I'm gonna invite our panelists to come up. While they make their way up, there's a story about the famous German theologian Karl Rahner, that his brother used to say, "it's always better to read Rahner in English translation, even if you speak German, because if you're reading in translation, at least somebody has had to struggle through what Rahner was trying to say." I love listening to David speak, but I'm really grateful for Noah, Noah's translation. I think sometimes when a great mind has great thoughts it's good to have somebody struggle through, so thank you so much for doing that, Noah.

We're joined now by a panel of local faith leaders here in the St. Louis region. I'm going to introduce them very briefly and then my first question for them is gonna ask them to describe a little bit the work that they do and to give just a short response to this human rights frame. Maharat Rori Picker Neiss is the executive director of the Jewish Community Relations Council. She's one of the first women to graduate from the Yeshivat Maharat, that is to say she is one of the first Orthodox women who is licensed in Jewish law and Jewish teaching. It's a bit of a pioneering job. She's been engaged in the St. Louis region for a number of years now in multi-religious dialogue, especially around the work of racial inequity, refugees, and immigration.

The Rev. Travis Winckler is the newest on our panel. He just, in January, became the new pastor of the landmark Second Presbyterian Church right in the Central West End. Travis is the first person of color to hold that pastorate and he trained before he came as a community organizer with the Industrial Areas Foundation, the group founded by Saul Alinsky.

The Rev. Dr. Dietra Baker-Wise, or Wise-Baker, she wears many hats. Among them, though, and the reason that I asked her to come speak with us, she's working with the organization Metropolitan Congregations United on their work to break what is called the school to prison

pipeline, so I'll let her describe a little bit of that. So, I'm going to toss it to you all, and maybe we'll go in the order I introduced you, but could you say a word or two about your work and how it might connect to human rights-based organizing?

**Maharat Rori Picker Neiss:**

Sure. First, let me add my own thanks to all of you for coming, to the organizers, and to our speakers, it's really just such an inspiration to hear about the work that you're doing. I should confess, when I was first asked to be on this panel, I said "I think I can speak a little bit more about what we're not doing right than what we're doing right." So, I don't mean to be negative about it, but I think we all have a lot of work ahead of us. So, as you heard, I run the Jewish Community Relations Council. We are an organization based here in St. Louis that works to bring together the Jewish community. We have a common table where all of our Jewish organizations can come and talk about the issues that are most pressing in the Jewish community. We then build bridges with other civic, religious, ethnic, and political groups to work together in partnership, and we then work in partnership with those groups on the issues that we think are pressing to the Jewish community and pressing to St. Louis at large. What I think is really interesting right now, we're at a pretty interesting point in American Jewish history in which, while we're still seeing anti-Semitism and certainly there's a lot of data to talk about rises in anti-Semitic incidences, but, for the most part, the issues that are facing the Jewish community are not really issues that are targeted against the Jewish community, but are really issues that the Jewish community has found to be at the core of our Jewish values. And so, most of the time, when we start talking about the issues, for example, the primary issues that our organization is talking about right now are new Americans, so immigrants and refugees, and racial equity. These are not necessarily issues where, although there certainly are Jews that are impacted by these issues, not the vast majority of the Jewish community, and so, we're at a point where we're really investigating what is the role of the Jewish community. How do we work in partnership with the groups? How do we elevate the voices of the people within our Jewish community who are at the core of these issues because they are impacted by them, but also how do we really elevate the voices of those outside of the Jewish community who are leading these efforts and what are the ways that the Jewish community can be a partner in magnifying those voices? And those are ongoing questions that we're consistently asking.

**Rev. Travis Winckler:**

Good evening, it's an honor to be with you tonight. My name is Travis Winckler and I'm the pastor at Second Presbyterian Church in the Central West End neighborhood here in St. Louis. And I must confess, I'm a newbie to St. Louis, I've only been here since January, and I asked Mike what is he thinking to have me speak already on matters here in St. Louis, but I'm honored to be here and to be learning a lot alongside each one of you. So, Second Church is celebrating 180 years of serving this city, and we are a progressive and inclusive faith community that believes faith is personal, but it's not private. Faith has to go public. And so, we talk a lot about the congregational setting as being a space for both love and wedding that sense of practices of love and empathy with being a school of public life and finding folks who are historically on the margins of power in this city, identifying the dignity and humanity of all of us here in this city, and seeking to create relationships across lines, racially and economically and culturally, that tend to divide us. So, we are right along the Delmar Boulevard, the "Delmar divide," here in the city of St. Louis, and we have folks who are north of that divide who are experiencing all of the

historic residue of racism and economic exploitation, and we have folks who are south of that divide who are living in affluent homes. And so, both are our neighbors and we are seeking to create relationship across that divide here in the city of St. Louis. I was really drawn to thinking tonight with you all about the link between individuals who are often—often feel stuck or on the underside of power and the congregation as a kind of unique space and, in terms of broad-based organizing approaches, as a unique space between that individual who's on the underside of power or feels marginalized and the state, which can exercise power over or against, and what does it look like to connect an individual to other folks in a coalition who can stand up and exercise agency that can hold authorities accountable and can be a player at the table, is something that I'm curious about here in our St. Louis context. So, thank you again for having me.

**Rev. Dr. Dietra Wise-Baker:**

Good evening, I'm Dr. Rev. Dietra Wise-Baker, an organizer with Metropolitan Congregation United, an organized campaign called Break the Pipeline, and we organize around three areas: education, policing, you might have heard that theme in the talk, policing, and the juvenile courts, which is another sort of branch and theme that I heard in the stories today. And so, what I'm thinking about, I mean there's just so much, there's so much resonance in our people and the people of El Salvador, in terms of the history of oppression, and I think maybe what's coming to me as I'm sitting and listening is I've never thought about our work particularly in the human rights frame, because of the way and the narratives that have shaped race in our country. I don't think that we think about African American history and oppression and suppression as human rights violations and so, as I was listening to you all, I kept asking the question: how come oppression is not illegal? You know, how come it's not illegal and it seems like your work in El Salvador is at least beginning to produce a model or framework where—when you use human rights violations as sort of the narrative for containing that work that you can begin to get a picture, right, if you look at sort of the historic civil rights movements, slavery, if you look at everything that has happened, in particular to African Americans, you can talk about Native Americans as well, first persons in this country, if you look at those as human rights violations, where thereby someone needs to be held accountable, someone needs to be held—that those are violations, it just gives a totally different picture in the sense of that work in our country, that I don't think we've thought about, or that we've had imaginations about. And so, that's what I'm thinking about as I've heard the beginning of these talks and I hope that we can talk more about that tonight.

**Angell:**

Well, that kicks me right into my first question for you all. One of the scriptures that we share across our two faiths is Proverbs. There's a line in Proverbs that says, "without a vision, the people perish," right? And, part of what we heard tonight was about the vision of human rights, the universal declaration of human rights that was signed after the second world war, provides the framework, and in many cases, because of signatory countries, a legal framework for what human rights—how they're defined. But, and that's a vision of human rights. As faith leaders, faith also informs how we think about that vision about human rights. So, how does faith inform your response to injustice and what gives you hope in the midst of it? I think we're in a time where hope is hard to come by for some of us and so, I'm asking us to talk a little bit about hope.

**Wise-Baker:**

I guess I'll start. I think where I would begin in terms of a faith is the struggle—the struggle of my people who, it sounds like, like the people in El Salvador have been struggling and fighting a long time and have built a capacity of resistance, a portion of our community, with a vision of hope that God counts them as human and that God holds their dignity, even when others won't respect their human dignity that we came to places of worship or in bushes or wherever we had to go to find that hope, to nurture that hope, to proclaim that hope, and to continue to fight. And so, I think as—so, for me it's the history of my people, the history of resistance in our communities that is alive today, the historic black churches still have strands of that history of those songs, of that theology, of that faith, of resistance that comes from a long time of fighting and struggling against people trying to deny us our human rights and our human dignity.

**Angell:**

Other responses?

**Picker Neiss:**

It's always interesting when people ask about reflections on Jewish faith, because I always first feel this need—for the Jewish community, faith is obviously a core part of our identity, but we're not a religion that's centered around faith, right? We might be somewhat of an anomaly in that you can completely deny the existence of God and still be Jewish, you completely can reject all of Jewish texts and still be Jewish, you can—there's many things you can do and still be Jewish, and so, for us, as a Jewish community, it's partially about our faith, it's partially about our history, about our culture, about a sense of peoplehood, about a sense of responsibility, and all of those, I think, become intertwined when we start talking about human rights. And so, what is so fascinating to me now and also what gives me hope right now is in this conversation that we're having today, even within our own country as we're seeing the way that migrants are being treated as people are being deported, as narratives against groups of people have led to attempts to dehumanize entire groups of people. The Jewish community by and large have been incredibly strong voices of opposition to that work and interestingly, often not from faith voices within the Jewish community. I think our faith voices are struggling sometimes with that. Our faith voices are sometimes worried about keeping people in the pews and that sometimes means being apolitical. But, as a community, the Jewish community is overwhelmingly political. We have a long history of knowing what it is to be dehumanized, what happens when people can say that you're animals, that you don't deserve the same rights, that you don't experience the same pain as other people and have been quick to step up and say we know what that experience is like and we will not allow that to happen to others. We know that if you could have said it about us and it wasn't true, then we don't have to believe it when you say it about another group of people. And so, when I think about our faith voices, for us, it's not necessarily coming from the Bible, but it's coming from a community that has entrenched itself, if not necessarily in a theo-centric viewpoint, in a viewpoint that I think is really centered around human dignity for all people and for all of God's creations, even if we might not always use the word God in that narrative.

**Winckler:**

I think partly for us, we're reflecting on what it means to have a faith that's not about escapism, but it's about courage and honesty and cultivating habits and dispositions in which we can engage this moment which can seem very overwhelming and challenging, with a tenacity and

with a vision of love and community and empathy, that can make a difference. So, for us, we're thinking about what does it look like to create space where the suffering and the exploited can begin to make a home in the world and can see oneself and one's community as endowed with a sacred dignity and also then can be part of creating a future as agents together. And I was really drawn to that model of the safe house, I think it was, where folks can come who have perhaps experienced a victimization for so many years and experience the kind of haven and a place to push the pause button for a while to perhaps go through some healing and some reparation of dignity and of soul and self to then be able to imagine and envision and to begin to put the pieces of agency back together in which, then, one can be part of a collective that can move some levers of power and change in one's society. So, faith, not as escaping, faith as courage and again being bold with that courage in this particular moment.

**Angell:**

Rori, part of what you spoke led into another question I wanted to ask about—Noah and David talked about the false narratives, the false characterizations with which our political system in the United States treats immigrants. The picture of a Mexican looking for a job is not really who is arriving at our border, even if it's politically convenient to still characterize them that way. So, my question for you all would be what false characterizations, what false narratives do you encounter in your work and how do you recharacterize?

**Wise-Baker:**

I would say there's a—so, I mean, it's a characterization of people of color. I mean, there seems to be a model for it. There's a criminalization, there's an erasure of one's history, an erasure of one's dignity, so if I take—so, the kids that I work with, kids that have been incarcerated as kids, we have narratives about children: innocent and safe and to be protected and beautiful, but, when you put black or brown on that narrative, then another narrative is offered for those children, as super predator, as criminal, as dangerous, as, you know, 'adultifying' those youth and then our behaviors and treatment of those youth follow in those ways. I've been thinking about immigration and mass incarceration and mass supervision and it's almost like, you know, you created, you know, you destabilized, you know, America destabilized many countries across the world on one side, and created some of the economic situations that people find themselves in where people are taking—are using criminality as a solution to poverty and then, on the other side, you criminalized those same people for trying to figure out a way how to survive and thrive in conditions of poverty that have been designed for them. And so, those are some of the narratives that we're constantly trying to fight against in our campaign.

**Picker Neiss:**

I hate to think of actually repeating the things that people say to me on a daily basis. You know, I think one of the big narratives that we're often hearing and we're often coming against, specifically with regard to immigration and to refugees, is this narrative of, and especially for the Jewish community, when we talk about our own history of migration to this country, people will say well, sure, but, we can come here legally and these people are illegally entering the country and they're criminals and, you know, if only they would just do it in the legal way, then we wouldn't have any problem with it, which not only completely ignores the current political reality of the ways in which we have criminalized individuals, many of whom are going through proper channels, but we've criminalized those channels. It erases the changes in our immigration

policy, when the primary wave of Jewish immigration was happening, we had vastly different immigration policies, but it also actually ignores the fact that we do have a history of Jews illegally entering this country. And I feel like, I don't know the statistics, I don't know how it compares to other communities, I can't say if it was overwhelming or not, but it seems to me like in my childhood, so many of the stories that we were told were about the ways that people heroically falsified papers, stole papers, did whatever they needed to do to survive and that was how, then, we were here. And so, this heroism that came with you survived, you made it, suddenly has now been kind of recast and so now we look back at this history when, I know from my own—my grandfather who came to the country came because his father was able to get sponsored in, I don't know, maybe 1915 or so, and then, stayed here, worked for 5 years, gained his citizenship automatically because that was the policy at the time, and then, brought over his wife and his 4 sons. That's a very different process and had we had avenues, people might use some of those, but the narrative that just—I can just rage about it because I hear it constantly, well we know this story and therefore they should have done what we did. People can't do what we did and we didn't actually do what we claim that we did.

**Angell:**

Travis, I'm gonna jump in for a second and one of the moments when David was speaking, he talked about the way that the government in El Salvador has a history of human rights abuses and then he used theological language, he talked about commission and omission, which is the way we talk about sin and sins of commission and sins of omission. He was talking about people who have been abandoned by the state. Here in St. Louis, you've been here the least amount of time, but who do already see—who are our abandoned? And before I let you answer, I'm also gonna add to that question. Part of what makes Cristosal's response, as a religiously-founded organization, so unique is the commitment to suing the government. So, who are our abandoned and who would you stand with to sue?

**Winckler:**

I'll have to think about that one for a little bit, brother Mike, that's a good one. Who would I stand to sue? Well, it's interesting, my first year I joked around with folks at Second Church that my aim is not to get sued in the first year, but in the second year, we'll have at it. You know, we're learning about—I'm learning a lot about the history of racism in St. Louis and the particular ways that that manifests economically, housing-wise, in other forms, and so, I admit, I'm still on a learning phase with that particular history here. But, I would say that I would be willing to stand with anyone who is willing to number one, do the work of building a broad base, a coalition of folks that includes city, county, north, south, these sort of divides that kind of chop us up in the region that is St. Louis and have done relational work to understand what it is that we are experiencing, perhaps even in a corner of this region that we would otherwise dismiss or think well that person is just obviously privileged or wouldn't understand what it feels or looks like to be on the underside of power, and after that process of relational work and building that broad base from a number of different institutions and right, left, center, whatever that might look like, stand together with a shared agenda vis-à-vis some form of domination that's affecting a broad array or a particular segment of our citizens here. So, identifying where is power out of control is one work there, doing that relational work to see how that out of control power is affecting someone or some communities, and what does that look across this space regionally, and then, you know, doing the hard work of building a coalition to go toe to toe with that power.



**Angell:**

I'm sure your church board and my church board would breathe a sigh of relief to hear you only want to sue with lots of other people as parties. Other answers?

**Wise-Baker:**

Well, technically we are part of a lawsuit to sue the Board of Education for the state of Missouri, in a lawsuit with Riverview School District because of the way that some students have not been getting things that they deserve to get, and that's not Riverview's fault. We know how school funding has been set up in the state of Missouri, and it puts Riverview and other schools like it in a bad position. They can't provide, they literally don't have the resources because of our school funding formula to provide what they need to provide to students and so, we are in a lawsuit against the Board of Education. As you know, Department of Justice is in place in a couple of places: one is in Ferguson, I would say this is a form of us trying to get some accountability from the state to take care and provide security for its citizens and so, in the realm of policing, I mean, I hear sort of the policing history in El Salvador and I just kind of shook my head. I mean, it sounds like the same, you know, the militarization, the criminalization, I mean, it sounds like the same story, the same song that has happened here. Literally, in the streets of Ferguson, we were standing in the face of tanks and police in riot gear and, you know, literally as citizens having to say wow, how do they understand who we are in their service to us as citizens in this community. And then, finally, it's also a Department of Justice investigation that has been going on for a while that we've been involved with in Break the Pipeline with the St. Louis family courts, the juvenile courts about violations around racial disparity and other items and so, again, I haven't used this frame of human rights, but I think it's an important frame to begin to think about these issues as there needs to be a certain count of accountability and understanding by the state that it must take care and protect the rights of its citizens and who they're supposed to be accountable to.

**Angell:**

I'm gonna—we've got about five minutes left on the panel, so I'm gonna ask you all a question, sort of looking toward next Sunday. A lot of us have heard the story of El Salvador through the lens of Monsignor Óscar Romero, the archbishop who was martyred in 1980 at the behest of the powers of the Salvadoran government and a lot of folks have found in Romero—before he was named a saint, he's been named a saint by the people. So, my question to you all, as we round out the panel, before we take questions from the audience is, who are the saints, the heros, that we look to in your work?

**Winckler:**

I tend to think of the unsung saints, you know, and heros. Those who came before us who sacrificed and often went unnoticed, but who came back to either the place called church or to their civic group, to their local association, in the midst of great challenges, and said I don't care what the narrative is, I don't care how I've been named, I know that I'm a child of God, I know that I'm a citizen of this city, of this country, and they've been able to stand up with that courage and speak truth to that, the power of their day. So, I'm always thinking about those models and those folks and often reflect on the fact that we stand on their witness and it's our job now to carry that legacy forward and to continue to identify folks who have leadership capacity and

ability, that we might otherwise overlook and to be encouraging them and coming alongside them and giving them opportunities to be mobilized and to mobilize others for change.

**Wise-Baker:**

For me, it's the children that I served in juvenile detention for fourteen years, who have to live through the denial of their human dignity, you know, who are sitting in prison right now, who are sitting in juvenile, and their parents and their families that accompany them. So, those children, those families that continue to fight and hold onto their dignity when everything about these systems and structures assaults it.

**Picker Neiss:**

I really—I think a lot about the individual people who collectively have such a significant voice and, and I don't want to diminish, because I know we have some really important and powerful voices that are consistently speaking up, but I think—and it's one of the things that struck me in the stories that were shared is that there's, there are the families that have to step forward and have to do this lawsuit, but there are all the people who come together to surround them, to say that they're safe and therefore they can be the ones who can speak out to make the change for everyone else. And so, I think about those individuals who have the brave voices, but I also think about the hundreds of people, the thousands, the millions of people that have to constantly surround those people because that's where I think, as individuals, we each have a capacity to change a narrative, not because we need to have a big platform and not because we need to have the right words, but because if we consistently stand up and surround people and tell people that they are safe, we can change the discourse. There are politicians who have a large microphone who can say what they want and they can characterize people as they want, but if we, as a community, collectively say we don't believe what you just said, then their voice suddenly loses in its power. And so, for me, I think that the saints and the heroes are the people who just collectively, constantly, and consistently are willing to just stand, arm-in-arm, surrounding all of the people and saying this is not who we are.

**Angell:**

I'm gonna ask Noah and David to come up and join us and there are a couple of microphones that will be passed around, and if you have a question, we'd love to hear from you. [Gestures to Bullock and Morales] Come up. Or we'll do it by raising of hands, this is... Do we have a microphone for questions? Oh, okay. So, Debra's got a...

**Debra Kennard, Assistant Director of the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics**  
Wait for me to get to you, because we need to hear it through the microphone.

**Angell:**

So, while we're waiting for folks to muster up the courage, sort of the way Quakers wait for the spirit to move, I'll ask a question of Noah and David. You talked a little bit about litigating historic cases, but I wonder if you'd say a word about El Mozote and how you decided to take the El Mozote case. Why does El Mozote matter? So, say a little bit about Mozote specifically.

**Morales:**

Durante la Guerra Civil en El Salvador, como dije, se perpetraron sistemáticamente grave violación de derechos humanos.

**Bullock:**

So, as I mentioned before, during the Salvadoran civil war, they perpetrated grave violations of human rights.

**Morales:**

Una de las formas más extremas fue la matanza de pobladores civiles en sitios rurales, población campesina.

**Bullock:**

One of the great violations was the massacre of civilian populations in rural areas.

**Morales:**

Y Mozote es el símbolo de esta práctica. Fueron asesinadas más de mil personas en cerca de siete poblados, más de la mitad de esas personas eran niños y niñas, menores de doce años.

**Bullock:**

El Mozote is emblematic of this practice. In about seven small villages, the Salvadoran army massacred over 1,000 people, more than half of them were children.

**Morales:**

El caso estuvo cerrado desde 1993 por aplicación de una ley de amnistía absoluta que fue declarada inconstitucional en 2016. Es decir, estuvo veintitrés años cerrado por esta legislación.

**Bullock:**

The justice, the prosecution of this war crime has been closed since 1990 with the application of an amnesty law that protected war criminals from penal prosecution, so it's to say that the case has been frozen for almost thirty years, until 2016 when the Supreme Court overruled that law.

**Morales:**

Al ser reabierto por el juez de la causa en 2016, yo estaba ingresando a Cristosal para fortalecer la unidad de litigio estratégico y tenía un vínculo profesional con el caso. Así que decidimos acompañar como Cristosal a las organizaciones históricas que lucharon por justicia y a las víctimas y somos parte de la acusación particular ahora que busca que se haya a un juicio contra la (unintelligible) de nosotros.

**Bullock:**

So, in 2016, when the case was overruled, and the court ordered these cases—or, the law was overruled, and the courts ordered the cases to be reopened, I was entering into Cristosal. He was, just as a side comment, the Human Rights Ombudsman in El Salvador, and he had had previous professional commitments with the case. He's the representative of the victims' groups and so, Cristosal, he was coming on board to be the Director of Litigation unit and Cristosal became directly involved with the case.

**Angell:**

Other questions? Go ahead.

**Bullock:**

The other part of the question was why it's important and I'm gonna go a little bit more broadly now. I think that why is it important to prosecute old war crimes, thirty-year-old crimes? And David once said, I'm going to quote the person standing next to me, but in an interview on national television he said that oppression is culture patrimony of the people and the recognition of it is part of the guarantee of the no repetition and so, while there is no truth, while there is no justice, there is a continuation of the norm, and David described in depth how that's played out in El Salvador. The other reason to prosecute war crimes is not because we think we'll stop them for all time, but we think that we can challenge the assumption of impunity. That is to say that the assumption of the powerful that they can do what they like with the weak and do what they like with the nation or the state's resources and institutions and there are no consequences. And so, when we challenge those assumptions in court, even if we lose, it's upholding a principle. It's upholding a standard that we hold fast to the historic progress towards greater justice. And so, those are the—those are the reasons why we do human rights work and I think in our current context where we see a resurgence of authoritarianism, even in our own country, challenging the assumption of impunity, that is that the powerful can act as they will on the basis of—on the premise that there will be no consequences is something we need to constantly chip away at.

**Audience Question #1:**

In your Supreme Court case, to what degree did you have to engage with the media to recreate, if not publicize, the situation, recreated narrative?

**Morales:**

Una de las—uno de los objetivos de litigio estratégico es precisamente tomar un caso emblemático que puede impactar en estructuras judiciales muy frecuentemente acostumbradas a reproducir impunidad.

**Bullock:**

So, one of the objectives of strategic litigation is precisely to impact judicial structures that are usually complicit in impunity.

**Morales:**

Pero esto debería acompañado con el apoyo psicológico a las víctimas facilitar su participación y también desarrollar una estratégica comunicacional para que haya un mensaje social.

**Bullock:**

So this strategy, judicial or penal strategy should be accompanied with the strategy of psychosocial assistance and accompaniment other victims to guarantee their participation in the process, but also it needs to be accompanied with the strategic communication strategy to generate social support.

**Morales:**

Porque el propósito de litigio es generar un cambio social, despertar conciencia social y que esto permita generar un cambio en las instituciones a favor de las víctimas.

**Bullock:**

Because the objective of strategic litigation is to generate social change, to generate social conscious about human rights issues and to impact the institutions in favor of the victims.

**Morales:**

Para el estado El Salvador el hablar de desplazamiento forzado le genera un problema político porque son desprestigio. Considerando. Quieren negar una crisis humanitaria.

**Bullock:**

In El Salvador, to talk about forced displacement by violence for the Salvadoran government was an issue of prestige, the threat that they were failing to protect their people, so they denied recognizing that there's a humanitarian crisis in the country.

**Morales:**

Creo que los gramos tener un cierto impacto que permitió que socialmente se hablara que desplazamiento existe que las víctimas están allí y desprotegidas por el estado. Al venir las intensivas favorable por eso ordenó al gobierno y a las autoridades que fenómeno fuera reconocido y ahora estas víctimas tienen una existencia legal y se puede luchar mejor por ellos.

**Bullock:**

So, to a large degree, I think we were able to generate that social change in being able to establish that there are internally displaced people in the country and that those people who have been unprotected by the state have a right to protection and that's a—that's a big victory for us and it's sort of on a side note, one of the things that we learned about strategic communications is that if you win the public narrative, even before you change public policy, you change political discourse. When we presented our report—our annual report on internal displacement this year, we invited the Minister of Justice and Security to join us in a public forum like this and we gave him a copy of our report, with a week ahead of time, but we had already done like a three or four week blitz in the media where all of our staff was in the national media talking about displacement, and the Minister had no other option but to say that we agree with all of Cristosal's findings and that was a precursor to the litigation in which the court ordered a recognition and so, those are—those are examples of truth, and we deny that there are victims we can do nothing to help them, bringing them to light and then highlighting the responsibility—somebody is responsible and we can say specifically who those people are.

**Angell:**

Other question.

**Audience Question #2:**

Gracias. I live and work in Honduras, serving with the Catholic church and I believe that the problems of poverty and violence and corruption in Honduras and El Salvador are outsourced from the United States, in the sense that the drugs that pass from Colombia and South America to

the United States pass through Honduras and El Salvador and so, our responsibility for the conditions in these countries is a great one that we need to take responsibility for, gracias. ¿Repito? ¿Repito en español?

**Angell:**

I think we're okay.

**Bullock:**

[Translating to Morales]

**Angell:**

If there's a question too, yeah? Yeah, let's do several questions and then we'll let the response go...

**Audience Question #3:**

Well, I thank you for your presentation and your comments, um, what are some concrete steps the United States government can take to help El Salvador with the displacement crisis? What—um...

**Angell:**

So, what are some concrete steps we could do from the United States to help with displacement? Is there another question or two we want to get before the panel? Oh, we're quiet. Okay.

**Bullock:**

So, you—you warned me about the question ahead of time, so I'm ready to answer it. One, we—I think it's worthwhile to recognize positive things too. It was mentioned that the United States has a long history of involvement in Central America. We can't see ourselves in isolation from the conditions that are there. There were certain—I'm just gonna—we're allowed to swear here, the president did, right—saying that there are shithole countries is an interesting worldview because it uh... [Laughter] it wasn't a joke, I'm talking about our president. Because there's a supposition—there's a premise that somehow the conditions in other countries are somehow the problems and the fault of those countries themselves, the result of weakness or incapability or corruption in those places and the U.S. interest and involvement in policy is isolated from those conditions and I think we actually personalize that as well, right? We say that the people who are—you know, they're poor and they're stupid and that's their own conditions and their own fault. Like, we're not—we have a—you said a great comment—the conditions of poverty and exclusion that were created from you, right, for you. And so, you asked—policy has played a role there, in the case of El Mozote, the forensic evidence shows us that the bullets used to massacre the people were made in Missouri and that's an evidence—physical evidence of our involvement, right?

But, there's also been great solidarity of the people of the United States with the people of El Salvador to support struggles and I think after the child migrant crisis there were lots of things done wrong in the U.S. Specifically, the thing that was most challenging to the U.S. was figuring out what to do with children who are asking for protection, children who we wanted to—who our system was set up to stop and send home, it seems there was a contradiction there, right? And so,

there were—we received lots of groups of senators and congressmen that came down and said “what are the root causes and what do we do?” and I think there was, at least, a positive thing that happened at the end of the Obama administration, and that was consensus around a need for change in U.S. foreign policy to the region by partisan consensus. And that is that the United States has a long-standing two-pillar approach to Central America: one is a prosperity approach where economic reforms and even free trade, these things, I’m not going to argue every point of it and then a security approach. We are security allies with the region, whether it’s against communism or against irregular immigration or on a war on drugs, we are—we have security interests. But, what changed is there’s a third pillar now, or was, and that is the need for the United States to support Central American countries in building transparency, in fighting corruption and organized crime, and specifically strengthening human rights protections and USAID changed their portfolio, for example, to provide assistance for human rights work for the first time. To promote transparency and combat corruption—the case that is most emblematic is [unintelligible]. So, that is something that would need sustained commitment to see any results from, to commit to structural change, to addressing the weak judicial systems, to enhancing accountability and governance, these are things that you don’t get in, you know, a two congressman—your congressional term or even a four-year presidential term. So, they—what’s needed is sustained commitment to those—that third pillar to see change over time.

It means a lot in the world whether we agree with our perfect record or not, that when the United States says that human rights matter, that combating corruption matters, there’s leverage then for organizations like ourselves to advocate. When the United States abdicates itself from its leadership role in promoting human rights in the world, there’s less pressure to leverage those changes, and to give you an example in our region, we already see that effect where there’s less and less leverage internationally to make—fulfill human rights. In Nicaragua, you have a regime, the Ortega-Murillo regime, that’s killed over 400 protestors in the last few months and kicked the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights out of the country with no concern of consequence. The president of Guatemala who was being investigated by an independent commission against corruption and organized crime called CICIG that the U.S. supported kicked them out of the country using the militaries about a month ago. The actions of authoritarian type governments who see—look around at the world and say I think I can do whatever I want and there will be no consequences, which is why I said we must challenge the assumption of impunity. And when, the U.S. is not around for leverage, we have to find other ways to build leverage internationally, to uphold standards. I made a long speech there.

**Angell:**

And that’s sort of our time for questions, um, I do want to say we will be around for a bit of a reception afterwards, I’m gonna let Marie kick it over to that. Before I do that, I do want to say just a couple things. Tonight, we’ve heard a sort of consistent theme around truth, around governments that don’t want to tell a truth, around processes to bring about the revealing of a truth, and we’ve talked a lot about human rights, which, in the founding documents of this country, we think of as self-evident, that we think of as coming from a Creator, and so, I’d encourage you all to walk out of here and continue to think about truth and to think about the kind of truths that we could be telling as we come together.

And, I want to make a little bit of a pitch, which is to say Cristosal, if you'd like to learn more about their work, there's two really great ways to do that. One is really low commitment. There's a sign-up sheet on the table with the Danforth Center sign-up sheets and if you give us your email, Cristosal will add you to their email list. You'll get a little bit of hope in your email box as they continue to make their cases through the Salvadoran courts and then the other way is to take a look at their website, the Global School at Cristosal, as I've said it's a very different thing these days to be a person of faith and have a relationship with El Salvador. You're not going to go swing a hammer, but you might get a chance to learn with some of the people who are on the forefront of telling truth and working for human rights in our hemisphere. Thanks so much for hearing us tonight. And Marie.

**Griffith:**

And to everything, Mike, that you just said, I can only add amen. I invite all of you to meet our incredible group of people here at a reception out here, and please, finally, join me in thanking them for this evening's program.

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