



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

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## Internally displaced Peruvians campaign for land (Villa El Salvador Land Invasion), 1971

**Time period notes:** *The definitive end of the campaign is not explicitly clear because families continued to trickle on to the new land. Villa El Salvador remains as a settlement community today, but for the purposes of the database, the campaign is considered to be the time between when the refugees staged the initial invasion, and the time when they had moved to the new land that the government gave them.*

April 29,  
1971

to: May  
1971

**Country:** Peru

**Location City/State/Province:** Lima

**Location Description:** *Settlement community on the outskirts of the city*

**Goals:**

To acquire land to settle on

### Methods

**Methods in 1st segment:**

- 001. Public speeches
- 013. Deputations
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 028. Symbolic sounds
- 048. Protest meetings
- 173. Nonviolent occupation
- 183. Nonviolent land seizure

**Methods in 2nd segment:**

- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 048. Protest meetings
- 173. Nonviolent occupation

**Methods in 3rd segment:**

- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 045. Demonstrative funerals
- 173. Nonviolent occupation

### **Methods in 4th segment:**

- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 173. Nonviolent occupation

### **Methods in 5th segment:**

- 173. Nonviolent occupation

### **Methods in 6th segment:**

- 173. Nonviolent occupation

## **Classifications**

### **Classification:**

Change

### **Cluster:**

Economic Justice

Human Rights

### **Group characterization:**

- Internally displaced peoples- mostly refugees from an earthquake

## **Leaders, partners, allies, elites**

### **Leaders:**

"Senor Perez"

### **Partners:**

Local bishops

### **External allies:**

Not Known

### **Involvement of social elites:**

Not Known

## **Joining/exiting order of social groups**

### **Groups in 1st Segment:**

- Internally displaced peoples/Housing Association

### **Groups in 2nd Segment:**

### **Groups in 3rd Segment:**

### **Groups in 4th Segment:**

### **Groups in 5th Segment:**

### **Groups in 6th Segment:**

**Segment Length:** *Approximately 5 days*

## Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

### Opponents:

Peruvian Housing Ministry

### Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not Known

### Campaigner violence:

Not Known

### Repressive Violence:

During the eviction attempt by Peruvian police forces, at least one squatter was shot and killed. Some sources say that several people were killed in the conflict.

## Success Outcome

### Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

5 points out of 6 points

### Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

### Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

### Notes on outcomes:

This was an incredibly successful campaign in that not only did the squatters achieve the goal of having settlement land, but they were able to receive recognition from the government and services delivered to community. As the community continued to grow, it began to receive international attention and was eventually nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize for excellence in social work and community growth.

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Today Villa El Salvador is a squatting community on the Southern outskirts of Lima, Peru, and is home to about 400,000 people. The shantytown, which was born of a small land invasion in 1971, has been recognized internationally as the largest continuously squatted area in the world.

Between April 29 and May 1, 1971 a number of families, many of whom were refugees from an earthquake, planned a land invasion on an unused government-owned parcel outside of Lima. Estimates on the number of families involved ranged from 200 to 4,000 depending on the source. At the time of the land invasion, a conference for the Inter-American Development Bank was meeting in Lima, so there was a lot of international attention on the city. The Bank is one of the most influential international development agencies and one of the greatest providers of funding in Latin America.

Just before dawn on May 1, 1971, about 180 families went out to the designated occupation site with mats, food, whistles, and Peruvian flags. The desert area was a place where 48 lots had been laid out, but had not been serviced yet, nor had anyone ever occupied the lots. Soon after the arrival of the squatters, five truckloads of police arrived to demand that they move. Señor Perez, one of the leaders of the land invasion, quoted part of Law 13517, which was passed by the Peruvian Congress in February of 1961. In one section it reads: “remodeling, improvement, and legalization” of “marginal barrios” was “of necessity, public utility, and national interest.” Upon hearing this law, the troops left the community, thinking it was within the squatters’ rights. However, over the next few days, more authorities returned to demand that they move.

Three days after the initial invasion, Señor Perez and five representatives of the squatters went to meet with the Ministry of Housing. The officials from the Ministry met in the Presidential office for five hours to discuss the land invasion before they saw the representatives. No deal seemed to come from their negotiations. The next day, some of the leaders went to the Ministry of

Justice to incorporate the squatting community as an official association. At that time, they found out that another housing association was vying for the same piece of land, but had chosen to pursue the land through official channels rather than occupation. Some of the people who were using legal means shifted groups to join the squatters in their efforts. Others continued using official paths and received significant support from the Ministry of the Interior.

As radio and newspapers began spreading information about the organized land invasion, more and more people began joining the squatters on the land. By the fifth day, 9,000 families were occupying the land. Troops returned to remove the squatters with force, but they did not intend it to be lethal. They used tear gas and materials to light the squatters' mats on fire. However, one of the Majors who were organizing the troops shot and killed one of the squatters.

The invaders held a funeral for the man, at which point, the Minister of the Interior had several of the bishops that were working with the squatters arrested. News of the conflict began reaching the representatives at the Inter-American Development Bank Conference in Lima, and some reports say that the government was pressured to reach a peaceful compromise.

Seven days after the occupation began, the government offered the group an alternate piece of land on the outskirts of Lima, to replace the land that they were on. Many of the squatters were highly skeptical of the deal, but the government said that the squatters would be allowed to occupy the land with formal permission. Most of the squatters remained on the original land, while they sent an engineer to lay out the lots on the new land.

The next day, after the campaign thought that it had potentially reached a deal, Señor Perez was arrested and ended up being subsequently held for three months. The other invasion leaders decided to maintain a low profile during that time. Meanwhile, on the land designated for resettlement, the government proceeded to lay out lots for the occupants. After several weeks, most of the families decided to make the move. In total, approximately 7,000 families from the original invasion moved to the new site, as well as internally displaced peoples from other parts of the country. Informal guidelines were established for the settlement community, such as the rule that new settlers were required to build some form of shelter within 24 hours of joining the settlement group. The community remained highly organized and they were able to get services provided to the area pretty quickly. Over the course of the two decades, more and more refugees traveled to the area and Villa El Salvador continued to grow. Today, the community has libraries, health services, and community centers, and 80% of the houses have electricity and running water.

## Research Notes

### Influences:

Land invasions are a very common tactic in Peru because much of the land between metropolitan centers is government-owned but unused. It is likely that this invasion was influenced by other smaller-scale land invasions in Peru and other parts of Latin America that had happened prior. (1)

### Sources:

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**Additional Notes:**

This case is a good example of using strategic timing to achieve a campaign's demands. Having the international attention of the Inter-American Development Bank conference taking place in Lima held Peruvian authorities accountable to reaching a peaceful agreement with the settlers rather than exercising force.

**Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:**

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**A project of Swarthmore College, including Peace and Conflict Studies, the Peace Collection, and the Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility.**

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**Source URL (retrieved on 02/17/2020 - 15:02):** <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/internally-displaced-peruvians-campaign-land-villa-el-salvador-land-invasion-1971>

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