

# SOLIDARIDAD

Witness for Peace

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

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## Witness for Peace: A Storied History and A Prophetic Future



*Some believe Witness for Peace's presence in conflict-torn countries is the organization's most important contribution in its 30-year history. A member of WFP's staff in Colombia interviews a community leader and war victim during a protective accompaniment trip to the conflict zone of Urabá.*

PHOTO CREDIT: MELISSA COX

"The most important thing Witness for Peace has done is to stand with people in Latin America in their most challenging times," says Gail Phares.

Gail has dedicated her entire life to working for social justice with Latin American people. She first traveled to Guatemala as a Maryknoll sister in 1968 and is one of Witness for Peace's founders. So when Gail talks about Witness for Peace's history, people listen.

"Witness for Peace has stopped funding for war. That is an amazing feat," says Phares. "But more important has been

training thousands of people in active non-violence and taking them to war zones to stand with people."

"Witness for Peace was at the center of a national debate on the Contra War in the 1980s," said Ben Beachy, a former WFP staffer and current Research Director with Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch. But Ben suggests that perhaps WFP's greatest contribution has been as a "university of the movement."

"Tens of thousands of people have been transformed on WFP delegations. Members of the International Team have

learned about the impacts of policy abroad, taken that to heart and gone on to work on social justice issues," said Beachy. "Organizations can say they got a large number of petitions signed or a bill passed by Congress and those are important accomplishments. But not many can say they have changed hearts and minds." WFP can.

This year at Witness for Peace we are reflecting on 30 years of accomplishments, 30 years of policy change, 30 years of struggle, 30 years of dreams, 30 years of protests, 30 years of great gifts and so much more.

But as we kick off this special anniversary year, we cannot focus exclusively on our past. Now is a time to build a greater vision for our future.

Gail Phares warns that age—of a person or an organization—can lead to becoming risk averse. "Witness for Peace needs to continue to take risks for peace and justice," Phares says. "WFP needs to be prophetic."

All those who have had a hand in the important social justice achievements have taken great risks through prophetic action. And that is exactly what we at Witness for Peace believe we need to do to tackle the great challenges to peace, justice and sustainable economies in our next 30 years. When we combine effective strategies to educate people, motivate them to work for change, provide them with the skills they need to be advocates for justice and invite them to join prophetic actions calling for peace we are on the right track.

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# Message From Sharon

People ask me all the time “Why do you keep doing this work?” How can I not work to change policies that kill, shatter people’s lives and contribute to poverty and oppression? My faith demands it of me.

When I began “this work” with WFP in 1984, I assumed it would take a few short years to convince policy makers that it was immoral to support a military force that committed human rights abuses. I was sure that if enough legislators saw the photos and read the reports of atrocities that the WFP team documented they would cut off the funds for war. Everyone would agree that no 10 year old should live the horror of seeing his mother and brother killed like Wilfredo did.

A policy change took more than a few short years. But tens of thousands of you traveled to the war zones to resist this war. Many pressured legislators and committed civil disobedience to call attention to this awful policy. Grassroots power worked! Military funding was cut and Nicaraguans signed a peace agreement.

So after the war, our work was done? Not so fast. I call it the policy onion where you peel off one layer, military aid, and there appears the next layer, economic policies. The structural adjustment and free trade agreement layers surface. There are the layers of corporate abuses, drug war policies, forced migration. Until there is peace with justice in the Americas, including in our own country, our work must continue.

It’s the work of solidarity, presence, mutuality, accompanying through struggle and resistance. It’s called faith, not always knowing the way, but

knowing that we have to keep walking the road of peace because the current situation of injustice must stop.

I hope you will join us in celebrating our 30th anniversary as we all renew our commitment to work for peace, justice and sustainable economies in the Americas. Change can happen. It has and it will.

In deep gratitude,



Sharon Hostetler,  
Executive Director

P.S. We have exciting plans for innovative work supporting human rights, fair trade and immigrant rights in 2013. I hope you will stay in touch to find out how you can get involved in this work for justice.



Wilfredo Miranda, age 10 at the burial of his mother and brother killed during a contra attack in Nueva Guinea, Nicaragua in 1986. WFP staffer and photographer Paul Dix who documented this met

Wilfredo again in 2005. In Dix's book, co-authored with Pamela Fitzpatrick, *Nicaragua: Surviving the Legacy of U.S. Policy*, Wilfredo says, “The drama of our misfortune is a situation that has kept us wounded forever, emotionally, forever. For us what happened will never be forgotten...”

PHOTO CREDIT: PAUL DIX

## DELEGATIONS

### Colombia

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

June 11-19, 2013

*Delegation Coordinators:*

Avi Chomsky, 978-542-6389  
Achomsky@salemstate.edu  
Steve Striffler, 479-283-4795  
striffler@hotmail.com

#### **Defending Human Rights**

June 24-July 4, 2013

*Delegation Coordinator*

Lyn Clark Pegg, 218-348-3048  
carolynpegg@yahoo.com

#### **Meet Colombian Communities**

##### **Resisting Repression**

July 9-19, 2013

*Delegation Coordinators*

Kate Faris, 401.252.9268 kfaris@uoregon.edu  
Pat Bonner, pkbonner@earthlink.net

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

August 1-10, 2013

*Delegation Coordinator*

Eunice Escobar, 773.458.0736  
eunicemescoabar@gmail.com

### Nicaragua

#### **Advocacy and Social Change in the Context of Globalization**

March 9-19, 2013

*Delegation Coordinators*

Elise Roberts, 920.421.2269  
wfpumw@witnessforpeace.org  
Jim Dimock, 507.389.5533  
james.dimock@mnsu.edu

#### **Fabric and Fair Trade Teen Delegation**

July 14-28, 2013

*Delegation Coordinator*

Gail Phares, 919.856.9468  
witnessforpeace2@gmail.com

### Mexico

#### **Roots and Realities of Migration**

May 25-June 3, 2013

*Delegation Coordinator*

Emily Zucchini, 919-856-9468  
emily@witnessforpeace.org

### CUBA TRAVEL PROGRAMS\*

For more information about legal travel on the following professional research programs to Cuba please contact Marazul Charters, Inc. a licensed travel provider with whom we are referring: Louisa Sanchez, lsanchez@marazul.com 201-319-1054 Ext. 15

### Cuba

#### **Research Program for Sustainable Agricultural Workers**

April 17-27, 2013



# PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

## Grassroots Action

**Witness for Peace New England** toured Ligna Pulido, of the CRIC in Cauca, Colombia, through five states in October, reaching nearly 1,000 people. Ligna was welcomed by Leaders of 26 tribes in CT, and Native American groups in RI and VT who are drafting a solidarity proclamation with Colombia's indigenous due to their exchange with Ligna and the advocacy of Jay Levy, Cultural Coordinator for the Mohegan Tribe and WFP delegate.

**Witness for Peace Northwest** is planning a mini-speaking tour for late March in Washington and Oregon with a well-known Honduran activist. WFP is working as a consultant with Marazul Charters for a sustainable agriculture professional research trip to Cuba in April. We are exploring a possible Honduras delegation in August. To apply for the Cuba delegation or to learn more about the tour, please contact Amy at **(206) 787-0657** or [amy@witnessforpeace.org](mailto:amy@witnessforpeace.org).

**Witness for Peace Southeast** is excited for this year! January 18-28, WFPSE visited Colombia to learn about social movements from indigenous, women, and Afro-Colombian populations. During Holy Week, we will join a diverse coalition of faith leaders and community organizers for our 27th annual Pilgrimage for Peace and Justice. We will walk in five NC cities, demanding fair immigration reform and workers' rights. May 25-June 3, WFPSE will partner with Student Action with Farmworkers on a delegation to Oaxaca, Mexico to learn about the forces and realities behind migration. Our annual Fabric and Fair Trade Teen Delegation will take place July 6-20. Join us! Contact [emily@witnessforpeace.org](mailto:emily@witnessforpeace.org) for more information.

**Witness for Peace Southwest** is recruiting for an alternative spring break delegation to Urabá, Colombia, March 23-31. Volunteers are needed to serve on Southwest Region's volunteer advocacy committees on Honduras, Colombia, Migrant Rights, and Cuba. Training provided! Southwest is also seeking new board members for 2013. Contact [southwestwfp@gmail.com](mailto:southwestwfp@gmail.com), visit [www.witnessforpeace.org/southwest](http://www.witnessforpeace.org/southwest), or [www.facebook.com/groups/witnessforpeacesouthwest](http://www.facebook.com/groups/witnessforpeacesouthwest).

**Witness for Peace Upper Midwest** is excited to begin 2013 with our Regional Organizer, Elise Roberts, on a full-time basis! With her energy and experience, and lots of volunteer hours by Board members and other volunteers, we look forward to a great year. In April, we will host a mini-speaker tour with Elizabeth Cuero Badillo, a labor activist from the Buenaventura Portworker's Union, to share her experience as one of two women labor leaders in all of Colombia's ports.

**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).**

## In Solidarity with Colombian GM Workers

On November 20, Jorge Parra, president of the Association of Injured Workers and Ex-Workers of General Motors Colmotores (ASOTRECOL), re-initiated his hunger strike to pressure GM to return to the negotiating table. A previous round of negotiations in late August 2012 produced no settlement with GM, and the company has not re-engaged since then. Workers who suffered workplace injuries and were subsequently fired without severance, benefits or worker's compensation continue to call for justice. Thousands of grassroots activists demand that GM negotiate a fair settlement.



*Danny Glover and Melvin Thompson join Jorge Parra and thousands of grassroots activists in demanding that GM negotiate a fair settlement with injured workers.*

PHOTO CREDIT: MARTHA GREVAT

In solidarity with the workers, WFP members delivered letters to dealerships across the country; held protests at the residence of GM's CEO, and rallies at corporate headquarters and the U.S. State Department; participated in numerous nationwide solidarity fasts

(pictures of which inundated GM's Facebook page and Twitter account); accompanied Jorge at meetings with U.S. Department of Labor officials; secured letters and other statements of support from faith leaders; and sent holiday letters of justice to the CEO.

On January 13-14, WFP members, faith leaders, union members, and human rights advocates converged on Detroit, MI for demonstrations and creative actions at the 2013 North American International Auto Show, to urge GM to return to negotiations with ASOTRECOL. On January 23, an International Day of Solidarity with GM Workers highlighted, with WFP participation, the ASOTRECOL struggle, among other issues of concern regarding GM. For information about how you can get involved in this campaign, contact Walker Grooms, WFP National Grassroots Organizer, at [walker@witnessforpeace.org](mailto:walker@witnessforpeace.org) or 202-547-6112.

## National Days of Action for Colombia 2013 to Focus on Peace

In late April (dates to be confirmed), WFP will participate in this annual campaign, with an emphasis on peace, in light of current negotiations between the Colombian government and guerrillas. Stay tuned for ways to participate and support peace in Colombia. [www.witnessforpeace.org](http://www.witnessforpeace.org) and [www.facebook.com/WFPeace](http://www.facebook.com/WFPeace)

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

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*Witness for Peace has seen lives destroyed by war and injustice but also dreams of peace and justice that have come true. Guatemalan refugees driven into Mexico by genocide were finally able to return home after peace accords were signed ending Guatemala's horrible civil war. Refugees in Mexico were accompanied by WFP staff.*

PHOTO CREDIT: WFP ARCHIVE

But even with all of the above, there is something else; something that has made Witness for Peace unique in the movement for 30 years.

Having staff based in Latin America—sharing space with key human rights activists, standing shoulder to shoulder with community leaders, providing protective accompaniment to peace leaders under threat—that connection is what makes Witness for Peace special. Those relationships ground Witness for Peace and ensure our work is accountable to our partners.

As Witness for Peace embarks on the next chapter of our work, we believe that four things are going to be pivotal for peace, justice and sustainable economies in the Americas: immigration reform and immigrant rights, just trade policies and corporate responsibility, a transformation of the approach to drug policy and nonviolent action against war and human rights abuses.

But Witness for Peace's future would not be possible without the foundation built over the past 30 years by our

members, friends, and partners—our compañeras and compañeros.

In those 30 years, we have seen dreams of peace and justice come true. We have also seen lives destroyed by war and injustice.

Nicaraguan farmers following a dream of learning to read and write, building a

vision for a new economy, were killed by U.S.-trained and funded death squads. Mexican corn farmers had their livelihood pulled out from under them by NAFTA's false promises substituting small farming for manufacturing in Mexico's heartland.

But dreams do come true thanks to Latin Americans' tireless work for peace and justice. We celebrated alongside Guatemalans ravaged by war when they were able to return from refugee camps in Mexico after peace accords were signed. We supported and rejoiced with our partners in Nicaragua's free trade zone when the first union was recognized and negotiated a contract.

What dreams will come true in the next 30 years? There is no telling what we can do when we work together, with activists across the U.S. and partners across the hemisphere.

We want to hear your voice. What are your hopes for Witness for Peace's future? What are your favorite memories about the past? What do you miss? What do you want to see moving forward? Tell us at [www.facebook.com/WFPeace](http://www.facebook.com/WFPeace) or on Twitter @witnessforpeace.



*Over the past 30 years, workers across the hemisphere have faced increased challenges due to free trade and anti-union activities. Witness for Peace has worked with workers to press for labor justice, including in Nicaragua's free trade zone.*

PHOTO CREDIT: WFP ARCHIVE