



William Calderon, Padre Gallego, Julio Dussan and members of the community.

## Trip Report: Austin-CSN Chapter to Tiquisio, Bolivar, Colombia

### August 2009

by Terry Adcock and Cesar Ocampo

This report summarizes the Austin-CSN delegation to Tiquisio which took place on August 9-11, 2009. The participants were Jack Laun, President of Colombia Support Network, and Austin-CSN members, Terry Adcock and Cesar Ocampo. The purpose of the trip was to begin a course of action to make Austin, Texas a “sister community” to the community in Tiquisio named “The Citizen’s Process for Tiquisio” (Proceso Ciudadano por Tiquisio, PCT). The first step was to go to Tiquisio, to talk to and interact with the people who are part of the PCT. The trip culminated in Bogota where we met up with another CSN delegation that had visited a community in Cauca. This report focuses on the Tiquisio portion of the overall trip.

The members of the delegation met in Monteria, Cordoba on August 9. There we were met by Padre Gallego and William Calderon, a representative of the Colombian Network for Peace (Redepaz). Padre Rafael Gallego has been a key figure in Tiquisio ever since he arrived in the region in 2000. He is a very intelligent and warm person who has been able to win over the hearts and minds of the community. He has been an outspoken critic of the presence

## Trip Report: Austin-CSN Chapter to Tiquisio, Bolivar, Colombia continued

of all the armed actors and therefore has been targeted and threatened. He has had verbal confrontations with the local army representatives. He tried to visit the US in 2008, under a CSN invitation to tour the U.S., but a visa was not issued to him by the US consulate in Bogota. The last word is that this visa has been delayed and is pending.

We took off in the Redepaz Jeep and headed for Magangué. There we were joined by Julio Dussan, another representative of Redepaz who will be working in the region for the next several months. From Magangué we all took a “chalupa” (a motorized, covered launch) on the wide expanse of the Magdalena River to Tiquisio.

The trip was a sightseeing marvel and a travelling nightmare. The trip allowed us to experience a tropical setting of beauty and wonders, including marshes stretching for miles containing an amazing variety of vegetation and exotic wildlife, especially birds, beyond description. The nightmare was provided by the rough waves and waters of the confluence of the Magdalena and Cauca Rivers that made our craft lurch and rattle much of the way to Tiquisio

### Puerto Rico

When we arrived in Puerto Rico, the town in the extended municipality of Tiquisio containing the seat of government, it was near dark. We spent the night in preparation for a meeting with the mayor and members of the municipal council the next day. That night we had a taste of what life was like for the residents of Puerto Rico when the lights went out in the entire town while we were having dinner at an outdoor restaurant on the main street. Some shops regained electricity by the use of private generators, but much of the town remained in the dark. Fans that had been providing a measure of relief from the oppressive heat were off. Before we went to bed the lights came back on, much to our relief. We were told that it was a rare day when the electricity did *not* fail at some point in the day.

The next morning we met with the mayor, Jose Jimenez, who supports the effort of the Citizen's Process, and various Municipal Council members. They laid out in chilling detail the difficulties



Cesar Ocampo during his presentation to the students.

facing the average citizen of Tiquisio, especially the poor.

During this meeting we heard the testimony of an elderly campesino, who had been displaced from his plot of land and forced into exile in Sweden some years ago because of threats resulting from his stance against the incursion of armed groups into the region. His testimony was very powerful and emotional. He decided to return to Tiquisio Nuevo to attempt to recover his home and his plot of land. Unfortunately, he has not been able to do so.

### Tiquisio Nuevo

From Puerto Rico, we continued on to Tiquisio Nuevo, the other main town, by chalupa on the Tiquisio River. The reality in the municipality of Tiquisio is that there are few roads and almost no cars or trucks. Between towns travel has to be by boat, for the most part. If Puerto Rico is challenged by its circumstances, Tiquisio Nuevo is tested almost beyond the limits of civilized society. In large portions of the town, including

where we spent the night, there is no running water. The situation with intermittent electricity is worse than in Puerto Rico. There is a clinic, but no medicine and little medical equipment. There are only two paved roads through the center of town and not even graveled roads outside of town. Bicycles, motor scooters, and one truck provide transportation, such as it is. We stayed in the parish house, a part of the town's main church and next to the town's school. None of those facilities had running water. There were sanitary facilities flushed by water poured in buckets from large barrels brought in from mountain streams. Water in sealed plastic bags provided the only safe drinking water.

In Tiquisio Nuevo, we met several community leaders. The first was a young woman who is the secretary of the Proceso and a member of the women's support group network. She provided many details associated with the violence which has afflicted the area over the past 20 years. She described the incursion of all the armed groups

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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 grass-roots 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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Terry Adcock dancing cumbia with one of the student dancers.

(guerrillas, paramilitaries, and army) and how this affected the community. She described a fierce battle between the guerrillas and the paramilitaries that occurred just on the outskirts of town. The dead were all dumped in the swamps surrounding the town, and she thinks they are still there. The community was held “captive” because no one dared to leave their homes. The army was nowhere to be seen. It was suspected that they knew about this battle but instead of protecting the community, they simply let the battle take its course.

In another incident, over 300 paramilitaries once entered the town looking for guerrilla sympathizers. The young woman described the gut-wrenching torture and assassination of a man that was captured by the paramilitaries just outside the town. The soles of the man’s feet were cut off and his face was slashed and disfigured. Then he was made to walk in this condition for over two days with his torturers behind him. He was tied up by rope, as if on a leash. Every few steps, his

torturers would yank the rope and the man would fall to the ground, and then be forced to get up. Finally he was killed by a machete. The young woman was able to make eye contact with the man and she still remembers his expression that beseeched her to “please help me”. She recounted the feeling of powerlessness at not being able to do anything about it.

In the afternoon we attended a community meeting in a cooperative sugar mill (trapiche). This was near Puerto Coca, a hamlet near Tiquisio Nuevo. Here we heard testimony from several community members. In particular, we were touched by the testimony of a very poor but very bright community leader. He recounted the first massacre which occurred in Puerto Coca in 1998. Several hundred paramilitaries entered the region with guerrilla informers who pointed out several members of the community. Four young men were singled out and made to lie face down on the street right by the river. All of these young men were killed with firearms and their faces were

stuffed with gunpowder. The community leader and his friends all witnessed this massacre. One of his friends was the brother of one of the massacred men. They were powerless to do anything about it, knowing very well that they would also fall victims if they tried to stop it. This massacre has never been officially reported by the community and its perpetrators will remain unpunished until a complaint is filed and the judicial system carries out the full process, something that is very unlikely in this part of Colombia.

The members of the community also confided to us the presence of paramilitaries in the region who had arrived a few months earlier and were constructing a landing strip for small airplanes. This landing strip most likely was intended for drug planes. The paramilitaries had also started recruiting young men from the community. Community members were concerned about their presence, even though they had not been directly threatened by them. They were afraid that they would be threatened if the paramilitaries ever found out they were being denounced. We assured them that we would do everything to protect their identities. Later in Bogota we provided the details of this complaint to U.S. Ambassador William Brownfield and his assistants and we mentioned the paramilitary base to high-ranking members of the Defense Ministry. Later we found out from Padre Gallego that the landing strip had been destroyed by the army and that the paramilitaries had fled into the surrounding forested area. Though this was good news, we are not sure if anyone was actually taken into custody. We do not know the details regarding the complicity of the local army battalion. It is hard to believe that this battalion did not know of the presence of the paramilitaries in the region, yet the offensive action taken by the army only occurred after we denounced their presence at the national level.

Finally, some community members also confided in us the fact that they feared they would soon be removed from their lands, where they grow their subsistence crops, which are later sold and bartered. The campesinos have divided among themselves plots of lands on farms that have been abandoned by their owners for more than twenty years. These owners are now returning and seeking to force them off the land. The campesinos feel unprotected with little legal recourse to protect themselves from this displacement. In Bogota we brought their plight to the attention of an attorney for the Jose Alvear Restrepo Lawyer’s Collective, who expressed interest in trying to prevent these campesinos from being forced off their crop lands. This is a very worrisome issue that needs to be

addressed with our help, and of course is a work in progress.

In Tiquisio Nuevo, we visited and talked to the educational staff of the school. One evening we set up a makeshift auditorium inside the church to see a beautiful dance presentation by a group of young teenagers who had traveled several hours just to show us their dance performance. Cesar also gave them a very visual and interactive presentation on space and aerospace engineering, which are part of his professional interests. On another evening, we set up a makeshift movie theatre at one of the street corners of the town to present two documentaries that were made about the PCT and included testimony of members of the community. These documentaries had been shown on Señal Colombia, which is the national public television service. Unfortunately only very few people of the community had seen these documentaries on TV. Therefore we replayed them, using a laptop and projector we had taken with us. Both of these events were very successful. In addition, Jack Laun delivered to the Tiquisio school a generous monetary donation from the Returned Peace Corps Volunteers organization in Madison, Wisconsin.

This trip has been extremely important in furthering the sister relationship between Austin and Tiquisio. Much work remains and it includes making the sister relationship official between the Austin Mayor's office and the PCT of Tiquisio. Several meetings will be held in Austin to recruit more members for the chapter and present to them this relationship and the issues that need to be addressed in working with the community in Tiquisio. We plan further trips in the future, and we also plan on coordinating a visit to the U.S. of members of the PCT of Tiquisio. Pressing tasks include strengthening the relationship and addressing the current needs of the community. One of these needs is helping the local farmers maintain their livelihood by protecting them from forced displacement from their cultivated plots of land. Additionally, we plan to support their efforts to achieve and maintain peace by keeping out the pressure and repression from all of the armed groups in the region.



Plants ready to be planted at La Aromatica farm of the MCC.

## Warrior Women

by Ursula Rozum,  
*CSN Central New York Chapter*

Anyone who read the last issue of *Action on Colombia* will remember the stirring testimony of a young woman who was sexually abused by the paramilitaries occupying her community. Women's bodies are often treated as trophies of war, used to demonstrate domination of one group over another. Men wage war and women are left to deal with the socio-economic aftermath of conflict. Looking at the photographic history of Colombia's conflict and peace process during a meeting in Bogota, I quickly noticed the absence of women in the photos. Since, I have been convinced that there can be no peace without women. Within the context of a protracted civil war and 80% rural poverty rate, the women of the *Movimiento Campesino de Cajibío* (The Small Farmers Movement of Cajibío, better known as the MCC) have taken to front lines of the struggle for peace and justice. From the main office of the *Movimiento Campesino de Cajibío* in Popayan to the fields of *La Aromatica*, they are organizing to confront the many challenges facing their *campesino* community and their message is reaching audiences throughout Colombia and around the world.

Marylen, the political organizer and spokes person of the MCC is like a lioness. She speaks

with confidence and resolve and naturally commands the attention of those around her. She explained to me that the *MCC* is based in the philosophy of *minga*; each individual contributes his or her skills strengths to meet the needs of the community. In exchange, the *MCC* helps provides a network through which members can receive and legal advice, counseling, and practical information

Dona Berta is a medicine woman who organizes women's groups to share traditional ways of cultivating plants and using herbs to ease physical and emotional pain, Berta leads monthly workshops on women's health, justice and human rights. Some women travel over an hour to attend, to learn and to bring back the information to their communities. Berta's son was a victims of a massacre perpetrated in 2001 by paramilitaries who accused him of being a guerilla. Many people in her family have told her to give up her struggle yet she is determined and relentless. "Since my son was murdered, the MCC has become my family and they support me in my struggle for truth and justice," says Berta.

In 2006, the MCC was able to purchase three hectares of land for an organic communal farm. Named *La Aromatica*, the farm produces herbs, *aromaticas*, and vegetables for communal consumption. *La*

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# Nonviolence and the Colombian Conflict

by B. Alyssa Neely, CSN Central New York Chapter

Nonviolence is hopeless. Do I really believe that statement? NO

To be honest I am newcomer to the whole of understanding the Colombian violence as well as the multitude of other problems which the people of this nation are facing. I am also a newcomer to understanding the various efforts of the people of the country to work constructively and nonviolently for change and subsequently justice. Instead of going on and on about the problems that I noticed while I was attending CSN's delegation I will try to provide a more hopeful light on the amazingly energetic people I met who are doing things nonviolently for the betterment of their country.

My college studies had led me to Social Philosophy and Communications as my major. Within my social philosophy major we have learned much about various wordily conflicts and the philosophical implications behind them. The professors at the college are often peace activists and nonviolence supporters on the sidelines of their university professing; notably this mindset has been a huge part of my studies as well. I have

studied various conflicts and the philosophical ideals behind them, specifically becoming immersed in study of some nonviolent movements in other countries such as that of the Serbian revolution, Ukrainian revolution and the Polish Solidarity movement.

Being caught in the Ivory Tower, otherwise known as a university, I am kind of disconnected from some of the real world problems that are occurring outside university life but yet are otherwise connected to our ('student's) lifestyle. I never thought I would meet people actually taking part in the nonviolent movements to combat the injustices that are occurring, unless of course some sort of initiative was to be taken.

Colombia Support Network is one group taking those initiatives to help get things done, unlike the various bureaucrats whom we met in Colombia who are doing next to nothing. The people I met within the Movimiento Campesino Cajibío (MCC) are also a group of people who are taking initiative to work for human rights and justice within the nation of Colombia. Admittedly the nonviolent movements such as MCC and Colombia Support Network are doing a much better job at getting things done than the hundreds of government bureaucrats who sit at desks filling out papers that get pushed down the line of responsibility, until there is nobody's responsibility. What happens when something that is everybody's responsibility is ignored or pushed aside due to procrastination or laziness? Nothing. The problems then end up remaining and sometimes just get worse.

What is everybody's responsibility? Well like I said I am no expert on the problems within Colombia, but on the delegation I have noticed a few of them. So coming from an outsiders viewpoint (outside of Colombia) I see different major issues, that have notably changed how I see the world and problems within the United States. Of course there are the massacres that are still being carried out by the paramilitaries which the government seems to ignore. There is a subsequent displacement of peoples in Colombian rural areas. Monocultures and illicit crops are destroying the environment as well as oppressing the already impoverished people. Communication problems are creating barriers between government officials, between peoples and their government, as well as between the United States and Colombia.

*Aromatica* is also the sight of a permaculture school. Men and women travel as long as two hours to learn sustainable farming techniques which they bring back to their localities. Sixty-eight families benefit from the courses offered and share in the vegetables produced. Each family sends a representative every two weeks to work on the farm and to bring back seeds. A young mother, Aracelis, is the care-taker and her greatest responsibility is maintaining the greenhouse. She starts all the plants from seed, experiments with composting methods to create more productive soil, and intuitively knows what each seedling needs to thrive.

In a country where many men have paid lip service to a peace process, Berta, Aracelis and the women of the MCC are nurturing peace in their community. The message of *minga* that the MCC espouses and shares with other grassroots organizations, including indigenous and labor organizations, is spreading through Colombia, and is reaching the ears of the world. After generation of living with a culture of *machismo* and with the inequalities inherent to neo-liberalism, the women of Cajibío have joined the collective "Ya Basta!" They are proving that there will not be peace without women.



Colleen Kattau from CSN Central New York greets the Cajibío Municipal Council President.

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Bureaucratic sloth and inaction are prevalent in the governmental sector. Most importantly, the bigger underlying problem, which is so often the problem, is power and greed on the part of the government, corporations and illegal forces such as the paramilitaries and guerrillas.

On this trip i met one of the most amazing and strong people who have lived and seeing so much for the sake of human rights. Upon arrival at the household of the Gonzalez's i would have never known that they have taken part and helped intensely with a protest of 60,000 people in Colombia on a march from some of the rural communities to the capital, Bogota. One major factor in this large scale protest is the MCC. Everybody within the MCC knows Marylen Serna and John Henry Gonzalez, as they are big names in the movement. John Henry came with CSN to Bogota and courageously communicated the problems that he has witnessed and understands in front of the many different people that we met with. These groups are various Non-governmental human rights groups, government human rights bureaucrats, and the Colombian Department of Defense. It takes immense courage and selflessness to take the time out of your day or week to fly to a city that is more than a mile above sea level and speak to such a wide range of people, and to speak strongly and competently. Actions like this are forces of nonviolence in action, breaking the barriers of faulty communication, sloth-bureaucracy, and elite greed.

One day we went to visit the farm where many of the families within the MCC work. It was beautiful to see what this group of people has done within one year period. Last year through CSN Central New York Chapter the land was donated to the MCC so they could lead sustainable farming practices by example. Looking out upon the mountains one sees acres and acres of pine trees, some brow spots, some fires, and the native growth. The native growth is wonderful, the farm is fantastic, but anyone who is knowledgeable about bionics of he world knows that pine trees are not native to tropical areas such as Colombia. Unnatural and unsustainable pines, which are planted by various multinational corporations, are sucking up ground water and diminishing the aquifer, leaving peasant crops without the water they need to grow. Thus these plantings are underling the livelihood of the campesinos in the area, The farm started by the MCC is sustainable and mostly organic. It is not harmful to the surrounding areas and nonpolluting . The MCC hopes it can lead by example.

One of the women at the farm was Dona Berta. Her son had been killed by paramilitaries, but she is a strong woman. Dona Berta came

to CSN to Bogota to break the communication barrier between the rural communities and the big city along with John Henry. She told her story as an example of what is happening in the rural communities and hopes that someone would be moved to help.

The people in the CSN delegation were also incredible strong and passionate. They use their intellect and compassion to provide aid nonviolently to the people in Colombia. I think that having the presence of people from the US brought about a different perspective for the officials we met with. This is a welcome difference from the people who come to Colombia for motives of profit or power, not humanity.

We told the officials in the Department of Defense with whom we met in Bogota that their policies have not help people in the countryside, where people are still being displaced and murdered. We told them that the focus on military presence had just created more displacement and more problems. The most important message we wanted to convey was that spending so much money on a military presence has not created a safer place and that maybe their money would be spend much more usefully in communication, dissemination and education, and justice for those affected by the violence/

I do not know if anyone heard with their heart. buy I surely hope that at least one did/ I know my heart was warmed by the hard-working people of a nation which deserves so much more.

Christmas is  
coming and  
we ask you all  
to be generous  
in support of  
CSN's work

## The Colombia Support Network

*Action on Colombia*

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# Chomsky's message to Cauca

Dear friends,

I have learned of the decision of the Social Movement of Cauca Department to plant a forest in memory of my beloved Carol, my lifelong companion since we were hardly more than children, who passed away a few months ago after a long and courageous struggle with cancer. Visiting Cauca and hearing the testimonies of victims of chemical warfare and terror was an unforgettable, searing experience. I cannot imagine a memorial that could possibly mean more to me than this wonderful gift that you have offered me. There is no way for me to find the right words to tell you how moved I am by your kindness and compassion. I hope very much to have the opportunity to walk through the forest in Lerma and to think about the many years we spent together, and to try to express to you my gratitude directly.

With hope for better days ahead,

*Noam Chomsky*

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## Father Rafael reports on his new visa interview

Greetings to you all, men and women builders of PEACE. A few minutes ago I returned to Rio Viejo. Yesterday, September 21, at three in the afternoon I had an interview in the American Embassy. A woman staff member at Window 14 in the Consulate, who spoke good Spanish with a U.S. accent, interviewed me, smiling.

She began by saying "Thank you for such patience with this visa." Then she asked me the following questions:

Q: "Where were you in 1988?"

I answered: "In Rio Viejo."

Q: "What did you do there?"

A: "I was the parish priest."

Q: "Did you have something with the police?"

A: "I never have had any problem with the police."

Q: "With the ELN? Did you provide a place to sleep to guerrillas in the parish house any time?"

A: "Never. We are persons of peace. We are against war."

She carried with her a piece of letter-sized paper with some information on it. As I answered her questions, she made notes on the bottom part of the paper in red ink. My interviewer asked her questions in an insistent way. And I insisted upon my answers. She bottom part of the paper in red ink.

I added: "I wish to note that we are not pro-guerrilla. I have received 25 guerrillas and we have turned them over to the national army so that they may avail themselves of the plan to return to civilian life. We have done this even at risk to our lives."

She said "but that is recent...I will share this information...It may help." Smiling, she said several times "I have to share this information with the team of the consulate...It will help in the processing of the visa...The visa cannot be given to you now. When there is something on your visa, we will call you."

In other words, I continue to be investigated... Successes!

Rafael Gallego Romero  
September 22, 2009

# Messages to CSN

Dear CSN :

Your latest newsletter blew me away—I had to read it twice. In the struggle, Robert Kimbrough

I hope in my small way, that I can help the people of Colombia. I do not think most people know that the loss of lives in Colombia and the abuses forced upon them are just as great if not greater than many other countries being supported. I wish you all well,  
Robert Trisler

From Tiquisio :

The presence of CSN in Tiquisio leads all of our groups in the Proceso Ciudadano to commit to working for peace, seeking a world where peace, love and freedom will flourish. Thank you North American friends.

A thousand thanks for your visit, Cesar, Jack and Terry. You are the living image of what peace and love will bring to a better world. Nelson Jimenez, Tiquisio Nuevo

Thanks a lot for your friendship, United States sister community. We await your future visit. Tiquisio Youth Group (Grupo Juvenil de Tiquisio)

We are little seeds of love who wish to sprout in your heart, so that with our innocence, peace and happiness we will build a better world. Tiquisio infancy.



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SETTING UP A TALK AT MY SCHOOL, GROUP, OR CHURCH

PARTICIPATING IN CSN STUDY GROUPS

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