

# SOLIDARIDAD

 **Witness for Peace**  
Transforming People — Transforming Policy

FALL 2010

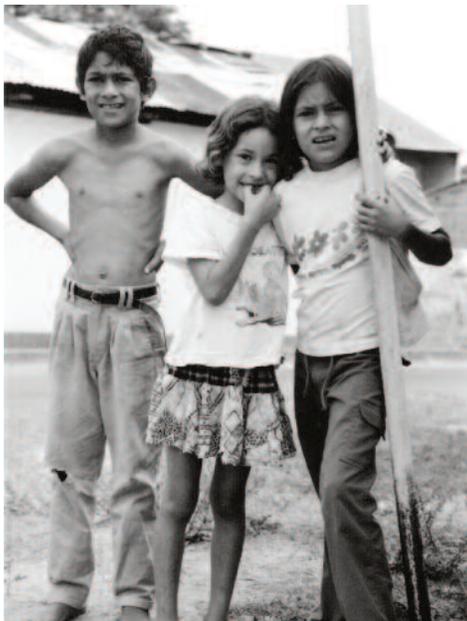
Volume 2 Issue 4

## U.S. Backed Military Kills Innocent Children in Oil Rich Province

Even before being brutally murdered by the Colombian military, the three young siblings, Yenni, Yimmy and Yefferson, had lived a hard life. They'd been displaced by Colombia's brutal war and sought refuge in rural Arauca province, near the Venezuelan border. Six months ago, their mother left them. From then on, 14-year-old Yenni took care of her little brothers, who were nine and six.

Until that terrible day, she regularly made breakfast, lunch and dinner for the whole family.

On October 14, their father, José Álvaro Torres, left early in the morning to find



*Innocent children in Colombia have once again been murdered by the U.S.-backed Colombian military.*

PHOTO CREDIT: JESS HUNTER-BOWMAN

work as a day laborer in the fields. His kids stayed at home, as they were on school vacation.

Hours later, soldiers from the Colombian military's 5th Mobile Brigade dragged these three defenseless children out of their house and took them into the woods where they raped Yenni before stabbing and killing all three.

Yenni, Yimmy and Yefferson's bodies were buried in a shallow grave just 300 yards from the local military base.

Their friends at school are still terrified that they will be next. Their teacher described them as in a state of "panic."

Parents indicate their kids are afraid to walk to school, as they may come across a soldier.

It should come as no surprise that for years the U.S. government poured millions of dollars in military aid into the 5th Mobile Bridge and at least one of the Colombian military officials fired in the wake of the killing was trained at the notorious School of the Americas. Lieutenant Colonel James Édison Pineda Parra took a cadet training course at the SOA in 1989.

"People in the United States desperately need to know about these killings because these units have received U.S.

military funding," said Fr. Alberto Franco, a Colombian priest and human rights advocate who has worked in Arauca.

"I feel anger, pain, indignation and a deep concern because this is not the first such killing," said Fr. Alberto.

On Dec. 13, 1998, 11 adults and 7 children were killed in Santo Domingo, Arauca when the U.S.-backed Colombian Air Force bombed their small village on market day.

And in the early morning hours of August 4, 2004, the U.S.-backed 18th Brigade broke into a house in Arauca and murdered three union leaders, Jorge Prieto Chamucero, Leonel Goyeneche and Héctor Alirio Martínez.

### U.S. Corporate Interest in Arauca

Since the mid 1980s, the fourth largest U.S. oil and gas company, Occidental Petroleum, has operated one of Colombia's most prolific and profitable oil fields in Arauca. The company has made billions off of its Caño Limon wells, but production was never what it could have been due to frequent attacks on the oil well and pipeline by the Colombian guerrillas.

Occidental looked to Washington for help.

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# Message From Sharon

Thinking about the three children brutally murdered in Colombia at the hands of military troops funded by our tax dollars and trained at the School of the Americas, I feel both grief and outrage. Unfortunately, it's not the only recent headline to produce those feelings. As this newsletter goes to print, for example, we are receiving reports that the president of an association of displaced people in northeastern Colombia was just found murdered in her home. Every day I hear about more violence in northern Mexico, in Honduras. Tragedies like these produce feelings of profound sadness and anger.

In the 1980's, as the U.S.-funded Contra War raged in Nicaragua, many concerned U.S. citizens had these same feelings. Their grief and anger inspired them to travel to the war zones to accompany Nicaraguans bearing the brunt of atrocious human rights violations and to document the "human face" of the Reagan Administration's military policy. Witness for Peace was at the forefront of exposing the brutal realities of those policies to the U.S. public through grassroots education and large-scale media outreach.

Today, U.S. military and police funding and training is still responsible for thousands of targeted, politically motivated murders across Latin America. Immigration policy within the United States is becoming increasingly militarized. And although WFP and our allies have cast sufficient doubt on the utility of the Mérida Initiative and Plan Colombia and have pressured Congress to reduce funding to Colombia and Mexico, these policies continue. Our partners on the ground in Colombia, Mexico and Honduras still call on us to work until our government's policies result in peace, justice and sustainable economies.

Over the years, Witness for Peace has answered our partners' calls to accompany those most affected by harmful U.S. policies and corporate practices. In response to these requests for solidarity, Witness for Peace established a model of merging on-the-ground documentation, assertive media strategies, a dynamic delegations program and stateside grassroots mobilization. Since 1983, more than 10,000 people have channeled their grief and anger into action by traveling to Latin America with Witness for Peace.

As our movement grows it becomes more and more important to complement our partners' work for justice in Latin America by communicating their realities to our communities and congress people in the United States. Thinking about what we can accomplish together gives me the energy to continue working for peace and justice.

As the new year approaches, we invite you to honor our Latin American partners' risks and sacrifices by renewing your own commitment to peace and justice in the Americas. Our future depends on it.

In solidarity,



Sharon Hostetler,  
Executive Director



## DELEGATIONS

### Colombia

January 14-24, 2011

**U.S. Military Assistance and Human Rights**

April 10-20, 2011

**Women Leaders for Peace and Justice**

March 12-21, 2011

**Internal Displacement and Human Rights**

May 31-June 10, 2011

**Appalachia & Colombia:  
The People Behind the Coal**

### Cuba

February 13-23, 2011

**Research Delegation for Professional Health Care Workers**

April 3-13, 2011

**Research Delegation for Professional Agricultural Workers**

June 5-15, 2011

**Research Delegation for Health Care and Education Professionals**

June 26-July 6, 2011

**Research Delegation for Professional Educators**

### Mexico

February 5-15, 2011

**Peaceful Ways: Stories of Sustainable Living in Oaxaca, Mexico**

March 19-26, 2011

**Following the Migration Trail from Oaxaca to the U.S.**

September 1-11, 2011

**Food, Farms and the Roots of Migration: Communities Cultivating Change**

### Nicaragua

January 12-21, 2011

**Another World is Possible: Sustainable Development and Fair Trade**

January 15-25, 2011

**Health Care and Human Rights**

July 13-27, 2011

**Inter-Cultural Teen Delegation**

For more information or to organize a custom delegation, please contact Ken Crowley at [ken@witnessforpeace.org](mailto:ken@witnessforpeace.org) or (202) 423-3402.

# PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

## Grassroots Action

**Witness for Peace New England** just completed a speaker tour focused on food sovereignty with Kiado Cruz, community organizer from Oaxaca, Mexico, and Nicole Marin, WFP international team member and Mr. Cruz's interpreter. The tour included 35 events in six states.

**Witness for Peace Northwest** in coordination with Saint Mark's Episcopal Cathedral recently completed a delegation witnessing the effects of U.S. economic policy in Nicaragua. The fall speaker tour, *Migrating Toward Justice: Stories to Transform People and Policy*, focused on exposing the roots of migration from Central America.

**Witness for Peace Southeast** sent a contingent of supporters to the School of the Americas Vigil in Georgia and is recruiting for the January 14-24th "U.S. Military Assistance and Human Rights" delegation to Colombia.

**Witness for Peace Southwest** is preparing for a February speaker tour featuring Blanca Cole, a Honduran women's rights activist who had to flee her home after the coup.

**Witness for Peace Mid-Atlantic** organized a speaker tour featuring Honduran Nectali Rodezno from the National Lawyers' Front against the Coup and interpreter Galen Cohee Baynes.

**Witness for Peace Upper Midwest** made connections in new communities in Minnesota and Wisconsin through a speaker tour featuring Padre Jesús Alberto Franco, a renowned leader in the Colombian human rights movement.

**To get in touch with your regional organizer or to learn more about upcoming events and delegations, please visit [witnessforpeace.org/grassroots](http://witnessforpeace.org/grassroots).**

## Trade and Immigration Update:

### Migrating Toward Justice Month of Action a Success

This October, Witness for Peace launched the first annual Migrating Toward Justice campaign for trade and immigration policy reform. Witness for Peace activists from coast to coast encouraged their communities to make the connection between free trade and forced migration. Participants held at least 70 different events in coordination with the campaign, including:

- movie nights fostering discussion about Witness for Peace's documentary *Roots of Migration*;
- speakers' tours featuring our Latin American allies in the New England and Pacific Northwest regions;
- calling for the demilitarization of the U.S./Mexican border through a demonstration at the White House;
- a webinar with Juan Manuel Sandoval of the Mexican Action Network on Free Trade.

Additionally, more than 600 Witness for Peace supporters called on their congressional representatives to support the TRADE Act, which would renegotiate both NAFTA and CAFTA. Witness for Peace also collected signatures for a petition calling on the Obama administration to put an end to policies that criminalize immigrants.

"The campaign demonstrates the hypocrisy of U.S. policy when it comes to trade and immigration," said Witness for Peace National Organizer Catalina Nieto. "Neoliberal trade policies pursued by the U.S. destroy livelihoods and force people to migrate. At the same time, U.S. immigration policy treats immigrants like criminals. The result is disastrous for many families."

## Honduras Update:

### Activists Catalyze Members of Congress to Stand up for Human Rights

This fall, the U.S. Department of State and de facto Honduran president Porfirio Lobo convened a working group to direct the implementation of the Mérida Initiative and the Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI). Both programs finance, equip and train police and military forces in the name of the "war on drugs." Since 2008, Congress has approved a total of \$258 million for Merida Initiative/CARSI funding for Central America, of which \$20 million have been designated for Honduras.

However, according to our partners in Honduras, politically motivated human rights violations are occurring with large-scale impunity. In many cases, Honduran authorities have summarily dismissed the attacks against political activists.

Despite the rise in human rights violations since the coup, the U.S. government continues to advocate for Honduras' reinstatement in the Organization of American States (OAS). Reentry to the OAS would lend legitimacy to a government engaged in massive human rights violations and allow for increased funding to the Honduran military and police forces.

Our Honduran partners have called on Witness for Peace to demand an end to all U.S. assistance to Honduras and prevent the country's reintegration to the OAS. In October, more than 500 Witness for Peace members took action, catalyzing 30 members of Congress to urge Washington to stop advocating for the reinstatement to the OAS until the human rights crisis is resolved.

Please consider joining a Witness for Peace delegation to Honduras in 2011 to document ongoing human rights violations, provide protective accompaniment and share our partners' firsthand testimonies in your community.

## Immigration Update:

### SOA Vigil Includes Protest at Georgia Detention Center

From November 19-21, Witness for Peace supporters from around the country participated in the annual SOA Watch vigil to close the School of the Americas/WHINSEC. The event was a testament to growing ties between people concerned with U.S. military funding in Latin America and immigrant rights activists focused on human rights abuse within the United States.

This year's demonstration at the Stewart Detention Center, just 30 miles from the School of the Americas, featured Witness for Peace National Grassroots Organizer Catalina Nieto. Hundreds of activists took a stand against unjust immigration policies at the for-profit detention center. The center currently houses more than 1,750 men, primarily immigrants from Latin America.

The Stewart Detention Center and its parent corporation, Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) have been the subject of scrutiny for failing to meet minimum living standards. Thanks to political connections and extensive lobbying, corporations like CCA have helped pass legislation like Arizona SB 1070. CCA now has close to 10,000 new beds under development in anticipation of increased demand across the country.



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*In the wake of the massacre in Arauca, the local school teacher indicated children were living in a state of "panic."*

PHOTO CREDIT: JESS HUNTER-BOWMAN

Between 1996 and 2000, Occidental spent \$9 million on lobbying and another \$1.5 million on campaign contributions, much of it focused on their concerns in Colombia. In 2000, when the U.S. Congress debated a billion dollar emergency military aid package for Colombia, Occidental's Vice President pleaded with policymakers to consider directing funding toward Occidental's area of operations to halt guerrilla attacks on their pipeline.

He got his wish just a few years later. Arauca became a focal point for U.S. counter-terrorism funding beginning in 2003, with hundreds of millions of dollars in aid and training flowing to the 5th Mobile Brigade and the 18th Brigade as part of Washington's "pipeline protection program."

For years, U.S. taxpayers have funded human rights abusers to ensure Occidental Petroleum's oil continued to flow.

Today those brigades continue killing innocent civilians and U.S. assistance continues to flow to the Colombian military.

## **Despite Murders, Continued Military Aid**

In the wake of Yenni, Yimmy and Yefferson's brutal murders, the newly elected Juan Manuel Santos Administration fired seven Colombian military officers—including two lieutenant colonels and a major. The Prosecutor General's office is investigating 60 Colombian soldiers' roles in the killings.

It remains to be seen whether the guilty soldiers will be successfully prosecuted and convicted, as the impunity rate in human rights cases is astronomical in Colombia. In the few cases in which justice has been served, victims' families often have to wait a decade before a judge finally reads a conviction.

After both the Santo Domingo and the trade unionist murders in Arauca, the military claimed that either guerrillas killed the victims or

that the victims themselves were guerrillas. It was years before an independent investigation was carried out and still more before the first convictions were handed down.

And, as is so often the case when the U.S.-backed Colombian military brutally murders innocent civilians, Washington remains silent. Once again, policymakers in our nation's capital are turning a blind eye when a prized Colombian military unit perpetrates horrendous acts against defenseless children.

Military aid to Colombia has not been suspended. Military training has not been halted.

With the support of people like you, Witness for Peace opposes continued military aid and training to human rights abusers. We take this stand because it is ethical, just and because it is the call of our Colombian partners.

"The United States should get back to the best of what it has to offer, respect for life and democracy," suggests Fr. Alberto Franco. "To do that you must demand that your government end support for a military that violates human rights."

"I think that would be the homage you could give to Yenni, Yimmy and Yefferson."



*Washington spent hundreds of millions protecting oil installations and pipelines in Colombia, effectively providing a security subsidy to Occidental Petroleum.*