

# SOLIDARIDAD

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

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## Charter Cities: In Honduras Free Trade and Privatization Move Forward at the Cost of the Most Marginalized

As Witness for Peace prepares to open an office in Honduras in early 2016, we observe the latest exclusionary and aggressive policy: Charter Cities, an attempt to lure foreign and domestic business. It's a policy that reminds us of the ever-present role of the U.S. in Honduras.

Those who promote Charter Cities—conceived of by U.S. neoliberal economist Paul Romer (considered a “shoo-in” for the Nobel Prize by some of his peers)—allege that they will promote development and reduce poverty. Romer himself laid out the three components of the Charter Cities during his 2009 TED talk [www.ted.com/talks/paul\\_romer](http://www.ted.com/talks/paul_romer): 1) creating a Charter with “good rules;” 2) establishing the Charter City in uninhabited land; and 3) creating choices for leaders that allow for partnerships with other countries.

What could be wrong with this picture, you ask?



Charter City: The Expulsion of the Garifuna [Afro-Indigenous] People from Honduras

For one, the law legalizing Charter Cities took Romer's idea one step further by saying that these cities could be established in uninhabited or inhabited land. That difference is crucial for the nine Indigenous communities in Honduras who collectively hold land and who will potentially see these lands privatized and handed over to investors. Facing the loss of their territorial and cultural rights, affected Indigenous communities are actively recuperating land grabbed from them.

The process of passing the Charter City law was also problematic, and can only be an indicator of how the development of these cities will move forward. The four Supreme Court judges who declared Charter Cities unconstitutional in 2012 were fired and replaced for challenging this law, and even called traitors by then-Honduran president Porfirio Lobo. The law enables the creation of Special Employment and Development Zones (ZEDEs, the Spanish acronym most commonly used to refer to Charter Cities); areas that will have



The Dispossession of the Garifuna People's Lands and Territory is Racism  
PHOTO CREDIT: CONEXIHON/OFRANEH

their own police, education and judicial systems, and possibly even their own laws. So, these judges had rightfully raised concerns about the loss of sovereignty Honduras would experience with these exclusive cities.

Charter Cities violate not only domestic laws, but also international legal principles such as United Nations Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, by infringing on Indigenous peoples' rights to prior consultation, communally held land, and self-determination.

WfP will be visiting a community impacted by a Charter Cities project on our Feb. 12th-22nd delegation to Honduras (see the delegation schedule on pg. 3 for more information). We will continue to monitor this disturbing phenomenon, and other harmful trends that affect or would affect our partners in Latin America and the Caribbean.

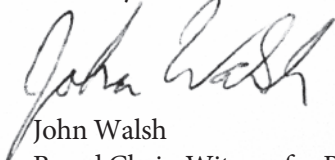
PHOTO CREDIT: G. TRUCCHI

# Message from Executive Director

Thank you, friends, for your support of this, our collective project to help build peace, justice, and sustainable economies in the Americas. In 2014, with your help, WfP weathered serious financial and structural challenges, and regaining stability came at the cost of having a much smaller staff. Now we embark on a phase of thoughtfully rebuilding WfP's capacity. We aim by early next year to have at least two international team members at each program site, which requires expanding the team by at least three people. We need to improve the ability of the national office to support the international team, to coordinate grassroots work on issues, and to maintain the organization's financial health. Our website and communications systems should work better. National platforms need to support regional work more effectively.

Witness for Peace is moving forward with new energy and sense of purpose. Please make the journey with us.

Sincerely,



John Walsh  
Board Chair, Witness for Peace



## DELEGATIONS

### Colombia

**Meet Colombian Communities Resisting Repression**  
July 20 through July 30, 2016  
*Delegation Coordinator*  
Patrick Bonner, 323-563-7940  
pkbonner@earthlink.net

### Cuba

**Education, Arts, and Culture**  
January 10, 2016 through January 20, 2016  
*Delegation Coordinator*  
Dixie Olmstead, 651-271-6558  
dixie\_olmstead@yahoo.com

**Explore Art, Culture and the Environment**  
February 05, 2016 through February 15, 2016  
*Delegation Coordinator*  
Diane Stradling, (603) 431-2525  
dianestrading@gmail.com

**Women, Health, and Wellness**  
February 28, 2016 through March 09, 2016  
*Delegation Coordinator*  
Julie Schwalbach, 651-230-1113  
schwalbs@comcast.net

### Arts and Culture - A Journey Through The Spirit of Cuba

May 20, 2016 through May 30, 2016  
*Delegation Coordinators*  
Alex Pamiloza, 973-580-7814  
cubanhorizons@gmail.com  
Melina Macall, 856-313-1996  
cubanhorizons@gmail.com

### Honduras

**Women Leading the Way to Justice and Peace**  
February 12, 2016 through February 22, 2016  
*Delegation Coordinator*  
Lyn Clark Pegg, 218-348-3048  
carolynpegg@yahoo.com

### Mexico

**The Militarization of Police and Criminalization of Social Movements**  
January 08, 2016 through January 18, 2016  
*Delegation Coordinator*  
Elise Roberts, 920-421-2269  
wfpumw@witnessforpeace.org

### Nicaragua

**Fair Trade Teen Delegation**  
July 16 through July 30, 2016  
*Delegation Coordinator*  
Ron García-Fogarty, 919-856-9468  
ron@wfpse.org



# PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

## Grassroots Action

**Witness for Peace Midwest** recently finished a powerful speaking tour with Alfredo Lopez entitled "Afro-Indigenous Hondurans in Resistance: the US Drug War, Violent Displacement, and Migration". We recently led a delegation to Colombia, including Rep. Keith Ellison and other Minnesotan leaders. WFP-Midwest is recruiting for delegations to Mexico, Honduras, and Cuba, and planning for our annual celebration and fundraiser in Dec. Contact Elise at [wfpumw@witnessforpeace.org](mailto:wfpumw@witnessforpeace.org) to learn more and get involved!

**Witness for Peace Northeast** recently concluded a speaker's tour with Ariel Dacal Diaz, international expert on popular education, based in Havana. The tour began on Oct. 13, and spanned 3 weeks, covering 5 New England states. The region also has 2 delegations to Cuba in Jan. and Feb., posted at [www.witnessforpeace.org/delegations](http://www.witnessforpeace.org/delegations).

**Witness for Peace Southeast** This past summer two delegations witnessed the impacts of free trade: our annual teen delegation to Nicaragua introduced youth from NC to global activism and fair trade; and a delegation led by Gail Phares and John Walsh to Colombia stood in solidarity with community activists. In Sept., we had our annual Rice and Beans dinner, with report-backs from the countries visited, interactive theater, fellowship, music, poetry, and food. Nov. 1-22, we're touring 5 states (NC, SC, FL, AL, & GA) for our fall Speaker's Tour: Nadin Reyes is with us raising awareness about the plight of disappeared people in Mexico. The tour ends at the SOA Vigil in Columbus, GA. For more info: [www.wfpse.org/speakers-tour](http://www.wfpse.org/speakers-tour). Ron is recruiting for the 25th Annual Nicaragua Fair Trade Teen Delegation: Jul. 17-31, 2016. Next year will also be the 30th anniversary of the Pilgrimage for Justice and Peace, Mar. 20-26, with daily walks across NC, highlighting local and international justice issues.

**Witness for Peace Southwest** has a new regional organizer, Jeanette Charles, after years of Tanya Hartley's service. Jeanette Charles is from Los Angeles, and a daughter of the Haitian diaspora. Jeanette has organized across Latin America and the Caribbean with African and Indigenous peoples struggling to build autonomy, guarantee self-determination and against U.S. intervention. She is also an experienced grassroots educator, translator and journalist. Tanya will continue to serve on the SW regional board. The region organized "Dump Trump" and Ayotzinapa solidarity actions in Sept. and Oct. Upcoming: Venezuela spring speaker's tour (Mar./Apr.) linked to summer delegations to Venezuela and Cuba. Delegation calendar TBA. Contact WFPSW via Jeanette at [jcharles.wfpsw@gmail.com](mailto:jcharles.wfpsw@gmail.com).

**Check out our website and Facebook page for further updates. 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).**

## "NAFTA-On-Steroids" TPP Proponents Push, WFP and Many Others Keep Pushing Back

Tremendous grassroots pressure from advocates of trade justice like you made the votes in the House and Senate very close, but unfortunately, "Fast Track" authority for the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) passed earlier this year. However, the TPP—which would bolster corporate rights to even more dangerous new levels and further force migration from places like the Mexican countryside—still faces votes in Congress. And with lawmakers and other politicians from both sides of the aisle (including several of the most prominent presidential candidates) voicing opposition, there is ample momentum to defeat this monstrous "free trade" agreement. And now that the TPP text has finally been released, after years of secrecy, people are speaking out more forcefully than ever, now that they see how big of a gift to corporations and threat to the majority the agreement would be. Votes in Congress could happen early in the new year: stay with WFP for more updates and opportunities for action!

## One-Year Anniversary of Ayotzinapa Disappearances

Sept. 26 marked one year since the disappearances of 43 young, mostly Indigenous students from the Ayotzinapa Teacher's School

in Guerrero, Mexico. There were actions all over the U.S., Mexico, the Western Hemisphere, and indeed the world, to protest the continuing lack of resolution of these and tens of thousands of other forced disappearances in Mexico during its nearly decade-long, U.S.-backed "war on drugs." WFP continues to call for the end of the Merida Initiative and other U.S. military and economic policies that have contributed to the tragic set of circumstances Mexico is living.

## WFP Delegates Last Group to Visit (Former) U.S. Interests Section in Havana

With the opening of the U.S. Embassy in Havana, following the opening of the Cuban Embassy in Washington, DC, young people on delegation with WFP in Cuba became the last group to meet with the now former U.S. Interests Section in Havana. Though the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Cuba is an important step forward, WFP will continue to advocate for the end of the unilateral embargo of the island, and all other U.S. policies that unjustly continue the Cold War in the Caribbean.

For full program updates and travel schedule details, visit [www.witnessforpeace.org](http://www.witnessforpeace.org).



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# All Eyes on Havana: The Colombian Peace Negotiations at the Top, and the View of Them from the Ground

There was an energetic buzz around the room as people chatted excitedly with friends, keeping their eyes on the news projected on the wall. They balance on tiptoes near the door, trying to get a glimpse of the screen and listening intently to the speaker. September 23 was an exciting day in Bogotá, Colombia, as everyone waited for the historic announcement from Havana, where the peace talks between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) have been developing for three years.

Throughout its 51-year conflict, Colombia has become the second country in the world most affected by landmines. Six million people have been internally displaced, making Colombia second only to Syria in that regard. The country has been plagued with kidnappings, sexual violence, and forced disappearances. The populations that have been most gravely affected by the war are minority groups, mainly Afro-Colombians, Indigenous people, and small-scale farmers.

Colombia has a lot at stake; everyone watching the news that day was acutely aware of this. A silence fell over the crowd as the leaders came onto the

screen, announced that they had reached an agreement on the issue of justice for victims, and that they plan to sign peace accords by March 23, 2016, thereby ending one of the longest civil wars the world has ever seen. The people cheered, camera bulbs flashed, and soon an image of Cuban President Raúl Castro grasping the handshake between Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos and FARC leader Rodrigo Londoño Echeverri (popularly known as Timochenko) would circulate the world, a symbol of the long-sought peace between Colombia's government and its largest guerrilla army.

The following weeks in Colombia were a time for the dust to settle and the echoes of cheers to fade away. The excitement died down and people began to voice their critiques of the peace process, wondering if they would ever truly see peace in Colombia, or if peace was merely a contract signed on a piece of paper. Many Colombians maintain that the conflict in their regions has less to do with the guerrillas, and more to do with state violence, attacks by neo-paramilitary groups, and growing multinational investment. They maintain that signing an agreement with the FARC will do little to fix the unrest that they face every day.

“Today in Havana, they're talking about peace. But we have been talking about peace for ages,” said River Armando Ortiz, a community member from the Peace Territory of Lerma, Cauca. “Peace is not just the absence of gunshots.”

River claims that instead, peace entails social justice and building dignified lives. Many within Colombian civil society fear that the peace accords will pave the way for more multinational investment that will displace them from their

land. They do not see these fundamental elements of peace reflected in the peace talks between the government and the FARC. Miguel Fernández, the coordinator for human rights and peace issues with the Committee for Macizo Integration (CIMA) stated that, “The problem in Colombia is economic and social. If the Colombian state does not invest in this, it will be very difficult to balance out the issue of human rights. If the government simply eases the weight of the guerrillas, but not the weight of multinational corporations, we will have to keep struggling for our sovereignty.”

Leaders from the two sides announced that a Peace Tribunal will be created, through which atonement for war crimes will give guerrilla fighters 5-8 year sentences. They also announced plans to transform the FARC from a guerrilla army into a political party, given that they disarm within 60 days of the signing. The entire document of the peace accords contains 75 points that will not be made available to the public until the parties agree upon them in their entirety. It remains to be seen whether these points deal with the social and economic issues of which Fernández spoke.

Like Fernández and Ortiz, other leaders of Colombia's social movements remain skeptical. Daira Quiñones, an Afro-Colombian activist from Tumaco, Nariño, says that she does not feel that the peace process will affect social movements at all. “In reality, it won't work,” she stated with a shrug. “It is a policy that will remain on paper.” As the negotiations in Havana advance, Witness for Peace will continue to stand with our partners in Colombian civil society. And we will continue to push for a U.S. role that supports real truth, justice, and reparations for the conflicts' victims, instead of the “security” aid and impunity for abusive corporate practices that have deepened the conflict for most Colombians.



*Peace is Ours.*

PHOTO CREDIT: WITNESS FOR PEACE COLOMBIA TEAM