SOLIDARIDAD
Witness for Peace
Transforming People — Transforming Policy
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Will Logan Get to Spend his Birthday with his Dad?

The only time four-year-old Logan got to play hide-and-seek with his dad this year was through a plexiglass window at the Stewart Detention Center in Lumpkin, Georgia, nine hours from his hometown.

There are any number of reasons a person might be detained in a for-profit center like Stewart, which primarily houses men from Latin America. Some detainees were seeking refuge in the United States, the victims of U.S.-sponsored military training and atrocities in Latin America. Others were farmers whose only economically viable option was to find work in the United States in order to provide for their families. Trade policies beneficial to American agribusiness have forced more than two million small scale farmers off their land in Mexico and are often at the root of this type of migration.

Despite the fact that Pedro Guzman Perez came to the United States 22 years ago as an eight-year-old child, is married to a U.S. citizen and has a U.S.-born son, 15 months ago he was handcuffed and carried off by ICE officials while his three-year-old watched. He's been locked up ever since.

It's been over a year since four-year-old Logan Guzman has been able to hug his father.

PHOTO CREDIT: EMILY GUZMAN

In Logan's dad's case, the issue was bureaucratic: in the legal process to become a permanent resident of the U.S. his mother became confused during an interview and was denied residency. Immigration authorities then sent Pedro Guzman Perez a notice to appear in court. Even though the same authorities had sent his work visa and other papers to the correct address, they sent the court notice to a wrong one. Not surprisingly, Pedro never showed up to court.

Despite the fact that Pedro came to the United States 22 years ago as an eight-year-old child, is married to a U.S. citizen and has a U.S.-born son, he was handcuffed and carried off by ICE officials while his three-year-old watched. He has been held in detention for the past 15 months.

Until his detention, Pedro was an immigrant success story. After surviving a difficult childhood in California, he moved away to start a new life in Minnesota. "It was there that I met my American wife," Pedro wrote to the judge overseeing his case. "We inspired and challenged each other and found the meaning of life and family. In 2006 our son, Logan Guzman, was born and he further improved our lives and gave us a higher purpose. Our purpose was to give him a better, more stable, and loving environment than we were provided and help him to make a positive impact on our community. In the past 10 years, I have worked hard to provide for my family and…be a loving and caring father."

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Message From Sharon

Listening to the story of Pedro Guzman's detention and the separation of his family, I'm struck by the links between U.S. military policy and U.S. immigration policy. The border is becoming more and more like a war zone. Ironically, many of the people who came over that border were fleeing the fallout from U.S. military and economic policies in their own countries.

For years, U.S. training and financial support for Latin American militaries convicted of egregious human rights abuses has terrorized communities and caused thousands of murders. In the name of national security and to fight the war on drugs, Washington joined forces with violent armed forces from Mexico to Colombia. And for just as long, people have come to the United States seeking refuge. Many immigrants, like Pedro, have been in the United States for decades. They've paid taxes, served in PTAs and coached Little League games. But in the United States, many people from Latin America experience the other side of the coin: punitive policies that criminalize immigrants and separate even more families.

Our immigration system is broken. Immigration policy reform will enable people like Pedro and his mother to fulfill their commitments to their families and communities. Immigrants are stuck in a Catch 22 that reminds me of a Nicaraguan saying: "If you stop I'll shoot you. If you run I'll kill you."

In 2010, the media airwaves were filled with reports about both violence in Mexico and the number of Mexicans fleeing the violence and taking their chances traveling to the United States. With your help, Witness for Peace helps people understand that U.S. policy is often at the root of migration – and gives them the tools they need to advocate for more peaceful policies on both sides of the border.

In 2011, we'll bring hundreds of delegates to Latin America to speak with the people most affected by U.S. military policy – in Mexico, Honduras, Colombia, and beyond. We'll demand that Washington pursue humane immigration policies and cut military funding through programs like Plan Colombia, the Merida Initiative and the Central American Regional Security Initiative. And we'll draw on our grassroots base – you and our 20,000 most dedicated supporters – to block the Colombian Free Trade Agreement and push for the passage of the TRADE Act, which would renegotiate existing free trade agreements.

We've got our work cut out for us in 2011. But with your commitment, dedication and support we'll contest immigration and foreign policy trends. Thank you for standing with us and our Latin American partners at this critical time.

In solidarity,

Sharon Hostetler
Executive Director

DELEGATIONS

Colombia

April 10-20, 2011
Female Leaders for Justice and Peace

June 19-29, 2011
Human Rights & Indigenous Movements

July 5-15, 2011
Meet Colombian Communities Resisting Repression

May 31-June 10, 2011
Appalachia & Colombia: The People Behind the Coal

August 13-23, 2011
U.S. Role in Colombian Militarism and the Effects of a Free Trade Agreement on the Colombian Marginalized

Cuba

June 5-15, 2011
Research Delegation for Professional Health Care Workers & Health Educators

June 16-26, 2011
Research Delegation for Professional Educators

Mexico

March 19-26, 2011
Following the Migration Trail from Oaxaca to the U.S.

June 18-28, 2011
Looking at the Roots of Migration

September 1-11, 2011
Food, Farms and the Roots of Migration: Communities Cultivating Change

Dates TBA
Peaceful Ways: Stories of Sustainable Living in Oaxaca, Mexico

Nicaragua

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*** *or* ***(202) 423-3402****.*

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Grassroots Action

Witness for Peace Northeast is reaching out to returned delegates to build local action groups and is recruiting for the regional board of directors.

Witness for Peace Northwest is planning a March delegation to Colombia with Seattle University law students. The region will also host Remember Me: Voices of the Silenced, a traveling art exhibit exposing the human cost of the conflict in Colombia, throughout spring 2011.

Witness for Peace Southeast is preparing for the annual Pilgrimage for Peace and Justice during Holy Week in April. The event will include vigils and demonstrations at immigrant detention centers across North Carolina.

Witness for Peace Southwest is organizing a spring break delegation to Oaxaca in March and a delegation to Cuba in May. In April, the region will host one of our Colombian partners for a speaker's tour.

Witness for Peace Upper Midwest is excited to be in the final stages of hiring a new Regional Organizer, with some outstanding candidates. The Board of Directors will hold a strategic planning session in early February.

To get in touch with your regional organizer or to learn more about upcoming events and delegations, please visit witnessforpeace.org/grassroots.

Witness for Peace Campaign Guide:

The 2011 Forecast

November's elections mean that in 2011 we will have to keep a more watchful eye on Congress. It's more important than ever to continue building a strong movement for peace, dignity and justice in the Americas. We need your help to educate and organize for policies that benefit the majority, not just a few. Here's a preview of what we stand to gain this year:

Trade Policy: During the early months of 2011, it is likely that the Colombia Free Trade Agreement will come up for a congressional vote. While the proposed NAFTA-style agreement between the U.S. and Colombia was signed by both governments in 2006, it has not yet been ratified by the U.S. Congress due to wide-scale grassroots opposition. This year Witness for Peace will stay on the frontlines of the opposition to the agreement. Meanwhile, the TRADE Act, the bill that would renegotiate NAFTA and CAFTA to prioritize human rights, is expected to be reintroduced in Congress. In both cases, we'll need your support to make sure that this year we usher in a more just era of U.S. trade policy.

Immigration Policy: Federal immigration reform is off the table for 2011, which means that the struggle for immigrant rights will largely play out at the state and local levels. In the name of national security, enforcement-only policies and border militarization are at the core of current immigration policy. It's up to us to denounce hate against migrants, resist policies that encourage racial profiling, and make the connection between migration and U.S. foreign policy.

War on Drugs: The U.S. government continues to pursue a military solution to drug production and trafficking through Latin America. Although drug violence is on the rise years into the War on Drugs, we will likely see an effort to expand military aid via the Merida Initiative in Mexico and CARSI in Central America, as well as a continuation of fumigations to eradicate drugs in Colombia. This year Witness for Peace demands an end to military aid for human rights abusers. Instead, the U.S. should be devoting funds to poverty reduction and community development.

National Days of Action for Colombia:

April 8th - 11th, 2011

Be a voice for peace and justice in Colombia! This April thousands of people will participate in educational public events, show solidarity with Colombian communities facing violence and displacement, and advocate for U.S. policies that don't exacerbate Colombia's crisis.

With nearly 5 million people displaced, Colombia has the world's second worst internal displacement crisis. Meanwhile, Washington continues to send hundreds of millions more dollars in military aid than in humanitarian aid to Colombia, helping the victimizers more than the victims. And to add salt to the wound, the U.S. government is pushing a dangerous NAFTA-style free trade agreement with Colombia this congressional season.

For the past five years Witness for Peace has led a coalition effort called the National Days of Action for Colombia. Last year was the most successful yet: tens of thousands of people held public actions that told the stories of Colombians forced from their homes, created displacement-focused worship services and lobbied both Congress and the Obama administration through meetings, calls and letters.

There are many ways to support human rights in Colombia during the April National Days of Action for Colombia. For information on how to get involved, please visit our website or contact Catalina Nieto at **catalina@witnessforpeace.org**.

Urabá Peace Communities:

Delegates Stand with the Displaced

This holiday season, the members of Witness for Peace's Colombia-based International Team provided protective accompaniment to people under threat in Urabá, northern Colombia. Since 1997, thousands of Afro-Colombians, indigenous people and farmers from this region have been killed by the U.S.-backed Colombian armed forces and other armed actors. Thousands more had to flee for their own safety. Many of these displaced families are now working to return to their homes and land, which in their absence have been largely taken over by palm oil corporations, large scale cattle ranches and hydroelectric projects.

Witness for Peace delegations began visiting Urabá after communities began establishing humanitarian zones in attempt to isolate their farms and families from armed actors. In May 2010, the Colombian Constitutional Court ordered the Colombian Government to restore the usurped lands to their rightful owners. But community leaders began to receive death threats from business owners with alleged paramilitary connections long before any land was returned. One community leader told Witness for Peace, ¨We want our land back, but we don't want our land back only to be murdered the next day."

In the coming months, Witness for Peace delegates to Colombia will continue visiting Urabá and call for the complete suspension of military assistance to the armed forces that have devastated so many communities.

(Continued from front page)

But for now, Pedro is stuck in immigration purgatory. And life in a detention center can be even harsher than federal lock-up. With 1,752 beds, Stewart Detention Center is run by Corrections Corporation of America (CCA). The CCA clearly prioritizes profit margin over maintaining minimum standards for health care. As a result, thousands of detainees across the country are left suffering in prison cells without access to the medical attention they need. Within the center, Pedro's fellow prisoners have resorted to hunger strikes to call for better conditions, In March 2009, Stewart detainee Roberto Martinez Medina died of a simple infection.

"You show me a for-profit prison and I'll show you a human rights violation," said one former commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service at a 2009 panel on immigration detention.

CCA's executive team wasn't always swimming in money. In 1999, independent auditors expressed doubt that CCA could even stay in business after the corporation suffered a net loss of $72 million, primarily due to beds left empty in their detention centers.

Then CCA began to lobby for harsher immigration policies. Over a 15 month period, CCA spent $4.4 million lobbying the Immigrant and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the Department of Homeland Security, both houses of congress and other government bodies.

Logan plays with his father Pedro during happier times.

PHOTO CREDIT: EMILY GUZMAN

Witness for Peace and other immigrant rights advocates have organized vigils outside for-profit detention centers like Stewart across the country.

PHOTO CREDIT: DIALOGUEMAKERS.ORG

"You show me a for-profit prison and I'll show you a human rights violation," said one former commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service at a 2009 panel on immigration detention.

Five of CCA's most lucrative contracts with ICE have no end date. And as a result, ICE is devoting less funding to immigration policies that meet basic human rights standards.

Meanwhile, CCA owners who refer to detained immigrants as "product," are set up to reap huge profits.

In addition to lobbying funding towards enforcement-only policies that criminalize immigrants, CCA pushes for immigration policies that get more undocumented residents locked up. In fact, a special investigation by National Public Radio uncovered CCA's role not only in lobbying for the anti-immigrant Arizona law SB1070, but also in drafting it. CCA already has six detention centers in Arizona. For CCA, laws like SB 1070 mean big bucks.

"We've never seen the wind at our back like it is today," CCA's President and Chief Executive Officer, John D. Ferguson said after discussing $1.3 billion in revenue during a conference call with investors. The federal government is spending $60.50 per inmate per day at the detention center.

And that's too bad for kids like Logan, who just missed a second Christmas with his dad this year.

"Since Pedro has been gone, Logan has asked about him everyday," says Pedro's wife Emily. "Each week he invents a new way to save his father and bring him home. One week he will be Spiderman and the next week he will be Batman. "

But for now, every day Pedro languishes at the Stewart Detention Center, his family is further torn apart and CCA's profit margin grows.