



"Melody for a seed" by Jafeth Gomez. Jafeth is a celebrated Colombian artist from the Cauca region of Colombia. He is a member of the Movimiento Campesino de Cajibio, the sister community of CSN's Central New York chapter. He recently visited New York.

My Impressions While in the United States

By Jafeth Gomez Ledezma – whttp://jafeth.proyectokalu.com/ Translated by Anne Schoeneborn, a CSN volunteer translator

Recently the path of life led me north, with luggage full of my artwork and the colorful symbols I used to express our life and our resistance. Our goal was to create a setting conducive to meeting and exchanging, where we could express our suffering and, above all, spread our shared artistic message in the defense of life, in search of hope and in the bid for a better world.

We sought to bring together those who believe in the magic of art as a transformative opportunity to express and make tangible our dreams and beliefs. We wanted to allow the miracle of our sensitivity to let us approach one another in a solidary and generous way so we could

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My Impressions While in the United States continued

mutually move and inspire one other with our ongoing search to generate a different future through every creative act.

Those of us who have chosen a path of nonconformity know that the "prohibited" path leading us toward the realization of our dreams continues to present us with political dilemmas. I felt uneasy and also curious about what it would mean to be in the country that has determined the course of history. Being there would also give me the opportunity to meet with others who are committed to their ideals and work tirelessly so the future will be different, so that it will be more human and just for all the peoples who have had their dignity tarnished for hundreds of years.

This trip allowed me to meet Americans who were far from the prototypical gringo. I became familiar with their daily reality and realized that they are my brothers and colleagues. They wanted to know about the Minga, our proposed agenda and our struggle. I knew that, just like in Colombia, in the United States relationships are woven out of solidarity and then translate into concrete actions and reciprocal commitments. However, a particular motivation for me was to also learn about different methods of organizing.

Going north had a special connotation in my mind because of the particular moment in North American history, a black man having just been elected to the White House for the first time. As the plane crossed the ocean and then passed over vast territories, fragments of history flitted about in my mind and I imagined what those places might have been like a little over 500 years ago—cultures tinted with magic, symbols and the rhythm of drums and dancing. I could almost feel the beat in my body.

I thought about those who resisted and courageously defended their lives and those of their people. I also thought about those violently and cruelly torn from distant Africa

so they could extract the wealth of this new land; I thought about the obsession with war; I thought about Wall Street and about Manhattan, with its skyscrapers inside of which the fate of the South is determined... right when the plane flew over New York I felt a strange feeling as I imagined where the twin towers would have stood a few years ago and then thought of their chaotic fate... and knowing that down below was also the statute of liberty...a strange contradiction that I still don't understand.

A great constellation of artists who had passed through this city in search of their dreams and who left behind great legacies to humanity came to my mind and comforted me... I felt tempted to walk the streets singing the Frank Sinatra song:

"These vagabond shoes / are longing to stray Right through the very heart of it, / New York, New York..."

Estos zapatos de vagabundo / Extrañan caminar Justo por el corazón de ella, / New York, New York.

The moment passed because Syracuse was my final destination, and a great friend, the singer, Colleen, was waiting to take me to Bread and Roses. This is an unusual name for a house, but to me, it signified a welcoming place full of friendship and affection on the part of my young hosts. Once there, I began to recognize faces. I also saw many new ones, but without a doubt they were faces of people walking the same path. Excepting the language barrier, it was, therefore, not difficult for us to understand each other. I felt that if there really are different worlds with multi-colored faces, we must ... and that tramples on their most elemental rights.

My happiness was most intense when I met and shared with organizations with so much history and commitment, such as Council for Peace, the Syracuse Cultural Workers, the ArtRage Gallery, the Colombia Support Network Central New York Chapter (Cajibio's

sister community), and the Caribbean and Latin American Coalition of Central New York, etc. The meeting with Syracuse Cultural Workers allowed me to confirm the rich and profound similarities in our work, our commitment and our search through art, except that our work is barely a small seed compared with theirs. It is urgently necessary for us to learn from their valuable experience. In the ArtRage gallery, thanks to the coordination of Rose Vivianco, the exhibition turned out wonderfully and I received kind and pleasing comments as well as countless shows of affection. There, like in other places, I was enchanted by the beautiful voice of Colleen Kattau and her heartfelt and profound songs that have a flavor encouraging a commitment to life and to causes of the

The universities of Ithaca, Cornell and Cortland generously opened their doors to allow us to tell of our experiences on their campuses. I was fortunate enough to be present at the birth of a great idea: la Casita Latina. Two professors at Syracuse University, Silvio and Inmaculada, have already begun to give this project life.

I could not leave to go home without having contact with the Onondaga Nation. I was accompanied by Tom, the indigenous sculptor of turtles. He gave us a tour of the maze that is their land and told us many of his peoples' stories. Despite the distance between his people and mine, most of these stories of ancestral magic peppered with blood and pain were similar to ours.

I consider this visit to have been a valuable experience that opened many doors, and I am completely convinced that the contribution of different artistic expressions is urgently necessary in promoting cultural exchange, and that sister-community projects facilitate relationships of support and solidarity that allow the creation of a different world.

Action On Colombia is the official newsletter of the Colombia Support Network, a national peace and justice network of groups and individuals working to promote respect for human rights in Colombia and a just relationship between the United States and Colombia through grassroots activism.

CSN supports a nonviolent, negotiated resolution to the conflict in Colombia.

CSN is the only current project of Wisconsin Interfaith Committee on Latin America

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A NOTE FROM CSN

People living in rural communities throughout Colombia are the direct victims of the armed conflict. Threats and acts of terrible violence are constantly used as a means of displacing entire communities. One way these communities non-violently confront this threat to their way of life is to create a "plan de vida," a long-term alternative plan for the future of their communities. All of CSN's sister communities in Colombia have created their own "plan de vida," which is why we decided to include the following articles which explore this topic more in-depth.

EXCERPT FROM THE MAGAZINE PIBICHO'S EDITORIAL • VOL 2 April '08 Working for the Colombian Amazonic region

(Translated by Anne Schoeneborn, a CSN volunteer translator)

Over the years, indigenous customs and cultures have been passed down from one generation to the next orally, teaching the wisdom of elders to the youngest of children. However, contact between indigenous groups of different ethnicities and other social groups is ever increasing, and mutual understanding

is needed in order to achieve a peaceful and harmonious conjoining of their different ways of life. Due to this fact, indigenous communities have recognized a need to write down their wisdom, creating documents to communicate their thoughts, ideologies, and interests as a community, as a culture, and as indigenous nations. (Note that in this case nations do not have borders such as those dividing neighboring countries because it is land that unites people, rivers that connect them, and years that legitimize their presence in a territory.)

These documents are called "Planes de Vida" (Life Plans), and are navigational maps that establish the way in which indigenous peoples conceive of their future. They define their objectives regarding how they want to live in order to preserve their culture and gather the knowledge of elders, youth, and women. They also state their principles for taking action on issues such as the environment, territory, government, health, education, gender and family, water, and plumbing.

After many years of working together, indigenous organizations in the Amazonas and in Putumayo have created their "planes de vida." These plans serve to recover and strengthen their cultural values, including the importance of traditional authority and indigenous systems of government, which

had begun to weaken. The ZIO A'I Foundation and the Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli (CISP), with the support of the European Union, played an important role with their project, "Strengthening the local systems of government and the rule of law in the indigenous communities of the river basins of San Miguel, Putumayo and Amazonas of the southern border of the Colombian Amazon."

The process of creating "planes de vida" has given indigenous groups the opportunity to identify the policies affecting their communities that governmental and other organizations have implemented. This is fundamental in developing these projects in a collaborative way so that they promote indigenous interests, respect for indigenous culture, and so that the projects benefit everyone.

We want to emphasize the importance of sharing the "planes de vida" with governmental institutions, private organizations and society as a whole because the knowledge gained through the projects and proposals of indigenous groups should serve to strengthen the relationship between indigenous communities and other social groups. The final objective of the proposals is to link projects within the "planes de vida" with national and regional development plans.

"El Plan de Vida"—What is a Life Plan?

Interview with Claudino Pérez President of OIMA (Indigenous Organization of the Amazon Region) (Translated by Anne Schoeneborn, a CSN volunteer translator)

According to the ideology and world view of the indigenous, what is a "plan de vida," and what does it represent?

The "plan de vida" is a plan made by indigenous organizations and communities in an effort to survive and to maintain traditions, customs, and the hope of having a society with its own identity based on the traditional knowledge of its people. It is a means of guaranteeing better conditions and a better quality of life for indigenous communities. However, it is also a document to be used in negotiations with both the regional and national government, as action must be taken at both of these levels. It is a document with which we can demand our

rights as indigenous peoples. It clearly states these rights that we have as indigenous peoples, according to both our political constitution and international agreements.

Included in the "plan de vida" are distinct levels of action. The first includes the issues of health, education, territory, the environment, natural resources, the economy and production, government, justice, youth, and women's and gender issues. The second level consists of athletics, culture, and, above all, maintaining the traditions of the Murui people. These are the pillars of the maloka¹ that is the "plan de vida."

Are there differences between a "plan de vida" and a development plan, or are they similar?

There is a big difference because a "plan de vida" is carried out over an indeterminate period of time whereas a development

¹ "Maloka" refers to the central gathering place of indigenous communities. In this case, the term is being used metaphorically.

plan is carried out during a period of time determined by the government. The "plan de vida" is not a program defined in terms of years, but yet we must understand that some types of actions and programs must also be incorporated into development plans, whether at the departmental or national level.

How was the "plan de vida" developed? What were the difficulties that you encountered, and what were the biggest benefits of this process?

The process of defining the "plan de vida" was very important—we began by reflecting on what it is that we want as indigenous peoples. Through our discussions we were able to then begin formulating the different components needed in the plan. We, as elderly, adults, youth and/or women all became increasingly aware of our roles within the plan. We became conscious of the great importance of this process and of the fact that this document is urgently needed to

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"El Plan de Vida"—What is a Life Plan? continued

guide us in the future. This is a process that brings people together and enables them to think collectively as a region with a territorial identity.

All processes have their difficulties, and for us, meeting every one or two months was very costly. We often had to meet in communities with poor accessibility. This created obstacles, but it also offered many benefits. Above all, it helped us to focus on initiatives that would improve the conditions in which we live and that would benefit us all.

You have commented that in the "plan de vida" the topics of government and justice are very important. In your opinion, how have these topics been dealt with in the two years since this project began?

Our experience during the two years has led us to realize that traditional leaders have the authority to apply their own system of justice (an authority recognized by the Colombian Constitution of 1991), and that leaders and chiefs can solve social conflicts without turning to the conventional justice system. Of course there are serious offenses that, due to the issue of human rights, we cannot handle within our own system, such as abuse or murder cases. Today, human rights cannot be violated by any justice system, and we are therefore working on establishing mechanisms of coordination between the conventional and the indigenous justice systems (or special jurisdiction in serious cases).

This two year experience provided us with the opportunity to strengthen the role of the authorities and the government. One of the main challenges we face is the fact that it is not clear to members of our community who, in the end, will enforce the rules. I think it is necessary that we carry out training sessions so that indigenous governors have a clear vision of how the rules are to be enforced.

What was the process and experience like of working on a project financed by the European Union?

The experience of working on this project has been one of a kind. Thanks to this project we have been able to reveal the true reality lived by the communities of the Putumayo River region. As a result, we have had the opportunity to identify both the problems and the necessities that exist.

In this sense, the support of the European Union by means of this program has been fundamental. There has been very active participation and the communities feel that the project has been extremely beneficial because action is now being taken on various levels to strengthen local governments by developing systems of indigenous justice and government, and also by strengthening associations of women who do work such as making handicrafts. The communities have also pushed for the recuperation or improvement of the traditional farming plots, as well as for improvements in housing and local courts. The program was essential and

the people believe that it was implemented in accordance with the necessities of the indigenous communities of the region.

How are the initiatives described in the "plan de vida" being implemented and what type of political impact are they having?

We are speaking with the Department in hopes of including some of the programs in the departmental development plan being carried out by the new administration. As president, I have already participated in a meeting of the departmental planning office to speak about the proposed initiatives we have in our "plan de vida."

After the project is concluded, how will the communities continue this process?

The process has allowed us to help ourselves because we, in our current state, are not yet organizationally, economically or technically self-sufficient. The project has also helped us to guide ourselves through the process, and we hope that with time we will be in the position to take care of ourselves, and to seek out ways in which we can meet our own needs—from the financial to the technical. That is what we are working toward, and when the constitution of the territorial entity is created, we will be able to speak of autonomy and an autonomous way of governing through which we can demonstrate that we, as indigenous groups, and with the help of this project, have learned this valuable lesson. We have shown the communities involved that this experience is one of coordinated work meant to address our people's dreams and aspirations.

I believe that we should have capable people with different academic backgrounds in our communities, and we therefore need education for our leaders. This will strengthen the process of decision-making needed to guide our people.

Our expectation, and the goal of our "plan de vida," is to both guarantee our survival and to ensure that we live in dignified conditions. Another goal is to put into practice processes, programs and projects that benefit everyone. Finally, we hope to motivate institutions to take us into account so that their actions will address the problems we face and so that we will one day be able to live good lives.



Ancizar Gutierrez, the young Embera-Chami leader from our sister community in Putumayo, while visiting CSN's president John Laun in Boqotá.

CSN Co-signs ACLU Letter Ref Father Gallego and Others

March 17, 2009

Hon. Eric H. Holder Jr. Attorney General U.S. Department of Justice 950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW Washington, D.C. 20530-0001

Hon. Hillary Rodham Clinton Secretary of State U.S. Department of State 2201 C Street, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20520

Hon. Janet Napolitano Secretary of Homeland Security U.S. Department of Homeland Security Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Attorney General Holder and Secretaries Clinton and Napolitano:



Noam Chomsky recently honored CSN by visiting our office headquarters in Madison, Wisconsin. Here he is pictured with CSN's Co-founders.

Over the last eight years, the Departments of State and Homeland Security revived the practice of "ideological exclusion," refusing visas to foreign scholars, writers, artists, and activists not on the basis of their actions but on the basis of their ideas, political views, and associations. As a result of this practice, dozens of prominent intellectuals were barred from assuming teaching posts at U.S. universities, fulfilling speaking engagements with U.S. audiences, and attending academic conferences. Many of those barred from the United States were vocal critics of U.S. foreign policy.

We are writing to urge you to end this practice. While the government plainly has an interest in excluding foreign nationals who present a threat to national security, no legitimate interest is served by the exclusion of foreign nationals on ideological grounds. To the contrary, ideological exclusion impoverishes academic and political debate inside the United States. It sends the message to the world that our country is more interested in silencing than engaging its critics. It undermines our ability to support political dissidents in other countries. And it deprives Americans of a right protected by the First Amendment. See Kleindienst v. Mandel, 408 U.S. 753 (1972). No legitimate interest is served by the government's use of the immigration laws as instruments of censorship.

In fact, ideological exclusion is a practice that history had discredited long before the Bush administration. During the Cold War, the United States used the ideological exclusion provisions of the McCarran-Walter Act to bar, among others, Colombian novelist Gabriel García Márquez, Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, Italian playwright Dario Fo, British novelist Doris Lessing, and Canadian writer and environmentalist Farley Mowat. Those exclusions came to be seen as an embarrassment to the country, and virtually no one proposes now that those exclusions served the national interest. History will judge the ideological exclusions of the last eight years in the same way. Such exclusions are ineffective as a matter of security policy and they are inconsistent with the ideals that make this country worth defending.

The undersigned organizations are eager to see the new administration commit itself to these ideals. Accordingly, we respectfully ask (1) that you evaluate applicants for admission to the United States on the basis of their actions rather than their political beliefs and associations; (2) that, as to foreign scholars, writers, artists, and activists who are deemed inadmissible under the Immigration and Nationality Act, you exercise your discretion to waive inadmissibility except where articulable national security interests unrelated to the applicant's political beliefs or associations make waiver inappropriate; and (3) that you immediately revisit the specific cases listed below:

- <u>Iñaki Egaña</u>. Mr. Egaña is a respected historian and writer from the Basque region of Spain. In March 2006, Mr. Egaña traveled to the United States to conduct research for a book about Basque author Mario Salegi, who was a target of McCarthyism during the 1950s. Upon disembarking the plane, however, Mr. Egaña and his children were interrogated, detained for 24 hours, and forced to return to Madrid. The government has provided no explanation for Mr. Egaña's exclusion.
- <u>Haluk Gerger</u>. Professor Gerger is a Turkish sociologist and journalist. He was jailed by Turkey in the 1990s for his writing about Turkey's Kurds. Twice during that time, in its 1994 and 1995 Country Reports on Human Rights, the U.S. State Department cited Professor Gerger's treatment as an example of the misuse of antiterrorism legislation to stifle freedom of expression. In 1999, when Gerger was on trial again for his writings, the U.S. issued Professor Gerger and his wife 10-year, multiple entry visas. In October 2002, however, when Professor Gerger and his wife arrived at Newark airport, border officials informed them that the State Department had cancelled their visas. The government has provided no explanation for Professor Gerger's exclusion.
- Adam Habib. Professor Habib, a South African national, is a prominent human rights activist and public intellectual. Although he

earned his PhD in the United States, when he attempted to visit the United States in October 2006 for professional meetings, he was interrogated for seven hours at the border and then told that his visa had been revoked. After U.S. organizations filed suit to challenge his exclusion, the government notified Professor Habib that he had been denied entry on terrorism-related grounds, but the government still has not informed him of the specific legal or factual basis for its decision. We believe that Professor Habib has been excluded not because of any connection to terrorism but because of his political activism.¹

- Riyadh Lafta. Dr. Lafta, an Iraqi national, is Professor of Medicine at Baghdad's Mustansiriyah University. In the fall of 2006, Dr. Lafta applied for a U.S. visa in order to attend a speaking engagement at the University of Washington which was to take place in April 2007. His visa application was denied. Although the government stated that the denial was the result of a "miscommunication," the circumstances strongly suggest that Dr. Lafta was refused a visa because of conclusions he had drawn in a 2006 article regarding the number of civilian casualties in Iraq.
- Tariq Ramadan. Professor Ramadan, a Swiss national, is a professor at the University of Oxford and, in the words of Time magazine, "the leading Islamic thinker among Europe's second- and third-generation Muslim immigrants." In 2004, he was offered a teaching position at the University of Notre Dame; only days before he was to begin teaching, however, he was told that his visa had been revoked under a provision that renders inadmissible anyone who has "endorse[d] or espouse[d]" terrorism. After U.S. groups filed suit, the government abandoned the accusation that Professor Ramadan had endorsed terrorism. It continues to exclude him now, however, under the INA's "material support" provisions. We believe that the material support provisions do not apply to Professor Ramadan and that he has been excluded not because of his donations but because of his vocal criticism of U.S. foreign policy.²
- Rafael de Jesus Gallego Romero. Father Gallego is a parish priest from the village of Tiquisio in North-Central Colombia, where he ministers to miners and peasants, facilitates community support initiatives, and runs a local radio station. Father Gallego is also a vocal critic of government-supported paramilitary units acting on behalf of multinational mining corporations. In the fall of 2008, Father Gallego received invitations to travel to the United States to address universities, activist organizations, community radio stations, and churches. The U.S. government simply failed to adjudicate the visa. Father Gallego eventually learned from the Provincial Jesuit, who has ties to the American Embassy that his visa was going to be denied "for national security reasons," but he has never received a formal notification that his visa was adjudicated, let alone an explanation of the grounds on which it was denied.
- <u>Dora María Téllez</u>. Professor Téllez was a leading figure in Nicaragua's revolution against the brutal Somoza regime, and has served in her country as a government minister, political activist, and professor. She has also been a vocal critic of U.S. foreign policy. In 2004, she was appointed Robert F. Kennedy visiting professor in Latin American Studies at Harvard's Divinity School and Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies. When Professor Téllez attempted to enroll at a language class in California in preparation for that post, however, her student visa was denied on the ground that she had previously engaged in terrorist acts, despite the fact that she had been granted visas to enter the United States in the past.

Ideological exclusion compromises the vitality of academic and political debate in the United States at a time when that debate is exceptionally important. The practice was misguided during the Cold War and it is misguided now. We strongly urge you to end the practice and to immediately revisit the cases noted above.

Sincerely,

[signatories]

The Colombia Support Network

Action on Colombia

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¹ Professor Habib's exclusion is the subject of ongoing litigation. *Am. Sociological Ass'n, et al. v. Clinton, et al.*, No. 07-cv-11796 (D. Mass. filed Sept. 25, 2007).

² Professor Ramadan's exclusion is the subject of ongoing litigation. *Am. Acad. of Religion, et al. v. Napolitano, et al.*, No. 08-0826-cv (2d Cir.).



CSN President John Laun delivers donation from the Freeze for Food race in January to Peace Community leader Jesus Emilio Tuberquia.

The Social Movement of Cauca department in Colombia, a coaltion of indigenous people, peasants and workers, has made the decision to plant a forest in the rural area of Lerma in the municipality of Bolivar. This region was chosen because it has a long tradition of social struggle, and has been a site of resistance against the imposed economic model. In this forest, they will build a path going to the top of the mountain, which is meant to symbolize the path of life. All the social movements of this region will participate. They have decided to name this forest the CAROL CHOMSKY forest honoring the memory of the person who was the love, the companion and the inspiration of Professor Noam Chomsky, who so graciously visited them and listened to their tales of suffering.

From Jesus Emilio Tuberquia, Legal Representative of the Peace Community of San Josesito de Apartadó:

Please receive our many thanks for this grand gesture of solidarity. On behalf of the community, may God bless you and (increase your good fortune). Thank you for feeling the pain from which we suffer living in the midst of the Colombian armed conflict, which has resulted in nothing but tears, orphans, widows, and poverty. I want to assure you that we always use these funds to buy food for the families returning to reoccupy the land from which they were displaced. We also use it to buy food for our anniversary celebration.

De Jesus Emilio Tuberquia Representante legal de la Comunidad de Paz de San Josesito de Apartado;

Reciban mil agradecimientos por el gran gesto de solidaridad. En nombre de la comunidad que Dios les bendiga y les aumente sus bienes. Gracias por sentir el dolor de los que sufrimos en medio de la confrontacion armada que vivimos en Colombia que solo ha dejado llanto ninos huerfanos, viudas y mucha miseria. Quiero contarles que estos recursos siempre los usamos en comprar alimentos para las familias que van regresando a ocupar sus tierras de donde fueron desplazadas. Y tambien en compra de alimentos para cada aniversario

From Ancizar Gutierrez, Embera leader:

I wish to thank all the members of the Kansas City community and I hope that one day I will be able to meet with you so we can share more ideas about the lives of the indigenous people in Colombia, and especially of the Embera-Chami.

Del Lider Embera Ancizar Gutierrez:

Agradezco a todos los miembros de esta comunidad de Kansas City y espero algun dia estar con ustedes compartiendo mas ideas de la vida de los pueblos indigenas en Colombia especialmente de los Embera-Chami



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