

CUSLAR

COMMITTEE ON U.S. AND LATIN AMERICAN
RELATIONS

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Thoughts on Haiti from Fairly Close By

It's been a rough past few weeks since the magnitude 7.0 earthquake devastated Haiti on January 12. Though in Santo Domingo we're only about 200 miles from Port-au-Prince, most of us don't speak enough Kreyol to do anything but get in the way over there.

In that light, I'd like to share some of the discussions we at Justicia Global have been having about disaster response and aid.

I've been getting a lot of e-mails about where to send money. Before the earthquake, our policy was to not participate in food-, clothing- or fundraising drives. We focused more on education and organization of the affected communities. This time we're pitching in on a lot of fronts while trying to always work toward structural solutions, not band-aids.

So what *do* we do when we want to help but we're either too far away or don't have the right tools?

The "aid" given at times like these often toes a blurry line between solidarity and charity. Charity, we feel, doesn't address systemic problems that natural disasters exacerbate.

It's a daily reality in Haiti -- and in most places in the world -- that people's right to food, water, shelter, a decent job, education, health care, participation in making decisions about things that affect them, and other basic human rights, are not respected or guaranteed. Not just after earthquakes.

Perhaps the bigger idea that sending money to disaster victims supports is the myth that this is how we can solve the world's crises. It takes the focus off of the fact that this is a historical, structural problem, not just an earthquake that happened to hit a poor country. Who was benefiting from the fact that 80 percent of Haitians lived in poverty before January 12?

So when we give of what we have -- our time and money -- how can we make the best use of them? How can we, in our giving, contribute to organizing ourselves as the peoples of the world?

We have enough brain power, caring and natural resources as a planet to provide for everyone. That I'm certain of. There's just the pesky problem of capitalism, reinforced by a few thousand years of patriarchy, to overcome before all of our collective resources can be focused on the collective well-being. Maybe our role in this is to work at chipping away at that mountain.

For those of us not "on the ground" in Haiti right now, a small promise we can make to ourselves is to redouble our efforts to work for economic and social justice where we are, to invest ourselves in the organization of our communities, to not allow big questions to go unasked.

I'm not trying to get "off the hook" of having to do something "concrete" for the earthquake victims. I'm feeling this thing pretty closely. I've got several friends who have lost loved ones, and they're going crazy trying to get over to Haiti or do whatever they can to alleviate the pain, theirs and others'. It's immense. I support them completely.

At Justicia Global we're donating to the Collection Center at the Santo Domingo Jesuit seminary, Centro Bonó, which has a long history of working on Haitian-Dominican relations and supporting immigrants from our sister country. (www.bono.org.do)

Maybe another part of what this can show us is the need to *always* be this incensed, hurt and bewildered about what capitalist patriarchy does to us. I don't want to reduce this horrific disaster to a "lesson we can learn from."

But it can get us riled up, and shake us, and help us remember that it's in our absolute best interest to work **(continued on Page 2)**

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Our Mission Statement



The Committee on US- Latin American Relations (CUSLAR) is a Cornell University based group, founded in 1965, which seeks to promote greater understanding of Latin America, and the Caribbean. The members of CUSLAR are 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 Relation through education, solidarity, and support of human rights.

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REMINDER! Your Yearly Gift Is Needed!

We wanted to follow-up on our year-end appeal for your continued support of our organization and movement—Times are challenging and the loss of just one donation has an impact. If you can possibly find a way to renew your support for CUSLAR today by mailing us a donation, it will be greatly appreciated. Your gift helps CUSLAR continue its work for social justice!

**And come to our MOOSEWOOD
BRUNCH on 3/7/10, more info. page 7.**

(Thoughts on Haiti Continued from page 1...) and fight for a world where people live in harmony with the earth and each other.

We can act out of love, consistently, and as a sustained effort. And may that outpouring of energy and care for others be a conviction that grows in us daily, feeds us and renews us.

Justicia Global is a self-funded political and cultural organization that works toward organization and mobilization with the objective of building a society characterized by solidarity, equality, justice and love. www.justiciaglobal.com.

Tim Shenk, Justicia Global, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

Welcome to the Winter/Spring Edition of the CUSLAR Newsletter!

In this issue, we tackle some of the important issues facing Latin American nations today. Of course, the tragic earthquake in Haiti is a wake-up call for many of us about the consequences that occur when centuries of colonialism and neo-imperialism leave nations extremely vulnerable to so-called “natural disasters”. What has happened and *is happening* in Haiti urges us to strongly consider what it means to “be in solidarity” with a nation. Is it sending a monetary donation? Or is it working to change the structures of the global economy which continue to widen the gap between the rich & the poor more each year? Or both? We also look to solidarity movements that continue working to close the School of the Americas in Fort Benning, GA, which CUSLAR participated in this past Fall, and we look at an analysis of the Bagua massacre in Peru, and of the recent Chilean elections.

CUSLAR has been very active, and growing! We have very high enrollment in our language classes this semester, which have become quite popular. We’ve visited local high schools to give presentations on Latin American Solidarity. We are working on the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Campaign along with several other local groups, forming the Tompkins County Immigrant Rights Coalition. The CUSLAR Student Group will be tackling this and other campaigns in the spring, including the Cornell-Ithaca Haiti Solidarity Campaign and the “Chevron in the Amazon: Clean it up!” campaign. In March we will have the pleasure of hosting Justicia Global from the Dominican Republic, tying struggles in the DR to protect the land from resource extraction to similar struggles here in Up-State New York. It is important to draw the connections between our struggles for social and environmental justice across the Americas, as this helps us all to better our movements and continue *adelante con fuerza*. We are already planning for our next Spanish for Activists Camp, to be held in up-State NY in July---stay tuned to our web-site www.cuslar.org for more information! We will also continue language classes in the Summer months. On February 10th 2010 we had the pleasure of hosting critically acclaimed Guatemalan film director Luis Argueta. Luis spoke at an ILR class, IHS, ACS and at Uris Auditorium in Cornell about his up-coming film *abUSed: The Postville Raid*, a documentary about the largest, most expensive and most brutal Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids in the history of the United States. Luis’ stories are inspiring many of us to become active working to make immigration policies more humane and just. See the up-date on Immigration Reform, page 3, for more information.

We invite you to join CUSLAR! That can mean anything from attending our events, to sending a monetary donation so we can keep doing our work, to starting a campaign or program of your own! We welcome new ideas and fresh energy. We can all make a difference, and *now* is the time we need to *act!* In Solidarity...

-Claire Stoscheck, CUSLAR Coordinator-

UPDATES

Honduras

By Patricia Rodriguez

Despite much domestic and international opposition to a process staged by the Honduran *coup*-installed leaders, the elections in Honduras occurred as scheduled on November 28th, 2009. Porfirio 'Pepe' Lobo from the conservative National Party won and took power on January 27th 2010. Though the victor claims legitimacy from supposed electoral data showing turnout at more than 50%, recent independent media reports mention a more likely 50-60% abstention rate. Under a deal being negotiated by the legislature and the current and incoming governments, deposed President Manuel Zelaya, who is in hiding at the Brazilian embassy in Tegucigalpa since September, will be allowed safe passage to the Dominican Republic, and all alleged charges of corruption and abuse of power against Zelaya may be dropped. In the meantime, coup-installed president Roberto Micheletti is being named Congressman for life, and a general amnesty for human rights violators being considered.

Still, this political resolution resolves none of the regional tensions or the immense problems surrounding the coup d'état, especially since many South American countries, including Brazil and Argentina, still refuse to recognize the legitimacy of the November elections. Only the United States and a handful of other Latin American countries have officially recognized the incoming Lobo administration. In fact, the new government has already indicated that it will withdraw Honduras from ALBA (Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas), a regional cooperative initiative that offers an alternate development strategy to the capitalist strategies of current free trade agreements. ALBA and a 60% raise in minimum wages were among Zelaya's economic policies that angered Honduran business sector and its allies, including the U.S. In the aftermath of the cover up elections, civil society groups continue to press for constitutional and social reforms despite the repressive tactics of the Micheletti government and the military. Under current civil rights restrictions and a Congress completely dominated by right-of-center parties, unions and other organizations will have a hard time maintaining the new wage legislation, or seeking new rights and social advances. Yet they press forward.



Comprehensive Immigration Reform

By Ute Ritz-Deutch

Our immigration system is terribly broken, and tragically so. It affects millions of people and is hurting all of us daily. Last year over 400,000 immigrants were imprisoned by the government at the staggering sum of \$1.8 billion, paid for by our tax dollars. Tens of thousands of families have been torn apart. Many have tried to gain legal entry into the United States but the backlog for issuing visas means it could take 8-10 years. Imagine if someone told you, that in ten years you might see your children again. What would you do?

Today, three million U.S. citizen children are from mixed-status families, living in daily fear of losing their parents and other relatives. Those whose parents get deported often end up in foster care. We are facing a monumental human crisis and deporting twelve million undocumented people is simply not the solution. It is cruel and prohibitively expensive. It also undermines the very principles this country stands for.

The vast majority of immigrants are hard-working people who want to take care of their families. They want to learn English. They want to be able to call for help in an emergency without the fear of getting arrested. Marginalizing law-abiding immigrants does not help us deal with crime; nor does it secure our border.

All across the nation, from local groups like the Tompkins County Immigrant Rights Coalition, to the national movement *Reform Immigration for America*, people are advocating for immigration reform this year. In December 2009, Luis Guitierrez (D-Ill) introduced the Comprehensive Immigration Reform for America's Security and Prosperity Act (H.R. 4321) in the House of Representatives, which offers a sensible approach to reform. Senator Schumer (D-NY) is expected to introduce a bill in the Senate soon.

We need legislation that offers a rational and humane process for undocumented people to gain residency and eventually citizenship, provides sufficient visas to close unlawful channels, and clears the backlog of visa applications so that families can legally stay together. We need an employment system beneficial to all workers (including immigrants) and employers who play by the rules. Comprehensive Immigration Reform can make us safer and more secure while also boosting the economy. It could generate billions of dollars in additional tax revenue.

We need workable solutions that uphold our nation's values and move us forward; but we cannot reach this goal alone. I therefore hope you will petition your representatives throughout the year and urge them to support comprehensive immigration reform that is sensible, fair, and just for all.

From February 15-19 supporters of immigration reform traveled across New York to urge legislators to pass the best possible bill. The caravan will stop in Ithaca on Thursday, Feb. 18 and the Tompkins County Immigrant Rights Coalition and other groups will host a welcome dinner starting at 6:30 p.m. at the Women's Community Building, 100 West Seneca Street. We hope to see you there.

For more information on the movement see

www.reformimmigrationforamerica.org, <http://tcirc.wordpress.com> or email Ute Ritz-Deutch: uteritzdeutch@yahoo.com

ARTICLES

School of the Americas Watch Annual Vigil

By Allison Lupico, graduate student at Cornell University

Every November since 1989 protestors have gathered at the gates of Fort Benning to peacefully oppose the School of the Americas, which is housed at the base. The event which initiated the ongoing struggle to close the school occurred twenty years ago when six Jesuit priests, their house keeper, and her daughter were assassinated in El Salvador by graduates of the US military training program. Violence has continued through the decades and the SOA still trains hundreds of Latin American troops each year. Currently, Colombian soldiers account for the majority of SOA trainees. Already a highly militarized country, the war in Colombia has claimed thousands of lives and has resulted in the largest number of internally displaced persons.

This November CUSLAR traveled to the five-day protest in Columbus, Georgia to gather with other Latin American and US organizations fighting for global justice and peace. Religious organizations, student groups, labor unions, women's organizations, artists collectives, and fair trade initiatives were among the groups present.

A full schedule of presentations held at the convention center addressed topics such as the murder of the six Jesuits, US military bases in Colombia, the Honduran coup, Venezuelan society, and testimony from torture survivors. Saturday's rally at the gates was an uplifting celebration of cross border solidarity. Speakers, musicians, and dancers preformed on the main stage just feet away from the Fort's entrance. Ithaca's Puppetistas paraded larger-than-life puppets down the main street. Contrastingly, Sunday's vigil was a somber event in which protestors silently marched holding white crosses which were placed on the gates. As the marchers moved forward, the names of the dead and missing were read aloud and the crowd answered with "Presente" in memory of each lost.

The five day vigil is an opportunity to learn about historic and current issues in the hemisphere from witnesses and people who are currently working on issues in Latin America. Moreover, the vigil provides a platform for collaboration with a multitude of social justice organizations. The School of the Americas Watch engages in peaceful protest, education, and lobbying efforts throughout the year. Each year the vigil has greater participation and Father Roy Bourgeois, SOAW founder, has recently been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. To learn more about the School of the Americas Watch visit the website at www.SOAW.org



People showing support for those who have lost their lives due to the practices taught at the School of the Americas.

Indigenous Marginalization and Activism in Peru: The Bagua Massacre of June 2009

By Jacquelyn Simone, Junior Journalism and Politics major at Ithaca College

For hundreds of years, indigenous Peruvians have been silenced and ignored. Their land has been taken, their rights violated and their cultures disrespected by the Peruvian government and the international community. However, on June 5, 2009, indigenous groups were suddenly appearing on news broadcasts around the world, as a deadly confrontation occurred in a remote province. Many outsiders did not know that the massacre of indigenous demonstrators in Peru was not an isolated incident, but rather a single event in a history of structural inequality and marginalization. Furthermore, foreigners were reluctant to admit their own role in the massacre—it was the government of the United States, after all, that encouraged the Peruvian government to pass the U.S.-Peru Free Trade Agreement that the indigenous groups were protesting.

Peruvian natives have often been cast as primitive sub-humans because their traditions do not align with the mainstream of their country. In response to these longstanding hostilities with the government, the indigenous groups formed organizations to call for social change. Regardless, the government has continued to deprive them of basic social programs and has shown complete disrespect for their ownership of land, allowing extractive industries to pollute the environment so they can utilize natural resources and succeed in the global economy. The thousands of indigenous protesters were calling for the repeal of legislation that enabled logging, gas and oil contractors to use the rainforest for industrial purposes. In late 2006, President Garcia presented Law 840 (Law of the Jungle) to Congress conceding nominally uncultivated lands to lumber companies. This meant that lands that had traditionally been used by indigenous peoples were to be taken from the communities and sold for industrial ventures; it is 1 striking that 58 of the 64 blocks currently leased to oil and gas companies are on lands belonging to indigenous peoples. In addition, the free trade agreement went into effect on Feb. 1, 2009, even though more than 60,000 Peruvians had signed petitions demanding that the proposed agreement be submitted to a popular referendum.¹

These petitions were certainly not isolated protests: indigenous groups indigenous had often tried to utilize

democratic institutions to voice their opinions, but their constant marginalization and government corruption stifled their comments. In September 2008, indigenous peoples had presented Congress with an in-depth analysis of the possible effects of the Law of the Jungle legislation that would allow unsustainable industrial development in the rainforest; however, the legislators engaged in a minimal consultation period, brushed their comments aside and still passed the legislation.² Furthermore, the government increased police and military presence in the indigenous communities, and cabinet members blatantly displayed their racism and hatred of native groups by portraying them as savages who did not deserve basic rights.³

Faced with such difficult conditions, indigenous groups tried to join forces to fight for greater social justice. The umbrella group AIDESEP, currently led by a national council representing six Amazonian communities, led the protest in the province of Bagua in Amazonas. On April 9, protesters formed large scale barricades of the roads connecting the jungle region with the rest of the country. On June 5, World Environment Day, shooting began and left hundreds of indigenous protesters injured or killed, and at least 23 police officers dead.⁴ As confrontations intensified, three MI-17 helicopters launched tear gas on the crowd of around 5,000 people. At the same time, without warning, police officials on the ground fired AKM rifles at protesters. In a counter-attack, demonstrators were joined by the population of Bagua, who set fire to the local office of the official party, the Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA). Demonstrators took hostage 38 police who were guarding an oil station in the Amazon, and some of the hostages were killed. Arrests and more violence followed until the conflict finally died down.⁵ Although exact numbers of deaths are difficult to ascertain, the massacre was clearly devastating. Among the protesters confirmed dead were five Awajun-Wampis indigenous people and five mestizo townspeople; however, since bodies were found thrown into surrounding rivers in subsequent days, the extent of the casualties is unknown.⁶

Reports of the Bagua massacre have faded from international news outlets, but the problems that led the indigenous groups to protest and those that led the government to react so violently remain. The main causes of this violent episode were structural, because a history of inequality and marginalization made indigenous organizations feel they had no other way to voice their opinions than through blockades. Additionally, the global economic structure and neoliberalism should be identified as primary contributors to the massacre. In these ways, the Bagua massacre should not be examined as an isolated incident; rather, the history of structural inequality and marginalization must be taken into account.

¹ Global Exchange. "Andean Free Trade Agreements." n.p. 2009.

² Mendizabal, Enrique. "Peru: Anguish, Oil and the Amazon." *New Statesman* June 2009: 18.

³ Renique, Gerardo. "Against the Law of the Jungle: Peru's Amazonian Uprising." *NACLA Report on the Americas* (Jan.-Feb. 2009): 5-8.

⁴ "Signs of the Times: For Indigenous Peoples, Equality Is a Long Struggle." *America Magazine* 31 Aug. 2009: 8-9.

⁵ Zibechi, Raul. *Massacre in the Amazon: The U.S.-Peru Free Trade Agreement Sparks a Battle Over Land and Resources*. Upside Down World, 16 June 2009.

⁶ Bebbington, Anthony. "The New Extraction: Rewriting the Political Ecology of the Andes?" *NACLA Report on the Americas* (Sept.-Oct. 2009): 12-20. Print.

Chile's Divided Election: Forward or Backward with Change?

By: Patricia Rodriguez, Assistant Professor of Politics,
Ithaca College

On December 13, 2009, Chileans went to the polls to elect a new president and legislators, amid a political crisis that has put the nation at a crossroads. The center-left Coalition of Parties for Democracy (Concertación) has emerged from its twenty-year rule severely weakened, with its official presidential candidate Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle (also a former president, 1994-1999) receiving a mere 30% of votes, against the 44% of the rightist candidate, billionaire businessman Sebastian Piñera. Despite the popularity of the current president Michele Bachelet, the pivotal events surrounding the elections - and the run-off elections scheduled for January 17th, 2010 - have something to do with the achievements and/or failures of her four year term, but much more to do with the remote political past that continues to haunt. The fact that the weeks leading up to the December election were marked by a series of significant (albeit not surprising) 'findings' about the monstrous abuses under the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990) makes this blatantly clear.

On the one hand, the exhumation of the remains and the naming of the murderers of popular folk-singer and activist Victor Jara, tortured and killed in the aftermath of the military coup d'état on September 11, 1973, represents somewhat of a vindication for human rights activists. On the other hand, the discovery that a former president (Eduardo Frei Montalva, father of the current presidential candidate) was poisoned to death for most-likely political reasons in the early 1980s draws the doors wide open to speculation about how the political elites will handle issues such as past human rights violations. Judging from the debates in current and past elections, the tendency will be for politicians to brush the past aside, still in the name of 'political stability.' Regardless, human rights and social justice are processes that need to - and are- continuously happening, mainly in the hands of those seeking to break the mold of the post-transition Chilean political system.

20 years of Concertación

The past twenty years in Chile has seen a center left coalition government restricted to the political and (neoliberal) economic agreements made with Pinochet in the late 1980s. Though the nation has indeed achieved a substantial reduction in poverty levels and has paid some attention to social spending on education, health, and housing, much more was expected and needed from the center-left coalition. The negative consequences of the Concertación's middle-of-the-road approach to the social question are undeniable: Chile has one of the highest rates of inequality in the region, and today bodes a high unemployment rate, particularly in regions inhabited by a high percentage of indigenous peoples. In addition, it is easy to perceive that Chile's 'development' has been financed largely by concessions made to private investors in Europe and in the United States, despite the protests of environmental and indigenous groups. Chileans nowadays have

to pay exorbitant prices for everything from tolls to fruits and vegetables that are grown locally but destined to export markets. Though the Bachelet government promised to incorporate citizen input into important policies, it failed to compromise in key transportation and social welfare policies.

Politically, the nation is significantly divided.

Political alliances within the Center-Left were broken, even as Sebastian Piñera and his 'Alliance for Change' Rightist coalition grew in the polls with the help of the conservative-dominated media. The chaos among Concertación leaders was such that Frei was 'appointed' as an official candidate through an admittedly bureaucratic and not very internally-democratic procedure. The lack of compromise was clear from the first round, with the independent candidacy of former Concertación legislator, Marco Enriquez-Ominami. The son of a murdered leader of the Leftist Revolutionary Movement (MIR), Ominami's meteoric rise to grasping 20% of the vote was a result the popular disenchantment with traditional parties especially among the youth and the poor. Yet another front in the December elections was a new coalition, *Juntos Podemos* (Together We Can), headed by Communist Party leaders. This last group received an unprecedented 6% of the presidential votes, and three seats in the legislature; twenty years into democratic rule, under an early arrangement within the Concertación, the Communist Party finally achieved some representation.

Moving beyond the Concertación

These latter two trends (independent and leftist victories, albeit apparently small) signal the desperate need for renewal in Chile, especially through the building of closer linkages between parties and constituents; sadly, this change will begin neither through Eduardo Frei's candidacy, nor through the impending election of Sebastian Piñera. A more focused attention by the Right on deepening social policies that truly address inequalities is far from what is likely to happen. Instead, it seems that the needed change will indeed come piecemeal, through the most arduous channels: women, indigenous, workers, and other social movements pushing for social change. For instance, indigenous groups have pushed resource and participatory claims through strong mobilization tactics, forcing the Chilean government to reconsider the question of indigenous rights. Through these types of efforts, and a positive responsiveness from parties needing to regain trust, the nation may finally truly start to deal with its past, and to move on with change in a significant manner.

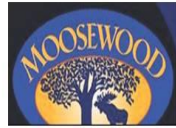


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