

Maria Elena Moyano

Requiem for a Feminist Activist

Maria Elena Moyano, Peruvian activist, community organizer and feminist was assassinated by a *comando de aniquilamiento* (death squad) of the group *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path) on February 15, 1992 in Lima. A 33 year old black woman, she was the mother of two boys, 10 and 8.

Moyano was the founding president of the *Federacion Popular de Mujeres de Villa El Salvador* -- FEPOMUVES (People's Federation of Women of Villa El Salvador), one of the most vibrant grassroots organizations in the largest shanty town on the outskirts of Lima, Peru. As head of the organization, she played a key role in the establishment of hundreds of social programs attending to the basic needs of an increasingly impoverished population. In the context of Peru's economic crisis, Moyano was instrumental in devising a response based on women's community efforts rather than on the State or outside agencies. Under Maria Elena Moyano's visionary leadership thousands of poor women became involved in mother's clubs, community soup kitchens, community health groups, small income generating projects, and programs that provide a daily glass of milk to malnourished children. These organizations were the training grounds for a leadership model from the bottom up, and catapulted Moyano to the position of Deputy Mayor of Villa El Salvador in the last municipal elections. In 1991 she was named "Woman of the Year" by two of Peru's most respected media publications.

The women's organization started by Maria Elena Moyano came together in their struggle for autonomy from all kinds of political manipulation and evolved into a powerful and independent women's Federation, the first of its kind. As President of

FEPOMUVES Moyano opposed publicly all Shining Path attempts at penetrating the community, denouncing its terrorist methods of trying to control the population by fear. She believed the only response to Shining Path's terrorism was to create awareness among the population, speak up against it and provide an avenue for people's participation in the direction of their communities. She was the target of death threats and various attempts at undermining her leadership. These only increased her commitment to change within the democratic system.

On February 14, Shining Path called for an "armed strike" aimed at bringing Lima, the capital of Peru, to a halt. They warned they would kill anyone who attempted to come out of their homes. That morning all the houses of Villa El Salvador raised a white flag under the slogan "Unity, Peace, and Work." Maria Elena Moyano and other community leaders took to the streets and thousands of people joined them in a March for Peace signaling their rejection of Shining Path's "armed strike".

On the evening of Saturday February 15, Moyano attended a community celebration to raise funds for the women's glass of milk program. At the event she was surrounded by a woman and four men who shot her twice, in the chest and in the head. After she fell down the killers ordered everybody to leave, shooting anyone who tried to assist Moyano. The squad proceeded to order a teenage boy to tie five kilos of dynamite to her body, blowing her to pieces in front of her children and other women from the organizations, and wounding eight other people. They further threatened to blow up her tomb if she was buried in the district's cemetery. The assassination of Maria Elena

Moyano is one of the most ferocious attacks in the relentless and bloody violence perpetrated by Shining Path in the 12 years it has been terrorizing Peru.

This is a call to the international community to denounce the assassination of Maria Elena Moyano at the hands of Shining Path. While the political and economic situation in Peru has deteriorated badly and there is an urgent need for social justice, it is ironic that Shining Path targets popular leaders of the very communities in whose name it claims to act. Union leaders, community organizers, peasants, religious and development workers, teachers, politicians, and small businessmen are among the thousands of civilian victims in the war waged between Shining Path and the armed forces. Shining Path has come to justify any violent act on the grounds that it will lead to a revolution and the destruction of the State. They are especially brutal to those who are trying to better the conditions of the poor, accusing them of collusion with the State. What is most distressing is how their claims find a sympathetic ear among romantic and uninformed people in the industrialized world who see them as revolutionaries.

You can show your rejection of this attack and express your solidarity with women's organizations by doing the following:

- Write to the President of Peru, Alberto Fujimori, Palacio de Gobierno, Lima 1, Peru, demanding the capture of the assassins, and bringing them to trial.
- Speak up against Shining Path in every forum where they come to spread their propaganda and sell their publications.

