

Dear Member and Friend of CSN:

This has been a year full of surprises, good and bad news and for sure a test year for our commitment for peace and justice. Before Christmas a dark chapter in the history of Colombia was closed on November 24, 2016, ending the political negotiation of the armed conflict in Colombia that took 52 years and brought only death and desolation to the country. Recently we had an article on Colombia published in *The Progressive* magazine. Here is a link: <http://www.progressive.org/news/2016/11/189080/magazine-vote-peace-colombia>.

This year CSN received some sad news, as we mourn the death of several friends: our beloved Vice-President Dolores Grenng; our long time Advisory Council Member Father Daniel Berrigan, S.J.; and our advisor and friend former director of CINEP in Bogota, Father Gabriel Izquierdo, S. J. We mourn the passing of all of them and pledge to keep up our work for peace and justice to honor their memory.

One good news item was the decision by the Wisconsin State Historical Society to keep CSN papers as part of their permanent collection. This not only honors us but is also a recognition of the importance of the work done during our 30 years of existence, to be celebrated in 2017.

Our work has to continue. On November 30 the United Nations Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights in Bogota launched a worrisome message about the persistence of killings in the countryside, as there were 35 attempted killings and 52 homicides against community leaders and defenders of human rights. It is worrisome, the UN office points out, that several of the killings happened in areas where the FARC were historically present, but have now left, being gone to the areas where they agreed to leave their arms. Therefore, there is a vacuum in the areas where they had imposed their order. The other affected areas are the ones with few economic alternatives for people to survive and therefore where illegal economies, based upon growing illicit plants or illegal mining, have developed.

We keep a watchful eye on the communities we have worked with through these years, such as the Peace Community of San Jose de

Apartado; the gold mining town of Marmato; the Movimiento Campesino Cajibío in Cauca and other rural communities in Cauca; Santurban in Santander; and the Kamentsá and Inga indigenous communities in the Sibundoy Valley in Putumayo. New worrisome communities are La Colosa, where the water supplies are threatened by a giant gold mining company or the hydroelectric dam development in El Quimbo, where Italian and Spanish multinational corporations have destroyed great expanses of campesinos' farmlands. In all of these community leaders are under threat, which is very worrisome.

Through the Wisconsin Medical Cuban project, our organization was able to coordinate the sending of kits for midwives to the Choco. Urgent actions, the translation of articles to English to contribute to our educational project, the production of our newsletter and the continuous support from the University of Wisconsin-Madison by providing us with wonderful interns have provided strength to our organization. The University of Wisconsin CSN Student chapter organized a movie series on Colombia, another achievement. A delegation to San Jose de Apartado also visited the village of La Union and while in Bogota had interchanges with government offices that had to do with human rights but also with NGO's and particularly with several high officials and academics working on the Peace Process. These gave the delegates the opportunity to know firsthand the broad scope and the complexity of the Peace Process discussed in Havana.

Finally, I want to say that the reaction to the tragic accident where a Brazilian soccer team's plane crashed near Medellin and 71 persons lost their lives, with 6 saved, demonstrated to the whole world that the politicians have not stolen our soul. The city of Medellin and surrounding towns showed the world the capacity for generosity and kindness of the Colombian people that had been hidden because of the many years of war. It is my sincere desire that the same happens here in the United States in the difficult times coming up.

Please be generous and contribute with a donation to CSN to help us keep up our work. We are a 501 © (3) tax-exempt organization and contributions to our organization are tax-deductible.

We wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New 2017! Keep up your good work.

Sincerely,

*Cecilia Zarate-Laun*

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