

SOLIDARIDAD

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

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A Father's Dream Derailed: U.S. Policy Pushes Thousands to Risk Riding Mexico's Trains



PHOTO CREDIT: MICHELLE FRANKFURTER, FORMER MEMBER OF THE WITNESS FOR PEACE INTERNATIONAL TEAM.

They call it “*La Bestia*”—the beast. To some migrants, the train that winds its way north through Mexico represents the path to survival. To others, it represents death. In José Luis’ case, it’s what left him an amputee as he tries to return to his young daughter in the United States.

“When I was climbing aboard the train, my foot slipped and was crushed under the wheel,” says José Luis.

For the last few months, José Luis (not his real name) has been on one of the most dangerous journeys in the world —

the migrant trail through Mexico to the United States. He has not seen his daughter or his wife since August 2010, when U.S. immigration officials detained, imprisoned, and ultimately deported him to El Salvador.

José Luis first left El Salvador in 2004 out of economic necessity. Ironically, his need to migrate was rooted in U.S. economic policies.

In El Salvador, neoliberal policies led to lower incomes, higher food prices, job displacement and increased inequality.

“I have suffered. I had an accident and lost my foot. But I continue to hope to return and be with my daughter,” says José Luis.

Given the lack of opportunities available in El Salvador, it’s not surprising that José Luis tried to reach the U.S. by any means possible, even risking death. In

fact, he attempted the journey three times before he was ultimately successful. Once he traveled across Mexico in a cargo truck with 90 other migrants.

“It’s so uncomfortable. You can hardly move, there’s not a lot of air, and you can’t go to the bathroom or make noise so that they won’t detect you,” he said.

Ultimately, José Luis settled in Maryland, where he worked as a cook for five years. While in the United States he married and had a daughter. But life wasn’t easy. “You suffer...because it is not the same as being in your own country,” he said. “Once you get to the U.S., all you do is work all the time.”

José Luis was deported at the end of last year and has been attempting to return to his family ever since. However, the journey is now significantly more perilous.

Since José Luis first left El Salvador for the U.S., both countries became signatories of the Dominican Republic-Central America Free Trade Agreement (DR-CAFTA), which pits small businesses and farmers against U.S.-subsidized industries. Although the trade agreement promised to increase employment and decrease poverty, it has done the opposite. In fact, today almost 50% of the Salvadorian population lives in poverty and migration is at an all-time high.

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Message From Sharon

Every now and again, you come across a story that renews your faith in the good of people. In this movement, these are often stories that affirm the ability of people to achieve progress for social justice.

Such is the story of the Arboleda brothers. These two young men arrived in the United States in 2004, seeking respite from the violence in Colombia. Both are star students. Mauro recently graduated from the University of Houston with a Bachelors of Business Administration, focusing on global energy management. Because of his first-rate academic performance in high school, Marlon was inducted to the U.S. President's List upon graduation. He is now an honors student and a rising junior in the mechanical engineering program at the University of Houston. The brothers regularly tutor local high school students in math, physics, and Spanish.

By all accounts, Mauro and Marlon are valuable members of their community and have great potential for the future.

However, in 2007 Mauro and Marlon were denied an asylum petition. And this summer, as the young men helped plan a church leadership development retreat, ICE officials began circling the brothers' apartment. One morning, as Mauro was driving to tutor a student, he was arrested and detained, despite having a valid driver's license.

Following his brother's detention, Marlon was afraid to leave the house for fear that he would also be arrested. However, he was able to mobilize a vast network of immigrant rights activists – including Witness for Peace members like you. More than 8500 people contacted ICE officials to ask for Mauro's release.

Their calls were answered! Within days, Mauro was allowed to return home to his family. Since then both brothers have received deferred action on their deportation orders.

But without definitive legal status in the country, the Arboleda brothers could face future risks.

We must keep up the pressure on ICE. But it's going to take more than responding to this specific case to make sure that the Arboleda brothers' experience isn't repeated with thousands of other students.

That's why Witness for Peace is focused not only on responding to these crisis situations but also on lobbying for humane immigration policies in the U.S. And as always, our priority is to attack the root causes of migration and discrimination against immigrants through public education and concerted media work.

Thank you for taking part in this inspiring and important work!

In solidarity,



Sharon Hostetler
Executive Director



DELEGATIONS

Colombia

November 5-15, 2011

**Labor Rights and Human Rights:
the Colombian Reality and
the Colombian Possibility**

Cuba

November 20-30, 2011

**Contemporary Developments
in Cuban Law**

November 26-December 6, 2011

**Sustainable Agriculture:
People to People Exchange**

December 10-20, 2011

**Building Peace with Cuba:
People to People Exchange**



Honduras

September 10-18, 2011

Human Rights Monitoring Delegation

October 14-24, 2011

Human Rights Two Years After the Coup

Mexico

September 21-October 1, 2011

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

For more information or inquiries regarding custom delegations please contact Ken Crowley at ken@witnessforpeace.org or (202) 423-3402.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Grassroots Action

Witness for Peace Mid-Atlantic is planning a Speaker Tour from November 1-16th. A Nicaraguan speaker will address the root causes of migration, making the connection between free trade policies and the increase in migration.

Witness for Peace New England will host Nicaraguan environmentalist Julio Sanchez for a Speaker Tour from October 8-29th. Sanchez will share experiences in working for environmental sustainability while discussing climate change and its impact on Nicaragua's development.

Witness for Peace Northwest is excited to sponsor a Food, Farms, and the Roots of Migration delegation to Mexico in September. They are also gearing up for a fall Speaker Tour focused on sustainable development in Mexico.

Witness for Peace Southeast will hold an organizer's retreat from October 7-9th at Camp New Hope near Chapel Hill. Colombian activist John Henry will tour Virginia, North Carolina and Kentucky from October 2-26th to speak to the impact of the War on Drugs on Colombia.

Witness for Peace Southwest is coordinating a human rights monitoring delegation to Honduras, a roots of migration and Día de los Muertos delegation to Mexico, and a People to People delegation to Cuba. In October, event hosts are needed for a speaker tour with Jani Silva of Colombia. All are invited to join Jani and other activists at the regional retreat in Ojai, California during early October.

Witness for Peace Upper Midwest is preparing for an October Speaker Tour with Nancy Garcia entitled "Railroaded by NAFTA/CAFTA: the Perilous Journey from Central America to the States." The region will partner with Woodwalk Gallery in Door County, WI for a September 5th fundraiser and host a regional retreat in the Twin Cities on October 2nd.

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

Victory for Immigrant Rights: Pedro is Home!

When Pedro Guzman was detained by ICE because he failed to appear in immigration court (officials had sent the notice to the wrong address), his family had no idea what a rocky journey awaited them. Physical separation, immense legal fees and psychological trauma became painful realities of the family's struggle with the U.S. immigration system.

For almost two years, Pedro's wife Emily mobilized family, friends, and immigrant rights supporters from coast to coast to help bring her husband home for the sake of their young son Logan. Hundreds of people responded to Witness for Peace's call to support Emily's efforts.

Now, finally, justice has been served. At his final court date, just three days before Pedro's 31st birthday and 8th wedding anniversary, he was granted permanent deportation relief and allowed to return home to his family.

"We suffered a lot but we survived and now we are just healing," says Pedro. Four-year-old Logan says that having his father home feels "like a dream."

Emily adds, "Our thoughts are still with those who continue to fight and who are detained. We will continue the battle for all of the other men and women who are suffering injustice!"

With inspiration from the Guzman family and the Witness for Peace grassroots base, we continue to push for comprehensive immigration reform and detention relief.

Witness for Peace Expands Cuba Delegation Program

Witness for Peace is delighted to announce that we have been granted a People to People license for an expanded delegations program to Cuba. Now anyone can apply to travel to Cuba with WFP.

For the past three years, Witness for Peace has organized professional research-based delegations to Cuba. Delegations have catered to

educators, lawyers, health care professionals, and other key groups. Now, anyone can benefit from the unique opportunity to visit our island neighbor and learn more about changing U.S./Cuban relations.

Witness for Peace has expanded the list of upcoming delegations to include additional themes as well as delegations that provide a general overview of how U.S. policy impacts people in Cuba.

For more information about Cuba travel opportunities or organizing a delegation, please contact Ken Crowley at ken@witnessforpeace.org or 202-423-3402.

Opposition to the Colombia Free Trade Agreement Delays Vote

As big business lobbyists pushed for the free trade agreement with Colombia to come up for a vote before the summer recess, Witness for Peace's grassroots mobilization in opposition to the FTA has reached an all-time high. The vote has been postponed.

Since the FTA was signed, Witness for Peace has organized 24 delegations to Colombia to study the potential consequences of the agreement. Some 320 delegates have interviewed union organizers, teachers, and environmental activists about their concerns with the proposed FTA.

With strategically placed opinion editorials and letters to the editor, Witness for Peace has reached more than 3 million people across the country with these messages about the true costs of the FTA.

In July, Witness for Peace and our allies coordinated a powerful free trade protest in front of the White House. A coalition of faith, labor, human rights and consumer organizations displayed 51 coffins, symbolizing the Colombian union leaders murdered in 2010 alone. The event was held in conjunction with a National Call-In Day, during which constituents asked their congressional representatives to drop the free trade push.

To date, Witness for Peace has mobilized more than 1300 supporters to voice FTA opposition to their representatives. Stay tuned for ways to get involved this fall.

For full program updates and travel schedule details, visit www.witnessforpeace.org.



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As the stream of migrants swells, everyone from drug cartels to immigration authorities and local police have targeted Central American migrants like José Luis as they cross Mexico on their way to the U.S. During a six-month period in 2010, the Mexican National Human Rights Commission documented 11,333 cases of migrant kidnappings. Extortion, theft, rape, and dismemberment are all daily risks.

Fortunately for José Luis, his train accident took place within sight of a migrant shelter. He was rushed to a local hospital and later transferred to a facility in Oaxaca where his foot was amputated.

Since then, José Luis has been under the care of the Center for the Orientation of Migrants (COMI). COMI runs a temporary shelter that provides lodging, food, and medical assistance to migrants. COMI staff also provide information about migrant rights, advise the families of migrants who have gone missing or been detained in the U.S., and lead workshops in local communities about the realities and dangers of migration.

At COMI, managing the day-to-day tasks of the organization and the shelter is tantamount to human rights activism. “I consider myself a human rights defender,” says administrator



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Nancy Garcia. “I get angry when I hear that an official violates the human rights of migrants, but I know I can help migrants so that this won’t happen again.”

In her work Nancy is continuously confronted with the horrors that migrants face in their journey north. However, she remains optimistic. In fact, Nancy believes that “one becomes more human by seeing their pain.”

And in Nancy’s eyes, it’s not just people in Oaxaca and El Salvador who must understand the risks, root causes and realities of migration. Because U.S. policy continues to both increase the flow of migration and criminalize immigrants, changing these policies is an important part of the puzzle.

For years, Witness for Peace has educated tens of thousands of U.S. citizens about the root causes of migration, exposing the connection between free trade policies and increased immigration as well as putting a human face on issues often clouded by overwhelming statistics or dehumanizing metaphors.

Through delegations that provide the opportunity to see firsthand the effects of U.S. policy on Mexico as well as documentary work, media outreach, and grassroots organizing, Witness for Peace spurs U.S. citizens to oppose detrimental trade agreements, push for policies that reduce poverty, and demand just immigration policy.

This fall, Witness for Peace will broaden its impact when Nancy travels to the United States as part of the Witness for



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Peace Upper Midwest Region's Speaker Tour entitled, “Railroaded by NAFTA/CAFTA: the Perilous Journey from Central America to the States.”

Through speaker tours like Nancy’s, Witness for Peace equips thousands of people in the U.S. to organize in their communities and on a national level for just trade and immigration policies. Nancy’s events will be an opportunity for U.S. audiences to gain a deeper understanding of the roots of migration, as well as to dialogue with a community leader on the front lines of human rights defense in Mexico.

“Nancy inspires people with her relentless drive to defend the dignity and human rights of migrants,” says Moravia de la O, member of Witness for Peace’s Mexico-based International Team.

Meanwhile, José Luis intends to continue his journey north, despite his new handicap. By addressing the policies at root of the decision to take such a tremendous risk, Witness for Peace strives to prevent other fathers from facing the same predicament.