

LATIN AMERICA WORKING GROUP

*Action at Home for
Just Policies Abroad*



2020 ANNUAL REPORT

As the Americas faced the pandemic, we saw heartless actions by our government towards our Latin American and Caribbean neighbors.

The United States deported thousands of children, women, and men, exposing them to COVID-19 in detention facilities, and exporting the virus south to a dozen nations across Latin America and the Caribbean. We spoke out with you against these cruel deportations, convincing members of Congress to introduce bills to stop them. We called on our Congress to provide generous relief aid to the region.

But we also knew it was a moment not just to be on the defensive, but to ask for what we want: a just and compassionate foreign policy towards our Latin American and Caribbean neighbors. True respect for the rights of migrants, refugees, immigrants, and asylum seekers. We created collective blueprints for change for a new relationship between our nations, and our peoples.

And we found that with you alongside us, we could use the moment to organize towards this vision for change.

Cover: *Virtual congressional briefing organized by LAWG with Rep. Escobar (D-TX) and Rep. Wilson (D-FL).*

PHOTO BY LAURI ALVAREZ

Handwritten signature of Lisa Haugeard in black ink.Handwritten signature of Yareli Cruz in black ink.

WHO WE ARE

The Latin America Working Group aims to ensure that U.S. policies advance human rights, peace, and social, environmental, and economic justice in Latin America and the Caribbean. To achieve this, we work with coalition partners in the United States and Latin America to educate policymakers and the public and to mobilize a diverse, and powerful grassroots base that can influence U.S. policymakers to achieve change.

The Latin America Working Group (LAWG), a 501 (c) 4 nonprofit, carries out advocacy and grassroots education. The Latin America Working Group Education Fund (LAWGEF), a 501 (c) 3 nonprofit, sponsors educational events and publishes reports and updates. In this year's activities, lobbying tasks were carried out by LAWG, and educational tasks by LAWGEF.



Daniella speaking at one-year anniversary vigil of the Remain in Mexico policy.

PHOTO BY LAURI ALVAREZ

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS*

AFL-CIO

AFL-CIO Solidarity Center

Alianza Americas

Alliance of Baptists

Amazon Watch

American Friends Service Committee

American Jewish World Service

Americans for Indian Opportunity

Bread for the World

Catholic Relief Services

Center for Economic and Policy Research

2020 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Addressing the Pandemic's Impact

- Organized a campaign to stop deportations as the Trump Administration continued to deport migrants, exposing them to COVID-19 in detention facilities and exporting the virus to a dozen Latin American and Caribbean countries, most with fragile health systems, like Haiti, Guatemala, and Honduras. Our efforts led to the introduction of **House** and **Senate** bills to declare a moratorium on deportations and defund expulsions at the border.
- **Documented** and raised with policymakers ways that some Latin American governments used the pandemic to restrict human rights.
- Advocated for generous U.S. assistance to Latin America and the Caribbean to address the pandemic, including funding for the Pan American Health Organization.
- Pivoted to virtual advocacy, successfully holding virtual advocacy **briefings** and meetings, and including Latin American partners in virtual strategy sessions and advocacy.

- Joined other partners in a **letter** calling for the easing of sanctions on Cuba to limit the humanitarian impact during the pandemic.
- Published and disseminated memos, alerts, reports, infographics, and blogs on the pandemic's wide-ranging impact (see our **COVID-19 Resources** page).



LAWG brings partners together to strategize about human rights and peace in Colombia during the pandemic.

PHOTO BY ANTONIO SAADIPOUR

Center for Global Education and Experience at Augsburg University

Center for International Environmental Law

Center for International Policy

Church World Service

Colombia Human Rights Committee

Columban Center for Advocacy & Outreach

Cuban American Alliance Education Fund

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Global Mission

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Washington Office

Global Exchange

Global Health Partners



Defending the Rights of Migrants and Refugees

- Coordinated broad coalitions efforts around the one-year anniversary of the “Remain in Mexico” policy, mobilizing digital advocacy and speaking at an in-person rally on Capitol Hill. Organized support for a congressional **letter** with over 100 signatures to end the policy.
- Uplifted a campaign to end and defund the so-called Asylum Cooperative Agreements, or safe third country agreements with Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador that deny asylum seekers protection and deport them to countries they are not from through petitions, meetings with policymakers, **webinars**, and educational materials.
- Educated organizations, policymakers, and journalists about the Trump Administration’s efforts during the pandemic to close the border to asylum seekers and expel them to Mexico and Central America, publishing **blogs**, **briefs**, and **infographics** on their harmful impacts.
- Organized a **webinar** with partners to inform civil society organizations in the region on the implications of changing U.S. border, immigration and asylum policies on migrants and refugees from Mexico and Central America.



Activist at candlelight vigil.

PHOTO BY LAURI ALVAREZ

Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA

Institute for Policy Studies

International Institute on Race, Equality and
Human Rights

International Labor Rights Forum

Jesuit Conference Office of Justice and Ecology

Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)

Lutheran World Relief Office of Public Policy

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

Mennonite Central Committee

Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate,
Justice and Peace Office

National Security Archive



Promoting Peace

- Created *Protect Colombia's Peace* with Colombian & U.S. civil society partners, a report on the status of Colombia's flagging peace process with recommendations to change U.S. policy to prioritize support and diplomatic pressure for peace. Shared with foreign policy experts, State Department officials, Congress, journalists, and activists.

Lisa, Antonio, and Cristina Espinel with the winners of the National Prize for the Defense of Human Rights in Colombia.

PHOTO BY ALYSON WOOLLEY

- Helped spur and organized 94 members of Congress to sign a congressional **letter** urging protection for Colombia's endangered human rights and community activists and increased attention to implementing Colombia's historic peace accords.
- Advocated with Congress to withhold military aid to Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador over abuses and authoritarian actions, resulting in the House cutting part of their military assistance. Urged Congress to press the administration to end its hold up of humanitarian aid to those countries.
- Supported **bills** that would allow unrestricted American travel to Cuba to counter the increased travel restrictions imposed by the State Department at the beginning of the year.
- Published and disseminated a joint memo updating on the security and human rights situation in Mexico with recommendations for U.S. assistance.

Network in Solidarity with the People
of Guatemala (NISGUA)

Oxfam America

Peace Brigades International, USA

Presbyterian Church (USA)

Presbyterian Peace Fellowship

Quixote Center

Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and
Human Rights

Sisters of Mercy of the Americas

United Church of Christ

United Methodist Church, General Board of
Church & Society

US-Cuba Cultural Exchange

Upholding Justice, Defending the Defenders

- Created with civil society partners *Serve Your People: A Roadmap for Transforming Relations between the United States and the Northern Countries of Central America*. The report calls for a new policy that goes far beyond undoing attacks on the rights of asylum seekers, immigrants, and migrants. It recommends starting with diplomacy against corruption and abuse and standing, not with corrupt officials, but with civil society forces for change. It offers a roadmap to address the pandemic, mitigate climate change, and restore and advance access to protection for migrants and refugees at our border and throughout Mexico and Central America. Shared with foreign policy experts, State Department officials, Congress, journalists, and activists.
- Increased attention to human rights abuses, authoritarian actions, and corruption in Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador by encouraging and gaining signers for congressional **letters**, promoting social media, and publishing memos for policymakers and the press.
- Stood by collectives of families of the disappeared and civil society organizations in Mexico by uplifting their campaigns and calls for the implementation of the Disappearance Law and advancing investigations into cases of enforced disappearances.



Antonio at Supreme Court DACA decision protest.

PHOTO BY LAURI ALVAREZ

Washington Office on Latin America

Witness for Peace

Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective

* This list includes some of the groups participating. Participation does not imply endorsement of all LAWG/LAWGEF efforts. Decisions to endorse statements and campaigns are made on a case-by-case basis by each participating organization





Photo source: UUSC

GUAPINOL DEFENDERS

The water defenders of Guapinol, Honduras, organized when a mining company operating in a national park polluted their river. Seven were jailed in 2019 for their efforts to defend their communities' rights to clean water. Their organization, the Comité Municipal de Defensa de los Bienes Públicos y Comunes de Tocoa, received the annual Letelier Moffitt Human Rights Award in 2019.



Stand with Guapinol Defenders in Honduras.

PHOTO BY EMILY FROUDE

Supporting Communities' Land, Environmental, and Economic Rights

- Organized an advocacy **tour** for the winners of the National Prize for the Defense of Human Rights in Colombia, including Clemencia Carabalí Rodallega, who defends the rights of Afro-Colombian communities to their lands and natural resources. The tour, which included meetings with the State Department, Congress, media, and public, was organized with partners Washington Office on Latin America and Diakonia.
- Urged our supporters to take action to **protect** the rights and territories of environmental defenders in the region. We urged activists to take part in a social media campaign on the fourth anniversary of the murder of indigenous leader Berta Cáceres; leveraged support for Congresswoman Omar's **letter** to the new U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) calling out its plan to invest in a controversial dam project; and urged supporters to write to Honduran

officials to **protest** the unjust pre-trial detention of Guapinol community leaders struggling to defend their local rivers and lands from pollution from a mining company.

- Created a **training memo** for State Department human rights officers to explain ways they can use their position to protect human rights defenders, particularly environmental and land rights defenders. Briefed new human rights and other officers posted to Honduras, Colombia, and Mexico on how they should stand up for environmental, land, and other activists at risk.



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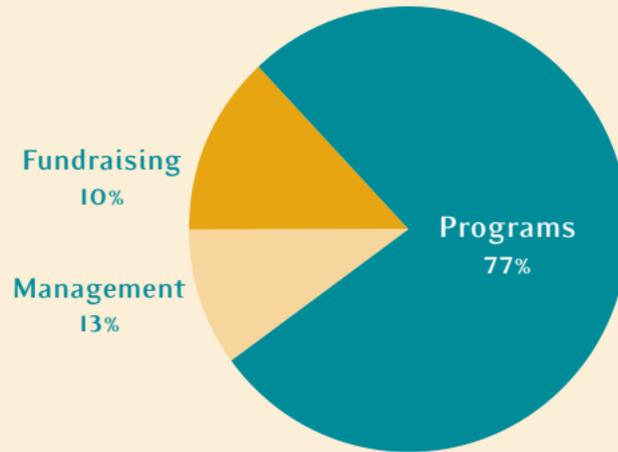
Alaide Vilchis Ibarra, Interfaith Movement for
Immigrant Justice

Finances

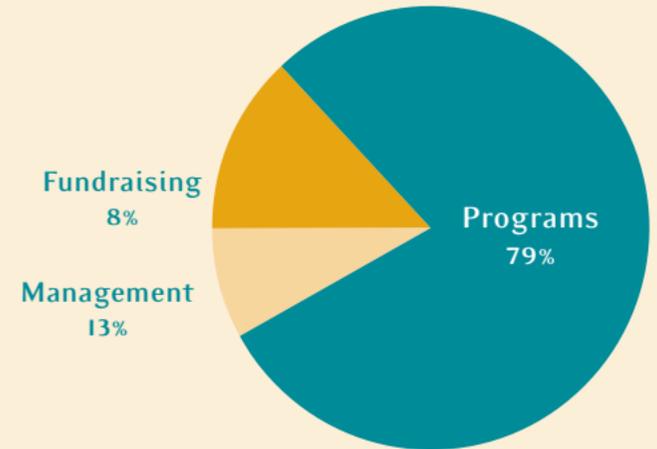
LAWGEF's income of \$413,010 in 2019 came from foundations as well as from individual donors and nongovernmental organizations. Expenditures for 2019 were \$322,909 (two two-year grants received in 2019 were partially carried over to 2020). Contributions to LAWGEF are tax-deductible.

LAWG's income of \$157,686 in 2019 came from contributions by funders and coalition partners, including humanitarian agencies, nongovernmental and faith-based organizations, and individual donors. Expenditures for 2019 were \$159,094. Contributions to LAWG are not tax-deductible.

LAWGEF 2019 Expenses



LAWG 2019 Expenses



Acknowledgments

Many thanks to the following for their contributions to LAWGEF's public education work: Ford Foundation, Foundation to Promote Open Society, HIP-CAMMINA, Moriah Fund, Stewart Mott Charitable Trust, Holthues Trust, Evelyn E. and Richard J. Gunst Foundation, Oxfam America, United Church of Christ, AFL-CIO, Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States, and Washington Office on Latin America.

Many thanks to the following for their contributions to LAWG: Open Society Policy Center, Church World Service, ELCA Global Mission, Mennonite Central Committee, Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Alliance of Baptists, and Presbyterian Church USA, as well as to the other partner organizations and many generous individuals contributing to both organizations.

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Action at Home for Just Policies Abroad

See our website to:

- Join our e-alert lists to learn ways to take action for just U.S. policies;
- See our reports, blogs, memos, and infographics;
- Power our work by making a contribution.

Shoes without laces, representing migrants returned to Mexico.

PHOTO BY LAURI ALVAREZ

