Back in my school days, I took a course in international relations. In this class, the developing nations of the world were discussed as if they were mere balls on a pool table run by superpowers. Foreign policy was portrayed as a game.

But the people of Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Middle East are not balls in a game of chance. The world is not a place to test out politicians’ theories. Our country wields enormous power today, and we must understand its impact on people’s lives.

That’s part of what we do at the Latin America Working Group – show the effects of foreign policy on the daily lives of people in Latin America, and people here at home.

This year we brought home the impact of the divisive travel embargo on Cuba through our photo show on Cuban Americans and their families on the island. The images told far more than any mere analysis could reveal.

And we worked with U.S.-Mexico border groups to help border residents tell their stories in Washington – stories of what harsh border enforcement would do to their communities and of the migrants who died crossing the desert in search of a better life.

These stories matter; these stories must be told.
Who We Are

The Latin America Working Group serves a coalition of nongovernmental, religious, grassroots and humanitarian agencies. We bring coalition partners together to create advocacy and public education campaigns to encourage U.S. policy towards Latin America and the Caribbean that favors human rights, justice, peace and sustainable development.

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 produces publications. In the list of this year’s activities, lobbying activities were carried out by the LAWG, and educational activities by the LAWGEF.

2006 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Humane Borders

Led, in coordination with Border Community Alliance partners, a 5-day tour of California, Arizona and Texas border communities for Senate staff, national immigrant
advocacy organization leaders and academics to allow these key advocates to experience the region firsthand. The tour drew attention to policies that can uphold border security while addressing community security and human rights. Participants met with local school officials, community groups, U.S. consuls, academics, business leaders, Border Patrol, port of entry directors, and police departments.

- Produced with Border Working Group members educational materials for policymakers documenting the failure of U.S. border security policies. Topics included the deaths of migrants crossing the U.S.-Mexico border and border communities’ opposition to further militarization of the region.

- Collaborated with Border Community Alliance partners to host a delegation from the U.S.-Mexico border to focus attention on the need to create border security measures that uphold civil and human rights. This delegation of over 300 church and community members held a congressional briefing to highlight recommendations for alternative border security policies entitled, “We are not the enemy; We are part of the solution” and met with over 40 senatorial offices. We briefed the activists and helped organize delegation activities.
Worked closely with Congresswoman Solis to craft and garner support for the "Juarez Resolution" condemning the Juarez murders and expressing sympathy for the families of the victims. The resolution also conveys concern for the manner in which Mexican authorities have conducted the investigations into these murders, and suggests a number of ways the U.S. government can cooperate with Mexico to put an end to these crimes. Both the House and the Senate versions of the Juarez Resolution passed by unanimous consent.

**Cuba: Love, Loss and Longing**

Created, with the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) and Drs. Jeanne Lempkau and David Strug, "Love, Loss, and Longing: The Impact of U.S. Travel Policy on Cuban-American Families," a powerful artistic exhibit in photographs and words that puts a human face on the cost of tightening travel restrictions. The exhibit opened in the House of Representatives and is on national tour through 2007. It has opened to date in Baltimore; Arlington, Virginia; Pittsburgh; Minneapolis; Jackson Hole, Wyoming; Oakland and Sacramento, California, Yellow Springs, Ohio; Newark, New Jersey.
- Published *Retreat from Reason: U.S.-Cuban Academic Relations and the Bush Administration*, a report on the history of U.S.-Cuban academic engagement and the impact of Bush Administration policy, with recommendations from a U.S.-Cuban bi-national academic working group, and launched its publication on Capitol Hill and George Washington University.

- Led, with Church World Service and WOLA, an on-going campaign by the religious community and members of Congress raising objections to the Treasury and State Departments about the lack of freedom for religious exchange with and travel to Cuba.

- Served as a resource to grassroots organizations around the nation, through LAWG’s grassroots e-mail network, and through travel to educational forums, photo exhibit openings, and advocacy/strategy meetings in Virginia, Maryland, Minnesota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, New York, Wyoming, California, the District of Columbia, and Canada.
Colombia: Siding with the Victims

- Published Longing for Home, a report on people displaced by Colombia’s internal conflict with recommendations to promote the return of land and improved assistance. The report was widely circulated in Colombia and to U.S. policymakers, and we are using it as a tool to prompt the State Department, USAID and other agencies to consider the return of land to displaced people in policy decisions and aid programs.

- Organized pressure on the State Department to enforce the human rights conditions on assistance to Colombia, playing a key role in State Department consultations and keeping congressional offices informed. This coalition effort resulted in part of Colombia’s military aid remaining on hold for much of 2006.

- Attended and offered a statement of solidarity to a national victims’ movement conference in Bogota, Colombia; spoke at the launch of the AFL-CIO’s launch of “The Struggle for Worker Rights in Colombia.”
Provided grassroots activists throughout the nation with materials and actions on Colombia, including working with religious organizations to create the “Days of Prayer and Action” in the spring and fall.

Helped teach a one-day training workshop for many of Colombia’s main human rights groups on U.S. policy and how they can affect it.

U.S. Military Policy: Erasing the Lines

Launched *Erasing the Lines*, our annual trends report on U.S. military programs in Latin America, produced with the Center for International Policy and WOLA. The report, which details disturbing trends regarding weakened civilian oversight of military programs and promotion of internal roles for Latin American militaries, was widely used in Latin America and the United States by journalists, scholars and activists. We discussed the results with the U.S. Southern Command, the U.S. military’s organization covering Latin America, which offered an official response. With CIP and WOLA we continued to provide the most systematic documentation
publicly available on U.S. military training and programs in Latin America through our website, http://ciponline.org/facts.

Published *Tarnished Image: Latin America Perceives the United States* and other materials showing the damage done to the image of the United States in the region by fateful U.S. decisions in the past year that demonstrated a disregard of human rights norms in treatment of prisoners, permitted the use of torture, and promoted a disregard for international law.

**Press & Other Programs**

- Staff were quoted in stories in the *Los Angeles Times, the Miami Herald, the El Paso Times* and other papers. Appeared on CNN Spanish, Telesur, and various radio programs.

- Organized letter to President Bush calling for increased disaster relief for Central America and renewal of temporary protected status for Salvadorans and Guatemalans.

- Helped organize support for a congressional letter on violence against women in Guatemala that garnered 111 signatures.

*Sisters of Mercy of the Americas
Sister Parish
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC)
United Church of Christ (UCC) – Global Ministries
United Methodist Church (UMC) – General Board of Church & Society (GBCS)
United Methodist Church Women’s Division
US/Labor Education in the Americas (US/LEAP)
US Office on Colombia
Voices on the Border
Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)
Witness for Peace*

*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.*
Acknowledgments

Many thanks to the following foundations and organizations for their contributions to the LAWGEF’s public education work: the Ford Foundation, the Open Society Institute Development Foundation, the Christopher Reynolds Foundation, the Moriah Fund, the General Service Foundation, the Arca Foundation, the Connect US Fund, the Stewart Mott Charitable Trust, the Oblate Charitable Fund and Oxfam America. Many thanks to Catholic Relief Services, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Women’s Division of the United Methodist Church, the United Church of Christ, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America and many other organizations that have contributed to the LAWG, as well as to the many generous individuals contributing to both organizations.

We dedicate this report to photographer Nestor Hernández, Jr., who took many of the photos in the “Love, Loss and Longing” show on Cuban-American families. He died of cancer this year, just as the photo exhibit was opening on Capitol Hill. Nestor’s father and younger brother are pictured on the cover, in one of our favorites of Nestor’s photos. Photographer Juan-Sí González then took the rest of the photos in the show.
FINANCES

LAWGEF’s income of $364,344 in 2005 came primarily from foundations as well as from individual donors and nongovernmental organizations. Expenditures for 2005 were $361,835. Contributions to the LAWGEF for education activities are tax-deductible.

LAWG’s income of $83,007 in 2005 came primarily from contributions by coalition partners, including humanitarian agencies and nongovernmental and religious organizations. Expenditures for 2005 were $87,747. Contributions to the LAWG are not tax-deductible. Audited financial statements available upon request.
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See our website to:
- sign up for our bimonthly newsletter, The Advocate;
- join our email listservs on Cuba, Colombia, and U.S./Mexico border issues, low-volume email alerts which let you know what you can do to call for improved U.S. policy;
- order or view on-line our special reports;
- make a contribution.

Action at Home for Just Policies Abroad

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