

This newsletter is focused on a leadership training for the Emberá-Chamí Community in Putumayo, sister community of our CSN Kansas City chapter. The trainer was John Henry Gonzalez leader of the Movimiento Campesino Cajibío, sister community of our Central New York Chapter. This training was possible thanks to a generous grant from the A.J. Muste Foundation. Our gratitude goes to all of them.



John Henry Gonzalez with residents of the Emberá-Chamí community during leadership training.

## **Sister Relationships Emerge from a Profound Desire to be Recognized as Dignified, Equal and Interdependent Peoples**

*John Henry Gonzalez*

*translated by Emily Hansen, CSN's Assistant Program Director*

Sister relationships have historically been established in an effective way so that two peoples can live in solidarity as men and women who represent one people and are committed to another.

In Colombia, we have experienced this through the Colombia Support Network (CSN) and through its chapters, which have enriched the participatory democracy in both countries. We, the Peasant Movement of Cajibío, feel proud of our experiences with the upstate New York chapter. For the CSN chapter, the sister relationship has meant the possibility to carry out an active exercise in democracy through establishing a permanent relationship with their representatives in the U.S. Congress, and advocating in our favor.

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## Sister relationships emerge continued

For us in Colombia the relationship has meant being protectors of our justice, and being supported in striving for the vigilance that the U.S. Congress should have so that the contributions of its citizens go toward peace and not to supporting war in Colombia.

The starting point for the sister relationships has been recognizing each other as peoples who share the same ideals.

In Colombia, the sister relationship develops in a context of conflict and has become an effective instrument for the protection of life, and the defense and maintenance of the processes of nonviolent resistance.

The sister relationship gives strength to men and women to recover their identity whom the war has made invisible, and seeks to make known the injustice that they are experiencing. The sister relationship becomes a support system when the persecution of a government does not cease and is merciless with those who are in disagreement, or when impunity seeks to erase the footprints of those who have resisted and who insist that a world at peace is possible.

The sister relationship is a way to

make solidarity come alive, with a cultural richness that is shared in abundance. We discover in each other values you cannot see at a simple glance. We also cry with you sharing the same pain. Joy appears at the accomplishments, which seem to be few, but which, when added together, give significance to a force that perseveres.

The sister relationship requires that the two peoples generate processes of solidarity with a political purpose, which permits the peoples to reconstruct their relationships among the peoples so that together, we find the answers and construct new alternatives.

The practices of solidarity, which we have been building for many years, are changing, and this change is being made by men and women who, from below, from the simple, are transforming these solidarity practices into liberating actions.

The sister relationship recognizes the legitimacy of the struggles that we have embarked upon so that there will be no more wars or hunger, and so that the lives of all are respected. In the sister communities we share solidarity with a respectful recognition of the other, and we see each other as political subjects

that seek to transform realities, which we believe are unjust. We have learned to appreciate and love the members of our sister community and to differentiate the U.S. People from the U.S. Government.

Because of my experience, I was invited to conduct a leadership-training workshop with the Indigenous of the Emberá-Chamí community and with CSN's Kansas City Chapter. It was marvelous to be able to contribute to the construction of new relationships. The workshop was an exercise in tearing down and building up, because previously we thought of solidarity only as the act of giving and then we were only prepared to receive. In this workshop we have learned that solidarity is a two-way act in which he who gives also acquires the right to receive. That is to say, when we become sister communities, we make a commitment to work together, carrying out efforts toward the same objective.

All of us, at the end, understood that it is important to look each other in the eyes, unite our hands, and shout in one voice so that the world will hear that in Colombia peace is being built, peace between peoples.

John Henry Gonzalez

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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# Potent Mix from Putumayo

*Robert Thatch*

One of the things for which the Putumayo Department is famous is the hallucinogen Yagé. In other parts of the Amazon it is referred to as Ayahuasca. It is sought after by tourists and locals alike for its unique qualities. The chemical is administered by aboriginal practitioners of “traditional medicine,” including some of the “taitas” (leaders/elders) of the Cofán and the Kam-chá peoples.

On our January trip we were fortunate to receive some expert information about Yagé from Taita Juan Agredo Chindoy, who lives near Sibundoy, in Alto Putumayo. He explained the process of using Yagé and its potential benefits.

Yagé is produced from bark stripped from a certain local plant, which is then boiled with other ingredients. The person being treated drinks the liquid, which produces a complete bodily cleansing effect, including vomiting and diarrhea.

According to Taita Juan, everyone reacts differently to the product, and his recommendation is always for him or her to relax and see if they can benefit

from the treatment.

After a length of time varying from 15 minutes to 2 hours, the patient hears a buzzing in his or her ears, and may feel drunk. The patient does not lose consciousness, but rather experiences vivid hallucinations that can be either pleasant or frightening.

In a “bad” experience of Yagé, the patient sees horrible images, often of snakes, and may even have the sense that a giant snake is eating them alive. Taita Juan said his first experience with Yagé was at age 20, and it included the dreaded “culebra” (snake). The frightening vision discouraged him from trying Yagé again for five years.

Taita Juan later figured out that some strains of plants produce negative experiences of Yagé, and that other plants produce delightful, positive visions of colors and lights, and leave the recipient with a sense of health and inner peace.

Taita Juan has traveled to the U.S. several times, where he has demonstrated the beneficial effects of Yagé to doctors and researchers. Taita Juan does not recommend it for persons who just want a psychedelic trip, but has great faith in Yagé as a treatment for some illnesses and symptoms, such as depression.

We left our interview very impressed with Taita Juan’s wisdom, knowledge and experience. His calm, confident presentation convinced us that Yagé is a serious medicinal product/procedure



Painting of a Yagé vision

from which many persons might benefit.

In Taita Juan’s home there were several exotic paintings by Carlos Jacanamoy who paints while under the influence of Yagé.

As we visited with Taita Juan, a journalist from Europe was filming him for a documentary about Taita Juan’s work, so perhaps an informative video will be available soon.

A quick Google search reveals: “The active ingredient in Ayahuasca is Dimethyltryptamine (DMT), which is classified as a drug in many countries. For this reason, the use of Ayahuasca in religious ceremonies has become a contentious legal issue in several countries, bringing into question freedom of religion.”



A painting of Taita Juan

# Connecting with Mother Earth and the Emberá-Chamí in Putumayo

Ann Suellentrop

**Editorial Note:** *The war in Colombia is primarily occurring in rural areas, particularly in the areas that have historically been indigenous ancestral territories. These areas are rich in biodiversity and in mineral and water resources, and it is in such rural areas that our sister communities are located. These are also the areas that large multinational corporations seek out for resource exploitation. Unfortunately, the way in which the companies choose to control the territories is to use violence against the communities that inhabit these areas. One such threatened community is that of the Emberá-Chamí.*

As we stepped onto the island in the middle of the large lake in the Southern part of Colombia, I became slowly aware of the peace and calm of the place. The trees here are never allowed to be cut down. I experienced the overwhelming hush of the rainforest. I thought, "It is alive! It is a sacred, living entity." As we left the island, someone commented that this place seemed ideal for meditation, and we laughed, because we were all thinking the same thing.

Our visit to the island took place during January 2010, when three members of the Kansas City chapter of CSN visited our sister community, the Emberá-Chamí, whose settlements, La Italia, Argelia and Las Palmeras, are in the Amazon region of the Putumayo Department in Southern Colombia. Kansas Citians Robert Thatch, Rachel Hogan and Ann Suellentrop were led by CSN's Program Director Cecilia Zarate-Laun and Father Campo Elias de la Cruz of Sibundoy, Colombia.

During the trip I came to know and appreciate each person on the delegation and the Emberá-Chamí much more deeply. It was a trip of



Father Campo addressing the closing meeting.

unforgettable impressions.

I imagine I began to feel some appreciation of the indigenous people's feeling for Mother Nature. I heard many times during our trip "madre tierra" or Mother Earth talked about with deep respect and love as a living, breathing being. For the Emberá-Chamí, it is Earth Day every day. They have an intimate, living relationship with Mother Earth. They feel seriously called upon to care for and protect her. To them, the world is not a "thing" to be used up. They reverence her, cry for her, and would maybe even die for her. I remember one of the leaders, Ancizar Gutierrez, saying proudly, "I was born in the jungle, I'm from the jungle!"

The bonds of solidarity between the Emberá-Chamí and us were strengthened by a training workshop held in the town of El Tigre near their settlements. A very skilled and soulful organizer, John Henry, one of the

leaders of the Movimiento Campesino de Cajibío, led us. He has worked with peasant communities and multi-ethnic communities that integrate peasants, indigenous and Afro-Colombians.

John Henry helped us identify the challenges the Emberá-Chamí face, which are numerous and overwhelming, and how we might together work to overcome these. He also presented a model of economic solidarity and helped us get our sister relationship off on an equal and solid footing.

I experienced the hospitality, generosity, and openness of the Emberá-Chamí people. We delighted each other by trying to say words from each other's language. I still remember "Biakamae" is a greeting that means, "How are you?" Ancizar even made up a song about us trading words. One sweet memory I have is that, at one point, the water system in El Tigre finally became overwhelmed by our numbers, so we all



went to the nearby river to bathe with our clothes on. The water was so cool, clear and refreshing after the oppressive, humid heat of the day's long workshop .

One of the highlights of our meeting was when we presented a written translation of their traditional teachings and wisdom as taught by their elders that had been translated from the Emberá-Chamí language to Spanish and then to English. Rachel, a graduate of Truman State University with a major in Spanish, formed a 5-member translation team with faculty to complete the Spanish to English translation .

The sweetness of the serenade by John Henry and Father Campo on the night before we left El Tigre was contrasted

the next morning by a picture on our driver's cell phone of a bomb exploding on the pipeline three miles away .

We had an amazing ride through green, precipitous Andean mountains going to the valley where Father Campo grew up and where he is currently pastor of an indigenous parish of the Kam'tsa tribe. Father Campo is a phenomenal organizer. He was constantly on his cell phone planning ahead for us during our visit. He also lives and breathes liberation theology; to me he enfleshes it, and puts it into action. Many times I heard him praise and uplift the indigenous peoples, and when he said Mass, the people sang in both Spanish and Kam'tsa. Father Campo designed an exquisite traditional

meeting place, called a "tulpa," which uses circular seating around a cooking pot to promote the exchange of ideas. Toward the end of our visit, Father Campo told us passionately that he will never forget Christ in the poor, and this made a big impression on me .

At the end of our trip, as we left Pasto and headed to the airport, I was shocked by the large city's enormous contrast with the indigenous cultures I had just come to know. Overall, this was a very spiritually rich and meaningful trip, perhaps the best I've ever been on in my life. Most of all, I can't forget the bravery of the Emberá-Chamí who persist in their non-violent way of life in the face of genocide .

## Evaluation from the Argelia Reserve

*Written by Emiliano Onogama, Spoken by Advisor to Resguardo Argelia Emiliano Onogama, and Translated by Rachel Hogan, a CSN Volunteer Translator*

Kansas City Friends,

We are sending you a summary of the response to the workshops.

The meeting with our allies from Kansas City was truly incredible. The principles of harmonization and sisterhood, joined with the rally for resistance of the indigenous groups of Colombia, especially those who live along the Ecuadorian border, is impressive. From our point of view, the issue of nationality can define reality; the legacy that our ancestors have left us is a source of pride in our everyday lives.

We have a very pleasant memory of the workshops. We learned a lot from Gonzales, the leader from Cajibío. We feel very happy about the presence of Cecilia, Ann, Rachel, and Robert. We want to continue the relationship until the sun no longer shines.

The different workshop sessions



Dancing under the Sun



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## Evaluation from the Argelia Reserves continued

focusing on training leaders were excellent. We are satisfied with the idea of a “Pueblo Milenario” (Ancient People) in which the organizational processes give way to knowledge through the publication of the lessons and wisdom that Mother Nature teaches us.

We are ready to continue our resistance by following a better path for everyday life. We want to give you our sincere thanks for the accompaniment and support that you are giving, especially to our comrade Ancizar Guterrez, a great leader of the Emberá-Chamí community who has concerned himself with the survival and life of a community that coexists with a world of riches and admiration.

In general, the Indian is from the jungle and here is where his sons shout and make clamor, asking for liberty for

the Americas, and that Colombia ends the war and for the harmony and peace that our elders have taught us.

Words remain written and the wisdom of our grandfathers expands through nature. We have wanted to have training on how to strengthen our leaders, create a leadership school, and have our leaders study in national and international environments or universities. We are waiting until you can help our leaders travel to the U.S. this year; in fact, they are already preparing.

Thanks in advance for the communication, and also, there are a few small material things that we are lacking in order to continue writing faithfully the words of the Indian.

We lack the technological means to do much. For example, we do not have laptops, video and photography cameras,

or musical instruments. Perhaps this is not the information that you wanted, but I have told our friend Ancizar to write down my words. These elements are very important for us in order to have evidence of the incidences that occur here daily in our territory. The armed conflict gets harder each day because of the confrontations between legal and illegal armed groups.

We know that it is difficult to obtain these materials but we thank you in advance that you are doing all you can and working hard. The ability to take video and photos would make it much easier for us to show you our reality and make sure that nothing is hidden between us.

Thanks to the  
CSN Kansas City Chapter



A sad goodbye

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## Message from the Italia Reservation

*Words of Rogelio Yagary,  
translated by Emily Hansen,  
CSN's Assistant Program Director*

First of all, we want to thank the Community of Kansas City for this great visit that brought us together with other indigenous towns of Colombia. Your great effort and work to get to know the lives of each one of the workers and of the communities that live on the Colombia-Ecuador border moves me in a special way. The leadership training workshop carried out with our social organizations in El Tigre, Putumayo was very impressive, as it has enabled us to continue our work of strengthening our culture. For 517 years the indigenous towns have been resisting, and we continue surviving thanks to the help of our superiors

## Italia Reservation continued

who give us spiritual strength. We want to recognize Cecilia Zarate because she helps us make the human rights struggles in the jungle visible to the world. We are children of the Mother Earth, and it is for this reason that we relate very much to nature and with everything that surrounds us. Karagabi [The Emberá-Chamí God] has taught us that we should fight together. Many believe that the Earth is dying on its own, but this is not true, because it is the white\* person who has misused it and who has always wanted to destroy it. Just as a person who cuts their finger later feels the pain in their whole body, if we build a tower to penetrate Mother Earth, we are destroying the blood of the earth. Petroleum is the equilibrium of the Earth, and if it is removed, emptiness is created within. It is because of this void that earthquakes occur everywhere. Natural disasters occur because we are taking the blood out of the Earth and we will suffer the consequences. Starting now, we are preparing some joint community work topics to send with our leaders who will visit the United States.

*We are lacking the technological work materials necessary to document the acts that occur daily in our communities .*

Thank you, CSN Kansas City Chapter.

\*For the Emberá-Chamí, a “white” person is any person who is not 100% indigenous.



Our reception meeting at the Algeria Reservation school.

## BAIKAME How are you?

*Community of Palmeras  
Translated by Emily Hansen,  
CSN's Assistant Program Director*

With all our hearts we thank you for the opportunity you have given us, and I pray that my Karagabi [God] will accompany you and give you a long life.

The training and the meeting were two of the most beautiful encounters that we have ever experienced with people from other countries. We know that you work for human rights. We wish you could do these trainings at least twice a year. We are looking forward to the trip of two of our leaders to the United States, as was one of

the agreements that we reached as a conclusion of the workshop held in El Tigre, Putumayo.

Thank you for the meeting. The truth is that there are many things to teach you, but we lack the technological material to carry out the work. There are very important themes that we still want to teach you about our reality. It makes us very happy to have shared experiences with you, and in advance we say goodbye with a big hug. Our friend Ancizar is authorized to speak with you about any questions. He can be found working in La Hormiga, Putumayo .

### The Colombia Support Network

*Action on Colombia*

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