

CUSLAR NEWSLETTER

Spring 1996

Faith and Struggle in Latin America



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Solidarity Forever

After four very inspiring years as CUSLAR Coordinator, I am hanging up my sombrero, or rather, moving it to Washington to work with the Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala (NISGUA). I began my work here at what looked like a time of transition for the Latin American solidarity movement: The Cold War was over, a Democratic administration was championing human rights, military juntas appeared to be in their final days, peasant revolution was declared a thing of the past, and Latin America once again disappeared from the news. Was U.S. solidarity even necessary anymore?

Judging by the events of the past four years, the answer is a resounding yes. As is painfully clear in the case of Guatemala, the U.S. Government's love affair with government-sponsored death squads and torturers continues unabated, even when their victims are U.S. citizens. The litany of crimes and cover-ups perpetrated at the highest levels of our government is slowly coming to light only because of the selfless crusades by people like Jennifer Harbury and Sister Dianna Ortiz. Just as Guatemalans continue their struggle for peace with justice, we have a duty to hold our government accountable for crimes committed in our name.

Amid the hateful political storm brewing over immigration, the need for solidarity is also great. In times of economic uncertainty, immigrants are convenient scapegoats. There is currently a bill in Congress that capitalizes on the current hysteria. Those who would deny schooling and medical treatment to children, and turn away those fleeing repression at home, need to hear the voices of reason and compassion.

The media have indeed decided that the destructive power U.S. government and corporations wield over the fate of our brothers and sisters from Havana to Santiago doesn't warrant a headline. But their indifference doesn't lessen our responsibility.

The people of Cuba and Nicaragua understand all too well what it means to feel the destructive force of U.S. imperialism. The campesinos of Chiapas who grow our food and the sweatshop workers in Haiti who sew our shirts know the true costs of "free trade." The residents of Rio's favelas and Lima's shantytowns are a testament to the brutality of capitalism. As long as the fundamental power imbalance between north and south remains, so will our duty to stand alongside those who struggle for change.

-Daniel Fireside

The Committee on U.S./Latin American Relations (CUSLAR) is a Cornell University based group, founded in 1965, which seeks to promote a greater understanding of Latin America and the Caribbean. The members of CUSLAR are a diverse group of people united in our concern about the role of the U.S. in the social, political, and economic affairs of the region. Within this context we support the right of the people of Latin America and the Caribbean to self determination, and support their efforts to free themselves from a legacy of colonialism, exploitation, and oppression. CUSLAR works for peace, justice, and greater mutual understanding in U.S./Latin American relations through education, solidarity and support of human rights.

If you are interested in writing or editing for the Newsletter, please call the CUSLAR office at (607) 255-7293. Articles and letters to the editor should be sent to: CUSLAR, G-29 Anabel Taylor Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853. You can also email us at: cuslar@cornell.edu. The CUSLAR Newsletter is published three times a year.

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Sister Dianna Ortiz Ends Vigil

Statement to the Press by Sister Dianna Ortiz May 6, 1996

Over five weeks ago, I stood in Lafayette Park, along with other survivors of torture in Guatemala, and with others whose lives had been torn apart by the violence there. The tulips were only slips of leaves, patches like open hands. Together, we called for truth: who was responsible for our life-shattering losses? Who was involved in the hundreds of thousands of disappearances and assassinations carried out by the Guatemalan death squads over the past three decades? What was the role of our own government in these atrocities? We asked, not out of idle curiosity, but because only by learning the truth can we heal and only by learning the truth can we prevent these terrible realities from recurring.

In the five weeks of my silent vigil, during two of which I have fasted, I have lost twenty-five pounds. I have suffered the wind, and the cold, and the rain. But

that is nothing. In Guatemala, approximately ten people have been tortured since the tulips budded and bloomed. Around thirty more have been murdered



Where are they?

for political reasons.

The United Nations mission in Guatemala has found that that vast majority of these abuses are committed by forces connected to the state, and the impunity these murderers and torturers enjoy is the main obstacle to human rights. The people of Guatemala want peace. They want to reconstruct their society, prosecute the abusers, break the cycle of impunity that allows the violations to continue. So, once again, I call on the United States government to declassify all information related to human

rights abuses in Guatemala, from 1954 to the present. Allow the Guatemalan people to heal.

Our government has taken the first step in the necessary declassification of files on Guatemala. Last Friday, the State Department released several thousand pages of documents. Those given to me are disappointing. I have asked repeatedly for information on the American present at my torture, whom my torturers referred to as their boss. I have always believed that if I could identify

Alejandro, I could also learn who my Guatemalan torturers were. On April 4, First Lady Hillary Clinton told me that any information related to Alejandro, even classified information, would be released to me. She did not rule out the possibility that Alejandro was a present or past employee of a US agency.

The documents I have received, however, do not reveal the identity of Alejandro nor shed any light on the identities of my Guatemalan torturers. What the documents do reveal is a pronounced bias against me, from the very beginning, on the part of the US embassy in Guatemala.

As most of you know, on November 2, 1989, I was abducted from the back yard of a religious retreat and taken to a clandestine prison, where I was

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Cuba: Bridle and Saddle

By María Díaz

February 24 1996- Two small planes from the anti-Castro group "Brothers to the Rescue" penetrate Cuban air space and, despite repeated warnings from the air border patrol, insists on continuing with its mission. One of them responds: "yes, we know, but we are exercising our right as free Cubans to complete our mission. A greeting from Brothers to the Rescue for you and for all Cubans in the name of its President, José Basulto."

The recording with these phrases could be heard repeatedly in Cuba in these days. Since then, the affair has been discussed in heartfelt battles between sympathizers and detractors of Cuba; it has been debated in international forums and numerous proposals have been put forth to explain the incident. I believe that to the multiple responses, one would have to add one that includes a very simple question: Why?

What objective could be accomplished by risking human lives in such a mission? Invading a country's airspace without permission is prohibited by international law, as we know; but that's not the issue. If you decide to take the risk, it's because you are convinced of the importance of your mission. You believe that your objective, which is worthy of risking your life, will benefit from your actions.

But the airplanes were not

carrying any type of special weapon, which would magically grant the wishes of exile groups. They have been hoping for 30 years to overthrow the government of a country they still believe is theirs. Nor were the airplanes carrying school supplies, food or medicines for the people they consider brothers

But who is going to take this feeble aggression seriously after the Bay of Pigs Invasion, the Cuban Missile Crisis and over thirty years of embargo?

to be rescued. In the end the only cargo of these planes was their pilots, whose important "mission" was to simply taunt the Cuban government by violating its airspace. Nothing more.

So I ask, for what? No one in their right mind believes such actions would topple the political order of a country. Were they trying to terrorize the Cuban people? Believe it or not, no one here experienced the slightest fear. Life in Cuba followed its normal course during those days. Children went to school, adults went to work, housewives continued using their imagination to change their menus. Everything was the same. However, the street talk

about the incident had two reactions, from one corner of the island to the other, a bit of surprise and a lot of curious indignation. The first reaction was expressed in the typical Cuban phrase "¿a quién se le ocurre, a estas alturas?" meaning "who would think of such a thing right now?" This was usually followed by another question: "who do these people think they are?"

"Right now," that's the problem. For the past 37 years, exile groups have declared themselves

enemies of the political system chosen by those who live on the island and have done all that's humanly possible to overthrow it. Of course, they have not been alone in this quest. If there has been something in common between all U.S. administrations, it's their support (major or minor) to those groups which are opposed to "Castro's Cuba" (a phrase which forgets that Cuba is also the country of 11 million people; and believe it or not, even though we complain a lot, we *like* living here). But who is going to take this feeble aggression seriously after the Bay of Pigs Invasion, the Cuban Missile Crisis and over thirty years of embargo?

María Díaz teaches sociology in Camagüey, Cuba



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The listing of violations to Cuban sovereignty is tiresome due to its exclusiveness and reiteration.

However, the reiteration of violations does not prohibit indignation. In fact, it promotes it. How long do we have to endure violations like this? Why don't they leave us alone? If Cubans, in Cuba, have elected and re-elected several times over their own destiny, no one has the right to interfere. The typical curiosity of the Cuban unites to our everyday anger when we ask: "What do they think? That the U.S. government is going to support them? It is enough already that it permits them to take off from its territory for such missions...Or is it that they all want to pressure the Clinton administration? After all, there are signs of better relations between the two countries, and the Miami elite does not benefit from this. But to send people to their death because of that! What do these people think?"

It seems that the popular belief has hit the nail on the head. Too many people in exile live off the tension between Cuba and the U.S. There are many who, obsessed by a fixed intransigent idea, refuse to see the Cuban reality, with its pros and cons. There are many who think—and teach their children that Cuba, like an untamed mare, needs only to be saddled and have its reins pulled to get in shape.

At the end of the 20th century, it seems that everyone is entitled to his or her opinion, except the Cubans from Cuba. We are tired of it. It is more tragic that, because of a simple political game, not only do the pilots risk their lives, but also those who, thanks to the Helms-Burton bill, are condemned to global isolation. Every unnecessary death is an attempt against humanity and to condemn a whole nation contains echoes of Auschwitz and Buchenwald. •

Strengthening the Embargo is Counterproductive

By Cynthia Crowner

I was in Cuba when the Brothers to the Rescue planes were shot down by the Cuban Air Force in February of this year. I asked several Cubans for their reaction. One woman said, "These groups have been buzzing Cuban airspace for the past nine months and even dropping anti-Castro leaflets on Havana. Would your government tolerate this?" An elderly minister said, "When my sister left Cuba to go live in Miami, I said to her, 'Have a good life.' I feel that way toward anyone who wishes to leave. I hope they find a better life, find what they want in the United States. But if they go, they should be good Americans and stop trying to meddle in the affairs of Cuba. Because each time they meddle, it makes it harder on those of us inside Cuba who are doing the delicate work of pressing for change here."

I think this pastor's perspective has been verified. Since that incident the Cuban authorities have suppressed dissent and have rounded up several hundred Cubans suspected of belonging to organizations that would like to see changes in the Cuban system. They have also agreed to take a harder line on economic matters. There is also no question in my mind that the intervention by Cuban

American lobbies in the affairs of Cuba only provides a justification for the Communist Party to tighten control and restrict whatever little political space might be available to those in the Cuban society who wish to express a dissenting point of view, a critique. It silences even a critically supportive perspective.

To be fair to Cuban Americans, they are not all in agreement with the Cuban American National Foundation. A Cuban American who had left the island in 1980 as part of the Mariel boatlift and who had come to Cuba to see relatives, spoke to me on our flight home. "The embargo and crises like the suicide mission by Brothers to the Rescue are the best thing for the Communist Party. They can claim the country is under attack and that for the good of the nation, they must tighten security."

I firmly believe that the 35 year old embargo of Cuba has not worked and that efforts to strengthen it will prove equally ineffective. I found Cubans on the island to be fiercely nationalistic even as they expressed doubts about the viability of the Communist Party's plans for the nation. One conservative evangelical Christian young man stated, "I think there are things in Cuba that must change, but if a solution is imposed from the outside, by Cuban American groups or by the United States government, I have no doubt that our people will take up in arms."

In this kind of situation, tightening the noose only creates greater resistance. •

**Cynthia Crowner,
former CUSLAR
Coordinator, is the
director of the
Kirkridge Retreat
Center**

Pastors Call for Release of Aid

By Cris McConkey

Chanting "SIXTY DAYS IS TOO LONG: SEIZING MEDICAL AID IS WRONG," more than 100 supporters of the "Fast for Life" demonstrated at the Treasury Department in Washington on Friday, April 19, demanding the release of 400 medical computers destined for Cuba. Five demonstrators at that action were arrested after blocking the entrance to the Treasury Department. One of those arrested was faster Lisa Valanti of Pittsburgh, who has not taken solid food in 59 days. The demonstration Friday follows demonstrations on Monday, April 15 in San Francisco and New York in which a total of 22 people were arrested.

On January 31, U.S. Treasury agents seized 325 medical computers when volunteers of the sixth Pastors for Peace US-Cuba Friendshipment attempted to take them across the San Diego/Tijuana border on foot. The computers that Treasury stole — all obsolete by US standards and including those donated by Canadian citizens for which a bond had been posted — would have formed part of INFOMED, an on-line medical information system that will connect every hospital and clinic on the island.

On February 17, having responded to a call from Pastors for Peace, I joined Peter DeMott and Tony Corradino of Ithaca and Mary Sopchak of Syracuse at the Vermont border. My truck

was packed with donated computers and medical aid collected by CUSLAR. All the computers were seized. I knew the risks, including the risk of my arrest and having my vehicle impounded but I half expected that we might prevail as we had in the past. It was a risk that had to be taken.

The Treasury Department maintains that the computers were confiscated because no license for shipment of humanitarian aid had been issued by the Office of Foreign Assets Control, as required under the terms of the U.S. embargo. However, previous caravans (there have been six "Friendshipments" so far) had been successful in transporting aid, including computers, to the churches of Cuba without a license. The Treasury Department has maintained that the donated computers, all obsolete by U.S. standards, might somehow end up in the hands of the Castro regime. This is utter nonsense.

The official statement does not explain why the administration chose to organize a special interagency task force to stop this particular shipment of donated old computers, marshalling an estimated 1,000 Treasury and Customs agents, police, and other personnel and expending nearly a million tax-payer dollars. Nor does it explain the violent behavior shown by border police — captured on video — against nonviolent caravaners, who in some cases were choked and gang-tackled. Despite efforts to pin the blame on the caravaners, there is not one shred of evidence

of caravaners acting in any manner other than nonviolently.

The principal server computers that form the backbone of the Cuban medical-information system were provided by the Pan American Health Organization with assistance from a United Nations special projects fund. The computers donated by U.S. and Canadian citizens would have served at the terminal ends of the system. As a direct response to the U.S. seizure of the aid and the ensuing Fast for Life for its release, over 1,000 computers have been donated to Cuba by European nongovernmental organizations. While the rest of the world supports Cuba's model health-care system, the Clinton administration follows the hyperbolic paranoia of Jesse Helms and his ilk. If the ultimate use of these computers is the real concern, then the administration could easily accept the offer of the World Council of Churches to assume responsibility for delivering and monitoring this medical aid, to be sure that it is used for its intended humanitarian purpose.

The four fasters — Lisa Valanti of Pittsburgh, Jim Clifford of Louisville, Brian Rohatyn of Regina, Canada and the Rev. Lucius Walker — continue to stand on their moral convictions. "We're not going away", says Lisa Valanti. "We're going to keep fasting; we're going to escalate the pressure and use every means at our disposal to get our message to the Clinton Administration."*

[More information is available at the Pastor's for Peace Web Site: www.igc.apc.org/cubasoli]

Cris McConkey is a local solidarity activist

Samuel Ruiz: The Hour of God

Controversial Mexican Bishop Samuel Ruiz is considered a saint by the church of the poor but a devil by others. Although twice nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, a mob of San Cristóbal residents, led by the local elite called *coletos*, tried to burn down his cathedral last year.

Although one of the most respectable liberation theologians in the Americas, the Ibero-American Solidarity Movement - a Lyndon Larouche offshoot - plasters posters across Mexico accusing Ruiz of endorsing human sacrifice.

While adored by his overwhelmingly Mayan flock in the southern state of Chiapas, the pro-government press delights in tagging the bishop "Comandante Sammy," because of his leftward learnings.

Life has been anything but dull for this vigorous, scholarly prelate since the Zapatista Army of National Liberation seized San Cristóbal - in his diocese - Jan. 1, 1994. Accused of masterminding the indigenous uprising and condemned by members of his own church, both the Mexican Catholic Bishops Conference (CEM) and then-President Carlos Salinas soon recognized that Ruiz was the only possible mediator acceptable to both sides. For two years now, he has functioned in that role.

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Ruiz arrived as bishop of San Cristóbal from Rome 36 years ago, and his transformation into the most outspoken defender of the indigenous has been a gradual one.

"The evangelization process dictated that the only way to express Christianity is the western way. This is not an authentic evangelization. Now, after 500 years, the real evangelization has begun"

As his ministry has grown stronger, so have the pressures from governors and large landowners. Priests were jailed and deported - they still are. Papal Nuncio Girolamo Prigione, determined to exorcise the germ of liberation theology from the Mexican hierarchy, has carried out a two-decade-long vendetta against Ruiz, and the Vatican's Sacred Congregation of Bishops has twice condemned Ruiz for, among other sins, "preaching a Marxist interpretation of the Gospel."

In September, a coadjutor bishop, Raúl Vera López was appointed by the pope to share diocesan tasks and succeed the 71-year-old Ruiz when he must retire in four years.

Ruiz seems to thrive on such tribulations. As both bishop and head of his personally assembled CONAI mediating team that facilitates peace talks between the Zapatistas and the government, the bishop remains vital, innovative, and supremely active. The following interview was conducted in San Cristóbal Cathedral by John Ross.

Don Samuel, what has

changed in San Cristóbal since the "*coletos*" - upper class Chiapans - attacked the Cathedral on Feb. 1995?

Everything and nothing. The indigenous remain vigilant.

Their faith is exceptional. Despite the obstacles that have been placed in our way, there is no question that we are on the correct path. The attacks on our work are diminishing. I cannot answer for the *coletos* but we pray that

reconciliation has entered their hearts. It is the hour of God.

Last summer's expulsions (of priests) were the most dramatic actions the Mexican government has taken against your diocese. Was there any complicity between the Zedillo regime, the church hierarchy and the nuncio to expel them?

I don't think you can make this assumption with respect to the CEM. The bishops were very clear. They made a direct complaint to the government that underscored the fact that the expulsions not only affected our diocese but the entire Catholic Church.

There well could have been a certain arrangement between the nuncio and the state, one that posited the conditions for the separation of the priests from our diocese but I do not know this. This is only what is said. The implicated ones have not denied it.

On the official side, the side

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of the state, we have ample proof that the priests were being pressured to leave. Despite the expulsions, we remain on our feet. We will continue to work here until our era ends.

Was the coadjutor bishop appointed to bring the coletos back to the church?

A bishop is not sent for one end. He comes for the whole diocesan process. An auxiliary bishop, as a coadjutor, for the diocese. Now, my brother Raúl is the successor. He will be bishop when I finish the first 75 years of my life. He is orienting himself, visiting the parishes, learning where to insert himself.

The nuncio claims that Bishop Vera has been put in charge of the clergy. How do you respond?

That's absurd. Monsignor

Raúl serves the whole diocese. He has no field in which he cannot participate. The whole diocese is in his hands just as it is in mine. We have common work.

Will this diocese transform Bishop Vera much as it has transformed you?

Are you saying the bishop is not transformed? The process of conversion does not stop at some determined point. We are each called to a constant conversion. If we listen and do not resist, we will come hear the essence of the community that is the Universal Church. I believe Raúl has a sensitivity to this diocese. He listens with interest and joy to the most simple people. And this is the transforming potential of our diocesan process.

You often speak of the Gospel as a revolutionary document. What does this mean?

There is no part of the Gospel that leaves one quiescent. The Gospel snaps you up - if it doesn't, you are not understanding it correctly. The Word of God is not to be memorized by rote. We interpret what it says and it transforms us into action.

I have been reading again about the birth of Christ in poverty and it is a revolutionary message. In the birth, says the Apostle Paul, is hidden all the riches of His dignity. This tells us of the profundity of humanity that is so often hidden in poverty. This is the real message of the Annunciation - that He was born in a stable. Pope Paul VI calls this the expressed decision of God the Word to become Man at a given moment in history, in poverty, under the weight of a foreign empire. This tells us so much that we need to know today.

Do you speak often of the faith of the indigenous peoples?

What a spirituality! There are such diverse paths to God. What we call popular religion,

the processions, the prayers. This is, of course, stronger with the simpler people. But frequently, the strongest spirituality, the most profound experience of God, is simply to live in community. In this, the indigenous are a much greater force than those of us who live in individualistic western civilization. This sense of community was here long before the arrival of Christianity.

But is this spirituality merely a refuge from poverty?

Absolutely not. The indigenous people live in history. Their spirituality is not an escape from confronting those who would oppress them. This spirituality shows itself not only in their relationship with the Lord but in the popular struggles too. The people are animated by their faith and through it, take concrete action.

Indigenous people these days are talking a great deal about autonomy - but what does autonomy really mean?

They can explain it much better than I can. I can only tell you what autonomy is not. Autonomy is not being discussed as separation from Mexico. It is not exclusive like the reservation system in North America. Autonomy doesn't exclude races or languages. Autonomy speaks to a designated territory where a people live but it does not say this is for us and you must get out.

Do you anticipate increased demands for autonomy from the church by indigenous clergy?

The indigenous clergy have autonomy. They form what we call the Indigenous Church. This is a recognition of the unique ethical and religious values of a people that the Latin fathers called "semina verbi" or "verbal seed."

The Indigenous Church is not a trampoline to Christianity but part of the content of the

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Annunciation. There is a presence of God in history. God inhabits each people, Paul says, and each people has its own road to the discovery of God, whatever they call it.

There is the calling of Christ to form one people from the many, a people of the peoples. Remember Pentecost. The first baptized are those who understand Peter although he is speaking in another language. God is discovered by each people and this richness is the new people of God.

The indigenous people have their own language and culture and values and presence. At this moment, the whole continent is on the march with the remembrance of 503 years of imposition. There is clear evidence of the urgency of the incarnation of the message in indigenous culture, despite the fact that Christianity was imposed upon them. The evangelization process dictated that the only way to express Christianity is the western way. This is not an authentic evangelization. Now, after 500 years, the real evangelization has begun.

So do you condemn the evangelization of the Conquest?

I'm not saying that. I speak of imposition, one culture upon another. This is discriminatory - one way was placed atop another and there was no dialogue. This is what Bartolomé de las Casas objected to. He insisted that you could not disseminate the Gospel by coercive means.

There is a not-very-well-known letter that de las Casas wrote to the Dominican community of Oaxaca after he had met with his adversaries. In it, he says that not one of his adversaries had sought to rebut his arguments. What was his argument? Nothing less than the legitimacy of human

sacrifice. How human sacrifice implies not only giving to God the fruits of the earth over which He has dominion - but also giving to Him the whole manifestation of the love of God.

In the Mayan culture, there were young men who, each year, offered themselves up to be drowned in the waters of the cenotes (sacred wells) to ensure that rain would fall. In the Jewish religion, one finds the echo of such sacrifice. And so de las Casas argued that human sacrifice was legitimate. And no one rebutted him. I find this very interesting.

Don Samuel, you have been mediating the peace process between the Zapatistas and the government for more than one year now - are they going anywhere?

I am optimistic that both sides are listening to each other but the dialogue is not only what takes place at the table with two distinct sides, an intermediary, with the intention of arriving at a peaceful solution. It is not those who participate in the dialogue

who bring the peace, not their discussions or their conclusions or the document they sign. The peace process has a concrete subject - civil society. The EZLN spoke of this on Jan. 1, 1994. The rebellion was being made so that civil society could participate organically in the transition to a true democracy.

You cannot legislate peace. Laws only signify a process - a law ratifies that process.

Don Samuel, you have only four years left as bishop of San Cristóbal. What work is left for you to do?

Our objectives for the next four years will be no different than what they have always been: peace and reconciliation.

We are most proud of the insurgent indigenous church we have built. We now have 8,000 indigenous catechists and 200 ordained deacons and we are moving towards maturity.

Evidently, this special moment has brought us new tests, but the road to true peace and justice has always been our goal as it is the goal of all who dwell in the kingdom of God. •

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Duke by Fernando Flores

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interrogated, tortured, and brutally raped. At one point, my torturers told me that if I did not cooperate, they would have to turn a videotape they had made of me over to Alejandro, their boss, and he would release the tape to the public and the press. The tape showed me engaged in an act I was ashamed of, an act I was forced to commit. I have finally spoken publicly about this: I was forced to stab another woman whom the torturers had taken prisoner.

Several hours later, I came face to face with Alejandro, the boss. As my torturers were beginning to rape me again, I became aware of the presence of someone else in the room—a man had cursed in unmistakable, American English. Then, in broken, heavily accented Spanish, he shouted that I was a North American nun and that my disappearance had become public. He ordered my torturers to stop. He took off my blindfold, which I had been forced to wear at various points in the torture, and helped me on with my clothes. I asked him directly, in English, if he was an American. He refused to answer but put me into a jeep and told me he was taking me to a friend at the American embassy who would help me leave the country. For the duration of the trip, I spoke to

him in English, which he understood perfectly. In his poor, broken Spanish, he told me he was working to liberate the Guatemalans from communism. He added I should forgive my torturers. He said my torturers had confused me with Veronica Ortiz Hernandez, a member of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity. I reminded him that the death threats I had received were addressed to me. There was no mistake involved. He then told me in English—perfect American English—to remember that he had access to the videotape and the photographs that had been made of me.

Since I did not trust Alejandro and did not know where he was really taking me, I jumped out of the jeep when it was stopped in heavy traffic. I made my way, eventually, to the Maryknoll house and then was taken to the Papal Nuncio for safety. The US Ambassador and another embassy official arrived and wanted to speak with me, but I refused to be alone with them, and I was too traumatized to talk to them about my experience. They seemed to accept this. They were told about the cigarette burns on my back, which the Archbishop and others had examined, and they could see the bruise and abrasion on the left side of my face, where my torturers had hit me.

As I have recently learned from the State Department

documents, however, the Ambassador did not patiently and impartially await my testimony. He did not ever intend to undertake a serious, impartial investigation. I left almost immediately for the United States, and within a week of my abduction and escape, before any serious investigation had been conducted and before I had submitted any formal testimony, Ambassador Stroock had drawn his conclusions about what he referred to as my "alleged disappearance and subsequent reappearance."

Her refusal to speak to US government representatives, either here or in the US, and the insistence by those around her on maximum publicity via press releases and phone conversations with congressional staff and religious groups in the US leads us to question the motives and timing behind the story: apparently a debate is scheduled in Congress this week on aid to Guatemala.

In other words, according to Ambassador Stroock, I was never abducted, but with the help of US priests and nuns and the Guatemalan Archbishop, I simulated an abduction as a political strategy to end US funding of the Guatemalan military.

The insinuations on the part of US embassy officials continued, no matter how illogical or contradictory. In a 1991 report to the Secretary of State, Ambassador Stroock says, "Human rights is a legitimate topic for discussion, a mainstream political issue. The topic is no longer the exclusive preserve of communists. It is now OK to be for human rights." But in a report to the Secretary of State dated April 1992, Stroock describes part of a visit I had made to Guatemala to testify in

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court:

Her press conference, while undoubtedly high on drama and very moving to most of those personally present and many television viewers, was patently political. Sister Diana read in Spanish from a prepared statement which was later published in a full-page ad in the newspaper. Unlike in her previous declarations, which were confined to what happened to her, this statement was a political manifesto in which she said she is pursuing her case on behalf of all victims of torture and injustice in Guatemala.

I was willing to return to Guatemala four times to testify in the Guatemalan courts. To give you an idea of the ambience in the courtroom, in 1992 the presiding judge told US embassy officials, "When there was a question she did not know how to answer (such as how many bodies were in the pit into which you were thrown?) she broke down and cried, and then requested a recess during which time she went into the bathroom with her therapist. Upon returning to the courtroom, Ortiz provided the answer." This, according to the judge, was an example of how I was parroting information given to me by others.

The same month, embassy official Sue Patterson remarks, "One of our crosses to bear here in Guatemala is the Sister Dianna Ortiz case. [It's a] big political problem for the Government of Guatemala because everybody believes a nun more than they do the Government of Guatemala. On this case, however, I don't, nor does anyone else who knows the case well—too many inconsistencies in her accounts. I write this informally because we have

to be so very careful in this case in order not to be accused of being partial or disbelieving.

The fact is, I have been consistent in my account since the beginning. The US embassy was inconsistent and, in fact, deceptive, paying lip service to the need to find the truth in my case and secretly undercutting me, slandering me, and trying to prevent the truth from emerging.

Stroock, who from the beginning had expressed concern about "the potential damage to US interests resulting from this alleged incident," wrote several letters to the State Department in 1990, arguing that my request to meet with the State Department desk officer to explain the sequence of events and answer questions should be denied: "If the department meets her," he writes, "pressure from all sorts of people and groups will build on the department to act on the information she provides...I am afraid we are going to get cooked on this one..."

The documents released to me by the State Department reveal that the US embassy never investigated the possibility that an American with a contact in the embassy was present at my torture. Instead, embassy officials engaged in intimidation. The day I escaped, an embassy official told a nun at the Maryknoll house that such a charge would damage the credibility of my

story. In a March 1990 meeting with my lawyers, Ambassador Stroock said the statement that an American with ties to the embassy was present at my torture was "an insult to every mission employee." In a letter to my lawyer, he accused me of breaking the eighth commandment, bearing false witness against my neighbor.

The enraged attitude of Embassy officials, their immediate unwillingness to investigate seriously, and their slanderous characterizations of me as a liar, a political strategist, or—according to a congressional aide who conversed with embassy official Lew Anselem at a cocktail party in December 1990—a lesbian involved in a lover's quarrel, suggest that there was indeed something about my abduction and torture that the embassy wanted to hide.

Of all the documents I received from the State Department, only one, dated 1990, contains a significant reference to Alejandro. It reads as follows: "VERY IMPORTANT: We need to close the loop on the issue of the 'North American' named by Ortiz as being involved in the case...The EMBASSY IS VERY SENSITIVE ON THIS ISSUE, but it is an issue we will have to respond to publicly...." Two completely redacted pages

Continued on
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page 11

follow.

I can only hope that full declassification of documents belonging to other agencies, such as the Pentagon, the Defense Intelligence Agency, and the Central Intelligence Agency, will reveal more than the State Department's disclosure has.

Numerous US congressional representatives have assured me of their commitment to pressuring for a full, agency-wide declassification of the files on Guatemala. Last Thursday, representatives Porter and Lantos presented me with a letter to President Clinton, asking for the declassification of all US government information on human rights cases in Guatemala since 1954. It was signed by 103 members of Congress, including Representative Nancy Pelosi, Representative Connie Morella, Representative Lynn Woolsey, Representative Robert Torricelli, and Representative Xavier Bercerra. [Ithaca's Rep. Maurice Hinchey also signed - ED]

I cannot adequately express my gratitude for their promise to assist the victims and survivors of human rights abuses in discovering the truth. The hundreds of thousands of people

in Guatemala who have lost loved ones to torture and murder, who are struggling to recover from heinous forms of torture, and who are desperately trying to prosecute human rights violators need this information. Justice is the only measure that will end the decades of torture, murder, and repression in Guatemala.

Given the assurance that members of Congress will vigorously take up the struggle

"I believe that together, we can bring the torture to an end"

for declassification, I will now suspend my fast and my vigil. I want to thank all the people who sat with me through the hot days and cold nights in the park in front of the White House. I would like to thank all the people throughout the country who conducted fasts and vigils in solidarity with the request for declassification of documents on Guatemala. I especially want to thank those who stood on the White House sidewalk, singing hymns and reading Scripture, then allowing themselves to be arrested one by one as a testament to their solidarity and to the seriousness of our request. Over a hundred people were arrested last week for civil disobedience in front of the White House, including Bishop Thomas Gumbleton, of Detroit, Dan Ellsburg, and Phillip Berrigan.

The struggle for truth and

justice in Guatemala needs to be taken up by all of us, on all fronts. Because I need and demand the truth, for myself and for the people of Guatemala, today I am filing a law suit against the United States agencies to which I submitted requests for documents over a year ago.

I am leaving the park, but my vigil continues. I hope the candle I lit on March 31, which has burned day and night in the park as a reminder to President Clinton of the hundreds of thousands of us who have suffered in Guatemala, now burns within you. We must all

ask together, Who is Alejandro?

That question has gone for so long unanswered. But there is always hope. By chance, when I appeared on the *Today Show*, I met forensic artist Jean Boylan. She offered to help me, and for the past four days I have had the opportunity to work with her to produce four sketches...

I am presenting these sketches to the Intelligence Oversight Board and the Department of Justice to assist them in their investigation. But I'm also seeking help from people throughout the world. If you have any information about these men, please contact Michele Arrington, at 202-383-6722 or Pat Davis, at the Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA (202-529-6599). I want to ask all of you for your help, for myself and for the people of Guatemala—for the innocent students, church workers, journalists, human rights advocates, and others typically targeted for disappearance, torture, and murder because they are work for truth and justice in a society characterized by inequality and oppression. I believe that together, we can bring the torture to an end.*

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Sweatshops Earn Big Bucks

It seems no matter where you turn these days, Walt Disney characters such as Pocahontas, Mickey Mouse or Bugs Bunny adorn T-shirts, pajamas and lunch boxes. And if you suspect Disney might be making a tidy profit on sales, a recent report by the US-based National Labor Committee (NLC) confirms this fact.

Take, for example, the Pocahontas pajamas you see at the US supermarket chain Wal-Mart for US\$11.97. They are made by workers at L.V. Miles, an assembly plant in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, under contract to the Walt Disney Company. L.V. Miles pays each worker about \$3.33 a day. In one day, then, 20 workers earn \$66.60, and together they produce 1,000 pairs of pajamas. That is \$11,970 worth of pajamas for less than \$67 in labor costs.

Less than seven cents per pair of pajamas goes to the workers who produced it. In contrast, Disney Chief Executive Officer Michael Eisner was paid \$203 million in salary and stock options in 1993.

An NLC report called "The US in Haiti: How to Get Rich on 11 Cents an Hour" says, "If a Haitian minimum wage worker worked full-time, six days a week, sewing clothes for Disney, it would take her 1,040 years to earn what Michael Eisner earned in one day in 1993."

The report goes on to say that although L.V. Miles pays the minimum wage, it subcontracts work to shops that pay even less.

The report was written by Eric Verhoogen, a labor researcher for the NLC, a human rights group funded by US labor unions. Verhoogen traveled to Haiti last August, visiting 50 assembly plants.

A loophole in the Organization of American States (OAS) embargo allowed US companies to continue operating after the coup which ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in September 1991. It was only after UN and OAS sanctions that they were finally forced to shut down in June 1994. They reopened again, however, when Aristide returned the following October.

Alpha Sewing makes safety gloves for Ansell International of Georgia in its Port-au-Prince factory. Work hours are from 6 am to 5:30 pm, Monday through Saturday. An additional nine-and-a-half hours are often required on Sundays.

Last April a worker who refused to come in one Sunday was summarily fired. "When he returned to pick up his severance pay the manager called the UN police and reported a burglar on the premises," the report said. The UN police arrived and handcuffed the worker. After protests from other employees, the police let the worker go.

"The next day management began firing, three at a time, four at a time, all those workers who had protested the arrest," workers told Verhoogen.

In May 1995, Aristide raised the legal minimum wage. The new law stated that a worker must receive 36 gourdes (\$2.40) a day. "Where the employee does piece work the price paid for a

unit of production must allow the employee who works eight hours to earn at least the minimum salary," under the law. But the companies' response was simply to raise production quotas needed to reach this figure to an impossible level.

The quota for sewing waistbands on panties (Hanes division of Sara Lee) before the minimum wage was raised had been 360 pieces a day. It is now 840 which allows a worker less than one minute to sew two waistbands. Since this is an impossible rate to maintain, a worker may earn less than half the minimum wage for a day that may last as long as 11 hours.

"In 1994, Wal-Mart made a profit of \$2.681 billion. The workers who sew the clothes for these companies are, in many cases, making less than \$312 a year working full time," writes Verhoogen.

Today's minimum wage has less buying power than before Aristide's election in December 1990. Since 1980, its real value has declined 50 percent. It is the lowest in the entire Caribbean area and provides less than 60 percent of the minimum needs for a family of five. A more common wage of \$1 a day provides about one-quarter of these minimum needs.

It is common knowledge that payment of less than the minimum wage is the rule in the industrial parks.

"We should ask JC Penny and Walt Disney: what happened to their so-called corporate codes of conduct? And why haven't their codes been translated into Creole and posted in their contractors' factories?" he said. •

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