

## **Hello dear friends of the Juan Sisay Spanish School!**

This is the sixth NewsLetter we send to you and the very first thing we want to do in this NewsLetter is to say thank you for your interest in the School, in Xela and in Guatemala!

You receive this NewsLetter because you subscribed on one of the schools homepages (either <http://www.juansisay.com> or <http://www.juansisay.de>) or are a known friend of the school. If you want to unsubscribe from this NewsLetter just reply to it (using the same email-address, you used for subscribing) and change the subject to "unsubscribe".

### **Content**

- Guatamalas new government – a sum up after more than 6 month
- News from the Juan Sisay Spanish school
- News from Xela
- Huelga de dolores
- Volunteer wanted
- Contact
- Older NewsLetters

### **Guatamalas new government – a sum up after more than 6 month**

In the second ballot of the the last presidential election in Guatemala Oscar Berger won 54% of the votes and was elected as the new president of Guatamala instead of Alvaro Colom. In the general election held on 9 November, 2003, Berger, as candidate of the conservative Grand National Alliance, obtained about 34% of the votes, putting him well ahead of Colom of the National Union of Hope (26%) and former dictator Efraín Ríos Montt of the Guatemalan Republican Front (19%).

Berger was born in Guatemala City and is a lawyer by profession. From January 1991 to June 1999, he was mayor of Guatemala City and gained some good reputation during this time.

When the results were published he said that he wants to be a “honest man with a honest team”, that he doesn't want to spend more money than necessary and that the reformation of the health system and public security would be two of his main targets.

Berger was mainly supported by the local economy and banks and gained most votes in the capital, unlike Colom who was stronger in the rural area.

The participation in the second ballot was at about 47% and lower than in the general election in november (58%).

The elections were observed by about 800 people, mainly from:

- United Nations - MINUGUA
- Organization of American States – OAS
- European Union – E.U.
- Observers from NGOs like Peace Brigades International, etc.

and were classified as free and fair.

Some things already have improved with this new government and the president started new projects. But changing a country in such a short period of time is impossible, because the former president Portillo left the country in a ruinous state: indebted, insecure and without any positive perspective.

Soon after being sworn in in mid January 2004 Berger's government started projects like the electrification of the rural areas and the maintenance of streets and highways. On the other hand, the army still has big influence in the country, public security is still bad (according to Amnesty International more than 260 persons were killed in so called "social cleanings" in January and February 2004). Still child labour is very common and gays and lesbians have to suffer under public and social discrimination and so on...

10 years after the report about the civil war in Guatemala ("Memoria del Silencio") was published Berger apologised to the families of the victims of the war and announced a compensation of 70 million quetzales (about 9 million USD). But still the army has the power to avert the exhumation of victims from the war like it happened recently in Cantabal where soldiers threatened more than 100 families from La Vega and Santa Catarina del Ixcán/El Quiché who wanted to search for the bodies of disappeared persons buried on the ground of an army camp there (Source: Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo, 23rd March 2004).

Even with some things getting better the problem of human rights in Guatemala is still not solved.

### **News from the school**

Recently the school accepted two new teachers who had to pass difficult exams to qualify for the desired occupation. Their names are Freddy de Paz and Flor Montes. They are already responsible to organize part of the activities of the school and we can promise you that they are doing a great job!

We also would like to felicitate our two teachers Magali y Claudia. Both will give birth to her first child soon.

### **News from Xela**

Quetzaltenangos local government is trying to attract tourists with different activities, i.e. some students from Spanish schools were invited to chat with the mayor of Xela to share their experiences with him. Generally Xela has a lot to offer to spend some time here: You can climb the volcanos, go to some natural steam baths, visit small towns nearby like San Andres Xecul or Zunil, work as a volunteer in one of the social projects in or around Xela, etc. etc. Even nightlife has increased: New bars like the "Hektisch" (club and live music) close to the Theatre Municipal or the "Vino y queso" in the cellar of the "La Luna", a known cafe in Xela multiply the fun in the city.

### **Huelga de dolores**

One of the biggest and most important activities in Xela is the so called "Huelga de dolores", the "Strike of the Anguished". This strike is a student tradition in Guatemala which was established more than 100 years ago in 1898 during the dictatorship of General Cabrerias. The "huelga" is an anarchistic and satirical forum for criticizing the country's rulers. The students had to wear long robes which also cover their faces to avoid being identified and prosecuted. Still today they choose this clothing which makes them look a little bit dangerous to those who don't know.

The strike in Xela is organized by students from the University San Carlos. The first strike in Xela was held about 40 years ago. The activities for the strike always start 40 days before Easter. The students collect money from the streets and from the shops in Xela which later is given to social projects or to the poorest students as a kind of scholarship (if you do not pay you may find your shop "beautified" with graffiti or painted black the next day...) .

The strike ends with a demonstration and manifestation in front of the town hall and a public party on the campus of the University San Carlos.

### **Volunteer wanted**

Some of you may have been in Quetzaltenango before and may know the project the school runs to support children from poor families enabling them to visit school. School isn't really for free in Guatemala, the parents have to pay an inscription fee every year, have to pay uniforms and the school materials which is about 100 \$-US a year. Due to their poverty and the number of children per family this is nearly impossible for a lot of families – the average yearly income of a single household is not more than 1.500 to 2.000 \$-US.

To help these children and support the Spanish School's project we have founded an organisation in Germany named Tob'anik e.V. (tob'anik is a quiche word meaning "to help"). Tob'anik e.V. currently supports 46 children, most of them live in Xela or little villages nearby. Due to the fact that most workload for the project in Xela has to be done in january and february (school year starts in january), i.e. new families have to be interviewed and visited, bills have to be controlled and paid and so on, we are looking for a responsible person who would like to work as a volunteer in our project in Xela doing this administrative work together with the responsible teacher from the Juan Sisay Spanish school.

If you would like to know more about this work or project, please do not hesitate to get in touch with us: [info@tobanik.de](mailto:info@tobanik.de).

### **Contact**

<http://www.juansisay.com> (en)  
<http://www.juansisay.de> (ger)  
[info@juansisay.com](mailto:info@juansisay.com)

### **Older NewsLetters**

You can find the older NewsLetters and even this one here:  
<http://www.juansisay.com/archiv/index.htm> in pdf-format and also as a flat text file.

Ok, that's it for the moment; I hope to be able to send you the next NewsLetter soon.

Hasta luego,

Andreas  
Webmaster & Coordinador Internacional