

**Bolivia: news from the political front, sent by Ronald & Nicky Irene in La Paz, 12 March 2008**

The situation in Bolivia is very complicated. This could end in a peaceful situation or in a civil war. The truth is that there is tremendous resentment and racism, and this is on both sides.

Bolivia is governed at the moment by the socialist party MAS (Movimiento al Socialismo). This party, even though it was elected democratically, has a dictatorship way of acting and governing. They have imposed a new Constitution which was approved by force in a hidden location, where most of the opposition couldn't get to and those who could get there weren't allowed into the meeting because there were 1000s of MAS followers outside not allowing them in. Sounds absurd but it is the truth! Autonomy was approved (in a vote) in most of the country's departments, but now they don't allow this to happen because this law hasn't yet been approved! This is because Bolivia is governed by the Cámara de Diputados [Deputies] where MAS has control (a majority) and a Cámara de Senadores . The Senators, who have more authority than the Diputados, are mostly from the opposition. So every time there is a senate meeting to approve new laws, masses controlled by the government (MAS) prevent these meetings. Thousands of violent people come into the city and destroy, throw stones, etc... at innocent people and obviously at the opposition senators.

So you will get a picture of what is going on here. It is constantly insecure and uncertain. The police don't do anything and there is tremendous violence. The business people are worried as property is not secure with our government being Socialist. The middle and upper class are not happy having an indigenous president, so obviously we have lots of racism and it's clear that if anyone can do anything for the government to fail they will do it. So there is speculation on products, basic goods (bread, flour, rice, meat, etc...). Prices have doubled and in some cases tripled. This directly attacks the household economy so there is incredible disapproval in the country. The government blames the opposition for speculating prices and the government is now selling their own products - and the opposition blame the government for the economic politics!

All across the country there are marches, manifestations, confrontations, roadblocks. In Santa Cruz, for example, which is the department that has the most opposition, whenever there is a demonstration in favour of the government, the Comité Cívico Pro Santa Cruz stops them and shuts them up with violence. And on the other side, here in La Paz where we live, one can't even march asking for peace! For example, in a senate meeting two lady senators from the opposition were beaten up violently, so they organized a non-political march where peacemakers asked both the government and the opposition for peace. But immediately trucks full of violent people who support the government came down with sticks and stones and there was a terrible confrontation

This confrontation took place right where we live. I was at church with the kids and at 7.30 I tried to get a taxi with the kids to get home. No taxi would take me so I started walking home. About a block away I felt that I shouldn't, so I returned to the church and waited for Ron. He finished his meeting about 9.30 and we got in the car. All the roads near my house were blocked off and when we finally got near our house, I got out of the car with the kids. It was really bad, tear gas and the buildings boarded up, etc. The next day on the news we realized how bad it was! As I am blonde (Nicky) and my kids too, it could have been very dangerous as there is so much hatred and racism. University windows, cafes, etc... were smashed and innocent people were hit by stones and sticks.

Now we are not 100% sure who pays these groups to make all the chaos. On one side it could be the government who wants to keep us afraid and therefore easy to govern; on the other side they could be paid by the opposition to create uncertainty and chaos to destabilize the government and in this way remove them from office. It could also be the indigenous groups who are tired of suffering and tired of living in conditions not human. Finally we have to accept that we are harvesting what we sowed. If we have a socialist government with an ignorant President (who didn't even finish school) and an ex-terrorist vice-president and various people in government with similar characteristics, it is because of the intellectuals with various titles and white skins!!! Instead of governing the country well and prospering Bolivia, they were filling their bank accounts and their stomachs, taking bread out of the poor people's mouths.

Even though we are used to marches, protests and uncertainty, we are worried for the future! We pray that this won't end in civil war. We ask for prayer that the government won't get more power as in this case religion will be in problems. Also please pray that the President and everyone in power will repent and become Christians!

Please also pray for us that we will continue working for the Lord. We also need to find a new place to live as it is very dangerous so please pray for this!

God bless you,

Ronnie and Nicky

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