LATIN AMERICA WORKING GROUP

Action at Home for Just Policies Abroad

2014 ANNUAL REPORT
As our three boats arrived at the little fishing village of Cojimar, Cuba, the entire town and the national and international press corps were there to greet John and Patrick Hemingway, Ernest’s grandsons. Hemingway had written *Old Man and the Sea* in Cojimar; Hemingway’s bust still adorns the tiny town square today.

We had arranged this trip with John, Patrick and environmental and maritime experts to highlight one of the ways the United States and Cuba could work together on noncontroversial issues—bringing the Hemingway legacy to call for preserving the fish that, sensibly ignoring the U.S. embargo, swim back and forth in the ocean in the Florida straits.

This amazing trip reconfirmed our commitment to urge our nation to construct, with all of you, a just—and, finally, sensible!—relationship with the Latin American and Caribbean region.
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.
Planned, coordinated and led, with LAWGEF board member Jeffrey Boutwell, the Hemingway Commemorative delegation to Cuba, headed by John and Patrick Hemingway, grandsons of Ernest, to celebrate the strong ties between the renowned author and Cuba. This people-to-people trip not only focused on the legacy left by Hemingway, but also demonstrated the ways in which the United States and Cuba can work together to protect and preserve the natural resources of the Gulf Stream and Florida Straits. More than 100 media stories (video, print, radio, and digital) reported on this delegation around the world, from CNN, NPR, the Miami Herald and the New York Times to Japan’s Kyodo News and the Sydney Morning Herald.

Organized and led an arts and culture people-to-people delegation to Cuba, licensed by U.S. Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), for 23 U.S. citizens to learn about Cuba and to experience its amazing culture.
Hosted educational delegations to Congress and the Obama Administration to call for increased dialogue between our two nations, removing Cuba from the list of state sponsors of terrorism, increasing travel and exchange with Cuba, in the context of significant reforms going on in Cuba: Cuban Americans for Engagement (CAFÉ), and Cuban pastors representing the Cuban Council of Churches.

Encouraged returned travelers and other Cuba policy advocates to contact the White House to urge executive action on travel to Cuba and to remove Cuba from the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism.

Motivated the on-line community in our campaign to end the travel ban through LAWG’s Facebook page, EndtheTravelBan, which has grown to nearly 35,000 “likes.”
Defending Human Rights in Central America

- Mobilized to protect the rights of child migrants as the massive numbers of unaccompanied children crossing the U.S. border hit the national headlines. We worked with faith and immigration groups to create letters and talking points for Congress and met with administration officials to encourage policies that protect children at risk and address the human rights and economic crises that cause them to flee.

- Brought Central American children’s advocates and migrant rights advocates to meet with policymakers, shedding light on the root causes spurring migration during a contentious debate over the plight of unaccompanied migrant children and families.

- Organized a visit by Honduran LGBT leader Nelson Arambú to meet with the Human Rights Campaign and other LGBT advocates, the State Department, and Congress, along with the Chicago Religious Leadership Network on Latin America and a Honduran-American advocate.
Colombia: Standing with the Victims of Violence

- Galvanized U.S. support behind the Colombian peace process, moving from the United States from tepid to enthusiastic support. We organized signers on a letter from Irish, Northern Irish, UK and U.S. members of Congress in support of peace; helped organize a country-wide faith leaders’ letter; organized a briefing on women and the peace process, and brought Colombian human rights advocates to speak with the National Security Council and Vice President’s office.

- Brought representatives of victims of violence to speak to Congress, government officials, press and public about what victims want to see in the peace process, including truth, justice, reparations and guarantees that the brutal past will not return.

- Created an infographic on the human toll of the Colombian conflict that was widely distributed and tweeted, including by Colombian rockstar Juanes.

- Organized a dynamic visit by the Campaign Against Rape and Other Sexual Violence, including a woman forced to serve as a child combatant in the ranks of the paramilitaries, recruited at age 11.
Organized a visit by a courageous human rights leader from Huila, Colombia, to denounce lack of progress in investigating extrajudicial executions alleged committed by members of the army (with Fellowship of Reconciliation).

Carried out a field investigation on Colombia’s Caribbean Coast with Lutheran World Relief, revealing obstacles to land return, and the danger still faced by land rights leaders, indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities. Our report, *Far from the Promised Land*, aims to spur improved protection for returning communities.

**Promoting Justice for Mexico & the Borderlands**

Worked with border-based partners to advance a more meaningful dialogue with the Customs and Border Protection Agency (CBP) to reform harsh deportation and detention practices that put migrants at risk. We also pressed for changes in CBP’s use-of-force policy given the disturbing track record of more than 30 individuals killed by border agents.
Brought multiple delegations of valiant migrant rights defenders to meet with policymakers and the public, raising awareness regarding the grave abuses and violence that many migrants experience in transit through Mexico.

Provided international pressure to support partners in Mexico advocating for a reform to Mexico’s military code of justice to ensure that abuses committed by the military against civilians are investigated and heard in civilian, not military, jurisdiction — a crucial reform that was passed unanimously by Mexico’s Congress.

* 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.
Monitoring Military Aid

Created a how-to on-line pamphlet to train human rights advocates in Latin America and the rest of the world on how to apply the Leahy Law, to block where needed U.S. training and support for abusive members of military forces (with the Center for International Policy).

Acknowledgments

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Finances

LAWGEF’s income of $467,512 in 2013 came from foundations as well as from individual donors and nongovernmental organizations. Expenditures for 2013 were $571,497. Some multiyear grants from 2012 were carried forward to cover 2013 and 2014 expenses. Contributions to the LAWGEF are tax-deductible.

LAWG’s income of $235,614 in 2013 came from contributions by coalition partners, including humanitarian agencies, nongovernmental and faith-based organizations, funders and individual donors. Expenditures for 2013 were $116,400. Part of a multiyear grant received in 2013 was carried forward into 2014. Contributions to the LAWG are not tax-deductible.
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