

The Chiva arriving at San José

CSN's Impunity Project A letter to CSN's members at large

Dear CSN member-at-large :

Many of you living in different cities occasionally call CSN's national office asking what you can do to improve the conditions of human rights in Colombia. You say you feel you could do more. Especially for those of you who live in places where there is not a CSN chapter nearby, I have an idea.

Given the high rate of impunity in Colombia, most massacres, selective killings of political or union activists, and social cleansing of "disposable persons" such as beggars, street children, prostitutes or homosexuals go unpunished. On a recent visit I made to Colombia, in a casual conversation with human rights lawyers, they told me the

story of a gentleman from France. He started to write letters, asking for justice in a specific case. Little by little and letter by letter the issue took shape and the authorities felt obligated to answer his inquiries. Wisely this gentleman sent copies of his letters to the French government. Eventually the case worked its way through the judiciary system until justice was done.

A side benefit in that case was that the gentleman's efforts provided great consolation to the family of the victim, They told me of a gentleman from France. Little by little and letter by letter the issue took shape and the authorities felt obligated to answer his inquires... Eventually the case worked its way through the judiciary system until justice was done.

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who knew that somebody in the world worried and cared about their terrible loss. They had not enough words to express their gratitude. Their feeling of loneliness was greatly reduced by the compassion of a fine human being who could not accept impunity.

My question to all of you is: Why not reproduce this idea in something called CSN's Impunity Project? All it takes is writing letters, which can be sent by mail or by fax. Emails can be erased easily. Letters are more difficult to erase. Copies to the relatives of the victims will enhance the urgency of the case. Copies should also be sent to the authorities, both in the U. S. and in Colombia, and to our office.

Please contact Cecilia Zarate at csn@ igc.org or call at (608) 257 8753.

Report on June 5–13, 2004 Sister Community Delegation to Colombia

By Judith Strasser

In early June, seven Wisconsin residents (Nan Cheney, Eunice and John Gibson, and Judith Strasser, Madison; Diane Steigerwald and David Thomas, Milwaukee; and Cecilia Zarate-Laun, CSN's Program Director, visited Colombia under the auspices of the Colombia Support Network, a U.S. non-profit organization. We spent three days in the Peace Community of San José de Apartado, and three days in Bogotá, where we met with Colombian Vice President Francisco Santos; Milton Drucker, Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy; Juan Carlos Monge of the United Nations High Commission on Human Rights; and leaders of Colombian NGOs concerned with labor, indigenous, and human rights issues. In the city of Apartado, we were received by Bishop Germán Garcia.

We all had qualms about our trip; news reports and State Department bulletins emphasize the dangers of travel in Colombia.We each carried personalized letters from Senators Feingold and Kohl asking that our safety be guaranteed; fortunately, we never needed to show these letters. But the assistance that the



A Peace Community meeting

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 activisim.

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

CSN is the only current project of Wisconsin Interfaith Committee on Latin America Colombia Support Network P.O Box 1505 Madison, WI 53701-1505

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phone 608.257.8753 fax 608.255.6621 Senators provided, and the repeated requests by Colombians that we report back to our elected officials on our observations in their country, prompt this report.

San José. In this rural village, we met with leaders of the Peace Community and with international iaccompaniersi from the Fellowship of Reconciliation, Peace Brigades International, and a Spanish NGO, and heard testimony from community members about the difficult conditions under which they live. Dane County, Wisconsin established a sistercommunity relationship with Apartado in 1988; when San José de Apartado decided to establish a Peace Community, following the massacre of four leaders of their cooperative and fearing being displaced from their land, the Colombia Support Network supported the initiative wholeheartedly.

The Peace Community is a remarkable model of non-violent resistence in a country with nearly a century-long history of political violence. Its members refuse to join or support either of the violent guerilla movements, the FARC and the ELN. As a result, more than 150 community members have been assassinated, some by guerrilla troops

Interested in joining a delegation to San José? Next CSN trip is planned January 22–30, 2005. Contact Cecilia Zarate-Laun at 608 257 8753.

who feel betrayed, and most by paramilitaries who are attempting to destroy all opposition to their control of the area. Although it seemed, when we were in Colombia, that the paramilitaries were changing their tactics from assassination of community members to attempted imprisonment of community leaders on trumped-up charges. However, we have recently learned that in the period from July 23 through August 6, numerous documented threats of murder



David Thomas and friends

were made against the community members and those who provide them with essential goods and services. Three individuals—a man who transported water to San Jose, a community leader, and a truck driver carrying wood—were assassinated in this two week period.

It is no exaggeration to say that the Peace Community won both our hearts and our unbounded admiration, and inspired us with its members'

> determination to win the peace for Colombians by resisting the terror imposed on the community by all of the armed actors: guerillas, paramilitaries, and the Colombian military. Over the past seven years, more than a thousand individuals have, after a rigorous training program,

joined the Peace Community, which requires giving up use of alcohol and other drugs, as well as participating in community organizing meetings and economic activities (working in communal banana and cacao fields). Others have been displaced from their homes; the community currently is trying to return some of these families to their land. We met with more than forty women and men, leaders of the community, next to a simple memorial to the community's dead. The killings give the community more strength, one of the leaders explained. "Those people were willing to give their lives to keep the [peace] process going. We keep going in their memory."

International accompaniment, largely by young people-we met two Franciscan nuns who live in the area, as well as PBI and FOR representatives—is crucial to the Peace Community's survival. The week before we arrived in Colombia, President Uribé warned, in a widely-publicized speech, that internationals who obstruct justice would be deported. Immediately, the young accompaniers were harassed by the DAS, the Colombian security police, and interrogated about Peace Community activities. International NGOs in Colombia perceived Uribe's speech as an omen of a new governmental strategy to threaten and perhaps remove (or force the departure of) international observers, making it easier to assassinate or imprison opposition leaders on trumped-up charges of possessing drugs or illegal weapons, or aiding the guerillas.

Bogotá. Our meetings with representatives of Colombia's NGOs, with Juan Carlos Monge of the UNHCHR, and with Father Javier Giraldo, a Jesuit priest who

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Sister Delegation continued

documents human rights abuses around the country through the organization he helped start, CINEP, confirmed our impression that the repressive situation in San José, rather than being unique, is representative of the plight of peasants, workers, and members of the political opposition throughout the country. American military assistance—and American aid is predominantly military, ostensibly designed to help the Colombian

government win the war on drugs—serves two main purposes: to protect oil and other mineral resources owned by American and multinational corporations, and to free the Colombian government to direct its own budget to unvetted (that is, unapproved for American aid) military brigades—such as the infamous 17th Brigade in Apartado—that commit documented human rights abuses.

When we spoke with Colombian Vice President Francisco Santos, we were both impressed by our cordial reception (we do, after all, elect the members of Congress who have provided billions of dollars in support of the Colombian military), and prepared for his defense of President Uribe's policies. "We see [in San José] a community that is not neutral," he said. "I've told them there is no place where the government [including the armed military] can't go."

We were appalled and upset, however, by our discussion with Milton Drucker, Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy. At first he welcomed us: he explained that he could not go to San José (Embassy personnel insist on entering the Peace Community accompanied by armed Colombian soldiers), and he was eager to hear what we had learned. But as soon as we began to speak, he interrupted us repeatedly, telling us that we were naive (if not stupid) to believe the Peace Community members. Of course they wouldn't show you their coca fields, he commented sarcastically. And We've heard more stories than you have about human rights violations [by the guerillas, not the paramilitaries]. This American diplomat, paid with our tax money, was dismissive, rude, and arrogant; no Colombian, whatever his or her political position, treated us with such disdain.

Summary. We left Colombia inspired by the struggle of its ordinary people, against tremendous odds, to restore justice and tranquility to a country that has been torn

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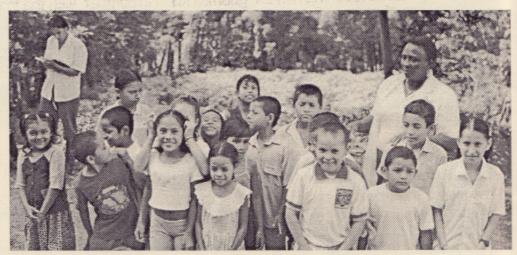
by war for more than forty years. We came to understand, in Colombia, that this is not—as the American government and media would have us believe—a war on drugs. It is a war for control of the country and its resources by opposing forces that use the sale of drugs to fund their campaigns. The Peace Community and other civilians are caught between these forces—many of them armed and assisted by the U.S. government, and by American tax money. In the last two years, Colombia received \$1.5 billion in foreign aid, more than any country other than Israel, Egypt, Afghanistan, and Iraq. This investment in the war on drugs has failed to have a significant effect on the flow of cocaine into the United States.

The terror and displacement the Colombians suffer, evident on their faces and in their bodies, is almost incomprehensible. Yet, in the face of this, they persevere, and we saw the hope for the future of Colombia in San Jose's Semillas de Paz (Seeds of Peace) day care center.

But we also left with heavy hearts, knowing that U.S. policy in Colombia supports war, not peace. The Bush administration backs President Uribe and the peace process he is currently conducting with paramilitary leaders, including drug lords wanted for prosecution in the United States, who demand impunity from extradition. Presidential candidate John Kerry has recently expressed his support for Plan Colombia, suggesting that even with a change in administration, our foreign policy, with respect to Colombia, will remain the same.

We urge our representatives—Senators Feingold and Kohl, and Representatives Tammy Baldwin and all the Wisconsin delegation—to consider the real cost of this unwise policy for the courageous people of Colombia.

Judith Strasser, a noted writer, poet and a former host of the Public Radio program "To the Best of Our Knowledge" is a CSN member from Madison



A teacher with students

A call to Latin American brothers by the Network of Communities doing Non-violent Resistance in Colombia

Testimony from a member of the San José de Apartadó Peace Community during the Social Forum of the Americas (FSA) in Quito last August.

Brothers and sisters of Latin America participating in the FSA: a brotherly greeting from the communities in Nonviolent Resistance and Rupture, coming from Colombia, in particular, from the San José de Apartadó Peace Community, located in Antioquia department in the Úraba region.

The community has spent seven years in civil resistance. In opposing the paramilitary project and in resisting the abandonment of our territories, we have had to confront a total paramilitary state in this region since March 23, 1997 because the paramilitaries have not respected our decision as an organization of peasants to declare ourselves nonparticipants in the armed conflict. The Army has bombed our communities, robbed our earnings and animals, burned our houses on various occasions, and has displaced communities. Some members have joined the paramilitary forces, which have committed five massacres, four of them in San José de Apartadó.

In seven years, with more that 120 assassinations, more than 300 human rights and international humanitarian rights violations, deaths, disappearances, raped women, stolen resources and products, continuing blockades and death threats against community members, it is important to keep in mind that the majority of these events have been announced by the same Army and denounced by the community without any effort by the government to prevent them.

The community has since 1997 had provisional measures dictated by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights for the future of the community.

In order to coordinate these measures, the

community participates constantly in meetings with the Vice President of the Republic, the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Defense, the Attorney Generals office, and the Ombudsman; by petition from the community, investigative commissions have been formed where more than 100 testimonies to these crimes and names of those who have participated in the events have been given. The result has been the assassination of witnesses, as well as their beeing threatened with death if they don't leave the community.

We the leaders are being prosecuted on the basis of testimony bought by the Army, of which many members are hired killers from Brigade 17 wearing paramilitary uniforms. Many of the people who have been arbitrarily detained have been taken to Brigade 17 where they have been tortured by the order of the same Brigade colonel who shamelessly demonstrated to them that he is inclined to put an end to our community.

President Álvaro Uribe, last May 27, in front of the media, ordered the Prosecutor's Office and the DAS to enter San José de Apartadó and to detain the leaders, placing them in prison, and to detain and deport international persons who visit our community.

This demonstrates the magnitude of the attack against our community. While it is officially a territory devoted to the narcoparamilitaries, Brigades 17 and 11 are also occupying our territories, stealing our resources such as wood, and using our lands for the spread of coca crops.

What they couldn't obtain in seven years of war with us, they are achieving through this farce of these so-called dialogues and with the complicity of the government, the Church, and even the Organization of American States. This is just a small example of what communities resisting the paramilitary project in certain regions of our country experience, but still we remain standing without submitting to these criminals.

Thus, on behalf of these communities of resistance (which we live daily) we are calling for the solidarity of our Latin American brothers and sisters who say and believe that a different America* is possible through the resistance of the people, so that they make their ideas a reality and come together with concrete facts with these experiences of resistance in our regions of Colombia.

All of the power-holders of the State are in the service of the government and its paramilitaries to attack us. And what is the solidarity of our brothers and sisters of Latin America? It is disheartening for me to participate in this Social Forum of the Americas and not have an opportunity that some intellectuals have to be heard, for example, regarding the situation that we have to live daily. When one is invited to these events one arrives with illusions because this would be an opportunity to gain concrete actions of support for the resistance. Unfortunately we are one more of the guests who come to enjoy the grand comforts and to hear magnificent discussions, but in the end we return with nothing concrete and we continue alone in our resistance.

For all of this I call on the international community to declare itself opposed to our criminal government, and to demand respect for our community and justice for the crimes committed against the Peace Community. To demand that the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights force the government to complete its recom-mendations with our process.

*America in this context means the the whole hemisphere

Translated by Carly Anne Norgord, a CSN translator

WHAT MOST IMPRESSED ME FROM OUR DELEGATION TO SAN JOSE DE APARTADO AND BOGOTA

I believe Father Javier Giraldo is my highlight. His voice is so soft that I am always straining my ears to hear what he has to say. His life is in danger, and probably has been for years, but he says he will never again leave Colombia. Look what he has accomplished with his contribution to starting the peace community, his support of CINEP and his continual letters to the President. He drafts them carefully like a legal document, which they are, not just whining constituent mail that elected officials can shrug off. Some day some truth commission will gather all his constancias and letters and piece together the full record of what has gone on. Without his work, that might never take place. *Eunice Gibson*

Of a gathering of about forty courageous, determined, well-organized, and well-trained leaders of the Peace Community. Many of these men and women walked miles to San Jose to meet with us near near the memoria—constructed of painted rocks—that honors community members who have been killed over the past seven years. In turn, each explained why, in the face of extreme danger, they continue to resist the armed actors, efforts to destroy them, their families, and their community. They emphasized the importance of international support for San Jose's continued existence, and thanked us for joining them in solidarity. Their bearing, demeanor, and simple but upsetting words about the conditions of their daily struggle to survive gave meaning to the expression

speak truth to power.

Judith Strasser

I was impressed by the wealth of the land, the production of bananas(primitivas) and cacao that supports their lives. But, much more impressive was their determination to remain on their land. A vital ingredient of thisdetermination is great courage and vision of the future. This courage in the face of certain death (for many) and terror (for all) is supported by their strong organization that they are committed to. They are all active members of work groups and participants in grass roots, supportive and visionary workshops. You can see it in their eyes, their body, that fear is an everyday reality and so is their dedication. They are dedicated to surviving, overcoming and spreading the peace communities under the fire of the violence of the armed actors and preventing displacement from their home.

Diane Steigerwald:

The highlight of the trip for me was undoubtedly the "Semillas de Paz" or "Seeds of Peace" daycare center. The kids gave us such a warm greeting and all wanted to be lifted or touched. The kids seemed so happy and healthy in spite of the violence that has touched all their lives. And the staff at the center seemed dedicated to providing them with all the love and support they needed to face the realities of present-day Colombia with the courage shown by their elders. I have no doubt about the future of Colombia. I can look in the eyes of these children and

see the courage of children everywhere. I know that fascism cannot survive once the seeds of peace are firmly established.

David Thomas

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Needless to say what impressed me the most was the beautiful gathering where the Peace Community gave me

a medal of recognition for supporting the Peace Community from its inception. I was moved to tears. As we went to many meetings with them I was very proud on seeing how much they have grown since I first met them when they were all frightened and desperate. They have come a long way and now they handle the meetings and the community's issues like pros!

Cecilia Zarate-Laun

The delegation highlight for me was the visit to the school, especially because I was asked to write a poem on the blackboard. After the poem was translated into Spanish, the teacher assigned the children to copy the poem in their notebooks. The children were so positive, so enthusiastic, and so energetic, in spite of the oppression they have experienced. These children are the hope of the world. *John W.Gibson*

AND WHAT LESS IMPRESSED ME!!!!

I'm a former activist within the Democratic Party of Wisconsin who, in my despair over Democrats' move to the middle of the road, can be found on the membership rolls of both Progressive Dane and the Wisconsin Green Party. I was confounded to learn about a third party attempt in Colombia. When the party achieved some success in elections throughout the country, the members were killed. One by one. Hundreds of them. Dead. Yet in the name of stopping drug traffic, Colombia has become the third largest recipient of U.S. foreign aid. The program has been singularly unsuccessful, but the largely military aid continues. Why?

Nan Cheney

President's footnote

By John I. Laun

A disturbing trend has emerged recently in Colombia. When Colombia Support Network began its activities some 16 years ago abusive conduct by the Colombian Armed Forces directed at civilian non-combatants was common. Then for a period of years extending up to the last few months, numbers of extrajudicial killings, disappearances, torture and rape by Colombian soldiers fell as the "dirty work" of the "dirty war" was carried out by illegal paramilitaries. These paramilitaries often were linked to Colombian army officers and, as in the case of the massacre of Mapiripan, logistics for the movement of paramilitary forces were provided by army officers.

Now, as the paramilitaries are engaged in government-sponsored "peace negotiations," including the absurdity of a formal presentation by Salvatore Mancuso and other cutthroat paramilitary leaders in the Colombian Congress, it seems to have fallen again to the Armed Forces themselves to conduct killings and kidnappings of innocent civilians. As in Tiquisio (sister community of our Methow Valley, Washington chapter), San Jose de Miranda in Santander and Arauca, Colombian army units have directly carried out attacks against innocent civilians. This is a disturbing trend which we need to communicate to our representatives in the Senate and House of Representatives, to see that pressure is placed upon President Uribe and his government to stop these state sponsored criminal acts.

A second development that is very promising is the establishment of bonds of fellowship between CSN chapters and communities in Colombia. In the past year delegations from Minnesota to Mogotes, from Wisconsin to San Jose de Apartado, from Central New York State to Cajibio and from New York City to the Alto Naya have set in place a framework for meaningful contributions between each U.S. community and its Colombian sister. We were privileged to have to extraordinary local leaders working in those communities, Father Joakin Mayorga (Mogotes) and Marylen Serna (Cajibio), with us at our national meeting in April. Our goal is to deepen and strenghten these contacts and form new sister community relationships to make it possible for our voices to be heard seriously in the counsels both of our government and of the Colombian government.

Interested in becoming an active CSN Member? Contact a CSN Representative in your area!

Chapters in formation not listed here. Please contact the CSN office to learn of Chapters in progress near you!

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Items for Sale

All items with the CSN logo as pictured left, in color (vibrant red and blue).

T-Shirts—S, M, L, XL	\$16.00
Bandanas—	\$6.00
Buttons—	\$1.75

Bumper Sticker

If you like Vietnam, You will love Plan Colombia \$3.00

Video

Plan Colombia Cashing in on the Drug War Failure Ungermann/Audrey Brohy \$22.00

Excellent film showing the reality of the conflict

The Colombia Support Network Action on Colombia

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Nаме	4 @ \$ each. How many subtotal	
Address	5 @ \$ each. How many subtotal	
City/State/Zip	□ I am sending a donation of □ \$5 □ \$10 □ \$25 □	
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