

SOLIDARIDAD

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

SPRING 2012

Volume 4 Issue 2

U.S. Military Aid Fuels a Human Rights Crisis in Honduras



A Honduran soldier stops us on our way to visit communities in the Aguan.

PHOTO CREDIT: NICARAGUA TEAM

We approach three young Honduran soldiers who stand outside a military post in Guadalupe Carney, a rural community in Honduras' Aguan Valley. Two are 19 and one is 20. Dressed in military garb, the oldest wears an automatic weapon on his chest. Sporting vests and name-tags and armed only with cameras and notebooks, we cautiously ask for an interview. After exchanging looks, they nod.

"Have you received training from the United States?"

"Yes," the oldest soldier replies.

"What kind of training?"

"Close combat, counter narcotics... We learn how to combat drug-trafficking.

We spend six months in practical training and three months on theory."

When asked who trained him he hesitates briefly, averts his gaze and timidly lists names of U.S. Captains and Generals.

The United States gave over \$9.8 million to the Honduran military and police in 2011 and has budgeted over \$8 million for 2012. This aid is part of the Central America Regional Security Initiative, a program designed to stop the flow of drugs to the United States via Central America. Almost half of the illicit drugs that enter the United States pass through Honduras.

We ask the soldier if there is much drug trafficking in Guadalupe Carney. His look implies the obvious. "No."

"What do you do here if there is no narco-trafficking?" we ask.

"Sometimes the community causes problems. We call the base if they take to the streets or if they invade Miguel Facussé's land."

The picture is becoming clearer.

Just moments before, we met with community members of Guadalupe Carney. Beneath a grass-roofed gazebo they told us about death threats, intimidation and assassinations. "We brought our friends and co-workers to this very floor after they were murdered," they told us.

In 2010, five community members were killed. A mother of five told us she lost her husband only ten days after her last child was born. The men were killed when campesino groups occupied El Tumbador, farm land that borders Guadalupe Carney. Although the land is legally theirs, they explained, it is occupied by a businessman, Miguel Facussé, one of the richest people in Honduras. His private guards shot the five men.

This tragic story is all too common in the Aguan Valley. Conflicts between campesinos and this large landowner end brutally. Forty-five campesinos have been killed in Aguan since the coup d'état in 2009. In response to these conflicts the Honduran government militarized the zone with aid from the U.S.

The young soldiers' answers to our questions reveal whose side the military is on. Their instructions are to call base when the community "causes problems." In other parts of the valley, the police have been called in. Families have been evicted from their homes and whole communities have been burned to the ground by the police. U.S. funds for the "War on Drugs" in Central America are supporting a different sinister agenda.

This isn't the first time Witness for Peace has documented the impact of U.S.-backed militarization in this

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Message From Sharon

Honduras is on my mind. In the midst of a mushrooming human rights crisis and rampant impunity the U.S. responds with military aid under the guise of fighting the “War on Drugs”. When will our government get it right?

Only when enough of us demand a change. In March many of you called your representatives asking them to sign a letter to Secretary of State Clinton demanding that the U.S. stop the flow of military aid to Honduras. Thanks to your pressure 94 representatives signed the strongly worded letter.

We must do much more. Witness for Peace has heard the call from our Honduran partners to accompany them as they seek justice. In July we will place an international team member in Honduras in coordination with the Honduras Accompaniment Project to document the impact of military aid and pressure our government to stop supporting a military that abuses the rights of its citizens. We will take U.S. citizens to Honduras to witness the impact of U.S. policy there. I hope you will join us.

Thanks to all of you who participated in the successful Days of Action for Colombia. Your voices calling on the President and Congress to stop funding the Colombian military and instead support aid for the displaced were heard loud and clear.

I recently visited our program in southern Mexico. U.S. free trade and economic policies are still driving farmers off their land, forcing them to migrate in search of opportunities for survival. Read a recent delegate’s inspiring testimony about a delegation to Mexico. See what he says about safety and security while in Mexico.

I hope you will join us in our efforts to work for peace justice and sustainable economies.

In solidarity,



Sharon Hostetler
Executive Director



DELEGATIONS

Gloria

June 7-17, 2012

Appalachia and Colombia – The People Behind the Coal

July 9-19, 2012

Meet Colombian Communities Resisting Repression

Cuba

June 3-June 13, 2012

Sustainable Agriculture

June 17-June 27, 2012

Education Delegation to Cuba

July 1-July 11, 2012

Delegation for Spanish Teachers

Mexico

May 19-May 31, 2012

Oaxaca and Alabama – The Immigration Delegation

Nicaragua

June 22-24 and July 11-25, 2012

Fabric and Fair Trade:

Teen Delegation to

North Carolina and Nicaragua

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

Trade to Mexico

After a week with Witness for Peace in Oaxaca, Mexico, I can say that participation on a delegation is a must for anyone interested in learning about social, economic, and political dynamics behind migration and U.S.-Mexico relations.

WFP Mexico staff set up meetings with many grassroots organizations, led workshops on Mexican history and U.S.-

Mexico relations and made sure we were all safe, healthy and happy. We visited a remote village where women are learning and teaching organic farming techniques, met with Guatemalan and Honduran migrants traveling through Oaxaca to the USA, stayed in the homes of members of a women’s weaving cooperative in a Zapotec village and soaked up Oaxacan culture.

For those concerned about violence in Mexico, I can assure you that at this time, Oaxaca is largely removed from the conflicts near the U.S. border and in a handful of other communities. WFP is very attentive to security and gave us practical advice on how to stay safe.

A week is a short time to learn about a region with a different culture, history, economy and languages but Witness for Peace knows how to help delegates make the most of their time. One said, “I would not have expected to learn, feel and experience so much in so little time.”

“I enjoyed the experience very much and plan to participate in other delegations in the future,” said another.

Arnie Alpert, AFSC New England



PHOTO CREDIT: MARTHA YAGER

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Grassroots Action

Witness for Peace Northeast organized delegations to Mexico (in coordination with AFSC), Cuba, and Nicaragua this spring. We are in the beginning stages of planning for our Fall Speaker's Tour in October, with a choice of subjects: immigration, drug war, and trade. We are seeking input from our partners who want to sponsor a talk on the tour.

Witness for Peace Northwest is pleased to introduce our new Field Organizer, Amy Truax. The regional board looks forward to integrating with WFP National, and supporting Amy as an Advisory Committee. We know a lot of education, delegation participation and policy change will come out of our region this year.

Witness for Peace Southeast organized the 26th Annual Pilgrimage for Peace and Justice. The first week of April, we walked across North Carolina and spoke out for fair immigration policies and human rights for all. From May 19-31, we will lead an Immigration Delegation to Oaxaca to learn about the roots of migration, then travel to Alabama for three days to see the effects of one of the nation's harshest immigration crackdowns. Join us!

Witness for Peace Southwest participated in the Days of Action for Colombia in April and celebrated the 94 Representatives and 7 Senators who signed letters in support of human rights in Honduras. For more information about events, meetings and conferences in the Southwest email southwestwfp@gmail.com or call **805-421-9708** or visit www.witnessforpeace.org/southwest.

Witness for Peace Upper Midwest completed two delegations in January and February (Nicaragua and Colombia) and we have four more planned for 2012. For our Fall Speaker Tour we are inviting a speaker from Honduras to share current information about the human rights situation there.

Standing Up for Colombia's Displaced

Thanks to the efforts of thousands of WFP activists from across the country—and our coalition partners—the 7th annual National Days of Action for Colombia was a great success. Groups around the country gathered to make 5,200 “houses for peace” to represent Colombia's 5.2 million internally displaced people. In the coming days, we will be displaying those houses in front of



the White House and then delivering them to President Obama's staff. You will be able to see pictures on our Facebook page, www.facebook.com/wfpeace.

Over 10,000 people sent postcards to President Obama calling for an end of U.S. support for the brutal Colombian military and instead to direct U.S. assistance to humanitarian and peacemaking efforts. And faith communities from coast to coast remembered Colombia in their worship services and prayed for peace for the war-torn nation.

Thanks to each of you for helping us make the National Days of Action for Colombia a success!

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

Leaving a Legacy of Peacemaking

Since the beginning of 2011, Witness for Peace has received generous legacy gifts from three members who passed away. Miriam Rosenn, Daniel Pettengill and Herbert Neil left a gift of peacemaking and justice-seeking in their wills. Their support has allowed us to make a substantial investment in our Northwest organizing efforts, ensuring activists in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana and Alaska are able to more fully engage in work for peace, justice and sustainable economies in the Americas.

Witness for Peace is deeply grateful to them, and many others, who have decided to make Witness for Peace part of their legacy planning.

Sanho Tree, a long-time supporter has also decided to make Witness for Peace part of his planned giving strategy. We asked him to share why.

When I think back on my life before my first WFP delegation and after, it's like night and day. The experience transformed my life and opened my eyes in ways I could never have imagined. I know WFP's work makes a difference because I have witnessed it myself. I have seen how staff in Colombia protects human rights defenders against paramilitary death threats. I have watched members of Congress stand up to oppose military aid because of WFP's reports and advocacy efforts. And in subsequent delegations, I have seen others undergo a similar awakening.

Although I am middle aged and don't have many assets, I can make a difference. I have made WFP a beneficiary of half my life insurance policy. In the event something should happen to me, I want to ensure that WFP has the funds it needs for the organization's important work long after I'm gone. I

hope you will consider doing the same. Think back to your first delegation. What more meaningful legacy could you leave behind than to enable others to share that incredibly transformational experience? Each life you touch with your legacy gift helps ensure that another delegate has the opportunity to experience something similar and it enables the staff to continue the important work of accompaniment and advocacy. We all try to live our lives in a way that leaves the world a little better than when we found it. Your planned gift is a way to continue your legacy for years to come.



You too can leave a legacy to support peace, justice and sustainable economies in the Americas. To find out how, talk to your attorney about options for making Witness for Peace part of your will or contact WFP Associate Director Jess Hunter-Bowman at jess@witnessforpeace.org or **202-664-6744**.

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

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region. In the 1980s the CIA built military bases in Honduras to arm and train the Nicaraguan Contras to fight against the Sandinista government. Thousands of Witness for Peace delegates traveled to Nicaragua's war zones to provide accompaniment to communities under threat of Contra attack, bearing witness to the tragic results of U.S. military support.

One of the U.S. military bases used in the 80s was the Regional Center for Military Training. After the facility ended its operations the land was transferred to the Honduran government's agriculture institution for distribution to campesinos.

Some of these lands reached rural farmers. A portion of those lands became the community named Guadalupe Carney: the very community where we stood and interviewed the three young soldiers. Other large plots were illegally sold to big business owners. One is Miguel Facussé. He bought land like El Tumbador across the Aguan Valley to expand his palm oil empire. This land produces palm oil for export rather than supporting the livelihood of rural farmers like those in Guadalupe Carney. For over a decade, the Honduran government had been

buying back the illegally sold lands to hand out to campesinos, but since the coup d'état negotiations have stalled.

Campesinos risking their lives occupy land for survival. Meanwhile, young soldiers receive orders to protect the land-holdings of businessmen like Miguel Facussé. And they do so after receiving military training from the U.S.

The land situation has gotten worse since the military coup in 2009 when democratically-elected President, Manuel Zelaya, was overthrown. To appease mounting criticism, the coup regime held what many consider illegitimate elections and Porfirio Lobo Sosa was elected president. The United States led the way to international recognition of the Lobo administration.

Since the coup the human rights crisis has mushroomed: Eighteen journalists have been killed, violence against women and hate crimes against the LGBTI community have risen and Afro-descendent and indigenous populations are under-threat as they struggle to maintain their land and the culture it sustains. In response the U.S. sends military aid.

While the human rights crisis rages the Lobo administration pushes neoliberal policy that benefits multi-national corporations and the U.S. continues to support militarization: \$17.8 million for the war on drugs and \$50 million for the Soto Cano Air Base (Palmerola Air Base). Used in the 80s to support the Contra war against Nicaragua, the base is now the center for operations for the "War on Drugs" in Central America.



Maritza lost her house when the Honduran police burned down her community in the Bajo Aguan.

PHOTO CREDIT: NICARAGUA TEAM

And it looks like this is only the beginning. In early March, Vice-President Joe Biden visited Honduras to discuss the war on drugs with Central American leaders. The next day, the Honduran newspaper La Tribuna quoted Lisa Kubiske, U.S. Ambassador to Honduras, saying, "We have an opportunity now, because we no longer have a war using the military in Iraq. We will no longer be spending on the military there, so there should be resources available to work here."

As we stood and listened to these timid young soldiers, the cycles of U.S. military and economic violence became clear. Our conversation revealed a common-thread that weaves militarization, neoliberalism and rampant human rights violations: The U.S. supports an administration that is favorable to multi-national corporations and a military force that protects corporate interest. The result? The abuse of human rights and loss of safety and security for the Hondurans who suffer from these policies and who dare to speak or act against them.

There is a wave of nonviolent resistance in Honduras led by those whose rights are under constant threat. Witness for Peace has heard the call from our partners for a long-term presence to accompany them as they seek justice. We will be in Honduras to document the impact of military aid and to pressure our government to stop backing a military that abuses the rights of its citizens.



A young boy lights a candle to commemorate campesinos killed in the Aguan.

PHOTO CREDIT: LUCY J. EDWARDS