

SOLIDARIDAD

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

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A Time To Resist New Leadership and Dangerous Directions in Policy Toward Latin America

As Latin America solidarity activists, we have our work cut out for us in the next four years. One source of concern is President Trump's choice of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary, retired Marine Corps General John F. Kelly. Kelly had previously been the head of U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) from 2012 to 2016, meaning that he oversaw all U.S. military activity in Central America, South America, and the Caribbean.

Plan Colombia Hawk:

One of the most concerning aspects of Gen. Kelly's new post is his support for the U.S.'s disastrous Plan Colombia. Kelly said, in a 2015 op-ed,

"Colombia taught us that the key to defeating violent, illegally armed groups is a strong, accountable government that protects its citizens, upholds the rule of law, combats corruption and expands economic opportunity for all. It taught us that inclusion, tolerance and democratic values are powerful antidotes to ideology." Basically every point of this statement can be disputed by the devastating experiences of vulnerable and marginalized populations in Colombia during the Plan's tenure. Kelly's deluded, convinced or otherwise rationalized to himself that the militarized counternarcotics Plan — which, beyond being a human rights catastrophe, has also failed in

its stated objectives of curbing drug production and trafficking — is somehow a successful model, worthy of replication. He's even said the Plan has supposedly "shown us the way" to defeat the Islamic State (ISIS).

Exporting and Outsourcing Militarism:

Gen. Kelly can be very slick in employing the language of root causes of problems in Latin America, including the causes of significant out-migration, and in particular, the large numbers of recent arrivals to the U.S. of children from Central America. With Kelly, however, the old cliché holds true that when the only tool you know is a hammer, all your problems look like nails. His solutions have entailed militarization of countries experiencing such issues. As a staunch proponent of Plan Colombia, Kelly also strongly supports the Alliance for Prosperity in the Northern Triangle (encompassing El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras). This is an aid package, explicitly modeled on Plan Colombia, which supposedly seeks to deal with the root causes of out-migration from those countries. However, nearly a third (\$200 million) of the Alliance for Prosperity package for Fiscal Year 2016 was "security" assistance, further militarizing Honduras and its neighbors. WFP's partners in Honduras have told us that the



General Kelly

PHOTO CREDIT: AL DRAGO, NEW YORK TIMES

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Message from the Board Chair

Saludos WFP Community. It is a great honor and privilege to serve as the new Board Chair of an organization that has defended human rights, activists, and their communities in Latin America for over three decades. Thanks for your support, commitment, and solidarity, as well as the solid commitment and expertise of WFP staff. Since 2007, after participating in a WFP delegation to visit Afro-Colombian communities in which other U.S. African-descendant activists participated, I have been committed to the mission and vision of WFP. As a community leader and activist, I feel seasoned and a veteran within WFP. In 2016, WFP faced serious challenges and difficulties: the assassination of Berta Cáceres in Honduras; the extremely difficult peace process in Colombia; ongoing disappearances in Mexico; and the election of Donald Trump. I envision and deeply desire a great 2017, full of challenges but with plenty of good struggles. I firmly believe that we can count upon your invaluable contributions and solidarity as we continue the battles on which WFP has embarked.



Thank you,

Eunice Mina Escobar
Board Chair, Witness for Peace

Solidarity Feature: Honduras Delegation Report-Back

In December, Witness for Peace led a 25-person delegation to Honduras, including U.S. and Belize-based journalists, activists, organizers, attorneys, and the foreign policy staffer from the office of Congressman Keith Ellison (MN). The delegates represented a broad cross-section of U.S. solidarity, organizing, and policymaking work, which enabled the facilitation of substantial and concrete action plans and connections with WFP partners in Honduras.

The delegates met with an equally broad representation of Honduran social and political movements — from organizations working on forced migration and displacement to indigenous rights organizations, women's rights organizations, LGBT rights organizations, prominent Honduran attorneys and journalists, and labor unions. It also concluded with a

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DELEGATIONS

Colombia

The People Behind the Coal

June 18-25, 2017

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

Cuba

Discovering Cuba: Art and Culture

March 24- April 2, 2017

Coordinator: Alex Pamiloza, 973-580-7814, alexandra.pamiloza@gmail.com

The Next Generation

April 8-17, 2017

Coordinator: Emily Schnee, emilyschnee1@gmail.com

Honduras

Radical Organizing Across Difference: Alternative Spring Break

March 17-26, 2017

Coordinator: Jeanette Charles, 805-669-VIVA, jcharles.wfpsw@gmail.com

Nonviolent Resistance to Land Takeovers through Community Organizing and Coalition Building

May 25-June 3, 2017

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

The Fight for Reparations

June 25-July 5, 2017

Coordinator: Jeanette Charles, 805-669-VIVA, jcharles.wfpsw@gmail.com

Mexico

Agriculture, Land Rights, and Migration

March 3-12, 2017

Coordinator: Liz Moldan, 507-227-1514, liz@witnessforpeace.org

Education Reform, State Repression, the and Roots of Migration

June 18-27, 2017

Coordinator: Dixie Olmstead, 651-271-6558, dixie_olmstead@yahoo.com

Nicaragua

Fair Trade Teen Delegation

July 3-12, 2017

Coordinator: Ron Garcia-Fogarty, 919-951-5961 nicamerican@gmail.com

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Grassroots Action

Witness for Peace-Midwest has just finished a powerful round of regional delegations to Honduras, Colombia, Mexico, and Cuba, and we are currently recruiting for spring and summer delegations to Honduras and Mexico with themes exploring education, nonviolent resistance, land rights, and immigration. The region is continuing to support work around the Berta Cáceres Human Rights in Honduras Act, including local events to mark one year since Berta's assassination on March 2nd. We're also planning a fall speaking tour focused on the ongoing movements for peace and justice in Colombia.

Witness for Peace-Northwest announces an opportunity for activists, organizations and universities in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana and Alaska to join with us as we revitalize WFP grassroots work in our region, with newly designated Regional Organizer, Kris Hannigan-Luther. Building on our long history of successful organizing in the NW, we want to partner with you as we plan for 2017. Contact us for more information on local events, delegations, and a WFPNW fall speaking tour. Kris Hannigan-Luther, kris@witnessforpeace.org, 208-771-3527

Witness for Peace Southeast will have a delegation to Cuba in February. We are planning the Pilgrimage for Justice and Peace April 9-14 to focus on: Welcome to Refugees and Immigrants, Black Lives Matter, and Protect the Earth. We have begun recruiting for our teen delegation in July.

Witness for Peace Southwest has two confirmed delegations to Honduras this year: an alternative spring break scheduled for March and one on reparations at the end of June. WFPSW will also be scheduling delegations to Cuba later in the year. Our region organized its 2017 inaugural event: Revolutionary Processes in the Americas with report backs from Cuba, Mexico and Venezuela. This year's programming looks to engage the region with Black and Indigenous struggles for sovereignty and freedom in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Update on Re-Introduction of the Berta bill: A short note: the Berta Cáceres Human Rights in Honduras Act is slated to be re-introduced on March 2. Look for communication from WFP about getting your representative to re-co-sponsor!

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.

Solidarity Feature: Honduras Delegation Report-Back *(Continued from page 2)*

meeting with several high-level embassy staff, including Ambassador James Nealon.

This delegation came at a critical juncture in Honduran history, as the wave of violent repression of the opposition intensifies and President Juan Orlando Hernández moves toward an unprecedented and unconstitutional re-election. Delegates heard first-hand the testimony of victims of that repression, as well as remarkably clear analysis on the U.S. role in providing tangible support to the repressive Honduran government.

Keying in on our delegates' own expertise, we built a series of action plans for 2017 that we expect will strengthen the incredibly important work of our partners in Honduras, and create lasting connections between their work and that of their counterparts in the U.S. and Belize.

WFP's work in Honduras, to illuminate, document, and resist the U.S. role in funding and training the increasingly brutal Honduran security forces, is more critical now than ever. With President Hernández's re-election campaign in 2017, and President Trump's choice of former SOUTHCOM head John Kelly (see lead feature) as his head of Homeland Security, the



situation will only become more critical, especially as the same tired "counternarcotics" excuses are used for the amplification of brutal tactics against organizers, journalists, rural communities, and members of the opposition.

It is our sincere hope and intention to continue to connect our Honduran partners to delegations and other U.S. organizations as a way to deepen our commitment to their struggles, and provide tangible international solidarity.

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



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Alliance for Prosperity and other security aid to the country is exacerbating the human rights crisis there, doing the exact opposite of countering factors that compel people to migrate. At times, the ways Kelly talks about issues like migration are highly alarming and don't acknowledge the human suffering behind them. He's even referred to undocumented immigration as an "existential threat" to the U.S. and its security. The militarizing lens that Kelly brings to his position could be absolutely disastrous for countries like Mexico, Honduras, and Colombia, especially paired with a "security" oriented view of immigration from Latin America that purportedly takes into account its root causes.

Interestingly, Kelly deftly speaks the language of human rights. In practice, though, as head of SOUTHCOM, Kelly circumvented human rights laws when it was convenient for so-called U.S. interests. For example, in 2014, he testified before Congress that, "The beauty of having a Colombia — they're such good partners, particularly in the military realm...[is that] when we ask them to go somewhere else and train the Mexicans, the Hondurans...they will do it almost without asking...it's



Senator Jeff Sessions

PHOTO CREDIT: KEVIN LAMARQUE/REUTERS

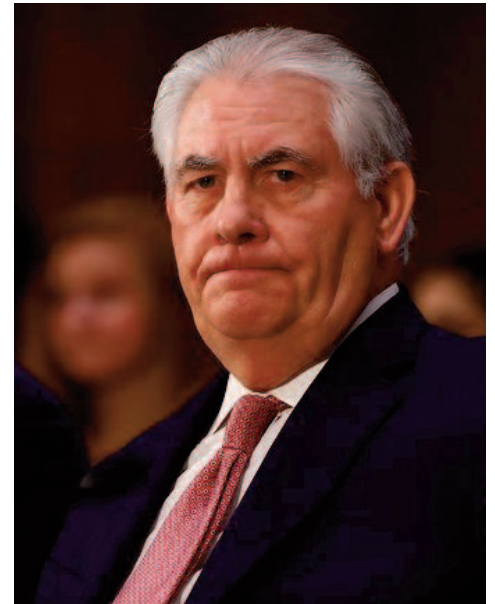
important for them to go, because I'm — at least on the military side — restricted from working with some of these countries because of limitations that are...really based on past sins."

Shockingly, Kelly is essentially admitting that Colombian state security forces are doing the U.S.'s dirty work of training state security forces like Honduras', whom Kelly's former purview SOUTHCOM was barred by U.S. law from training because of those security forces' human rights abuses. This outsourcing of training to Colombian state security forces is extremely concerning to WFP and our partners, since the Colombian forces' pattern of human rights abuses and collaboration with murderous paramilitary groups — especially at the height of Plan Colombia — will only escalate human rights crises when injected into places like Honduras and Mexico.

Gitmo Supporter:

To head DHS, which oversees a number of large detention systems, Kelly's views on the prison at Guantánamo Bay — where detainees have been held for over a decade, in many cases with no formal charges against them — make him a very disturbing choice. He's called Gitmo a "model of detention for the world." The *Washington Post* reports that "Kelly opposed Obama's failed plans to close Guantánamo...and he has strongly defended how the military handles detainees. In a 2014 interview, he told [the *Post*] that criticism of [detainees'] treatment by human rights groups and others was 'foolishness.'"

From a Latin America solidarity perspective, Gen. Kelly is not the only concerning nominee President Trump has tapped. Attorney General nominee **Sen. Jeff Sessions** (AL) has sought to double down on the disastrous Drug War, having opposed recent reforms at various levels that move away from criminalizing drug



Rex Tillerson

PHOTO CREDIT: JOE RAEDLE/GETTY IMAGES

use; he's opposed measures that provide a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, favoring measures restricting immigration; and he thinks Gitmo "fits [its] purpose marvelously well."

And though in his confirmation hearing he didn't say much about Latin America beyond that he would advise Trump to veto any bill ending the embargo of Cuba, then-nominee for Secretary of State (and former Exxon-Mobil CEO) **Rex Tillerson** said he'd need further "facts from the ground" before saying whether the thousands of recent extrajudicial executions in the Philippines — which closely echo similar atrocities in Colombia and other countries — were "conducive to human rights violations that we should be concerned about and condemning."

With a cabinet like this, we will have to be vigilant. We must call out the dangerous tendencies we see in these new officials and — led by our Latin American partners — organize and resist: militarization; criminalization of vulnerable people, from threatened trade unionists to immigrants; and the oppressive Drug War.