

# SOLIDARIDAD

Witness for Peace

Transforming People — Transforming Policy for 30 Years • 1983-2013

SPRING 2013

Volume 5 Issue 2

## The Missing Link: NAFTA and Immigration Reform



*Doña Anastacia, a small scale farmer from San Miguel Huautla in Oaxaca, Mexico, tells WFP about projects in her community that encourage people to stay and work their land instead of migrating to larger cities in Mexico and the U.S. Since NAFTA more than 2 million agricultural jobs have been lost.*

PHOTO CREDIT: WFP MEXICO TEAM

Last weekend while chatting with a local taxi driver, the conversation took a familiar turn. As we talked about where we were from, Marco said that he'd spent five years living in the U.S., where he worked building houses. He left his hometown in coastal Mexico in search of work, and ended up in Alabama. When I asked him why he decided to leave the States, he told me that the context in Alabama had become increasingly hostile to immigrants, and that he had been deported by the immigration police.

His story is not an unusual one. There are an estimated 11.5 million undocumented immigrants living in the U.S., and, as Marco's story demonstrates, there are many more who have lived in the States but are now back in their home

countries. With U.S. Comprehensive Immigration Reform high on the current congressional agenda, it is crucial that we ground our understanding of the issue in people's stories and lived experiences.

Currently, the patchwork of immigration laws in the U.S. does not give those who want to move to the States a clear sense of what that process looks like, or what it means if the process is not followed at all. All sides are in agreement that now is the time to pass truly comprehensive immigration reform. The Senate recently released a version of reform legislation, and its terminology echoes catchphrases recycled in op-ed pieces, political speeches, and across the media landscape. "Border security," "guest worker programs," "pathway to citizenship," and

"E-verify" are the hinges on which the debate turns.

These are undoubtedly important, but a fundamental question is absent from these conversations—why? Why did millions of people choose to leave their families, friends, homelands, to move to the United States, and why do they continue to come? It seems simple at first: there are more opportunities for living-wage employment in the U.S. But why is it increasingly difficult to achieve this in the migrants' home countries?

It is not by accident that sixty-two percent of undocumented people in the U.S. are from Mexico. The reasons they leave their homes are often rooted in the United States' policy relationship with Mexico, one of the most important of which is The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

As its twentieth birthday approaches, NAFTA's legacy bears little resemblance to the promises that were made when it was ratified. Instead of leading to an increase in the Mexican average wage, there are 12 million more impoverished people and now over half the population lives in poverty. Many small-scale Mexican farmers, who were once protected from subsidized and highly mechanized U.S.-grown agricultural products, are unable to sustain themselves on their land. More than 2 million agriculture jobs have been lost. A disproportionate number of Mexicans have left the countryside, bound for the U.S. In fact, while only

*(Continued on back page)*

# Message From Sharon

When's the last time you contacted your congressional representative to let her/him know what you think about U.S. policies toward Latin America? Thousands of you have traveled with WFP to Latin America providing you with a unique understanding of how our country's policies impact the lives of our sisters and brothers in Colombia, Mexico, Nicaragua, Honduras and Cuba. You have heard their stories about how free trade agreements push more and more people off the land, out of jobs and into poverty. You have heard and read about the link between U.S. aid to the military and police, and the reappearance of death squads in Honduras. You have heard how a Colombian priest has been targeted for his work supporting peace communities under threat, human rights victims and peacemakers. Single mothers in Colombia have told you about the fumigation of their pineapple crops as if they were illicit crops, a result of the U.S.-sponsored War on Drugs. You have heard how an embargo and travel ban have isolated and made daily life more difficult for our neighbors only 90 miles off the coast of Florida.

In the past few months thousands of you have contacted your congressional representatives, President Obama and the U.S. ambassador in Colombia about these misguided policies at least nine times through the WFP online action center. You responded to urgent actions asking your representatives to sign on to "Dear Colleague" letters, you signed petitions urging immigration reform and peace in Colombia, and participated in the Days of Action for Colombia campaign. All these

actions bring us closer to peace, justice and sustainable economies in our Americas.

From the bottom of my heart, thank you for your support and tireless efforts for peace.

In deep gratitude,



Sharon Hostetler,  
Executive Director



## People-to-People Cuba License Announcement

Witness for Peace is happy to announce that we have been granted a renewal of our People-to-People license for travel to Cuba. WFP is now able to organize delegations that will offer a full-time schedule of educational exchange activities that will result in meaningful interaction between delegates and Cubans.

Our two year license authorizes as many delegations as we wish during the validity period of the license. Delegation themes range from arts and culture, education and law to sustainable agriculture and health care.

WFP will be expanding its list of upcoming delegations to include additional themes as well as delegations that will provide a general overview of how U.S. policy affects people in Cuba.

If you are interested in planning or joining a delegation to Cuba, please contact the National Delegations Organizer, Ken Crowley, [ken@witnessforpeace.org](mailto:ken@witnessforpeace.org), 202-423-3402.

For a partial list of upcoming delegations to Cuba, go to [www.witnessforpeace.org](http://www.witnessforpeace.org), and click on "Travel With Us," then "All Country Schedule".

## DELEGATIONS

### Colombia

#### ***The People Behind the Coal – Professional Delegation***

June 11-19, 2013

*Delegation Coordinators:*

Avi Chomsky, 978-542-6389, [Achomsky@salemstate.edu](mailto:Achomsky@salemstate.edu)  
Steve Striffler, 479-283-4795 [striffler@hotmail.com](mailto:striffler@hotmail.com)

#### ***Meet Colombian Communities Resisting Repression***

July 9-19, 2013

*Delegation Coordinators*

Kate Faris, 401.252.9268 [kfaris@uoregon.edu](mailto:kfaris@uoregon.edu)  
Pat Bonner, 323-563-7940 [pkbonner@earthlink.net](mailto:pkbonner@earthlink.net)

#### ***Reality of the U.S. – Colombia Free Trade Agreement***

August 1-10, 2013

*Delegation Coordinator*

Eunice Escobar, 773.458.0736  
[eunicemescobar@gmail.com](mailto:eunicemescobar@gmail.com)

### Cuba

#### ***Beauty and Brains - An Exploration of Cuba's Culture***

June 21-July 1, 2013

*Delegation Coordinator*

Susan Letendre, 401-268-9810,  
[wfpne@witnessforpeace.org](mailto:wfpne@witnessforpeace.org)

#### ***Education Delegation***

January 26-February 5, 2014

*Delegation Coordinator*

Dixie Olmstead, 651-271-6558  
[dixie\\_olmstead@yahoo.com](mailto:dixie_olmstead@yahoo.com)

#### ***The Good Food Revolution - Strengthening Community Through Sustainable Agriculture***

February 14-24, 2014

*Delegation Coordinator*

Kristin Stuchis, 218-340-8079  
[kstuchis@gmail.com](mailto:kstuchis@gmail.com)

### Nicaragua

#### ***Fabric and Fair Trade - Youth Delegation with WFP Southeast***

July 6-20, 2013

*Delegation Coordinators*

Emily Zucchini, 919-856- 9468  
[emily@witnessforpeace.org](mailto:emily@witnessforpeace.org)

### Honduras/Nicaragua

#### ***30th Anniversary Delegation***

August 17-September 3, 2013

*Delegation Coordinator*

Amy Truax, 206-787-0657  
[amy@witnessforpeace.org](mailto:amy@witnessforpeace.org)

### Mexico

#### ***Roots and Realities of Migration - Oaxaca***

May 25-June 3, 2013

*Delegation Coordinator*

Emily Zucchini, 919-856-9468  
[emily@witnessforpeace.org](mailto:emily@witnessforpeace.org)

#### ***Free Trade, Monsanto and the Midwest – Building Food Justice and Fair Trade Solidarity Across Borders***

January 10-19, 2014

*Delegation Coordinator*

Elise Roberts, 920-421-2269  
[wfpumw@witnessforpeace.org](mailto:wfpumw@witnessforpeace.org)  
Corliss Jacobs, 913-764-4101  
[cjackc@sbcglobal.net](mailto:cjackc@sbcglobal.net)



# PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

## Grassroots Action

**Witness for Peace New England** with the help of an intern, Antioch graduate student Meghan Straughen, is reaching out to food sovereignty/food security organizations to identify areas where our missions overlap. Since WfP is doing more and more in the just trade area, educational opportunities and dissemination of advocacy efforts abound! A delegation from Providence College explored just trade, especially in the coffee industry, on a March delegation to Nicaragua. Two more delegations are in the offing: Cuba in June, and Oaxaca in the fall. There are preliminary plans for a Honduran activist speaker to tour New England in October. Stay tuned!

**Witness for Peace Northwest** led a sustainable agriculture delegation to Cuba in April. Fourteen participants mostly from the PNW learned from Cubans how to integrate sustainability into our culture and society. We are planning a Honduras/Nicaragua delegation August 17 to Sept 3, to celebrate WfP's 30th anniversary, as well as staying busy on immigration issues—Northwest Field Organizer Amy Truax attended the week-long March for ONE Oregon bus tour, and testified before the Washington House Public Safety Committee in favor of a WA Trust Act. We are beginning to plan our fall speaking tour with a Colombian labor activist. Please be in touch with Amy if you're interested in any of these events!

**Witness for Peace Southeast** began the spring with the 27th annual Pilgrimage for Peace and Justice. We walked in five North Carolina cities to call for fair immigration reform, workers' rights, and an end to militarization. We marched with 25 people or more in each city, and reached thousands more through media coverage. Participants signed and sent postcards to state senators and representatives. It was a great success! We are recruiting for several important delegations. Join us on our Roots of Migration Delegation to Oaxaca, Mexico from May 25 to June 3, or on our annual Fabric and Fair Trade Teen Delegation to Nicaragua, July 6 to 20. Visit [wfpse.org](http://wfpse.org) for more information.

**Witness for Peace Southwest** is planning member meetings in Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area, hosted a webinar report from the Venezuelan Presidential elections and participated in May 1st activities on International Workers Day. For more information contact [southwestwfp@gmail.com](mailto:southwestwfp@gmail.com) or visit our website [www.witnessforpeace.org/southwest](http://www.witnessforpeace.org/southwest).

**Witness for Peace Upper Midwest** just finished a successful tour with Sohely Rua Castañeda, focused on women and labor rights in Colombia, and is finalizing plans for an October speaking tour with Francisco Cerezo from *Comite Cerezo* in Mexico. The region is currently recruiting for upcoming delegations to Mexico, Cuba, and Colombia, and working with local colleges and universities to create options for students to receive credit.

**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).**

## WfP Calls for Peace with Justice in Colombia

WfP, in collaboration with community organizations, congregations, faith-based organizations, and other groups, organized the National Days of Action for Colombia (DOPA). This year's theme "Now Is the Time for Peace with Justice" called on thousands to participate in activities such as a craft project involving the creation of paper doves with messages for a just peace on the wings, a faith leader letter, a grassroots petition, and a collaborative video project. The efforts of DOPA this year centered on the U.S. supporting truth, justice, and reparations for the Colombian conflict's victims within the peace process, as well as civil society involvement in that process.

## WfP Aids Congressional Letter Demanding Accountability for Honduras Killings, Continues Calling for No Military and Police Aid

WfP helped secure a number of the 58 Representatives' signatures on a Dear Colleague letter from the Congressional Black Caucus, regarding Afro-Indigenous rights in Honduras and—in an



unprecedented ask for such a letter--asking for a full investigation of the DEA for its role in the May 11th, 2012 killings of four Afro-Indigenous villagers in Ahuas, Honduras. The letter received high-level media attention, and in the wake of more revelations about continued human rights abuses by U.S.-funded Honduran security forces, should serve as an important building-block for an end to U.S. military aid to Honduras. With U.S. officials unable to justify continued funding for the Honduran police, given the police's alleged death squad activity, WfP will continue demanding that wrongheaded U.S. policies of militarism cease.

## SumOfUs and WfP Secure Staggering Response to Plight of GM Workers

Working closely with corporate accountability organization SumOfUs.org, WfP brought the total petition signatures demanding a just solution for the injured Colombian workers (ASOTRECOL) to an astronomical 76,000 by late January 2013, and now the count stands at nearly 80,000. Thank you for being part of this massive showing of support for the workers. Injured ASOTRECOL President Jorge Parra has returned to Colombia. While there is a fact-finding process underway, conducted by the United Auto Workers and ASOTRECOL, regarding the workers' injuries and dismissal, at the time of this writing there has been no compensation or re-integration for the affected workers.

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

*(Continued from front page)*

25% of Mexicans live in the countryside, they account for 44% of those who migrate.

Even Mexico's export-centric model that promised to generate jobs has proved lackluster. One-third of the new jobs created in the manufacturing sector in Mexico have been lost since 2001 as a result of companies moving to Central America, Southeast Asia and China, where labor costs are cheaper. As the cost of labor in Mexico has stagnated, maquila jobs are returning from China, though this is hardly something to celebrate, especially given the fact that maquila workers typically earn half of the minimum income level determined to meet an individual's basic needs. Growing poverty, stagnating wages, and shrinking opportunities for decent work create a recipe for continued migration in search of something better in the north.

Citizens of Capulalpam, a small town in the Sierra de Juarez mountain range in southern Mexico, understand NAFTA's effects all too well. As a result of the agreement, thirty percent of territorial Mexico has been granted in concessions to U.S. and Canadian mining companies, of which Capulalpam's mine was one. The 250-year legacy of mining in the town is devastating. Thirteen aquifers disappeared, abuses against miners were common, and contaminated waste was found in waterways stretching from Capulalpam to the lower Sierra de Juarez. Sundance, a Canadian mining company, returned in 2004 to explore Capulalpam's closed mine, and its efforts have indicated promising returns for gold and silver. Mining's return to Capulalpam would be an irrevocable blow to the town's recovering ecosystems and community.

NAFTA's devastating legacy seems self-evident, but it is not. The governments of the U.S. and Mexico are currently involved in negotiations for an even more expansive NAFTA style free trade agreement among 11 countries in the

Asia-Pacific region—the Trans-Pacific Partnership. The TPP will cover everything from intellectual property to agricultural products and pharmaceuticals. The disconnect between the reality on the ground and the official conversation is staggering. At a public hearing last fall on the entrance of Mexico into the TPP, Kyd Brenner, the representative from the U.S. Corn Refiner's Association, boldly stated, "Both the United States and Mexico have prospered from the enhanced economic relationship fostered by the NAFTA... Consumers on both sides of the border have benefited from this improved trading relationship."

The numbers tend to disagree. Worse still, voices from civil society that would provide a richer understanding of the effects of NAFTA have not been invited to the negotiating table, and the text of the agreement is not available publicly, even for members of Congress. Ratification of the TPP would mean even more consolidated access and control by transnational corporations, and would undermine individual countries' ability to hold them accountable.

As grim as the current picture looks, there are sparks of resistance across

Mexico and the U.S. When the community in Capulalpam discovered that Sundance was planning to reopen the mine, they organized to block its access. Citizens petitioned the federal government, blocked the roadways leading to the community, and organized a Mesoamerican Summit on Mining that brought together communities from Mexico and Central America to organize resistance efforts. As a result, Sundance has been forced to stop all of its mining efforts in the community.

Capulalpam gives us one example of many resistance efforts. Their actions should serve to embolden us, to flip the script on the rhetoric that free trade policies benefit all countries and citizens involved. Now we must deepen our commitment to organizing, to informing and educating ourselves and then sharing that knowledge, and to listening to the stories of those whose lives are directly affected by our government's policies, including telling our own. This is the heart of the Witness for Peace mission, and our delegations to Mexico are the roots of change in the U.S. Come discover that change is possible!



*In the last year, the conflict over the mine in San José del Progreso, Oaxaca, has turned increasingly violent, resulting in the deaths of anti-mine activists Bernardo Vazquez and Bernardo Mendez. Carmen Santiago Alonso, from Flor y Canto, puts together an altar with offerings and photographs of land defenders.*

PHOTO CREDIT: LARIZA GARZON