

Colombia

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Action on

TIQUISIO

A MULTINATIONAL CHALLENGE TO PEASANTS AND MINERS

Father Rafael Gallegos

A multinational is threatening the small community sitting on top of a gold mine which local peasants have considered communal property. Father Rafael Gallego is a Philosopher and Theologian with experience in the field of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law, and is the motor behind the creation of the CitizensProcess for Tiquisio which is a collective way to protect their self-determination, life, human rights and a space for dialogue. For this reason he was seriously threatened. He has led the creation of the radio station, the peasant school/farm and above all he is considered a threat by all the economic, political and military local powers. The community radio "Echoves from Tiquisio" defends life, and is aimed at the political, social, educational, environmental and cultural development of the people in the town.

Wednesday, November 5, 2008, 7:00 p.m.
Daemen College, Schenck Science Building Room 202
4380 Main St, Buffalo, NY

Sponsors: Colombia Support Network, Latin American Solidarity Committee (A Task Force of the WNY Peace Center), Daemen College – History and Government Club, Pre-law Association

Citizen's Initiatives for Peace in Colombia: the case of Tiquisio

COLOMBIA SUPPORT NETWORK

CSN's Visa Policy Review Initiative

by Jack Laun

For several weeks CSN planned a visit by Father Rafael Gallego, parish priest of Tiquisio in Bolivar department. He was to visit several cities in the US, including CSN study groups in Austin, Texas, Portland, Oregon and Olympia, Washington, and two cities in Canada, to discuss grass-roots community organizing and development of a community radio station. He was invited to speak in Montreal at

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CSN's Visa Policy Review Initiative continued

the world conference on community radio. We received several contributions to support his trip and purchased plane and train tickets for his tour. But after hearing from the human rights office at

Clearly, a parish priest working in the Colombian countryside is not a national security threat to the United States.

the Embassy in Bogota that his visa should be granted promptly with no problem, the US Consulate denied him a visa for "security" reasons. When Father Francisco de Roux, now the head of the Jesuits in Colombia, attempted to intercede on behalf of Father Rafael, who works with him, he was given to understand that Father Rafael's visa would not be granted, for "security" reasons, which Father De Roux indicated he believed were due to objections by the Colombian military.

Clearly, a parish priest working in the Colombian countryside is not a national security threat to the United States. The only threat Father Rafael could present is that he would tell the truth about how paramilitaries exercise control in the Tiquisio area and he would show how grass-roots community organization offers an alternative. Father Rafael, whose name has appeared on a hit list of the Black Eagle paramilitaries, would shed light on the Colombian reality for US audiences. That could only be a threat to the billion dollar US support of the Colombian military and their tireless defender, President Alvaro Uribe Velez, whose political movement is itself rife with paramilitary links.

The CSN Board of Directors decided to respond by requesting that the General Accountability Office (GAO) of the US Congress conduct an audit of the operation of the US Embassy and

Consulate in Colombia to determine what criteria are being applied, and at whose direction, to decide who is a "security risk" and should be denied a visa. Others who have been denied visas include former

Apartado Mayor Gloria Cuartas and Clara Lopez Obregon, who brought to light the "false positive" kidnappings by the Colombian military.

We hope to cooperate with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), which prevailed in a case in the US District Court in Massachusetts which questioned the denial of a visa to a university professor for "national security" reasons. We understand that Judge George A. O'Toole Jr., held that the US Government could not deny a visa for national security reasons without explaining the basis for that denial. We hope not only that the audit will be carried out, but that the Obama administration will review and redefine the "national security" basis for visa denial and allow Father Rafael Gallego, Gloria Cuartas, Clara Lopez Obregon and others, to come to tell the truth about Colombia to US audiences. We have been encouraged by our chapters' support of this initiative, as well as the support other organizations and individuals have given us.

Please write to your Senators and Representatives in Congress to ask them to support a GAO audit and to encourage a review of visa policy by the new Obama

administration. Please send CSN 's office a copy of your letters, faxes or emails.

GREETING FROM FATHER RAFAEL TO ALL:

At the start of this new year I would like to send my warm greetings to all the eleven groups that helped arrange my trip to the US and Canada. I believe the trip failed to happen in the end precisely because of the strong commitment we have shown to our communities. However, I do not feel discouraged. Just the opposite, this has given me the opportunity to learn more about myself. I feel more committed than ever to my life's work of helping to create a better world. This work is shared by idealists everywhere. Let us revel in the knowledge that we are different from those who govern tyrannically and who seek to make their ways of thinking the only valid option. United in this new year, let us continue fighting for peace as well as social and economic justice on behalf of the poor of the earth.

Donate \$100 to CSN and Receive a Signed Copy of John Dear's new book, "Put Down Your Sword"

Noted peace activist, priest and author John Dear, a friend of CSN, has offered to send a signed copy of his latest book, "Put Down Your Sword: Answering the Gospel Call to Creative Nonviolence" (Eerdmans

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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Publishing) to anyone who sends a \$100 contribution to CSN. The book features essays from his weekly column from the National Catholic Reporter (at www.ncrcafe.org); reflections on peacemakers such as Thomas Merton, Joan Baez, Thich Nhat Hanh, and Dr. King; and a diary from his CSN delegation journey to Colombia in 2005. Earlier this year, John was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Make checks payable to: ... and mail them to: CSN ... Be sure to add to whom you want the book autographed!

Jack Laun is the President of CSN.



Leaders of the Peace Community greet Visitors from Wisconsin

Delegation to the Peace Community November 2008

By Eunice Gibson

The first thing you notice is that the road is worse. The road from Apartadó to San José was bad in 2004, bad in 2005, better in 2007, and now worse than ever. The rains have washed away the support and only the courageous driver looks down into the ravine. If you do look, you see the retaining wall lying flat on the ground. It must have given way in one piece. One of the community members told us it had lasted only one year.

The Mayor of Apartadó told us that, in the near future, federal, provincial and local funds will be used to pave the road. In spite of its bad condition, this road gets a lot of use. A better road would benefit the local economy.

When you reach San Josesito, you see physical improvement everywhere. There is a new library and preschool, with plenty of educational toys and games for the children. There is a solar water heating system, and a large kitchen where *Cocina Sin Fronteras* (a Swiss NGO) employs local women to furnish meals. Best of all (depending on your point of view) there is a soccer field. When we visited on a Sunday there was a whole day of soccer

games, the final day of competition among teams from the surrounding communities.

We visited the chocolate factory located in a new building on a hill across the road. Mules carry bags of cacao beans to the small factory, where spotless new machines from Europe dry, shell, and crush the beans, and turn out blocks of chocolate ready to be used in manufacturing. The chocolate is certified as organic. A member of the community told us that it is trucked to Cartagena and then sent by ship to buyers in Europe.

Life is still hard in San Josesito, but the Police Chief was mistaken when he told us that the people of San Josesito live in miserable poverty because they don't take advantage of the government services in old San José de Apartadó. Peace Community members are still concerned that "demobilized" paramilitaries are being invited to make their homes in old San José and that illegal activities are going on there.

Members of the Peace Community are still being threatened by paramilitaries and soldiers. They did tell us that there had been combat between soldiers and

paramilitaries, but their experience hasn't made them able to trust the police and soldiers to protect them. In early November a leader of the community was attacked when he went to the bank in Apartadó and then to an Internet café. His attacker held a gun to his head and threatened to kill him. He was able to deflect the gun, but the attacker took the money and fled. He recognized the robber as a paramilitary, but police insist it was just one more robbery by a "common criminal." Both could be right.

Some paramilitaries have never demobilized, and still seek to displace farmers, take land, and control the population. Some have "demobilized" and turned to crime, and have either formed their own criminal band or have joined existing drug trafficking gangs. In all cases, they continue to threaten, terrorize and displace the members of the Peace Community, including the farmers who live in the hills above San Josesito. We keep our strong commitment and solidarity work with them.

Eunice Gibson is a prominent attorney and a member of CSN's board of directors.

The Peasant Movement of Cajibío in the Minga of Social and Community Resistance

by Marylen Serna of the *Movimiento Campesino Cajibío**

Several months ago, a group of indigenous, peasant and Afro-Colombian organizations joined in an effort to create the “social and community Minga.” It was in this context that on October 13, 2008 peasant demonstrators, members of either the Peasant Movement of Cajibío or its sister organizations, marched for two days into the city of Popayán to meet with peasants from other regions of the Cauca and to carry out a large march. The intention was to demand recognition, to demand respect for dignity and the human rights of peasant organizations,

and to make visible the problems that affect us, such as the lack of land, the privatization of water, the arrival of multinationals in our territories, the violations of the human rights of the leaders of our organizations, and the government’s abandonment of our people. On October 23, 2008, we focused the Minga on exposing the problems faced by women. We walked to Villa Rica where we then rejected the violent manner in which the government has reacted to this legitimate social movement known as the Minga. We passed through Jamundí and then entered Cali to attend a meeting with President Alvaro Uribe Velez.

However, he failed to show up as promised.

We continue spreading our message. The president finally came to meet with us at the reservation La María in the town of Piendamó, where the problems facing the indigenous population were laid out in regards to the impact of policies such as the free trade agreement, Plan Colombia and Colombian Legislation. This includes laws dealing with water, rainforests and rural areas, which can be harmful to the quality of life and the survival of these communities.

The government has reacted violently to the Minga and has refused to address



The MiNGA entering Cali. See Movimiento Campesino Cajibío's banner on the front

either any of the issues described above or the human rights violations committed against the members of the Minga. Therefore, the decision of the social and indigenous movement of the Cauca and of Colombia is: **THE MINGA SHALL CONTINUE!**

Since Monday, November 28, we decided to march to the city of Bogotá in a joint effort with the Indigenous Movement and the Colombian Social Movement, which have united in the Minga to open a space for dialogue and negotiation with the national government around three points:

1 The defense of human rights: the rectification and respect of the good name of the indigenous communities and of the organizations that demand their rights. Also, the demand for the payment of reparations to the victims of abuses committed by the military and the police, as well as to those affected by the conflict. The return of those displaced from their homes with a guarantee that they be able to live a dignified life with the right to employment. This implies the elimination of the forms of slavery represented by organizations that act as intermediaries, and the adoption of the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. Among the rights demanded is the respect and legal recognition of the territories of the indigenous. Finally, we are asking

for an “integral” agrarian policy and the protection of fundamental rights such as the rights to decent housing, healthcare, education and access to clean water.

- 2 Territories: witnessing the crisis caused by the greed of the neo-liberal economic model that is causing environmental tragedy and affecting thousands, the participants of the Minga continue demanding that the government have a policy of consultation when it comes to free trade agreements. We of the Minga demand the protection of our territories, and the suspension of policies that divide and commodify our territories. We also demand the elimination of state laws that regulate water, rural development, mining codes, sanitary standards for products of the rural economy, and commercial farms. In all these cases, the constitutional mandate must be observed that places common interest above individual interests, and that requires consultation with communities.
- 3 Agreements: the government ought to make public to both the national and international community a report that describes the ways in which it has fulfilled its promises and commitments made to individual communities, social sectors and organizations in the last 25

years. Similarly, the government must incorporate the other sectors that are participating in the Minga, such as cane-cutters, health workers, and those displaced and/or victimized by the conflict.

There was a dialogue with the entire council of ministers during which a common agenda was proposed. However, it was not possible to develop it further due to a lack of political will within the government and the lack of decision-making capacity of the ministers. This resulted in the political commission of the Minga, after 14 hours of discussion, leaving the table with nothing but a further appointment time that was then postponed by the ministers. The members of the Minga saw this as a sign of disrespect for their demands, as a sign that the government does not plan to keep its word to the country and the world, and that it will further delay its commitment to guarantee the fundamental rights of all Colombians.

The Social Resistance Minga is a forceful demonstration that it is possible to create a united national front that includes all sectors of society and that demands an open debate about the problems affecting the population and also demands that the government assume its responsibilities.

*Sister Community to CSN's Central New York Chapter



Our Kansas City chapter marches at the SOA Watch in Fort Benning.

UPDATE FROM CHAPTERS

FROM OUR CSN STUDY GROUP IN PORTLAND

Hi Cecilia,

Just letting you know that we've distributed the letters asking for the audit pretty broadly around the city. I did go and speak to several organizations such as the local IWW union, the Freedom Socialist Party, a local book collective, the community radio station and some of the Portland State University Latin American Studies professors. Many Organizations and some PSU professors have agreed to distribute letters as well. I'll also be going on the community radio station to talk about why an audit of the embassy is important and necessary. In talking with some of the other organizations around town, I have found out that we are not

From Our Committees

Dear Friends of CSN,

Tiquisio belongs to the “La Mojana” region in northeast Colombia where the large Cauca and Magdalena Rivers meet. This winter has been the worst in living memory for this part of the country. The rains started in July and became more intense in October. Previously, it was common for 1,250 hectares to flood, but this year that number exceeded 3,500. Entire rural districts such as Bocas de Solis, Palma Esteral and Aguas Negras with a total population of 4,000 people have been affected because the flooding caused the Cauca River to form a new branch, which measures more than 60 meters across.

Inhabitants are being forced to leave using canoes and small boats. In Tiquisio’s urban area, the primary school, the high school and some large homes had to be converted into temporary shelters for the victims. Tiquisio’s children need clothing and rubber boots; unfortunately this year their Christmas dreams have been drowned. Their fathers and mothers are in a state of distress. Let’s bring some happiness to Tiquisio’s children. If you are able, please send a donation to CSN. We have opened a separate account for these funds, so please write “Tiquisio” on the memo line of your checks.

(Citizen’s Movement for Tiquisio)

Message from the Embera-Chami Community of Putumayo

(The following note has been included in the newsletter to give readers an idea of the reaction some communities in the Putumayo have had to the arrest of David Murcia Guzman, the founder of the DMG pyramid scheme)

Dear friends of CSN, We send greetings from Putumayo, Colombia. We are grateful to you, and pleased to have progressed in our relationship with Kansas City. We have made great advancements, especially with the support that the Kansas City community has given us in the development of our “life plan[1]”. This plan will restructure our system of self-government, which is based on our indigenous worldview and our “original law[2]”. We have been abandoned by the national government. Yet, we will continue resisting with the strength of our community, and confront the difficulties we face here in the Amazon region.

We are in the midst of a very difficult situation in Putumayo because of the social and economic emergency brought on by the



Oblivious to the tragedy the children of Tiquisio play in the water inundating the town

government’s intervention in DMG. The head of this corporation, David Murcia Guzman, has been arrested and we, the people, are asking that he be released and that the decision of the people be respected. DMG was a corporation formed by the people, and it’s not what the government thinks. We would like you to help us publicize this unsatisfactory situation, which has had a great impact, especially on the Putumayo region.

Ancizar Gutierrez, representative of the Embera-Chami Community

[1] Life plan refers to a collection of projects and goals designed by a rural community as a whole to benefit all of its members.

[2] Original law refers to the original moral and judicial codes of indigenous communities, which were first legally recognized by the Colombian constitution of 1991.

UPDATE FROM CHAPTERS continued

alone in this situation. It seems other organizations have also had Latin American speakers’ visas unexpectedly denied this year. I’m also working with some local artists and musicians to see if

we can get some sort of benefit together for Tiquisio, so I’ll keep you updated with that. I wrote to Said and I know they’re really needing help desperately right now. I also have a lawyer friend here in Portland, who is wanting to know how he

can put his skills to use in the human rights field, and I suggested that he contact you, as I figured you would have some ideas. I hope everything is going well in Madison. Take care.

—Wesley Hill

UPDATE FROM CHAPTERS continued
CSN STUDY GROUP IN OLYMPIA
WASHINGTON

Reported showing documentaries the day of Father Rafael 's visit; 50 people came to the meeting !

CSN AUSTIN also showed the documentaries on the day of Rafael's supposed to visit them

CENTRAL NEW YORK CHAPTER

When our Central New York chapter of CSN heard about the Minga, we were excited and proud of our brothers and sisters from Cajibío. We have had a close sister relationship with the Movimiento Campesino de Cajibío for several years, and are awed by what they teach us about organizing for change. Marylen Serna Salinas, one of the leaders of the MCC, always insists that this relationship is not about money; it's about solidarity, mutual learning, and shared work in the cause for justice. So when we received a message from Marylen asking for financial help to cover the costs of feeding and transporting people during this mobilization, we knew it was a critical need. MCC has never asked us for funds before this! The members of our chapter rallied, and we made some personal donations. But we knew this wasn't enough; we wanted to bring the story of the Minga to others, and also raise more money, so some members from Ithaca organized a small solidarity dinner. It was held on November 14 at our local Workers Center, and catered by a friend and fellow activist who specializes in delicious Latin American food. We were delighted with the turnout of 25 people, to whom we told the story of our CSN chapter, our sister community, and their current mobilization. We had asked for a "suggested donation of \$10-\$50" for the dinner, but through the generosity of one chapter member who covered the cost of the food and the wonderful response of the participants, we raised over \$550 to send to MCC! We were thrilled.



Nancy Fiallo smiles in spite of being an exile

It is a journey that no one should have to take, but my turn finally came ...

I left my beloved Colombia heavy-hearted with sadness and the pain of having to leave my country, my loved-ones, my friends, my 20-year career working to defend human rights, and everything I had built over the course of many years. I never wanted to leave. I always maintained a resistance to leaving because I never again wanted to experience exile as I had when I left my city of birth, Bucaramanga, which was my life at the time. I resisted leaving for many years, holding on, although always fearing that I might come to harm. My father told me, "Life is what matters!" He and the rest of my family had to flee into exile 5 years earlier, and I had bid them a painful farewell at the airport in Bogotá. My father was leaving behind a life of 70 years of work; he left everything behind because what mattered to him was his life and that of his family. That is the lesson he taught me: the value of life. I intended to stay for a few months, but those few months turned into five years ... until the day finally arrived when I also had to leave.

When I arrived in Europe, my new home, I felt relieved ... I am alive! But then you look back ... and the others? They are not safe! Then you become filled with remorse. You managed to escape, and the others who are also in danger? What about them? At the beginning of this new life, one's expectations hide the reality of exile, but with each passing day you begin to confront your new life. You are no one here, you feel shocked by a different culture that demands rapid adaptation, and every time you fail in a relationship with someone, or in a project you want to undertake, the person to blame is you! You are not from here, you have to be more understanding! They are like this, we are like that! You have to adapt to them, not the other way around. When your foreign accent gives you away, "Ah! So you're not from here!"

Exile affects your health, everything hurts, your soul and much more. You lose confidence in your ability to accomplish things, to suggest things, and you think, "Would it be a good idea to do this? Or to

do something else?" You are afraid of bothering others and so you decide to walk the streets silently in a country that is not yours and where being alive in the end means suffering. You feel the loneliness in your bones; what is my reason for living? But then you take heart: you will return one day! You become hopeful and maintain that hope like the many exiled Colombians who are here, far from our country, far from everything.

And so your load becomes heavier, you carry with you the image of a country at war...a country that many people wish to help. Is it that they don't understand what is happening there? Are so many bad things happening that no one understands them? My generation was born in the midst of this war, and we may die in the midst of it. Colombia is a country full of riches, and yet its people are immersed in poverty. We do not understand how five million people go to bed hungry; nobody understands how this happens. Colombia is a country with such happy, hard-working and honest people; we do not understand how so many can die violently each year. No one understands why so many of us have had to leave, with the homesickness, with the pain of exile. No one understands how in a country with so many laws, impunity can cause so many to lose all hope.

Colombia, my beloved country, one day I would like to return to walk the streets hand in hand with my daughter and with love, enjoying an ice cream or a cup of coffee without the fear that I will be killed or incarcerated because of my work promoting peace. Walking without fear would make me so happy. My daughter dreams of this in the loneliness of exile, for she has been subjected to a life in exile just as her mother has. This is the price for those of us who want to speak the truth. But I have a dream! That this time the world will look at us, not in order to bring us more war, but instead to ensure that civil and political rights be respected in Colombia. That is how we will start to build peace.

Nancy Fiallo Araque
Colombian, Defender of Human Rights

The Colombia Support Network

Action on Colombia

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