

2003 Annual Report



# LATIN AMERICA WORKING GROUP

*Action at Home for Just Policies Abroad*



WITNESS FOR PEACE

**O**ur nation's foreign policy should reflect our own most cherished values of justice, truth and generosity. US policies can and should support human rights and a more peaceful world. The US role abroad should reflect the best of our American experience and not be exempt from the values we aspire to at home.

These ideals, however reasonable, have never been an easy goal. They have been especially hard to pursue in the aftermath of September 11th, as the world has become a more fearful place. And US policy towards Latin America throughout history has often been more concerned with maintaining stability than with helping our neighbors.

As citizens of the most powerful nation in the world today, we have an obligation to make sure our nation's actions reflect our values. Foreign policy should not be the sole province of a handful of experts, corporations, and government officials. It belongs to us, the people of the United States.

*Lisa Haugaard*

Lisa Haugaard  
*Executive Director*

## Who We Are

The Latin America Working Group serves a coalition of nongovernmental, religious, grassroots, policy, and humanitarian agencies. We bring coalition partners together to design and implement advocacy and public education to promote US policy towards Latin America that favors human rights, justice, peace and sustainable development.

The Latin America Working Group carries out advocacy campaigns and grassroots education. The Latin America Working Group Education Fund, a 501 (c) 3 organization established this year, carries out educational activities, sponsoring events and publications. In the list of this year's activities, lobbying activities were carried out by the LAWG, and educational activities by the LAWG Education Fund.

## Citizen Power

In 2003 we've focused our energies on giving concerned citizens better tools to understand, and challenge where needed, US policy towards Latin America.

Our website, [www.lawg.org](http://www.lawg.org), offers regular action alerts that individuals can take to influence US policymakers or Latin American governments. The website has extensive background material on the issues we follow. It also features a comprehensive set of tools

## PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS\*

Alliance of Baptists

American Association for the Advancement  
of Science

American Friends Service Committee

Center for Economic and Policy Research

Center for Global Education at Augsburg College

Center for International Policy

Church of the Brethren, Washington Office

Church Women United

Church World Service

Colombia Human Rights Committee

Cuban American Alliance Education Fund

Development GAP

Disarm Education Fund

EPICA

Episcopal Church, Washington Office

Federation of American Scientists

Fellowship of Reconciliation, Task Force on Latin  
America and the Caribbean



LAWGEF, WOLA, and the Mexico Solidarity Network organized a congressional delegation to Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, in October. Here are LAWGEF members Sean García and Elanor Starmer with Representatives Hilda Solis, Ciro Rodriguez and Sylvester Reyes and other colleagues.

for advocates, including how-tos on influencing the media, contacting Congress, organizing students, and many other subjects. Our newsletter *The Advocate* and email alerts on Colombia, Cuba, and the US-Mexico border keep concerned citizens informed.

## Our Campaigns

This year we've moved forward with three major campaigns:

- 1 To support a more peaceful approach to Colombia, opposing military aid & supporting increased social aid;
- 2 To lift the travel embargo to Cuba; and
- 3 To promote humane US border policies, opposing policies that are increasing the deaths of immigrants on the US-Mexico border.

We also worked to: champion human rights in Guatemala, Mexico and other countries; educate the Congress regarding the impact of the Central American free trade agreement on small farmers; and provide public access to extensive information on US military training to Latin America.

We open doors in Washington for Latin American human rights activists, union leaders, religious leaders and community activists, arranging their meetings with Congress, the administration and the public.

## Highlights

### Towards a More Peaceful Colombia

- Turned Colombia policy into one of the most hotly-debated international issues in the House of Representatives. Our work led to the largest number of votes ever in favor of transferring Colombian military aid to AIDS/HIV programs or US firefighters. Our talking points for members of Congress helped ensure a passionate and well-informed debate on human rights and the most effective approaches to the terrible problem of drug abuse. Our recommendations of increased humanitarian aid to Colombia were included in the Senate foreign aid bill.
- Ensured that members of Congress asked tough questions of Colombian President Alvaro Uribe in his two Washington visits, regarding the human rights record of the

Franciscan Mission Service  
Friends Committee on National Legislation  
Global Exchange  
Global Ministries UCC, Disciples of Christ  
Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA  
Institute for Policy Studies  
Interhemispheric Resource Center  
International Human Rights Law Group  
International Labor Rights Fund  
Jesuit Refugee Service/USA  
Lawyers Committee for Human Rights  
Loretto Community  
Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs  
Lutheran World Relief  
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns  
Mennonite Central Committee  
Mexico Solidarity Network  
Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Justice  
and Peace Office  
National Council of Churches



Over 370 women have been murdered in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, in the last ten years. These crosses mark the spot in an empty lot in downtown Juarez where eight bodies were found in 2001.

Colombian army, Uribe's statements attacking human rights groups, and the impact of his hardline policies on human rights and civil liberties.

- Our press work helped to keep up attention on the Colombian army's ties with abusive paramilitary forces and the ineffective and inhumane US drug policies.
- Kept an expanding network of activists informed and active through email alerts and gave workshops to Colombian-American, religious and grassroots groups.
- Co-chaired the Colombia Steering Committee, an effective forum for action and strategy for over forty major US human rights, labor, grassroots, religious, environmental, and humanitarian organizations.

## **Justice in Mexico & Humane Border Policies**

- Worked with organizations in Tucson, Arizona to organize a daylong teach-in for over 100 activists to oppose the construction of a 260-mile long wall between Arizona and Mexico which could increase deaths of migrants in the desert. As a result of this meeting and other work by LAWG and colleagues, the proposal for the wall was taken back to the drawing board in June 2003.

- Helped to plan and coordinate, with the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) and Mexican human rights groups, a bi-national summit of human rights organizations. The first such meeting since 1998, it resulted in a coordinated action plan between 20 organizations in both countries on five key issues.
- Led a congressional delegation for four members of Congress to Ciudad Juarez, Mexico to investigate the murders of over 370 women in that city since 1993. The delegation met with victims' families, labor leaders, and the officials in charge of investigating and preventing these crimes. International pressure of this nature has played a key role in encouraging investigation into these crimes.
- Raised the devastating impact of US border policies by sending lists of migrants who have died along the southwest border to member of Congress, in coordination with the Border Working Group.

## **Cuba: Freedom to Travel**

- Successfully advocated for passage of bills in both houses to end funding to enforce the travel ban, a historic step towards lifting the embargo.

National Security Archives  
NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby  
Network in Solidarity with the People of  
Guatemala (NISGUA)  
Nicaragua Network/Alliance for Global Justice  
Nicaragua-U.S. Friendship Office  
NISBCO/Center of Conscience and War  
North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA)  
Oxfam America  
Peace Brigades International  
Peace Brigades USA  
Peru Peace Network  
Presbyterian Church (USA), Washington Office  
Quixote Center/Quest for Peace  
Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism  
Religious Task Force on Central America/Mexico  
Results, Inc.  
Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center for Human Rights  
School of the Americas Watch  
SHARE Foundation



*Girls join hands on a street in Cuba.*

PHOTO BY ANGELA ROWLINGS

- Organized, with WOLA, a national consultation on Cuba policy including religious, Cuban-American, grassroots, policy, travel industry, agriculture, people-to-people, and other groups. The consultation resulted in a plan of action for creating a national citizens' movement to end the travel ban.
- Led, along with the Center for International Policy and the Lexington Institute, a highly successful fact-finding delegation to Cuba of key senior Senate aides.
- Recruited hundreds of farmers as advocates for change in US policy toward Cuba at the American Farm Bureau's national trade show in Tampa, Florida. Worked to change US-Cuba policy through our active and expanding grassroots constituency.
- Arranged congressional meetings with WOLA for 25-30 Cuban-Americans who had come to Washington from Miami and other cities to make their voices heard in favor of travel to and engagement with Cuba.
- Coordinated expressions to the Cuban government of profound concern at the arrest of more than 70 Cuban citizens, urging their immediate release. At the same time, asked the Department of State and the Bush Administration to reduce tensions with the Cuban government through diplomatic means.

## Defending Human Rights, Fighting Poverty in Central America

- Successfully pushed for the creation of an international commission to investigate the shadowy networks in Guatemala that are behind threats and attacks against human rights defenders, drug trafficking and corruption, supporting a coalition effort led by Guatemalan human rights defenders and the Washington Office on Latin America.
- Maintained in place the ban on US military aid to Guatemala, one of only a handful of countries around the world still banned from receiving US military training due to human rights abuses.
- Worked with other nongovernmental organizations in a campaign led by Oxfam to educate Congress on the impact of the coffee crisis on small farmers. The work resulted in a House and Senate resolution, passed by unanimous consent in both chambers, calling on the Secretary of State to devise a global strategy to address the coffee crisis.

## Keeping Tabs on Military Aid & Training

- Helped to keep in place laws requiring the Pentagon to report to Congress and the public about military training the United States provides to developing nations. We

Sister Parish

Unitarian Universalist Service Committee

United Church of Christ, Justice and  
Witness Ministries

United Methodist Church, General Board of  
Church & Society

United Methodist Church, Women's Division

US/Labor Education in the Americas

US Office on Colombia

Voices on the Border

Washington Office on Latin America

Witness for Peace

Women Strike for Peace

\*Participation does not imply endorsement of all LAWG efforts; decisions to endorse statements and projects are made on a case-by-case basis by each participating organization.



## STAFF

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Bethann Rechner, Office Manager



WITNESS FOR PEACE

Troops march by a military aircraft in Colombia. The US provides over half a billion dollars in aid per year to Colombia.

achieved this despite considerable pressure from the White House in favor of greater secrecy in US military programs.

- Published *Paint by Numbers*, with the Center for International Policy and WOLA, a study of trends in US military training for Latin America which revealed that US military aid nearly equals economic aid for the region.
- Expanded our remarkable website on US military training and aid programs for every country in Latin America and the Caribbean ([www.ciponline/facts](http://www.ciponline/facts)). This website, maintained with the Center for International Policy, is the most comprehensive, authoritative public source for information on these programs, and is widely used by scholars, journalists, congressional staff and activists.

## Acknowledgments

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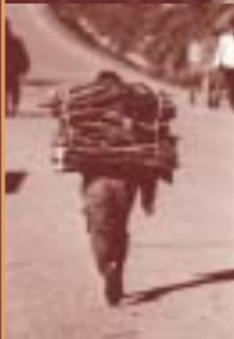
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See our website to order publications, donate, and stay informed.

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Design by Free Hand Press

Front cover: A girl displays coffee berries in southern Mexico. Coffee prices have fallen dramatically, putting thousands of Latin American coffee farmers and farmhands out of work. Back cover: Women sort coffee beans. A man hauls firewood. A Mexican farmer tills the land. Courtesy of Witness for Peace.