



IFCLA

Inter-Faith Witness

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The St. Louis
Inter-Faith
Committee on
Latin America

A faith-based source of information about events that shape our lives

OSCAR ROMERO: A LEGACY OF 30 YEARS

Mark your calendar: March 21, 2010,
30th anniversary commemoration
of Mons. Oscar Romero's death.

Thirty years ago this March, Mons. Oscar Romero was assassinated at the altar in San Salvador. It's fitting to reflect for a moment with the people of El Salvador on his legacy. In those dark days the brutal repression that he denounced was front and center in the consciousness of the Salvadoran people and frequently broke into the headlines here in the U.S. What has changed in the ensuing 30 years?

There have been notable successes and causes for celebration. IFCLA has continued to maintain its strong ties to the people of Guarjila. Students from St. Louis visit every year, noting the progress of infrastructure improvements to the quality of life for the locals. Contributions to our Scholarship Fund have made it possible for many of the young people to continue their secondary and college education. Two women who visited St. Louis years ago recently learned that their daughters have been accepted to universities in San Salvador. Another young woman will complete her training and begin nursing in 2010. Contributions to the Clinica Ana Manganaro have strengthened its service to the point where it is considered a national model for the kind of care that everyone in the country should be receiving.

On the national level the FMLN won the elections last March and the new president, Mauricio Funes, has dedicated his presidency to the memory of Msgr. Romero. Does this mean that the political process has come full circle? As wonderful as it is to contemplate that reality, we know it is not that simple.

Across the Western Hemisphere, developing nations like El Salvador continue to be assaulted by economic oppression in various forms. NAFTA and CAFTA (Free Trade Agreements) have brought lots of new products and some jobs to Mexico and Central America, but at the cost of family farms, small businesses and respect for cultural traditions. Faced with the lack of meaningful employment, family and social upheaval, scars from the violence of the past and in the present, and the

temptation of a lucrative drug and arms industry, too many people are outside of an economic system which would truly build the world which they fought for in the civil wars and were promised in the Peace Accords. There are remarkable projects all over the country but they are not enough.

We have been accompanying an anti-mining campaign in Chalatenango. Using environmentally devastating strip mining techniques similar to those used in some of the world's poorest nations, Pacific Rim (Canada) and others are seeking to squeeze tiny bits of gold from the earth. Exceedingly dangerous for the land and the people, and tremendously wasteful of precious water resources, the people were able to convince the government to block the project near Guerilla. In April Pacific Rim filed a \$77 million lawsuit against El Salvador after the government refused to grant extraction permits for the El Dorado mining project due to environmental and public health concerns.

In November, Hurricane Ida brought five days of severe wind and rain creating damage in 60% of the country. The have been primarily in the dislocation and loss of life; destruction of housing and infrastructure; and disruption of agricultural patterns. The preliminary assessment of damage is as follows: 157 people dead 58 people disappeared, 14,000 displaced people. 1,835 houses damaged or partially destroyed, 209 houses completely destroyed, and 24 bridges affected including completely destroyed. SHARE and other IFCLA partners have been involved in relief aid. Contact us for more information.

The perennial questions about what is progress and development remain central in the discussion. Caught in the center of the debate are the poor who then decide to migrate in search of employment, opportunity and hope. They find themselves in the mess of the broken immigration system in the U.S. and in other neighboring countries. The work continues.

EMERGING TRENDS IN THE HEMISPHERE

Latinobarómetro (Latin Barometer) recently issued its annual report on Latin America where they said, "Democracy consolidates in times of crisis. The perception of progress grows despite the coup d'ete in Honduras, the H1N1 virus and the economic crisis. Latin America appreciates their institutions, presidents and markets more and are more satisfied with their democracy. Is democracy more mature?"

La democracia se afianza en tiempos de crisis. La percepción de progreso aumenta a pesar del golpe de estado en Honduras, el virus AH1N1 y la crisis económica. América Latina aprecia más sus instituciones, sus presidents, el Mercado y esta más satisfecha con su democracia.

¿La democracia está más madura?

<http://www.latinobarometro.org>

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"Is democracy more mature?"



From Honduras: Virginia Druhe

The current reality in Honduras — having at one time a legitimate president, a coup president and a president-elect — is so fluid that any article risks being out of date by the time of publication. For the most recent information, subscribe to IFCLA email updates or check The Quixote Center website: <http://www.quixote.org/>

In the early hours of June 28, 2009, Honduran military officials took President Manuel Zelaya from his home in his pajamas and flew him to Costa Rica. The president of the Honduran Congress, Roberto Michiletti, was sworn in as president. A strong popular resistance movement arose immediately in response to this illegal action.

Thousands of people took to the streets in the first days and a coordinated leadership soon developed to build, sustain and deepen this thoroughly non-violent movement throughout the country. Mass protests were held daily in the capital and other major cities for more than five months.

Initially, the coup government responded with mass arrests, beatings and disappearances. When the coup itself and its human rights violations were denounced by governments across Latin America and Europe, mass repressions ceased, but as I learned from resistance leadership during a Witness for Peace delegation in

September, targeted death threats, arrests and beatings continued. It was almost more unnerving to know that individual leaders, their friends, families and activities were under surveillance by armed men in pickups with darkened windows. Threats were offered over private cell phone numbers. Censorship and closing of major media outlets also began in earnest.

President Obama condemned the coup immediately. Unfortunately, neither he nor his State Department managed to notice or condemn any of the extensive human rights violations, or to implement the full range of standard diplomatic and economic sanctions toward the coup government. Anyone who knew the long U.S. history of running Honduran military and economic affairs for our benefit found it hard to believe this coup was staged without at least a wink from the U.S. Ambassador (a right-wing Cuban-American appointed by President Bush).

The Obama Administration's failure to seriously defend democratic government and human rights in Honduras after the coup, and its acceptance of elections held in late November under those conditions, have shattered the good will — and hope for fair treatment — that Latin Americans had offered.



By the end of our visit in early September it was pretty clear that the coup government and its backers in Congress and the State Department were planning to stall until the November elections and hope to reestablish legitimacy then.

It was also clear that the time after the elections would be very dangerous for the thousands of people who had actively resisted the coup, and especially for the leadership of the many organizations involved.

The elections were held under severe media censorship and threats against the opposition. More than 300 candidates boycotted the election along with 60% of the voters. The U.S. and a few close allies have accepted their legitimacy. No one else has.

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From Columbia: Marilyn Lorenz

WITNESS FOR PEACE DELEGATION 10-24 August 2009

Our group of twelve were based in Cali and traveled to Buenaventura, Triana and the ACIN indigenous community, all in the Valle de Cauca. I spent four days in Bogota at the end. The focus of the trip was the effect of the FTA (Free Trade Agreement) which is awaiting a vote in the U.S. Congress.

FTA

We were told that Colombia lacks an industrial base, access to services, justice, or technology- the economy cannot support it. Displacement is a national problem (4.4 million) because the multinationals want the natural resources. People are forced into cities where there are neither houses nor jobs.

Food and water security are major issues, especially with the FTA. 50% of the land is in sugar production, with 13 sugar refineries. Basic foods are imported. Biofuel production is expanding. In 2005 Colombia produced 29 million liters of ethanol, by 2007, it grew to 279 million liters. All of this while malnutrition in Colombia is 15% compared to 2.5% in the U.S.

In the name of "democratic security" a corrupted legal system is involved in mass evictions and untried crimes and pardons.

LABOR

It is a dangerous thing to be involved in a union in Colombia. We met with dock and sugar cane workers, most of whom were Afro-Colombians. To organize for fair wages, health and safety issues, and other workers rights leads to threats, arrests and death. They fight against the FTA which will bring privatization, mechanization, and dislocation. Jobs will be lost to sub-contractors.

HUMAN RIGHTS

President Uribe has made some good will human rights changes but scandals continue. Poverty rate is 60% so socio-economic issues take precedence. Human rights workers document some 24,000 disappearances over 15 years. There are fewer kidnappings, but overall violence has increased. Colombia remains in the midst of a four-decade civil war. The armed actors are not easily defined or identified. One never knows who to trust. There are communities that seek to be outside the armed struggle, wanted none of the armed actors to come on their land. This includes various indigenous groups, but their courageous positions are not respected and are met with attacks and assassinations.

MILITARIZATION

The U.S. signed an agreement in Bogota on Oct. 30 to occupy/use seven Colombian bases. U.S. contractors and service-persons will have immunity from prosecution. This is an affront to their national sovereignty and goes against articles in their Constitution. But it does provide a support system to protect investments and production under the FTA. It also gives the U.S. Southern Command better access to all of Latin America, especially their new nemesis, Venezuela.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Colombia has recently spent over \$800,000 on a public relations campaign in the U.S. to promote tourism and trade. Huge heart sculptures were places all over New York and Washington, DC saying "Colombia Is Passion." It was supposedly designed to educate Americans about the "real" Colombia, a fun and beautiful country in which violence and human rights abuses are a thing of the distant past. CNN also carries multiple spots on Colombia.

The stakes are high, the FTA will bring profits to a few and increase poverty, violence, and extrajudicial killings.



Sugar Cane Workers

"Contact Congress and say NO to the FTA when the vote comes up. Support the TRADE Act HR 3021."

From Cuba: Kathy Peterson and Dan Mosby



Our visit to Cuba, planned by Witness for Peace, focused on education with a goal of providing us enough background to understand the experiences of Cuban people today. We visited schools, were briefed by government officials, toured museums, and interviewed teachers and students. Most of our time was spent in Havana, but we were able to travel to the countryside for two days.

In a nation where equality is such a high priority, the idea of poverty appeared very different to us. All Cubans have education, health care, housing, and a limited ration for basic nutrition. Material goods are in short supply. Even among professionals discretionary incomes average \$12 per month. Cuban officials admit that the economy is not meeting the needs of the Cuban people, but they blame these failures on the 50-year-old US economic blockade of Cuba which prohibits most US trade and discourages other nations from trading as well.

In the past decade, two changes have altered Cuba's economy: introduction of hard currencies as remittances from outside the country and promotion of tourist industries. Both sources of outside wealth threaten the economic equality that is the basis of the social contract. Teachers able to speak English are leaving the profession to work in more lucrative services for tourists. Some Cubans grumbled about sacrificing for the greater good only to see a neighbor receiving a remittance from Miami and living like a king.

Educated Cubans who saw their opportunities widened by the revolution seemed to believe earnestly in equality and social justice. Older people tended to worry about the younger generation who did not have experience with the gains of the revolution, only the privations.

Long-time activists, Kathy and Dan are IFCLA Core Committee members who have recently retired and live on a boat in Puget Sound when the weather's warm.

The streets of Havana appeared to be the safest streets of any city we have ever walked. People were out in droves through the middle of the night. There was no evidence that people felt that they needed to be protected from each other. The buildings of Havana were old but beautiful. Most buildings were owned by the State, but private ownership was allowed.

When we visited the countryside, it was clear that farmers, who had bachelor's degrees in economics, were living at a higher standard because they were able to sell their surplus produce back to the state, adding to their usual rations and salaries.

The US press has been hailing the future death of Fidel Castro as the end of the Cuban revolution. Most people we talked to did not see the revolution's course being significantly affected by his death. Rather, they saw the US economic blockade as a primary explanation for their economic situation.

While there have been periods of loosening of the sanctions in the 50 years since the revolution, the period since the Helms-Burton Act of 1995 has been among the most restrictive. Cubans are hopeful that during the Obama administration, the travel ban will be lifted and eventually the economic embargo will be ended. We believe that the embargo serves no benefit to the US while negatively impacting Cubans. It's time to let the revolution succeed or fail on its own merits and end the US sabotage of our very near neighbor.



HR 874 "To allow travel between the United States and Cuba" — will allow travel for all Americans, no exclusions. It was introduced by Representatives Bill Delahunt (D-MA) and Jeff Flake (R-AZ) and cosponsored by Reps. Lacy Clay (MO-1), Emanuel Cleaver (MO-5), Jo Ann Emerson (MO-8), but Russ Carnahan (MO-3) has not yet signed on the bill. He needs a little push from his constituents. Call: 314-962-1523 or 202-225-2671. Thank the others for their support of the bill. Senator McCaskill is a co-sponsor of the Senate bill (S. 428). Thank her.

From Guatemala: Mary Lois Sennewald



Mary is now helping a school in the Ixil region. <http://newmayas.org>

When I left Guatemala, I left people with great visions and pained stories, people with implacable hope, people who work very hard to construct foundations for those dreams. As things heated up, I found it hard to leave. So, yes, there is turmoil, and you may soon be reading about Guatemala in the U.S. press.

Now I prefer to focus on the beauty and strengths of the people who have crossed my path and, in some cases, stolen my heart. I am thankful the human rights accompaniment work gave me time out to catch my breath, improve my Spanish, hike hours each week in the mountains, and let the next phase of my life take shape.

I can't say goodbye for good, so I won't. Because, like the Sirens' song, Guatemala calls me back. Hasta luego, Guatemala, for just a while....

Mary did human rights accompaniment work through the Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala. www.nisgua.org

Nicaragua: The Power of Networks

Mary's Pence in Nicaragua has given birth to Red de Mujeres Nicaraguenses, a network of women working with women. Reyna Moreno Lazo, who worked with IFCLA's hermanamiento with Rio Abajo, is one of the coordinators. "Reyna is an outgoing, get-things-done type that likes to challenge the status quo; walk down the street with Reyna and she will introduce you to half the community." www.maryspence.org Fall 2009



From Peru: Jenn Lay

There is still a lot of work to do in the struggle to end violence and to ensure all the human rights outlined in the UN document, and there is no easy answer or single solution. In many ways the systems and structures we live in/under are inherently violent and oppressive and until the larger structure changes the global reality won't change. Meditating on this global reality can be incredibly overwhelming and depressing with the thought, there is so much to do and I am so small. But at the

same time I am grateful for the micro-view of the situation and the continual reminder in my work with the Good Shepherd sisters that one person is worth more than the world (una persona vale mas que un mundo). One person does contain the whole world, and so if it takes changing the world by changing the world of one person at a time then that is the work we are called to do with patience and love. Everyone has the right to love and be loved, to explore this

complicated mystery called life, to question, dream, live and learn. But these take a backseat in the face of a reality where people don't have food, water, adequate shelter, education, or health. All of these are necessary, and it is our collective responsibility as a human family to meet the basic needs/rights of our brothers and sisters so that we can all fully participate in the divine life for which we were/are created.

"Everyone has the right to love and be loved, to explore this complicated mystery called life."

Jenn went to Peru after graduating from SLU in May. Read her blog: <http://elcaminodejennlay.blogspot.com>

From the School of Americas/WHINSEC: Trish Curtis

Driving away from the gates of Fort Benning last month, I got a little nostalgic. Could this be the last time for this joyful and purposeful gathering of thousands? Could we really be on the verge of assembling the number Congressional votes necessary to close this School for Assassins for once and for all? While that would be a wonderful victory, anyone with a fair knowledge of the history of our country knows that our desire to dominate, particularly here in “our” hemisphere, is not likely to be eliminated by one vote in Congress, however momentous.

This year the annual assembly in Columbus, GA, commemorated 20 years since six Jesuit priests and two women who worked for them were savagely murdered in their home by graduates of the SOA. The Puppetistas, assisted by St. Louis’ own Tina Busch-Nema, had created marvelous visages of these martyrs to lead Sunday’s somber funeral procession and celebration of Resurrection. You can catch the spirit of the event by viewing Linda Panetta’s photos at her website (Optical Realities): www.opticalrealities.org/United-States/Protest/Nov-22-09-SOAW-Vigil/. As names and ages of the SOA’s victims are chanted, we had the sacred opportunity to be voices for the voiceless in declaring them “Presente!”

Over 200 people (probably our largest group ever) made the long trip from St. Louis to call for change in U.S. policy in Latin America. As usual, there was too much going on to take it all in! It was especially encouraging to be among the huge numbers of young people who participated in the many workshops and events. Having grown up in the days when the civil rights and peace movement captured national attention with huge marches on Washington, I wondered what it might take in today’s 24/7 news cycle to “get the word out” to our fellow citizens and influence the direction of federal policies. While it surely is a sign of hope that we no longer recognize a division between civil rights and anti-war efforts, our

wisdom, creativity and dogged persistence are needed now more than ever. After 10 years of protesting at Fort Benning, WE MUST CLOSE THE SOA. And, once that is accomplished, we must be ready to re-focus on other issues of militarism so that our tax dollars can be directed toward true development and peace in every part of the world where our military might is now felt.

On December 9, IFCLA convened a meeting of St. Louis participants to plan follow up actions, with special emphasis on leadership at the high school level. Valentines Day marks the deadline for influencing Congressional reps across the country. Since most of our St. Louis area reps have agreed to co-sponsor the legislation to close SOA, our strategy is to influence legislators in more rural parts of Missouri. Let IFCLA know of any contacts you may have who may be able to help and watch for IFCLA bulletins as the vote nears.

Yes, we can insure that 2009 was our last trip to Fort Benning!

“Our desire to dominate ‘our’ hemisphere is not likely to be eliminated by one vote in Congress.”



*The Puppetistas celebrate hope
Photo by Linda Panetta*

Trish has spent her life educating young children, but always has time for some activism and justice work.

In Latin America of the 21st Century, an independence is emerging...with a reactionary response... will business as usual win the day?



Outside the Memory Gallery, Cali, Colombia

ALBA: Antigua and Barbuda, Bolivia, Cuba, Dominica, Ecuador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Venezuela.
UNASUR-UNASUL: Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname, and Chile.

“A leader of the Resistance movement told visiting North Americans, “Now things will be very dangerous for us. We are more vulnerable now. Without you, it would be even worse. You are our lifeline “now.”

Emerging Trends: Marilyn Lorenz

from p. 2

- ALBA is a socialist response to the US-led Free Trade Area of the Americas (ALCA/FTAA) initiated by Canada, Mexico, Colombia and Peru. ALBA and UNASUR- UNSUL are alternatives to the IMF/ World Bank...
- New wave of leaders with indigenous and popular movement roots: Bolivia, Ecuador, Uruguay, Paraguay, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Venezuela. Others are a mix: Brazil, Argentina, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Mexico. Nevertheless the old guard remains in Peru, Colombia, Panama, and a backlash to times past in Honduras (Pepe Lobo has Opus Dei connections). Voter apathy reported among the young in Chile might leave the country with

a new President with ties to Pinochet and Opus Dei in January.

- Coup in Honduras, first one in 31 years in Latin America. Most countries stand firm against it and the elections held in Nov. U.S. policy is conflicted.
- Mining projects challenged by antimining movements. Leaders targeted and murdered. Efforts to protect the rainforest also meet repression.
- Push for Free Trade Agreements with added military presence to support or to fight them, done in the name of anti-drug/narco-trafficking policy. (eg. Plan Colombia and Mérida Initiative in México)

- Water and energy are highly valued and threatened resources treated as commodities.
- Human rights violated to make way for more extraction and exports crops. Biofuel products emerging as major crops displacing local and indigenous farmers.
- Truth and Reconciliation work bringing to justice the human rights abusers of the past.
- Democracy is being defined by a wider range of people.
- Solidarity and activist movements are growing again...will we meet the challenge of accompaniment again?

Honduras: death squads and dirty war

from p. 2

And now that the elections are over the repression has begun. It is hard to think of the courage and commitment and gentleness of the Honduran resistance movement and at the same time have to recognize that targeted assassinations against them have begun.

Corrales Garcia was found near Tegucigalpa. He had been detained on December 5th in a neighborhood in the south of Tegucigalpa .by five people wearing DNIC uniforms.

tened journalist Karol Cabrera of Channel 8 was assassinated by gunmen on a motorcycle. Catherine was seven months pregnant. Doctors were miraculously able to save her infant daughter.

*On December 4, human rights defender Walter Trochez, member of the LGBT community and active member of the National Resistance Front was kidnapped and bru tally beaten in Comayaguela by four hooded men in a grey pick-up truck without plates.

*Along with Corrales, other members of the resistance movement were arrested. All were tied at the feet and hands and taken to clandestine houses or police cells for interrogation. Black bags were placed over their heads so that they would lose their orientation.

* The kidnapping, disappearance, torture and interrogation of journalist Cesar Omar Silva by a street patrol with military training confirms the existence of a pattern of systematic violations of human rights committed by the same structure that violated the constitutional order on June 28, 2009.

*On December 11 the decapitated body of Santos

*On December 15, Catherine Nicolle Rodriguez Cabrera, 16 year old daughter of often threa-

*Death squads and dirty war return.



**Inter-Faith
Committee on
Latin America**

¡PRESENTE!

Friends, Donors, Fellow
Advocates... like Mons.
Romero, leaving a legacy:

*Joyce Becherer
Rachel Crandell*

(Rainbow Alliance)

Joseph Desloge, Jr.

David Felix

Frank & Joanne Flynn

Fr. Jim Krings

Paul Roman

Mary Auer

Frank Manganaro

Dick Spiering

(Core Committee for many years)

Lorenzo Rosebaugh, OMI

(killed in Guatemala)

Jim McGinnis

*Institute for Peace &
Justice*

ACTION FOR HONDURAS:

PLEASE CALL:

- Secretary of State Hillary Clinton 202-647-5291
- Assistant Secretary of State Arturo Valenzuela 202-647-4009
- White House Comment Line and Dan Restrepo (Special Assistant to the President and National Security Council Senior Director for Western Hemisphere Affairs) 202-456-111, 202-356-1414.
- Your members of Congress 202-224-3121

Share what you have learned and say/ask:

1. Violence and threats against members of the nonviolent resistance must stop now.
2. Where is the new US policy which was going to "repair the damage" of the past?

SUNDAY, MARCH 21 ~ 2:00-5:00PM

30TH ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATION - OSCAR ARNULFO ROMERO: ¡PRESENTE!

nerinx hall high school

530 e lockwood 63119

PRAYER SERVICE

REFRESHMENTS & CONVIVENCIA

MAGGIE FISHER WILL JOIN US!

MAY 1

KEINER PLAZA

12:00 noon

**JOIN WITH UNITED
METHODIST WOMEN AND
LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS TO
MARCH FOR CIVIL AND
IMMIGRANTS RIGHTS**

**ON THE INTERNATIONAL
DAY OF THE WORKER**

more information later

Immigration Update

Rep. Luis Gutierrez of Illinois introduced a comprehensive immigration bill on December 16: Immigration Reform for America's Security And Prosperity (CIR ASAP) Act of 2009, H.R. 4321. Another bill is expected from Sen. Charles Schumer of New York early in 2010. It is too soon to say what will happen. Enforcement issues are emphasized.

IFCLA is working with MIRA (Missouri Immigrant and Refugee Advocates) to organize a Missouri Detention Watch Network group. If you are interested in joining this effort to monitor the detention of immigrants in detention facilities across the state call us at the office.

IFCLA has copies of the dvd "**Made in L.A.**" which follows the remarkable story of three Latina immigrants working in Los Angeles sweatshops as the embark on a three year odyssey to win basic labor protections from trendy retailer Forever 21. Totally bilingual, this film links immigration and trade through very personal stories.

You may purchase it for \$20 and/or invite a speaker to show it and lead a discussion.

Contributors to this issue of IFW: Trish Curtis & Virginia Druhe, editors. Kathy Peterson and Dan Mosby, Mary Lois Sennewald, Virginia Druhe, Jenn Lay, Marilyn Lorenz, Mary's Pence Nov. 2009 Newsletter



IFCLA receives
major funding from
Justice and Peace Shares:
join JPS at
www.jps-stl.org