

Interview with **Elva Navarro**, Peruvian Witness

Interviewer: Angela Marino, PhD
Transcription and translation: Anahi Araiza
University of California, Berkeley
4/14/23

Angela: Greetings and thank you for being here today. I would like to ask you about US involvement in Peru. We know that USAID has a presence and there is discussion of US intervention in regards to recent events of the coup. What do you see happening today in Peru?

Elva: In general in Latin America, always interventionism, meddling, non-military meddling. In all the countries of Latin America, aid has been given for many years and with different names and from many institutions. In this case, USAID.

Well, USAID entered my country supposedly to help this government, supposedly to cut down coca trafficking, to make the coca plantations disappear because they lent themselves to drug trafficking, but they demonized campesinos, and campesinos always defended their coca crop because it was their source of work, their source of life, and the government did not give them any planting alternative so that they could stop planting coca. Then the years passed. And what happened? Nothing. Everything remains the same. And the help? What help have they received? None. On the contrary, it is known that drug trafficking operations have continued and grown, right? And there is a lot of suspicion that in the past year, past governments have been involved in high-profile drug trafficking, right? It is also suspected that the American military that has been there is also part of that. So what has USAID brought? Absolutely nothing. That is what I think.

Elva: Right now in Peru a government has practically been installed with military support with the support of the militaries, a repressive fascist government. And it is true, that same formula that they are placing in Haiti is in Peru. For example, one goes out to marches and I will tell you personally that I have never, since I was young and have attended many marches or protests, never seen such cruelty from the police. So much anger towards the people. They were like people transformed because they really hit the person they grabbed really hard. They didn't care if they were breaking an arm or a leg, that is, they act in a way... I don't know how to tell you what I've seen. They are transformed and people are really afraid, afraid that they will go to the marches and they could get hit or killed.

Perhaps the press in my country does not speak. They don't say anything. Those things don't happen. The only press that is spreading the truth is the alternative press, but I have seen how the police mistreat, punish, beat us up, they throw tear gas at us. They don't care. Even if they are children and they are elders, they are all the same and the repression is the same for everyone. So what is this? What is this? So they want to keep us quiet. We can't say anything. We cannot protest. What about our rights as human beings that we have? And I'm not just talking about the police. There are also the military. The military are in all the departments of southern Peru, massacring communities, massacring indigenous people. In reality, we have to ask that the sale of pervasive weapons, firearms, tear gas, and pellets stops. We have to make our voices reach others so that they listen to us because they are really massacring the people. That is what I can tell you.

Angela: And is there evidence or ways that you have seen that show that these police or military are carrying out this repression with equipment from the United States or evidence that [this violence] is supported by the US state?

Elva: I was in a march in the Plaza San Martín two months ago, I personally was able to see totally different people than a Peruvian soldier who has the race, the bearing, the size. This person was tall, very tall, white, and even when he spoke, he didn't speak clear Spanish, no. And look at the evidence. You can see that all the alternative press has a lot of evidence.

I will tell you what I have seen personally. Now, for me, I have never investigated further because since I am a human being who is also afraid, I have felt a fear from this. From the repression when... it happened to me, when I could feel firsthand, the bombs, the pushes, fear for my life, fear for everything. And just like me, many people, so we want to tell you, please, that the people are not terrorists.

The only thing they are demanding are their rights and there is no right for the foreign military to be supporting these Peruvian soldiers to repress the Peruvian people.

Angela: Thank you very much, Elva, for taking the time to talk with us. Are there other things that are important to express, or would you like to say more?

Elva: Many things to say, but I prefer to say it that same day. I am going to simplify my experience a bit, because I also want to tell you that I have never been a politician. I have never been involved in political movements or political parties. I only learned about politics when I was a student and we went out to protest on the streets for student rights. That was in the 80s, but after that, I have never been in politics. But yes, in these times, I will tell you that, as an artist who is a painter, I am a being with a lot of feeling and I am very sorry for what my country is going through, what the less favored class, the campesino, are suffering, especially when they are being massacred, right now. That is what hurts me and what motivates me to continue to want to do something for them, and if going to meet people who are doing the same thing is going to help something, I am very grateful.

That's true. It is true because as you will realize, I do not have any political speech. My language is a simple village language. It is colloquial. That expresses what those who cannot be heard would like to say. Perhaps these words represent the experience of the campesino, to the poor, to the struggling people who have no voice at this time in this country. At the very least, I am also a country person who was born into it. And well, I have been educated, but I never left my campesino spirit either.