

ACTION ON COLOMBIA

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International Community Mourns the Death of Senator Paul Wellstone

All of us in the Colombia Support Network are deeply saddened by the untimely death in an airplane crash of Minnesota Senator Paul Wellstone, his wife and daughter. Paul was the best friend of the Colombian people in the United States Congress and traveled twice to Colombia in the past two years to meet with grass roots organizations, peasants, indigenous peoples and labor union members. Just as he spoke out courageously against a U.S. invasion of Iraq, he worked tirelessly to change the militaristic approach of U.S. foreign policy toward Colombia. He focused his efforts on protection of human rights and promotion of the well-being of the poor and disadvantaged people of Colombia. His constant goal was to do what was best for the Colombian people, not multinational and U.S. commercial interests which so often pursue policies harmful to the majority of Colombians. He always had time for us and a sympathetic ear. We will miss him terribly. We extend our condolences to Paul's family. We pledge to redouble our efforts to seek peace with justice for Colombia, inspired by the dedication and commitment of Paul Wellstone to this goal.

CSN shares our grief with friends Senator Wellstone made in Colombia as well as many other countries.



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"I don't represent the big oil companies, I don't represent the big pharmaceutical companies, I don't represent the Enrons of this world. But you know what, they already have great representation in Washington. It's the rest of the people that need it."

Senator Paul Wellstone, 1944-2002

From Colombia-

Dear Friends of CSN:

We join with you in most profound sorrow upon the tragic death of Paul Wellstone, his wife and his daughter. Paul came to Barrancabermeja as a brave and sincere friend. He came one day with a group from the U.S. Embassy and when he found out that the paramilitaries were extorting the women

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We mourn cont.

he wanted to go there. We went together. Paul was always at our side. Ever ready to help us in the way that we would want his help. We know that the men and women who lived as Paul, his wife and child lived, do not end with their death. We know that they are with us in the definite mystery of solidarity and love which we call God. We know that each time we speak the truth, each time that we rise up against the injustices, each time that we place ourselves at the side of the victims of violence, there we will meet Paul. We are going to continue to the end of the road where Paul awaits us along with all those who had the greatness to entrust their life and their heart for the joy of others. Very united to all of you from the Magdalena Medio, dear friends who are a part of the great Wellstone family.

Francisco de Roux



REJOICING IN THE BLESSINGS

Despite the many sad and discouraging events of the past few months those of us at the CSN national office also realize that we continue to be blessed in so many ways-

Monika Parikh has just joined us part time as a grant writer. We are so fortunate to have her with us and trust that she will be able to solve a part of the financial crisis that we have been facing.

Yoko Koizumi has been a very faithful volunteer for these past weeks. She preforms many of the tasks at the office that have been piling up.

Kathleen Ruff again kicked off our annual phone-a-thon with a generous contribution as a matching grant.

Memberships have continued to grow and this we can attribute in a very large measure to the faithfulness of Emily Mahlik who sends out the reminders and shares our gratitude for the gifts received.

Cliff Jones has offered to assist us in the updating and improvement of our web page and to assist our chapters in getting a page on the web.

Anne Boylan, Eunice Gibson, Nolen Johnson and all the other translators who help us to get the message out in English.

The many, many persons who have shared their time, talents and gifts with us.

And for those of you who have asked- yes, we do have a wish list. A desk for Cecilia which has four legs of the same length would be most welcome, additional translators, a generous response to our next mailing and mostly a negotiated peace in Colombia and safety for all those who have become our sisters and brothers truly.

DEL- EGATIONS

Because of the current situation in Colombia and the location of the sister communities of CSN local chapters, delegations sponsored by CSN will be put on hold for the time being. We hope to be able to schedule delegations to the sister communities again when we have clarified the safety of traveling to these regions.



COLOMBIA 'DRUG WAR' A SHAM

by Al Gedicks

Colombia is the third largest recipient of U.S. military aid in the world.

As U.S. military aid has escalated so have the civilian casualties of Colombia's 38-year-old civil war. Human rights groups estimate that more than 70 percent of the political killings in Colombia, about 3,500 per year, can be attributed to the paramilitary groups and their military allies. The other 30 percent is done by the guerrillas and drug traffickers. Another 2 million Colombians are refugees of the violence.

With the recent election of President Alvaro Uribe and his pledge to double the size of the army and police forces, this violence will only get worse. What is the U.S. stake in this conflict?

The official reason given for the massive U.S. support for Colombia's war against the guerrillas is to stop the drug traffic in cocaine and heroin. But the so-called war has not targeted the drug kingpins who use drug profits to finance the paramilitaries. Instead, it is directed to only one of the coca-producing regions in Colombia, the southern Putumayo region, which is the stronghold of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or the FARC.

Much of the \$1.8 billion worth of American military aid since 2001 has provided for the training, weapons and attack helicopters for the Army's anti-drug battalion operating in this Amazon jungle area on the frontier with Ecuador.

I arrived in the Putumayo in July 2002 as part of a Colombian Support Network delegation, the Colombian army was preparing to enter guerrilla territory in advance of the low-flying planes spraying herbicides on coca plantations as well as legal crops nearby.

The herbicide is a Monsanto-made mixture containing glyphosate. While the glyphosate mixture is a variety of the weed killer known by the trade name Roundup, the concentrations of glyphosate used in Colombia have never been approved for use in the United States by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

This escalation of the drug war has fallen disproportionately upon the indigenous peoples of the Putumayo. We spoke to indigenous leaders who told us that previous rounds of spraying had devastated their small subsistence farms and gardens and polluted the rivers. The U.S. Embassy officials we spoke to said that people who complain about the drug spraying are the ones who benefit from coca trade.

The results of this last round of spraying according to the indigenous leaders will be a further escalation of the war and a huge number of people who will be driven from their homes. This becomes a vicious circle.

As more weapons are brought in by the military and the paramilitaries, the guerrillas rearm themselves by simply increasing the area under coca cultivation and available for taxation, pushing further into the Amazon jungle, invading the lands of yet more indigenous communities. Coca production has increased by nearly 25%. From the perspective of the indigenous leaders, the hidden agenda...is the elimination of obstacles to massive U.S. and international investment in mega-projects including mines, dams, roads and canals that will allow the efficient exploitation of Colombia's rich natural resources.

Al Gedicks is a professor of sociology at the University of Wisconsin-LaCrosse

SISTER COMMUNITY "DISAPPEARS"

Last year, after CSN representatives visited the displaced community of Cienaga del Opon, CSN along with PDPMM (Programa de Desarrollo y Paz del Magdalena Medio) recommended this community as a sister community to the budding chapter in Duluth Minnesota. This community had all of the requirements of a sisterhood project.

However, war realities took over and the hopes of the group that took refuge in the empty Normal School building are lost. Almost two years after having fled their homes, the 40 families are convinced they can not return to their place of origin.

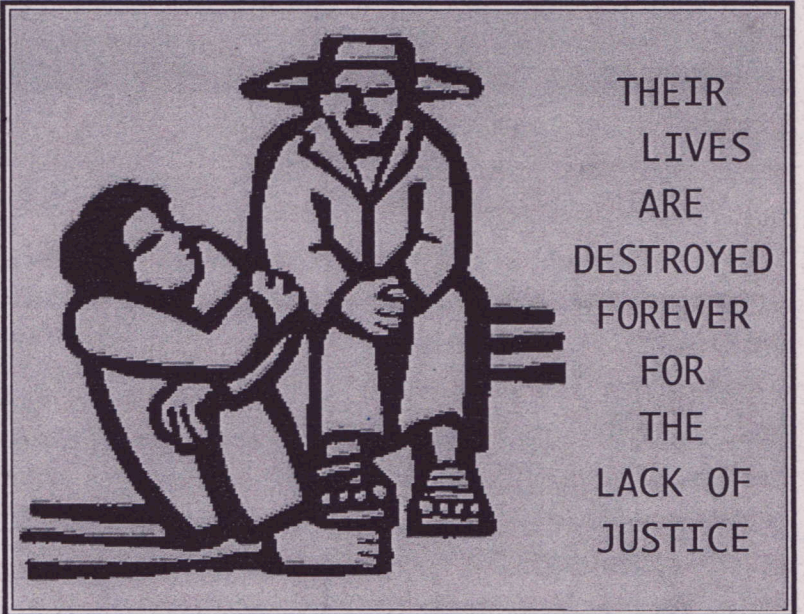
Cienaga del Opon was a nice little village where the community lovingly built, with their own resources, a small building for a school and another for a health community center, where they dreamed of constructing their lives with a future together. All of that is gone. When the armed actors, both FARC and the AUC, started to enter their village to threaten them, burn their homes and kill some of their members, they fled to the security of Barrancabermeja. All the time the community dreamed of going back. The cramped, old and inadequate building in which they were staying was not at all for the children to live comfortably. Peasants such as Benjamin Jimenez dreamed of going back. Back to his little farm where he cultivated plaintain, corn, and cassava and fished all the fish he wanted in the nearby Opon River. There there was always something to eat and there he felt that "there is no life other than the Opon". But the families who were in Barranca felt there was not food for them there and they suffered greatly in the school- especially the children.

At the beginning of this year they were asked to pay the ultimate sacrifice. Their leader- Manual Francisco Sampayo- was taken by the AUC and has not been seen since. It was his leadership and commitment which had kept their hopes to return to their village alive. Since his "disappearance" their dreams are also gone. Maybe that is exactly why he was taken away.

Without him the community has lost their compass and the desperate community believes that their fear of returning is stronger than their hunger. At any moment "the armed actors who want our land, will come back to evict us and we cannot live like that with so much uncertainty and fear". Besides food, another worrisome item is the schooling for their children, since in Cienaga the teachers were the first to be threatened. They have made a decision. There will be no return and the community is disbanding.

CSN has never had this situation before. We learn from this experience and can ponder together about the cruelty and insanity of war; the anguish and desperation of the people who, once their means of livelihood and organizing are taken from them, have no illusion in life and see a bleak future for themselves and their children. We should see from this example the tragedy and pain that thousands of humble people in Colombia experience constantly. Their lives are destroyed forever for the lack of justice.

Their land will be taken by people who support another way of looking at life. A way where only the individual is important and life as a community has no value. This example will reinforce our commitment for peace with justice in Colombian and for a negotiated solution in the hopes that children will have a school, a roof, food and laughter. The cruelty experienced by Cienaga del Opon shows the real strategy for the peasant communities in Colombia which is- either accept the new rules of the new society which is led by the paramilitaries or leave and become displaced. *by Cecilia Zarate-Laun*



Legislation

What can we say? The time for discussing the pros and cons of spending more money to kill more food plants and more of the Amazon rainforest in the name of the war on drugs- or is it anti-terrorism now?- has escaped us. During the past session of Congress the 2003 foreign aid bill was not passed. This means there will be little or no time for any debate and hoped for amendments will not be forthcoming. The \$508 million asked for by Bush will be passed as a continuing resolution. So we need to set our sights on the 2004 foreign aid bill. We certainly have enough information that tells us that the present plan of thwarting the production of coca in Colombia is not working. Estimates are that the production has increased by 25% from 2000 to 2001 and that the area of growing has spread from 12 of Colombia's 32 departments growing it in 1999 to 22 departments in 2001. Although we can do nothing about the current legislation, we must continue to speak with our members of Congress about all of the issues that remain talking points:

The fumigating of crops, children and waterways of Colombia is a disaster.

The so-called "war on drugs" is ever more evidently a cover for the real war- that on the union leaders, indigenous groups, human rights workers and peace workers, Afro-Colombians, teachers and journalists- led by the paramilitary groups and backed by the U.S. Involvement with these groups makes our declared "war on terrorism" a mockery.

The Colombian government cannot certify that it has met the human rights criteria necessary before securing more U.S.military aid.

ACTION:

A call to your representative and your senator now or a visit with him/her during the December break will lay the ground work for our continued protest about the deepening involvement of our government in Colombia.

ABOUT THE DEFEND THE DEFENDERS CAMPAIGN

In our last Action on Colombia issue, we invited our readers to participate in the Defend the Defenders Campaign in order to defend the existence of the Ombudsman's office or Defensoria del Pueblo. We thank all of you who send e-mails and letters. After talking to the Defensor, Dr. Eduardo Cifuentes, We also want to pass on to you his deepest gratitude. He thanked CSN for this idea and informed us that the Uribe government decided not to eliminate the Defensoria after all, basically because they received many letters from outside of Colombia requesting him to keep this important office which is focused on defending the rights of Colombians and foreigners in Colombia. However, the Defensoria is having serious budgetary problems and these make the work of the Defensoria difficult. Particularly affected is the work of the public defenders for poor, humble Colombians. Dr. Cifuentes requested a meeting with CSN representatives in order to discuss cooperation on several projects that he has in mind. CSN looks forward to meeting with him and his team.

Local Chapters "Make Sisterhood a Reality" Sharings and Activities from Around the Country

Northeast Ohio-CSN Chapter Update

NEO-CSN continues to communicate with the new friends they have made on their recent delegation to Cimitarra. Poems written by these friends and others are being compiled into a booklet which will be officially introduced at the annual IRTF commemoration of the martyrs of Central and South America. At this commemoration Rosemary Snow and Peggy Zimmerman will share their experiences of the visit to their sister community. This chapter also is planning a table at the Women Speak Out annual festival at which time they will be selling craft items from Colombia. Their legislative action continues strong as they have planned a meeting with Senator Mike DeWine during his December break.

SEVERAL CHAPTERS PURSUE SISTER CITY RELATIONSHIPS IN THE PUTU- MAYO

Following Rev. Eduardo Ordonez's visit here last summer, several of the CSN local chapters are forming relationships with sister communities in the Putumayo region. Kansas City, Vermont and Methow Valley, WA have all begun the necessary steps to become formal communities in solidarity with one another. Each of these chapters look forward to the possibility of visiting in the Putumayo soon.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS NOW FOR THE CSN ANNUAL NATIONAL MEETING- APRIL 4-5-6 MADISON, WISCONSIN

DANE COUNTY CSN CHAPTER

The Dane County Chapter has been quite busy with planning activities for the good of their sister community Apartado. On a cool Saturday in October Coordinator Mary Sanderson hosted an apple-cider making party for the good of the sister community. Friends and neighbors gathered and learned more about Colombia while preparing the apples for the big squeeze.

On Saturday, January 25th CSN-Dane County and the Returned Peace Corps Volunteers will again co-host the annual "Freeze for Food" run. CSN is planning a teach-in to precede this event.

Landazuri-Montana Chocolate Project

A group in Montana has been engaged in discussions with an association of cacao producer in Landazuri, Colombia- sister community of Montana. They are exploring the potential for direct U.S. or international marketing of the product. In the past year they have participated in exchanges of personnel with several representatives of Landazuri visiting Montana and representatives of Montana visiting Landazuri last July. There is a hope that this relationship will improve income for growers in Landazuri and at the same time employ the expertise of people in Montana. We will continue to keep you posted on the progress of this endeavor.

Congratulations to Katie Knight who recently went "on the road" with the wonderful pictures she took during her visit to Colombia.

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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The Colombian Civil War by Bert Ruiz

The complexities of the drug-financed civil war and U.S. concern that the Colombian conflict will destabilize the Andean region. \$20.00

See us on the Web at
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Items for Sale!

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

T-Shirts-Sizes S,M,L,XL- \$15
Bandanas - \$5.00
Buttons - \$2.00
Bumper Sticker: "If you liked Vietnam, You will love Colombia!" \$2.00

BOOKS!

(\$15 each)

The Palace of Justice.

by Ana Carrigan. A beautifully crafted book which unveils the truth about who makes decisions in Colombia and in whose interests.

Many thanks to our network of volunteer translators, who make our urgent actions possible. These generous individuals donate their time and energy so that we can help make a difference!

The Colombia Support Network "Action on Colombia"

Editors

Sister Marge Eilerman, OSF
Cecilia Zarate-Laun

Special Thanks to Our Contributors and our Volunteers

The Colombia Support Network is 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.

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YOU CAN HELP!!

GET INVOLVED: END THE HORRIBLE HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES IN COLOMBIA

- ☐ I would like to become a member of CSN
WICOLA/CSN membership donation \$_____ (\$25 regular, \$15 low income)
- ☐ I am sending a donation of \$_____
- ☐ Send items: _____ @ \$_____ each and _____ @ \$_____ each. Total: _____
- ☐ Check enclosed ☐ MasterCard ☐ VISA
Account number _____
Expiration date _____ Name _____
(*exactly as it appears on card*)
- I am interested in volunteering:**
____ starting a CSN chapter in my city
____ going on a delegation to Colombia
____ translating / interpreting
____ setting up a talk at my school, group, or church
____ participating in CSN working groups
- Name (please print) _____
Address _____
City/State/Zip _____
Phone/Fax _____
E-mail _____

Please make checks payable in \$ US to
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