

Guarjila, June 11, 2011

To our sister cites:

- “Grupo Viva Guarjila” Bielefeld, Germany
- Saint Louis, Missouri, U.S.A.
- United Methodist Church of Wallingford, Seattle, U.S.A.
- Jon Cortina Solidarity Group, Barcelona
- Carlitos

Dear friends, Greetings from the Board of Directors of Guarjila and the Companion Communities Committee. We hope you’ve been experiencing success in all your work.

We’d like to express our solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Missouri who have suffered the wrath of the tornado season. We hope that Marilyn is well in the United States.

We’re writing today to let you know about some events in the community of Guarjila, and to inform you about El Salvador.

Visit by UNHCR Representative to Guarjila.

A UNHCR official points to the community of Guarjila as an example. **Statement by Doctor Sergé Male, deputy director of the UNHCR.**

On a visit completed by the deputy director of the UN High Commission to the Americas to raise awareness for UNHCR refugees, he stated, “The community in Guarjila, in Chalatenango, is an example to follow for refugee populations around the world,” because Guarjila “has achieved, having nothing, in the midst of an armed conflict, to remain civilians in their own land.”

In reference to the conflict, he expressed that, “El Salvador, a Central American country, went through a twelve-year armed conflict from 1980 to 1992. According to official data, this war incurred a cost of more than 75 thousand killed, 8 thousand disappeared, and thousands more looking for refuge outside Cuscatleca borders. Several communities like Guarjila (which in Nahuatl means “beautiful corner”), in the northern department of Chalatenango, one of the most devastated zones of the war, had to take refuge in Mesa Grande, Honduras, from 1982 to 1987. The town organized and decided to return, as recommended by a United Nations official.”

As Board of Directors, these words give us strength. They encourage us to continue working for the good of the community. Knowing how many challenges we have yet to overcome, it’s important to remember what a significant role the UNHCR played in accompanying refugee populations in Honduras during the El Salvador’s civil war.

Commemoration of the 3st Anniversary of the Massacre in Las Aradas.

May 14th marks the commemoration of the massacre in Las Aradas, on the Sumpul River. In 1980, more than 600 people were lined up and murdered in cold blood when they fled the armed conflict in our country. This May 14th, we took time to remember the victims of Las Aradas, and at the site, they held commemorative activities to think back 31 years to the Armed Forces' cruel assassination of these poor farmers. Included in the day were a mass, testimonies of survivors, theater, and music. More than 500 people traveled to the place the Salvadorian state will soon declare a Cultural Heritage Site, although for us it already is A HERITAGE.

Political, Social, and Organizational State of the Community.

Dear friends, we are now closer to an election period in this country. In March of next year, we will elect a new round of mayors and representatives. At the municipal level, we are very content because we already have a candidate for mayor of Chalatenango from the FMLN party, although this is not yet official. We hope that with a mayor of our own, we will achieve the developments we need in our community, since up until now, we have been excluded under ARENA management. Long story short, after 6 years, we haven't received a single plan [for our community].

At the Community Level

On another note, the board has been working to keep the community organized. We'd like to stress our commitment to upholding the principles by which we returned from Mesa Grande Honduras. We periodically hold General Assemblies so the people may discuss their needs and problems, and we participate in commemorative activities and meetings. Friends, we are doing everything possible for our community projects to continue functioning. The struggle to change what displeases us and transform our community belongs to us all.

On the topic of employment, we are quite pleased because the new government has given priority to more people in Guarjila.

Employment in Guarjila.

Job/Employment in Public Institutions Within and Outside of the Community	Number of People in Guarjila who Earn an Income	Gender	
		M	F
Equipo Comunitario de Especializado	10		
FOSALUD	8		
Centro de Rehabilitación	5		
Hospital Nacional de Chalatenango	1		
Unidad de Salud de Chalatenango	1		
Laboratorio San Juan Bautista Chalatenango	1		
Centro Escolar Cantón Guarjila (school)	21		
Círculos de Alfabetización de adultos	2		
Ministerio de Trabajo	3		

Gobernación Política Departamental de Chalatenango	3		
Policía Nacional Civil	4		
Cuerpo de Agentes Metropolitanos CAM	7		
Mecánica automotriz	1		
Instituto Nacional de los Deportes	1		
FOMILENIO	3		
Centro Escolar San José las Flores	1		
C.C.R	2		
Negocios en Chalatenango	3		
Pequeños Negocios en la comunidad	10		
Comedores (restaurants)	8		
Panadería (bakeries)	5		
Taller de estructuras metálicas (foundries)	10		
Proyecto de agua	2		
Carpintería	4		
Grupo Tamarindo	4		
Radio Sumpul	2		
Taller de reparación de Bicicletas	2		
Iniciativa de hortaliza	4		
All jobs	128 employed		

The economically active sector represents a total of 128 people who regularly receive a small income on which to sustain themselves and ultimately improve their living conditions. Nevertheless, some people who are busy with their work, now don't want, don't have time, to help out with voluntary work in the community. This situation creates even more responsibilities for the few people of Guarjila, especially all in the Directiva (Town Council) who have to work daily to advance the community.

Primary Problems in Guarjila

When talking of Guarjila, it's also important to illustrate a number of risk factors that affect our community.

1. **Emigration to the U.S.** The latest poll, taken in May of 2011, recorded that 416 people, most of them youth, emigrated from Guarjila in search of the "American Dream," hoping to improve their own living situation and that of their families.
2. **Poverty.** There are still families in Guarjila living in deplorable conditions, with little chance of overcoming them. They don't receive basic services, and they have no income to fulfill their need for food, clothing, etc.
3. **Indicators of a desire to form gangs.** Lately, problems among youth have gone down, and Guarjila is experiencing a much calmer atmosphere. This comes as a result of certain actions and programs developed by and for young people to raise awareness of social issues. Very few young people are in the habit of stealing. Some try to copy the gangs.

4. **Low community involvement.** Although there is plenty of evidence that the community is very well organized, we also have people who have grown comfortable and become more dependent.
5. **New families coming to live in Guarjila.** Currently in our community, a number of families are coming to live in Guarjila. Some have relatives in the community and choose to stay, because here they find a calmer, more secure place to live.
6. **Lack of lots for new housing.** One of the most urgent needs of our people is the availability of a lot for building a new house. We have 75 solicitations for lots for newly formed families that need a home. For the moment we are thinking about a project using land that belongs to the community in order to resolve the needs of these families,
7. **The number one threat is the Longitudinal Highway.** As you all know, the latest meetings with the FOMILENIO and the Ministry of Public Works have not yielded any desirable results. The community's negotiation commission suffered defeat upon learning that the aforementioned authorities have confirmed that the Longitudinal Highway will pass through the center of Guarjila. This measure has incited different reactions from our citizens. Some want a road in the center, but the majority are opposed [to the Project] because the damage that this construction will cause will be irreversible. Also, we have to tell you that on the topic of the Highway we have not had the support of the Government to debate with transparency and respect (and this is important) because we believe that the Highway will bring incalculable risks and disadvantages to the community.

In the designs for highway construction passing through many other communities, they plan a bypass, but not in Guarjila. It's terrible the level of tensión this has created in our community, and the fact that the commission no longer meets makes it even worse. It's more important now than ever that we track the [project's] process and take action when FOMILENIO commits atrocities and doesn't follow through on agreements.

Focus on subsidies for propane gas for the Salvadoran people

As a means to save money, the government has decided to focus on subsidizing propane gas. In previous years, subsidies had been more generalized, and the greatest beneficiaries were of the middle-upper class and large private companies. This new approach aims to prevent the smuggling of government-subsidized propane which is then sold in other countries like Honduras and Guatemala. Just one example: a 25-pound canister used to cost \$5.10 dollars and was sold at about \$14.00. With new propane gas subsidies, the 25-pound canister costs about \$14.68.

The amount of subsidies received will depend on one's use of electric energy. For example, someone who consumes up to 99 kilowatts of energy receives a regular subsidy of \$9.10 dollars, and with this money they get \$5.10 and they buy their tank of propane gas. In Guarjila, some 98% of the families receive \$9.10 monthly and those who consume

less than a tank of gas each month receive the subsidy and they use it for other family expenses.

Evaluation of the two years of the term of President Funes. The first two years of the FMLN government ended on June 1. In general terms the citizens approve President Mauricio Funes for his social programs which benefit the Salvadoran people. In Education, they have given uniforms, shoes and school supplies for children in all the education centers in the country. In Health, they have built 4 national hospitals and created 408 Community Health Centers, including in Guarjila. Now there is more attention in hospitals, more specialists and health teams moved to the communities and small villages. In Agriculture, they have given seeds and fertilizers to farmers. The principal problems in El Salvador are economics and security.

That's all for now.

Esto es todo por ahora.

Constantino Guardado

En nombre de la directiva comunal de Guarjila y del Comité de Hermanamientos.

In the name of the community directiva and Committee for Companion Communities