



Protesting General Motors Colomotores Workers in Bogotá

COLOMBIA'S SPECIAL JURISDICTION FOR PEACE (JEP)

By Eunice Gibson
CSN Board Secretary

LEGAL BASIS IN THE PEACE AGREEMENT

Why does the Peace Agreement create a special court? Every peace agreement must deal with each side's desire to punish the crimes of its opponents, and with each side's desire for amnesty for its own crimes. No party will agree to a peace that will consign its own members to imprisonment. But the United Nations warns against amnesty for the perpetrators of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and gross violations of human rights.

For a first hand account of the way this challenge was resolved in the Peace Agreement, listen to Colombia peace negotiator Sergio Jaramillo explain it to Prof. Roddy Brett of St. Andrews University, Scotland. Use this link: <https://soundcloud.com/chromeradio/chrome360-colombia-in-conversation-rodny-brett-sergio-jaramillo-caro>. Or even easier, just Google "Roddy Brett and Sergio Jaramillo".

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In the Peace Agreement, provisions for the special court are contained in Section V, entitled “Victims”. Colombia’s peace process and agreement are unique in such processes around the world, because both parties agreed from the start that victims’ rights and punishment issues are a crucial element that could not be swept aside or put off for the future.

The Victims Section is structured to provide Truth, Reparation, and a Guarantee that there will be no Repetition, and it creates three key elements of the transitional justice system.

A Truth Commission, now headed by Fr. Francisco de Roux, formerly head of Colombia’s Jesuits, has power to investigate and hear testimonies and stories to bring to light what happened during the conflict. It has no authority to punish.

There is a special unit tasked with searching for people who disappeared as a result of the conflict and the JEP has played an important role in this incredibly difficult task.

Finally, the parties agreed on the creation of a Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP is the Spanish acronym). It is a court, created by the Colombian Congress and approved by Colombia’s Constitutional Court. It has jurisdiction to investigate, prosecute, and punish crimes that were directly or indirectly related to the conflict. It is empowered to provide very limited sentences to parties who tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth, provide

reparations to the victims, and furnish a plan to avoid recurrence. The Court can turn over those who are untruthful to the regular criminal justice system.

I. POLITICAL OPPOSITION TO THE JEP

Politicians that opposed the Peace Agreement objected strongly to the special court. They believed that the former guerrillas would be punished insufficiently for their crimes. Some even suggested that a separate court should be created to hear complaints against members of the military. Ex-President Uribe and his party are still pushing that idea.

(“Uribe presenta borrador de su referendo: Insiste en derogar o ‘reformular’ la JEP”, *EL ESPECTADOR*, November 1, 2020).

When President Duque, a protégé of former President Álvaro Uribe, was serving as a Senator and campaigning for office in 2017, he promised major changes to the Peace Agreement and to the Court in particular. The Colombian Congress adopted an enabling statute and procedures and the Court began its work in January 2018, with the Justices continuing to receive numerous death threats.

Retiring Chief Justice Patricia Linares described what they saw when they walked into their new quarters. “We arrived to empty rooms. There were no desks, no telephones, no computers, nothing.” (“Confrontarse con la verdad es doloroso”: Patricia Linares”, by Gloria

Castrillón, *EL ESPECTADOR*, October 24, 2020).

President Duque took office in August 2018. In March of 2019, he offered six “objections” and requested three “improvements” to the law. He complained of “problems” with the extradition provisions in the statute. The International Criminal Court expressed concern about his objections. So did Human Rights Watch and the Secretary General of the United Nations, and the countries of Norway and the United Kingdom. There were protests in the streets and some members of the opposition in the Congress took part in them. Some members of the President’s party also objected. (*See* <https://latinamericareports.com/colombias-president-rejects-parts-of-jep-bill-in-a-bid-for-more-genuine-transitional-justice>)(<https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-47647953>)

Then there was a rather unusual series of events. United States Ambassador to Colombia Kevin Whitaker scheduled two breakfasts. To the first, he invited some members of Colombia’s Senate. For the next day, he invited members of Colombia’s Chamber of Representatives. At both meetings, he explained that President Trump had expressed concern at the increase in drug plantings, and that the President was displeased with the Peace Agreement signed by President Santos. He told them why they should support President Duque’s position and make the changes he had suggested. The meetings did not go well.

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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Referring to the US request for the extradition of Jesus Santrich, he said the United States would never give in to the JEP request for additional evidence, or to any Colombian Court's request for additional evidence in any extradition case. He told them not to pay any attention to Colombia's Constitutional Court, because courts "can make mistakes", citing the Dred Scott case. He threatened that if President Duque's objections were not approved, US aid might be withdrawn. He told Rep. John Jáiro Cárdenas that his comments were "inane", and he told Rep. José Daniel López that his explanation of the separation of powers was "leguleyadas", which could be translated as "cheap lawyer tactics." (*El Espectador*, April 13, 2019, "Detalles del desayuno entre Whitaker y congresistas")

The lower house of the Colombian Congress rejected President Duque's proposals by a vote of 110 – 44, and the Senate subsequently reached the same conclusion. Next the Constitutional Court was to review the legislation. Three high court Justices were invited to dinner at the Embassy residence, but having heard of the unpleasant meeting with members of Congress, they sent their regrets. The Ambassador immediately cancelled the dinner. To their surprise, the three Justices were notified that their US visas had been cancelled. After some diplomatic tumult, the visas were reinstated.

Rep. John Jáiro Cárdenas also found his visa withdrawn. He thinks Ambassador Whitaker was upset because he talked to the press about the breakfast meeting. He told a radio station that the Ambassador had said that if we didn't support President Duque's objections, we would be supporting the drug traffickers, and that the U.S government would never submit to any JEP request for evidence

of any kind or nature. (*Radio Nacional*, April 17, 2019)

But disagreement between the US Embassy and the Colombian High Courts appears to go beyond President Duque's objections. Besides the Justices who turned down Ambassador Whitaker's dinner invitation, Colombia Supreme Court Justice Éyder Patiño also lost his US visa. He had written a Supreme Court decision rejecting the extradition of an indigenous man because the man had already been punished under indigenous law, and the Court held that extradition would amount to double jeopardy. Some Justices believe that, besides the extradition decision, the United States, which strongly supports the spraying of glyphosate in Colombia, objects to the Colombia Supreme Court's decision imposing strict regulations on the use of glyphosate. ("Aumenta la grave tension entre las cortes colombianas y EE.UU", *EL TIEMPO*, May 11, 2019) ("El lunes, 'cumbre' entre embajada de EE.UU. y Cortes por lío de visas," *EL TIEMPO*, May 10, 2019)

To make matters worse, four planned U.S.-funded modernization projects at the Constitutional Court office were cancelled. (*El Planeta*, May 10, 2019, "United States revokes the visa for three Colombian Justices."), ("EEUU retira la visa a tres magistrados de las cortes", *EL HERALDO*, May 10, 2019), (*peoples dispatch*, "Colombian lower house rejects President Duque's objections to Special Jurisdiction for Peace," April 11, 2019)

The court's enemies have not given up. The day after former Presented Álvaro Uribe Vélez was released from house arrest following an investigation for fraud and witness tampering, on October 10, 2020, he issued a "manual of instructions" for his Democratic Center Party to win the 2022 presidential election. Foremost in his list

of instructions is the need to call for a referendum on the abolition of the JEP. (By Juanita León, *La Silla Vacía*, "El 'manual de instrucciones' de Uribe para ganar en 2022", October 13, 2020).

Adding insult to injury, the proposed 2021 budget that President Duque sent to the Colombian Congress cuts the JEP budget by 20%. ("Advierten que la JEP está desfinanciada en proyecto de presupuesto para 2021", *EL ESPECTADOR*, October 19, 2020.) Critics point out that the largest reduction would be in the witness protection program and that assistance to legal representation of victims would also be affected. ("Alerta por desfinanciación de la JEP en el presupuesto de 2021", *EL TIEMPO*, October 19, 2020). The Treasury Minister, Alberto Carrasquilla, insisted that the government was not biased against the JEP, but that it had to endure budget reductions in requested amounts just like other government agencies. (*EL TIEMPO*, "Así se repartirá la torta del presupuesto de la Nación en 2021", October 21, 2020).

I. ORGANIZATION OF THE JEP

According to the JEP website, the Court has 38 Justices. Fifty-three percent of the Justices are women and 47% are men. Ten percent are Afro-Colombian and 10% are Indigenous people.

The JEP is organized with three branches: Branch 1 is for Recognition of Truth and Responsibility. Branch 2 is for Amnesty, and Branch 3 determines jurisdiction. There are several different Sections and Units within each Branch.

As well as handling individual cases, the Court has opened seven "Macrocases" to deal with crimes that have harmed many thousands of victims.

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They are Case No. 001- Kidnapping and illegal retention of persons by the FARC-EP, opened July 6, 2018.

Case No. 002-Violence both by the FARC-EP and the Colombian Armed Forces in Tumaco, Ricaurte, and Barbacoas (Nariño Province), opened July 10, 2018.

Case No. 003-Extrajudicial murders by the Colombian Armed Forces, opened July 17, 2018

Case No. 004-Violence in Urabá, opened September 11, 2018.

Case No. 005-Violence in Quilichao, Suárez, Buenos Aires, Morales, Calotá, Corinto, Toribío, and Caldon (Cauca Province), opened November 8, 2018. There are 164,000 accredited victims.

Case No. 006-Victimization of the Patriotic Union Party, opened March 4, 2019.

Case No. 007-Recruitment and use of children in the armed conflict, opened March 6, 2019.

The JEP may decide to open a 7th macrocase to deal with the confession by leaders of the former FARC that they ordered the assassination of Álvaro Gómez Hurtado, a conservative politician and member of Colombia's Congress, and five other selective murders. (“Guía para entender qué pasará con las confesiones de la ex-Farc”, *Dejusticia*, October 23, 2020.)

II. THE JEP STANDS FIRM IN A PUBLIC RELATIONS NIGHTMARE.

One of the first major challenges to the JEP was the United States request for the extradition of one of the most hated guerrilla leaders, Seuxis Pausias Hernández Solarte, alias “Jesús Santrich”. Extradition has been a subject of disagreement between the United States and supporters of the JEP. He had been the FARC's chief

propagandist, a lead FARC negotiator in Havana, and believed by the DEA to be a long-time drug dealer. (“Seuxis Pausías Hernández, alias ‘Jesús Santrich’,” *INSIGHT CRIME*, August 18 2020).

The Peace Agreement provides that no former combatant will be extradited for any criminal activity performed before the date the Agreement was signed. On April 9, 2018, Santrich was arrested and jailed, charged with drug trafficking activity after the signing date. (*CNN.com*, April 9, 2018). Colombia's prosecutors claimed to have a video and several audios as evidence. The US Justice Department claimed to have audio evidence.

Santrich sought admission to the JEP. The issue to be decided was whether or not he had violated drug trafficking laws after the date the agreement was signed. The JEP requested additional evidence from the U.S. Justice Department, but that Department refused, claiming that the audio they supplied was enough. (“Estados Unidos asegura que no enviará las pruebas en el caso Santrich”, *El Tiempo*, March 1, 2019.)

In November 2020, it was revealed that the Attorney General's Office had 24,000 audios of wiretapped phone calls in its possession when it sent only 12 audios to the JEP in support of its claim that Santrich had dealt drugs after the signing of the Peace Agreement. (“Los audios de la DEA y la Fiscalía que le negaron a la JEP sobre el caso ‘Santrich’”, by Edinson Arley Bolaños, *El Espectador*, November 8, 2020; “Las dudas que dejan los audios del caso ‘Santrich’”, *El Espectador*, November 9, 2020).

The Appellate Section of the JEP, in a 148-page decision, found the audio evidence to be insufficiently probative, not clearly establishing the date of the

alleged drug activity. It ordered his release. He could still be charged under Colombian law.

Sadly, Santrich, along with two other FARC leaders, Luciano Marín, alias Iván Márquez and Hernán Darío Velásquez, alias “El Paisa”, announced their return to the jungle to resume the battle.

III. THE JEP DEALS WITH COLOMBIAN MILITARY ACCUSED OF AWFUL CRIMES.

The JEP's macrocase 003 is focused on extrajudicial killing by the Colombian military. These events, sometimes referred to as “false positives,” had been going on for years, but did not receive extensive publicity until late in 2008. In the early 2000's the guerrillas sustained significant military setbacks, so they did what guerrillas do. They melted into the jungle. But the Colombian Army wanted to keep on demonstrating success via body count, although there were far fewer guerrillas available to kill.

On November 17, 2005, the Colombian Army issued top secret Directive #29. It authorized rewards, such as time off, trips, and even promotions for soldiers who killed one or more guerrillas. In addition to rewards, there was competition among Army units to get the most kills. “We need liters of blood,” ordered General Mario Montoya, then-Commander of the Army. (“El general que frenó los falsos positivos en Sucre,” *EL ESPECTADOR*, April 16, 2016).

As early as 1994, the CIA and senior U.S. diplomats were aware that the Colombian Army encouraged a “body count” syndrome. There appears to have been a longstanding institutional incentive to commit murder. (“Body Count Mentalities, Colombia's

‘False Positive’ Scandal, Declassified”, *NATIONAL SECURITY ARCHIVE ELECTRONIC BRIEFING BOOK NO. 266*, January 7, 2009).

So Army soldiers killing civilians was not a new thing, but now there was pressure to increase the killing. The Army bought dead bodies from guerrillas, drug traffickers, and paramilitaries, all of whom occasionally had reasons to kill their own members. Army soldiers seized campesinos going about their business, killed them, and dressed them in guerrilla boots and uniforms, not always their size, and buried them as “unidentified” in local cemeteries. They hired recruiters to lure young men with promises of good-paying jobs.

A soldier described this as follows:
1) One “kill” could give you five days off. 2) The units that got the most “kills” received airline tickets to raffle off among the members. 3) They also gave out those cards for charging your phone. 4) They would roast a calf to celebrate the unit that got the most “kills”. (*Semana*, December 21, 2019).

Late in 2008, this practice received public attention when it was discovered that some 18 young men from a poor neighborhood in Soacha, a suburb of Bogotá, had disappeared and were discovered in Ocaña, dressed in camouflage, murdered, and their bodies presented as guerrillas killed in combat.

Generals were fired. The commander of the Army, General Montoya, was made Ambassador to the Dominican Republic, although he has subsequently been arrested, extradited to the United States to serve time for unrelated charges, and returned to Colombia. Victims accuse him of more than 100 “false positives”, but, after a lengthy investigation, he has yet to be charged. He is seeking the protection of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace. (“The

100 Victims in the Case Against Mario Montoya,” by Juan David Laverde Palma, *EL ESPECTADOR*, July 15, 2019.)

In CSN’s 2019 Winter newsletter, we reported on a number of these cases, including the case of General Montoya and two other generals. One of the three mentioned, Retired General Rito Alejo del Río, has been summoned to appear before the JEP and provide truthful testimony in Macrocase 004, regarding Urabá, as he commanded the Army’s 17th Brigade headquartered in Carepa.

IV. WHAT WILL THE JEP DO WITH THE PARAMILITARIES AND THOSE WHO FINANCED THEM?

A. The Paramilitaries

Do the paramilitaries have access to the JEP? The answer is “no” and “maybe”. Some paramilitaries who have been convicted and are serving prison sentences would like to submit to the JEP. The JEP has dismissed those cases, noting that the paramilitaries had access to their own demobilization/amnesty process, created by Statute 975 of 2005. That process required them to turn in all their weapons and tell the whole truth about what they did. It offered limited sentences to paramilitaries who had done awful things. The JEP has held that, even though an applicant did not take advantage of the process, he could have, and should not have a second opportunity.

However, the JEP opened a window in the case of Fabio César Mejía Correa. He did not demobilize in 2005 and is serving a 20-year sentence for the crimes he committed as a paramilitary. He requested access to the JEP and was refused. But the JEP Appeals Branch

suggested that, in order to put a final conclusion to the conflict, a paramilitary who also financed illegal activity might resolve that crime through JEP procedures. (*La ventana para que los ‘paras’ entren a la JEP*”, by Laura Dulce Romero, *EL ESPECTADOR*, July 28, 2019).

From the numerous “parapolítica” prosecutions, we know that local and regional government officials supported the paramilitaries extensively. But the financing came from local, regional, national and even international businesses. There has been very limited prosecution of those entities. Obviously, the paramilitaries have the necessary information. And frequently they worked so closely together, that it may be difficult for the Court to separate the two activities. And the businesses frequently used straw men and dummy corporations to blur the relationship. Obtaining that information could be an important function of the JEP.

The JEP has rejected the applications of the two most notorious paramilitary chieftains, Salvatore Mancuso and Rodrigo Tovar Pupo, alias Jorge 40. The Recognition of Truth and Responsibility Branch ruled last June that, while Mancuso claimed that he had been a paramilitary financier before he became the head of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), available evidence showed that he had always been an “organic” member of the paramilitaries, patrolling with the Colombian Army, as was common, and fighting insurgents. (“La JEP rechaza el sometimiento del ex-jefe paramilitar,” *EL TIEMPO*, June 4, 2020).

More recently, the JEP also rejected Jorge 40, and for similar reasons. The Court advised him that other agencies were available to him, including the ordinary criminal justice system. There are 38 pending warrants for his arrest,

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38 criminal charges, and 1,456 open investigations into his criminal activities. His defense counsel announced that he would appeal the decision to the JEP's appellate section.

Senator Roy Barerras of the "U" party indicated that he planned to introduce legislation to allow the JEP to take jurisdiction of cases like these. He believes that the nation would be greatly benefited by obtaining full information about the activities of the paramilitaries and their financiers and supporters. Former President Santos also stated that he would agree with that change, because the paramilitaries have information that the country needs. ("JEP le cierra la puerta a Jorge 40 y su defensa apelará," *EL TIEMPO*, September 9, 2020).

B. The third parties who financed the paramilitaries.

A "tercero" or third party is a private individual or government employee not part of the guerrillas or the Armed Forces that aided, financed, or otherwise supported serious crimes that were directly or indirectly connected to the armed conflict. This probably includes powerful politicians and business leaders. Admission of third parties to the JEP must be voluntary, but the JEP has authority to investigate third party activity when it finds relevant evidence. And it has received lots of such evidence. The JEP has received 257 reports from the Attorney General, from the Inspector General, from ethnic organizations, victims' organizations and civil society. ("A dos años de apertura de la JEP, los terceros van a medio camino" by Pablo Gómez, *EL ESPECTADOR*, March 29, 2020).

But, as long as submission to the JEP is voluntary, a third party is not motivated to submit until the

prosecutors are ready to file charges or have already done so. There is also a deadline for third parties to submit to the JEP, and that deadline passed in December 2019, when 916 third parties had requested admission. It's conceivable that, if there are more serious reports, the deadline could be extended, but that has not yet happened.

The JEP has prioritized third parties related to the Northern Bloc of the AUC (United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia) in Córdoba and Urabá, as well as the extrajudicial murders (false positives). The JEP will not accept the submission of third parties unless they are willing to furnish truthful information and make substantial reparations. Those reparations will need to be funds that can be used, among other things, to fund important efforts like the Victims Law and Land Restitution, which are seriously underfunded. (*Id.*)

V. THE JEP HAS MADE PROGRESS IN THE SEARCH FOR DISAPPEARED PERSONS.

Statistics furnished by Colombia's National Center for Historical Memory reveal that 262,197 people were killed in the war between 1958 and July of 2018. The great majority of those killed, 215,005, were civilians, compared to 46,813 combatants. The paramilitaries killed 94,754 people, the guerrillas killed 35,683, and 9,804 were killed by agents of the government. (<http://www.centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/noticias-cmh/262-197-muertos-dejo-el-conflicto-armado>)

The International Commission on Missing Persons estimates that at least 120,000 people are missing or disappeared in Colombia's civil war. The Peace Agreement provides that

immediate measures will be taken to locate disappeared persons and furnish their families with their remains in a dignified manner. (*United States Peace Institute*, "Acuerdo de paz sobre desaparecidos en Colombia", July 2016). The Colombian government has established a Commission for the Search for Disappeared Persons. It is the government's responsibility and is not part of the JEP.

The JEP, however, has a Section on Cases of Absence of Recognition of Truth and Responsibility. That Section has authority to investigate the possible locations of burials of disappeared persons who are often buried without identification. It is empowered to issue preliminary injunctions ordering the protections of such locations.

Because of the informality of the massive killings, bodies were often not buried at all. Many were dismembered and thrown into the river. According to testimony by paramilitary chieftain Salvatore Mancuso, the paramilitaries burned hundreds of bodies in ovens that they built out of bricks. (*ABC International*, Spain, "Los paramilitares colombianos usaron hornos crematorios", 10/12/2014).

The JEP has also used its authority to protect areas that may contain the remains of disappeared persons. In doing this, it has learned that cemeteries, both urban and rural, are in an almost unbelievable state of disorder and confusion.

Bodies were thrown into mass graves as "unidentified", sometimes without even a body bag, and without legally required documentation. Some mass graves were moved, increasing the difficulty of ever identifying bodies and returning them to families. ("Cementerio del horror: el lugar donde estarían ocultos los falsos positivos que el país no conoce", *SEMANA*,

December 14, 2019). For some of the false positives, identifying the remains is particularly difficult because sometimes soldiers were ordered to fire M60 machineguns into the faces of the dead victims, to hinder identification. (*Id.*)

The JEP has also used its authority to protect areas that may contain the remains of disappeared persons. Cemeteries in Dabeiba, Puerto Berrío, (Antioquia), Neiva (Huila), Aguachica (Cesar), and San Onofre (Sucre), among others.

Late in 2019, JEP Justices and staff found that skeletal remains allegedly from the Universal Cemetery in Medellín were being stored at the University of Antioquia Anthropology Laboratory for “academic and scientific research”. They were surprised to find that, of 136 bodies from that cemetery, 56 contained evident signs of violence. Most had been shot, others bore other trauma and some had been dismembered. Very few of the bodies had any identification or any documentation. They found a “monumental disorder” not just in the records, but in the graves themselves. Nobody knew how many unidentified bodies there were. Some of them had been manipulated during “research”.

The manager of the cemetery did not know how many people were buried in the Medellín cemetery. (“La escalofriante historia de 136 cadáveres perdidos”, *SEMANA*, March 1, 2020.)

Finally, little or no record was made when a number of cemeteries had to be moved during the construction of the Hidroituango energy project. Six municipalities were involved and hundreds of people disappeared in those areas during intense fighting in the civil war. People that lived near the River Cauca reported that they occasionally found bodies floating down the river and they would bury them at the beach.

Some bodies from the cemeteries that were moved remain at the University Laboratory and many contain signs of violence (*Id.*)

The JEP has ordered the manager of the energy company, EPM, to produce evidence of the conditions under which cemeteries in the Districts (corregimientos) of Barbacoa, Peque, Orobajo, Sabanalarga, La Fortuna, and Buriticá were moved. As of late August 2020 he had not responded. (“EPM deberá justificar ante JEP el traslado de restos en Hidroituango”, by Javier Alexander Macías, *EL COLOMBIANO*, August 21, 2020).

The JEP is playing an extremely important role in carrying out the promise of the Peace Agreement that there will be a serious effort to find and identify the many victims of forced disappearance.

VI. CONCLUSION: THE JEP IS ACCOMPLISHING THE PURPOSE THAT IS THE BASIS OF THE PEACE AGREEMENT

The JEP is a cornerstone of the Peace Agreement goal that all of the truth about the war be told. The implication of the fierce opposition to the JEP is that there are powerful forces that do not want that. A victims’ organization, Movice (National Movement of Victims of Government Crimes) and other victims groups sent a letter to the Democratic Center Party, complaining that the Party’s opposition to the JEP is interfering with their rights to full truth that is promised in the Peace Agreement. (“Victimas piden al partido de gobierno y gremios no derogar la JEP y contar la verdad del conflicto”, By Jenny Rocio Angarita, *RCN RADIO*, October 16, 2020).

On the Court’s second anniversary,

a well-known Colombian political scientist María Emma Wills commented, “Many will still not admit the seriousness of what happened.” In her view the Court serves to bring the terrible brutality to light so that people will insist, “What happened is unconscionable. We can’t ever let this happen again.” (“Muchos sectores siguen sin reconocer la gravedad de lo que aconteció”, by Juan David López Morales, *EL TIEMPO*, January 18, 2020).

As Chief Justice Patricia Linares concludes her three-year term, she expresses the same concern. Confronting the truth of what happened is painful. (“Confrontarse con la verdad es doloroso: Patricia Linares”, by Gloria Castrillón, *EL ESPECTADOR*, October 24, 2020). But she insists that achieving peace depends on the whole truth and nothing but the truth. (“La paz no se puede construir a partir del olvido: Patricia Linares”, By Luis Carlos Gómez, *EL PAIS*, October 30, 2020).

Contrary to the government party and its officials, the Inspector General of Colombia, Fernando Carrillo, emphasizes the importance of the JEP. He believes that, without it, The Truth Commission and the Commission for the Search of Disappeared Persons will be “lame”. (“Procurador General pide que dejen trabajar a la JEP en paz”, By Johana Rodríguez, *RCN RADIO*, November 3, 2020).

In October of 2020, the United Nations Security Council praised the accomplishments of the JEP. The UN has a Verification Committee on the ground in Colombia and thus has first hand information on the functioning of the JEP. Also the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, has praised the JEP as “one of the most powerful

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instruments for overcoming the conflict and breaking the cycle of violence and impunity.” (“Bachelet pide al Estado colombiano garantizar independencia de la justicia transicional”, By Jairo Tarazona *RCN RADIO*, October 22, 2020).

The International Criminal Court is watching Colombia very carefully. The Court’s Deputy Prosecutor, James Stewart, responded to former President Uribe’s call for ending the JEP. He believes that, to the contrary, the JEP may turn out to be a model for the rest of the world. He notes

that the necessary examinations of the many violations of human rights and International Humanitarian Law will take time, but that itself is beneficial because it guarantees that the investigation necessary to provide complete versions of all that really happened will be carried out. (“La CPI dice que la JEP puede convertirse en un referente mundial”, *EL ESPECTADOR*, November 2, 2020).

Deputy Prosecutor Stewart spoke discreetly and diplomatically. He did not point out in so many words that, since Colombia is a party to the treaty

creating the Rome Statute, which created the International Criminal Court, the impunity that former President Uribe and the Democratic Center Party appear to desire, could result in some of Colombia’s very high officials being required to appear before the International Criminal Court. If the JEP is not allowed to continue examining and sanctioning the violations of International Humanitarian Law that took place during the war, the resulting impunity can be the basis of the International Court’s jurisdiction to prosecute them.

“Back Forty” Mine is a Threat to the Menominee River

by Al Gedicks

The Menominee River, named after the Menominee Indians of Wisconsin, is the largest river system in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula. The Menominee River watershed encompasses 4,000 square miles and drains into Lake Michigan’s Green Bay. In April 2020, American Rivers, a national conservation group, named the Menominee River one of the 10 most endangered rivers in America, citing the threat from Aquila Resources’ proposed “Back Forty” open pit metallic (gold and zinc) sulfide mine a mere 150 feet from the Menominee River, near Stephenson, Michigan.

Aquila Resources is a Canadian exploration company that has no experience with mining. The name “Back Forty Mine” is highly misleading; rather than the forty acres suggested by the name, the footprint of the mine and

tailings dam encompasses 1,087 acres – or 1435 football fields. The pit would be 2,000 feet wide, 2,500 feet long and 750 feet deep (the equivalent of a 57-story skyscraper).

The proposed mine would produce 70 million tons of acid-producing waste rock and milled tailings. When sulfide minerals in mines and mining wastes are exposed to air and water, the chemical reaction produces sulfuric acid and metal pollution known as acid mine drainage (AMD). AMD is toxic to fish and wildlife due to dissolved metals and contaminants such as mercury, lead and arsenic. These contaminants would threaten the Menominee River and eventually Lake Michigan, which provides drinking water to millions in the upper Midwest. Aquatic life, including the largest source of sturgeon for Lake Michigan, as well as property values and tourism in nearby

communities would also be adversely affected.

The location of the proposed Back Forty mine project has special significance for the Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin because it is their original homeland. They occupied the Menominee River area for millennia, until an 1836 Treaty with the U.S. forced them to cede their original territory in Michigan. The present-day Menominee reservation is sixty miles southwest of the proposed mine. However, the Menominee Nation never gave up its right to protect its traditional cultural resources that are essential to their identity. The Back Forty project threatens to desecrate prehistoric burial mounds, garden beds and religious ceremonial grounds within the footprint of the proposed mine.

While Aquila says it conducted its

own archaeological survey and that it will not encroach on these cultural sites, the Menominee say Aquila did not consult with them. Aquila's failure to consult with the Menominee Nation is in violation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples that requires all extractive resource projects to obtain the free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous peoples.

The greatest threat to the water and communities downstream from the proposed mine is the massive release of toxic mine waste into the Menominee River from Aquila's proposed tailings dam. Tailings are the finely ground muddy or sandy mine wastes left behind after the valuable metals and minerals have been extracted from the ore. The Back Forty proposed mine would produce millions of tons of tailings that contain substances that can harm human health, drinking water supplies and destroy entire communities and livelihoods. However, unlike water-retaining dams made of concrete and steel, the proposed Back Forty tailings dam is made of crushed waste rock and overburden soil. Such dams are extremely unstable in areas of heavy rainfall such as the upper Midwest.

The upstream tailings dam design proposed by Aquila is the lowest cost option but the most prone to failure, according to experts. Such dams are involved in approximately 76% of tailings dam failures worldwide. After a catastrophic tailings dam collapse in Brazil killed 270 people in January of 2019, Brazil banned that design from future mines. Because of the demonstrated risk associated with upstream dam construction, an international group of 142 scientists

representing 24 nations urged that upstream dams must not be built at any new facilities.

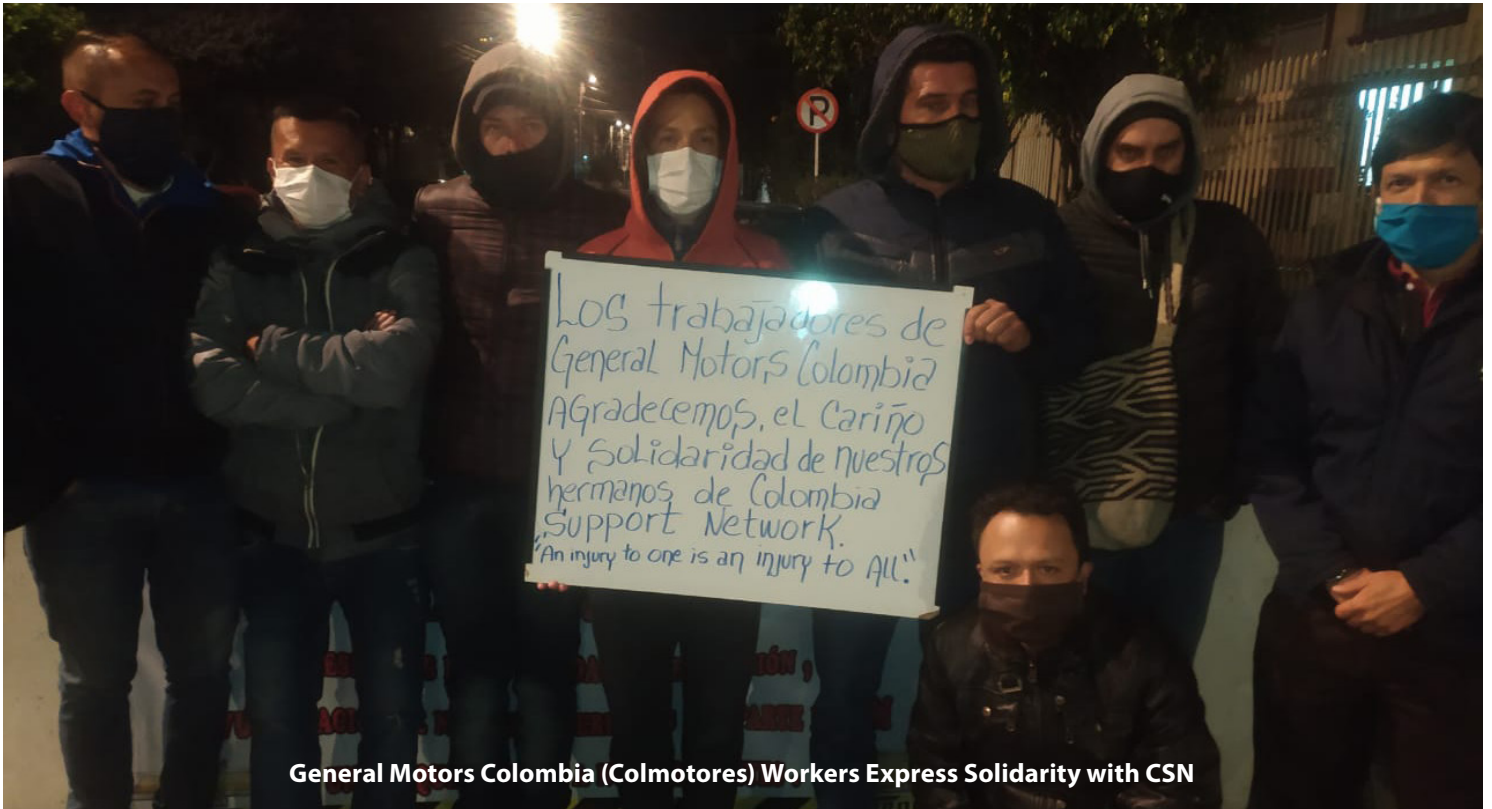
Downstream residents rely on the river (which is also the Michigan-Wisconsin border) for their drinking water, fishing and tourism. They are skeptical of the mining company's safety assurances. Eight counties – including Menominee (MI), and Marinette, Oconto, Menominee, Shawano, Door, Outagamie and Brown in Wisconsin - have passed resolutions against the mine.

Aquila's claim that they have all the permits required for construction of the mine is false. There are three permits "issued" but not "effective" due to the number of pre-mining conditions attached. All three permits are currently involved in court cases. Aquila withdrew

its original Dam Safety Permit application in December 2019 due to insufficient information and has just submitted a new permit application to Michigan's Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE). However, the company has not yet submitted an Emergency Action Plan in the event of a dam failure and the release of toxic mine waste into the Menominee River. The Coalition to SAVE the Menominee River (www.jointherivercoalition.org) is urging EGLE to protect our communities from catastrophic damage by prohibiting the upstream dam construction design for the proposed Back Forty tailings dam.

Al Gedicks is the Executive Secretary of the Wisconsin Resources Protection Council (www.wrpc.net).





General Motors Colombia (Colmotores) Workers Express Solidarity with CSN

An Injury to One: An update of the struggle of the injured Colombian GM workers

By Paige Shell-Spurling,
Coordinator of the Colombia Section,
Portland Central America Solidarity Committee

The injured Colombian General Motors workers celebrated 9 years of permanent presence in the tent encampment in front of the U.S. Embassy in Bogota in August. The workers who organized as ASOTRECOL (the Association of Injured Workers and Ex-Workers from GM Colombia) are fighting against General Motors' practice of illegally firing injured workers, which leaves the worker in a precarious state, without an income, without healthcare but with serious health needs, and often without the possibility of continuing to do the trade that they learned (or any other physical occupation since they cannot pass the physical required at hire). When the workers organized ASOTRECOL in 2011, the free trade agreement between Colombia and the

United States was being negotiated, the United States government was the majority shareholder of General Motors (after the bankruptcy bailout), and the Colombian government through a mix of omission, collusion and negligence had failed to hold the company to account.

As the workers spent time together they realized how systematically General Motors had violated their fundamental human rights and left them with their backs to the wall. Workers were developing disabling injuries from the grueling workplace conditions of the plant, partly from accidents, but largely from musculoskeletal injuries that develop over time from repetitive movements, heavy lifting, and poor ergonomics-factors which were the company's responsibility to mitigate. Instead of fixing the assembly line so that workers

would not become disabled from going to work, GM perfected its ability to identify and dismiss injured workers. The company illegally comingled workers' healthcare and personnel records, kept the worker ignorant of the extent of their injuries (by treating the worker at the in-house medical center which provided shots to numb pain and alternative non-work related reasons for the pain being experienced), to prevent the creation of documents that could generate legal responsibility for the company (by creating benign descriptions of the risks of the workers' jobs underreporting workplace accidents), and by creating a playbook of intimidation and pressure tactics which allowed the company to dishonestly dismiss workers with false charges and contrived testimony, with the worker not having access to a lawyer, or with the Ministry of Labor (which is required to

authorize the dismissal of each injured worker) failing to provide the control that its responsibility demands.

While the plight of each of the individual workers and their families is important, it is worthwhile to consider the larger context. If workers from a U.S. company cannot even get their rights recognized and respected under the U.S.-Colombia free trade agreement, what chance do any other group of Colombian workers have for the same? If General Motors is allowed to literally destroy the bodies of its workers for profit, even though doing so violates numerous Colombian and international laws, what prevents other companies in Colombia from following suit? We often hear of the race to the bottom, in which labor conditions are ever plummeting, and as such it is imperative that we find ways to organize across borders. In one of the last contract negotiations, U.S. autoworkers were implored to accept concessions “in order to be competitive”. Competitive with whom? With Colombian autoworkers who are being destroyed by their jobs? Wouldn't that mean that we would want to rally around those workers facing the worst conditions and fighting back? ASOTRECOL represents just such a group. Their struggle is quite literally our struggle whether we are autoworkers or not.

There is a lot to learn from the injured Colombian GM workers, not least of which is the value of persistence. While the company has been hoping to wait them out, the workers do not have much of an alternative. The injured workers who have walked away from the struggle are eking out a living watching over the cars in a parking lot for tips, or working on a construction site for a few days before their injuries flare up and they are asked not to come back. The workers who remain in the tent

encampment are optimistic that they can negotiate a settlement with General Motors which can provide them with a path forward in their lives. GM's interest in settling with the workers of the encampment might have just increased, thanks to their efforts to support 44 injured workers who were dismissed from the assembly plant in February.

Injured workers, over the years, have known that the tent encampment was a place that they could go for advice and support. The tent encampment has received visits from injured workers from multiple sectors, but especially from injured workers recently dismissed from General Motors. It is a little bit inconvenient for the company to have such a visible rallying point for the workers it wishes to quietly dismiss. Furthermore, at this point ASOTRECOL is supported internationally, is way more connected than any individual vulnerable recently dismissed unoriented worker, and knows how to use pressure to move agencies.

The dismissal of the 44 workers was not surprising. In December of 2018, General Motors Colombia had requested permission to dismiss 103 workers in a supposed “partial shutdown” due to alleged economic problems (at the time the SEC filings seemed to indicate the opposite). Our international effort called the Ministry of Labor and argued that the company would use this authorization to dismiss injured workers if it was granted. We were able to get support from the CUT labor federation which also submitted a letter to the Ministry of Labor expressing the same concern. The Ministry of Labor ended up authorizing the mass dismissal but included a clause that stated that injured workers were not to be included. The company dismissed dozens of injured workers,

pretending that the clause did not exist.

The Colombian legal system is quite interesting. With the new Constitution which was adopted in 1991, the Colombian Supreme Court was suddenly joined by a co-equal or more powerful Constitutional Court and the citizenry had a new legal tool, known as the “tutela” which they could use to correct situations in which their fundamental human rights as laid out in the Constitution were violated. So injured workers have two separate pathways that they can use to try to achieve justice. The first is through a “tutela” which is required to be ruled on in a very short period of time and can be appealed just once before arriving at the Constitutional Court for a possible review (somewhat akin to having a case ascend and be selected by our Supreme Court). The second is through ordinary labor law which can easily take years before it is ruled on. The labor laws which are on the books in Colombia are not nearly as protective for the injured worker as what the case law established by the tutelas and rulings from the Constitutional Court have been. To begin with, labor law requires that an injured worker have a disability rating of at least 25% (in some cases they have accepted as low as 15%). The Constitutional Court defines injured workers based on the effect the injury has had on the worker's life and ability to carry out life tasks,

General Motors in Colombia is currently working to dismiss all of the injured workers as well as all of the workers that remain in unions. Unfortunately the unions inside of the plant have not taken the principled stand that one would hope for from those bearing witness to the injustices being committed against one's fellow workers. It appears that all of the unions, in an attempt to save their own

An Injury to One cont.

necks, made a deal with the company to not oppose the dismissal of any workers with less than 15% injury within this collective dismissal. Extremely short-sighted, this amounts to the classic divide and conquer method and you can almost imagine the unionists saying “first they came for the workers with 1-15% disability ratings and since that wasn’t me I said nothing... then they came for the...” In any case, the 44 workers dismissed in February who decided to fight back had 15% or less disability. All had on-the-job injuries and medical restrictions.

Liliana Quemba is a lawyer who has represented many injured GM workers successfully, and she is widely trusted by the injured workers in the plant. When GM dismissed the workers in February, 44 of them sought her out. She told them that she would take their case if they would commit to working with ASOTRECOL and the tent encampment (which would help ensure success). Soon after, quarantine restrictions came into place. Our international effort attempted to get all of the injured dismissed GM workers onto the list of individuals receiving food subsidies from the mayor’s office, but we were unsuccessful. Carlos Trujillo, vice-president of ASOTRECOL largely assumed responsibility for the tent encampment. Jorge Parra, president of ASOTRECOL, has been attending law school at night and continued to do so, moving to the virtual platform (he has completed 3 out of the 5 years of his program). In Bogota, the quarantine limited movement around the city and in the interest of health and safety they largely hunkered down. Toward the end of the summer, lawyer Liliana Quemba had the tutela of the

44 workers ready to submit. Since it was no longer possible to submit tutelas in person, she had to file it virtually and the file size limited what could be submitted as a single process. She ended up submitting a tutela for 20 workers and a tutela for 24 workers. The first ruling in both tutelas went against the workers, largely because the Ministry of Labor failed to provide the clarification regarding the fact that their dismissal authorization excluded injured workers, instead answering in a bewildering show of incompetence that the workers who were being asked about had never been employees of the Ministry of Labor. The lawyer appealed. In the first tutela the Ministry of Labor corrected their mistake and the judge ruled in favor of the workers, ordering the company to immediately reinstate them. In the second tutela, the Ministry of Labor again failed to provide the clarification that the dismissal excluded injured workers in a timely manner, submitting it 30 minutes after the judge had ruled against the 24 workers. GM accepted the 20 workers back into the plant but demanded repayment of the liquidations and indemnifications which the workers had supposedly received in February when they were dismissed (in reality those payments had been applied against their mortgage balances automatically by the company and many of the workers had left without a cent and then somehow survived the next 9 months without an income). In addition, the company filed a legal process arguing that their due process rights had been violated because the judge had not sent them a write-up of why she denied their request of the annulment of her decision; this move was meant to try to overturn the reinstatement of the

20 workers by changing the decision from a permanent reinstatement to a temporary reinstatement (giving the lawyer 4 months to file a labor law legal process which would likely overturn their reinstatement since they all had 15% or less disability). It appeared that the new judge was going to rule with the company because his office was essentially hiding the fact that this time the Ministry of Labor HAD provided clarification in a timely manner. His office responded that he would not be including the Ministry’s response in his decision. It very much appeared that the judge was going to rule in favor of General Motors, so the lawyer filed a complaint detailing the irregularities with the Attorney General’s office and forwarded her complaint to the judge in question to try to prevent him from ruling over the weekend. On Monday, with leadership from Carlos Trujillo, vice-president of ASOTRECOL, workers from both tutelas gathered in front of the Attorney General’s building with signs. The Attorney General’s office met with them almost immediately. They then proceeded to move their rolling action to the Defensoria del Pueblo and were able to get a meeting scheduling and then did the same with the CUT labor federation. The following day they went to the Personeria and got a meeting and then met with the CUT (the meeting had been scheduled the day before). The workers were very happily surprised by how well their series of actions had worked, and felt very supported by ASOTRECOL, especially by Carlos, who had led all of the actions. On the second day of protest actions, we learned from the Attorney General office’s investigation

that the judge had ruled against the company, maintaining the reinstatement of the 20 workers- in a decision that was curiously dated (or quite possibly back-dated) to the previous Wednesday (before his office said they would not be considering the clarification from the Ministry of Labor). Through the protest actions already described from Monday and Tuesday and those that happened through the rest of the week, the workers were able to gain promises of support from all of the government agencies with the ability to request the review of the decision against the 24 workers.

In other words, GM's attempt to dismiss the 44 injured workers with less than 15% disability pretty much has failed, due to the work of the lawyer and the tent encampment. Twenty of those workers are already reinstated and the other 24 are likely to follow. As long as the tent encampment remains, GM is going to have a challenge to the removal of all of the injured workers. Although the company last week showed us that they are (not surprisingly) moving on to dismiss the workers in the 15-20% disability category, our collective actions have set back their plans. As long as the workers in the tent encampment remain without a settlement, GM can expect to have problems carrying out its plans against injured workers. How much does the company want to be able to clear out the workers it has injured? Only time will tell, but it is not impossible to believe that a settlement with a handful of workers might be a prudent call for the multinational. As the saying goes, "if you think you are too small to be effective, you have never been in the dark with a mosquito."



Dan and Wendy Austin, a couple we traveled with us, who also teach at the University I do, are registering with a local Chinese authority at the Shanghai Pudong International Airport in preparation to travel to a "quarantine hotel." Notice the official fully garbed in hazmat gear.

The view of the Pandemic from a CSN member working in China

by Randy Clark

As a twenty plus year member of CSN, I am the one responsible for cobbling together the newsletter every few months. I presently teach at Wenzhou-Kean University in Southern China.

Almost a year ago, my wife and I were attempting to leave China during the holiday break, but missed our connecting flight in Guangzhou. With airline prices so high to rebook, we returned to our apartment at the University in Wenzhou.

Then the news came out about the pandemic. We then received an urgent email from our University detailing the new rules governing our stay. Only a skeleton staff now came to work, with no faculty were allowed off campus. Busses and taxis stopped running. Everyone donned a mask, including us.

We now were in lockdown.

Most of the faculty had already left for the holiday break, leaving just a few of us on campus. We were still here, as my wife Tammy is the Vice Principal of the Wenzhou Kean University Experimental Kindergarten. She had to work right up until the Chinese Lunar New Year festival thus preventing us from having an early departure.

As the outbreak in China worsened, it became apparent we should attempt again to leave. The Vice President at Kean University in New Jersey (of which we are formally faculty) sent out an email that the University would find us a way out of China. We were so relieved, but also concerned about abandoning our Chinese friends that we have come to love so much.

Two days later, we were on a plane

Pandemic cont.

bound for Korea, then to San Francisco, then home to Dallas/Fort Worth. The Wenzhou International Airport is quite small, especially for a city of 10 million people. Even so, it was practically deserted. All the employees were garbed in googles and Hazmat suits. Getting through the medical check took 30 minutes even though there were just 20 people on this flight.

Upon landing at the Incheon Airport in Seoul, we were subjected to the same rigorous medical check. Forms, temperature check, being questioned by medical personnel. Both the Koreans and the Chinese took this pandemic VERY seriously.

When we arrived in San Francisco, we were expecting more of the same. We were expecting medical people to greet us with the possibility, even the probability of being quarantined. But this happened instead.

Nothing.

Not even a custom official questioning us about our luggage. Did someone forget to tell our Border Control People THERE WAS A PANDEMIC RAGING IN ASIA? We were shocked. **WE. WERE. SHOCKED!**

After a few weeks and my dental work finally resolved (thankfully), I booked a ticket back to China. Twelve hours later, China closed its borders to all international flights. Now the United States became the epicenter of the virus, while China had the virus contained.

Tammy and I were stuck in Texas, basically prisoners of a townhouse that we owned, inhabited by our son and his wife and children. My son and his wife are hardcore Trumpers, and always ready to “enlighten us” as to the great things the Trump Administration was

doing to save Christianity and the Country. My son corrected me about how the United States was a “republic” and not a “democracy.” I could only shake my head in disbelief. Arrogantly, neither one of them would listen to facts or reason. Rush Limbaugh was all knowing and thus infallible.

Our children living in our townhouse were doing very little in the way of masks, isolation, and things safely to avoid the virus. After all, it really was nothing more than a “hoax.” We eventually moved out into an Extended Stay Hotel for fear of catching the virus. There I continued to teach via distance learning on the internet. It was emotionally demanding, teaching at 1 o'clock in the morning for a series of a few nights in a row each week.

The summer came and we had no idea if we would still have our jobs for the following year. Tammy stopped being paid. There was no longer any money in the Kindergarten account to pay her or any of the teachers. Also, my Mother, who was 92, was isolated in her assisted living facility. We visited her as best we could from the parking lot while shouting to her on the third floor balcony.

Texans believe in Guns, God, and Football. They just couldn't be bothered by the “Kung flu.” This was Trump country.

Then Tammy received an email from her boss, Ms. Dei. The Chinese government had issued a declaration that “essential workers” were to return to China as reasonably possible. We were actually sent a photo of the memo in Chinese, which we translated through a translation app on our iPhone. It was obvious that “reasonably possible” meant right away.

Two days later, I received another

email from our HR department that the University was feverishly working with the Chinese Immigration Department to get their foreign faculty back as well. One thing you learn about the Chinese. Nothing is done halfshod.

We had to gather a dozen documents, photos and tests to get a transit visa to return (as our old visas had since expired). The Chinese Embassy and its Consulates also wanted everything in digital form for pre-approval prior to sending our paperwork and passports to them.

Our assigned Consulate was in Houston. Over the weekend, Tammy and I gathered and scanned everything, attaching the digital documentation in an email at 3 a.m. Congratulating ourselves, we slept in late only to find that President Trump later that morning, had ordered the Houston Consulate closed by week's end. We were at square one again.

Panicking, we emailed our contact at our University, that by now was inundated with emails from most of the overseas faculty wanting to know just what was happening. Our contact's response was classic. “We can't understand why Trump would do such a thing?!”

A week later, we received new instructions giving us a new contact at the Chinese Embassy in Washington DC. We received a green light a week later from the Embassy, so we overnighted everything in a certified/tracked mail pouch.

In the meantime, my Mother had a life-threatening health episode. She was rushed to the hospital where she was diagnosed with an intestinal blockage, a terminal condition.

Tammy and I were now two

weeks from flying back to China, and my Mother was now in hospice care. Because she was experiencing Alzheimer's, she kept asking me, what was wrong with her. It pained me to tell her about her blockage that would eventually end her life. My Mother passed away in late November. We attended her funeral via ZOOM while here in China. I was thankful that we had the opportunity to be with her so much of that time when we were back in Texas.

We had our tickets issued to us. Another Covid test before we left. One last dental exam. One last dermatology visit. One last time at the Doctors' office.

DFW to Detroit to Korea to Shanghai.

Arriving, we then proceeded through a well-organized series of interviews and tests at the Pudong airport. The medical screening again was thorough. Another Covid test with the cotton swab sticks placed all the way to the end, tickling my nasal cavity, which now had been my third time.

Off to customs/entry into China and to the baggage claim (and bathroom). To the bus and another series of interviews that would send us to a mandatory 14-day quarantine. 3 hours later, after prepaying for our room and meals, Tammy and I were given a room on the 18th floor of the Vienna International Hotel in Shanghai. We were beyond tired and dirty.

But wait, a knock on the door. Our breakfast. Cooked vegetables and a bowl of rice each. An apple (the fruit in China is excellent). Not to our Western tastes, but good. We each showered. Another knock on the door. Temperature check. We were settling in for sleep. Another knock on the door, lunch. Two hours

later, temperature check again, but this time, self-administered. Another knock, now dinner. Finally, sleep. twelve uninterrupted hours of it. Everything repeated again for the next 7 days.

Then we were carted off to another hotel in Zhejiang Provence. Same routine. Got our health certificates and our individual green QR codes. on our iPhones A van arranged by the University was waiting for us. 5 hours later with one bathroom stop, we were in our apartments, washing our bed sheets and clothes.

The head of the HR department ran up and hugged us both. The housekeeper on our floor did the same. The guards by our apartment greeted me with their kind smiles by saying in English with their Chinese accent, "Good morning, Raandi." The one thing that became emotional for me was a message from one of my students on my iPhone. "We miss you very very very much." We were finally home and safe from the Trump virus, 7 months later. The semester was already a month underway and we were behind.

Now safe, and recovering, we were amazed that some of the Chinese were fearful of the United States readying itself to go to war with them. Trump's continued "blame game" of China was all over their television. Every news channel in China (and there are several) had Trump's orange face and carnival antics on screen 24/7.

I would be asked, "what is wrong with your President, and why are there Americans with guns?" The very worst of America and its ignorance, intolerance and its show of "democracy" was on display for the world to see. Our Emperor wearing no clothes. If the average American could see just how ridiculous and shameful we look to the

rest of world. The light upon the hill? What a cruel joke.

I explained that Donald Trump is a troubled man, basically a paper tiger. No need to worry. He'll be gone soon. Just not soon enough. It is those that enabled (and continue to enable) this damaged individual that worried me. It does not speak well of us.

Postscript. I wrote this article a couple of months ago, and since, there has been the ill-advised Insurrection by Pro Trumpers. It didn't surprise that Trump would attempt such a misguided and doomed-to-fail stunt. But the damage done to the prestige and image of democracy in the United States is incalculable. The whole world is watching the United States, once the pillar of stability, unravel in real time.

The Colombia Support Network

Action on Colombia

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