



LATIN AMERICA WORKING GROUP

Action at Home for Just Policies Abroad

ANNUAL REPORT 2009



Logo for the campaign to end the travel ban on Cuba. © Andrew Turner

Often I think of our work as being centered on justice. This year I felt our watchword was also freedom.

The freedom to travel anywhere in the world—including Cuba.

The freedom to organize, investigate abuses, and speak out, without having your government spy upon you, as in, among other places, Colombia.

The freedom to cross borders, to immigrate.

The freedom to publish and protest, now restricted in Honduras.

The freedom to dream of, and try to build, a just world.

We've had some victories this year—restoring the rights of Cuban Americans to travel, and convincing our government that Colombia's spying scandal matters. But we've lots left to do, working together for justice. And freedom.

Lisa Haugard

Cover: Activists made thousands of paper dolls to symbolize Colombia's over 4 million displaced people. ©Chicago Religious Leadership Network (CRLN)

Who We Are

One 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.

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS*

AFL-CIO Solidarity Center

Alliance of Baptists

American Friends Service Committee

Catholic Relief Services

Center for Economic and Policy Research

Center for Global Education at Augsburg College

Center for International Policy

Christian Peacemaker Teams

Church of the Brethren

Church Women United

Church World Service

Colombia Human Rights Committee

Conference of Major Superiors of Men

Cuban American Alliance Education Fund

Disarm Education Fund

Episcopal Church



Street scene in Cuba. © Mavis Anderson

2009 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Cuba: Travel for All

- Coordinated **CubaGO!** - a day of educational Hill visits on ending the ban on travel to Cuba for ALL Americans, and a national call-in day that generated more than a thousand calls to Congress from around the country. The Hill day consisted of 75 Americans from diverse sectors, divided into 14 delegations, educating 60 members of Congress and senators from ten states on the need to open travel to Cuba. CubaGO! (www.cubago.info) is a project of LAWG and a group of allied organizations working to increase dialogue and exchange with Cuba.
- Launched an innovative social networking campaign to promote policy change toward Cuba, including an “End the Travel Ban on Cuba” Facebook page, an “EndtheTravelBan” Twitter account, and new LAWG blog posts and website initiatives.

- Hosted and organized a series of delegations to Washington, DC, to promote unrestricted travel to Cuba, including Church World Service mission directors; the Emergency Network of Cuban American Scholars and Artists (ENCASA); the Moderator and staff of the Presbyterian Church (USA); a Jewish and Cuban-American delegation; the President of the Jewish community of Cienfuegos, Cuba, and local Jewish leaders.
- Solicited and placed more than ten op-eds in local and regional newspapers across the nation by Americans supporting engagement with Cuba.
- Participated on a cultural exchange panel with Danny Glover, Septime Webre (artistic director of the Washington Ballet), James Early (Smithsonian Institute), Viengsay Valdés (prima ballerina of the Ballet Nacional de Cuba), and other cultural leaders, organized by the U.S.-Cuba Cultural Exchange.

Evangelical Lutheran Church of America,
Global Mission

Evangelical Lutheran Church of America,
Washington Office

Fellowship of Reconciliation Task Force on
Latin America and the Caribbean

Friends Committee on National Legislation
Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA
Human Rights First

Institute for Policy Studies

Jesuit Refugee Service/USA

US Jesuit Conference

Loretto Community Latin American/
Caribbean Community

Lutheran World Relief Office of Public Policy

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

Mennonite Central Committee (MCC)

Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate,
Justice and Peace Office



Activists send Obama a message through LAWG's photo campaign. ©Christa Schelter

Mexico: Justice for Mexico and the Borderlands

- With Mexican human rights groups and the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), extensively documented rising abuses by the Mexican security forces, demanding enforcement of the Merida Initiative's human rights provisions, directly and via grassroots actions. While the provisions have not yet been invoked, we placed our governments on notice, began to increase congressional oversight, and laid the basis for future enforcement.
- Testified before the U.S. House of Representatives on rising cartel violence in Mexico, calling for the United States to support justice initiatives but end funding that dangerously brings the army into the streets. LAWGEF challenged U.S. policymakers to make sure we do our part by curbing the flow of weapons from the United States to Mexico and expanding drug treatment programs at home.
- Coordinated with WOLA events for three experts on an alternative strategy to address drug-related violence in Mexico, by improving Mexico's policing through

community approaches with greater citizen involvement and oversight, with meetings at the State Department, Congress and the Woodrow Wilson Center.

- Organized with the Border Working Group statements of concern over the rise in abuses, kidnappings, and murders of migrants traveling northward.
- Organized grassroots responses with a coalition of groups against border fences that just push migrants farther into the desert where migrant deaths are on the rise. An amendment was dropped from the final Homeland Security appropriations bill, marking the first-ever defeat of counterproductive border construction.

Colombia: Standing with the Victims of Violence

- Organized with WOLA a delegation of human rights activists and a journalist who had been the focus of illegal surveillance by the Colombian government, and brought them to meet at high levels with the National Security Council, Pentagon, State Department, and congressional committees. As a result of our efforts

National Council of Churches

National Security Archive

NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby

Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala
(NISGUA)

Nicaragua Network/Alliance for Global Justice

Oxfam America

Peace Brigades International, USA

Presbyterian Church (USA)

Project Counselling Service

Quixote Center/Quest for Peace

Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism

Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and
Human Rights

School of the Americas Watch (SOA Watch)

SHARE Foundation

Sisters of Mercy of the Americas

Sister Parish



Advocates in Chicago wear dolls on prayer shawls and read a “Grieving Mothers” liturgy to mourn the displacement in Colombia. ©Chicago Religious Leadership Network (CRLN)

to expose the wiretapping scandal, President Obama raised the issue with the President of Colombia and Congress placed some provisions in law restricting funding to the agency that had conducted the spying.

- Through meetings, letters, memos, and organized grassroots efforts, directed at every angle from the White House and State Department to the Pentagon and US Trade Representative, called on the new administration to create a new policy towards Colombia centered on justice and human rights.
- When the Colombian government tried to whitewash its image by placing heart-shaped statues around DC during the first week of the congressional fall session, our coalition used pickets and street theater to get out the truth about what’s really going on in Colombia.
- Participated with faith-based and grassroots groups in Days of Prayer and Action, where people unleashed their creativity through paper dolls, sent to policymakers, that represented Colombia’s invisible millions of displaced people.

Honduras: Saying No to Repression

- Organized statements by faith-based, policy, humanitarian and grassroots groups opposing the June 28th coup in Honduras and calling on our government to insist upon the restoration of the elected government and speak out on violations of human rights and civil liberties.
- Organized with other groups an emergency delegation from Honduras, including a human rights activist, member of Congress and judicial expert, to speak to Congress and the administration.
- Ensured a steady drumbeat of information to policymakers about violations of human rights and freedom of expression in Honduras through regular memos synthesizing Honduran and international human rights and press freedom reports and articles.

STITCH

TransAfrica Forum

United Church of Christ

United Methodist Church, General Board of Church
& Society

United Methodist Church, General Board of Global
Ministries

United Methodist Church, Women's Division

US-Cuba Cultural Exchange

US/Labor Education in the Americas

US Office on Colombia

Voices on the Border

Washington Office on Latin America

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.



STAFF

(left to right, back to front)

*Mavis Anderson, Suzette Diaz, Emily Chow,
Paulo Gusmao, Lisa Haugaard, Vanessa Kritzer,
Andy Turner, Brian Erickson, Jennifer Johnson
(not pictured)*

Acknowledgments

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Finances

LAWGEF's income of \$241,873 in 2008 came primarily from foundations as well as from individual donors and nongovernmental organizations. In addition, LAWGEF had received two-year grants in 2007 which were carried forward to 2008. Expenditures for 2008 were \$410,746. Contributions to the LAWGEF for education activities are tax-deductible.

LAWG's income of \$69,096 in 2008 came primarily from contributions by coalition partners, including humanitarian agencies and nongovernmental and religious organizations. Expenditures for 2008 were \$79,904. Contributions to the LAWG are not tax-deductible.

Audited financial statements available upon request.

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U.S.-Cuba Cultural Exchange

Heather Mansfield
Online Outreach Expert

Latin America Working Group
424 C Street NE, Washington, DC 20002
Tel: 202.546.7010 Fax: 202.543.7647
Email: lawg@lawg.org

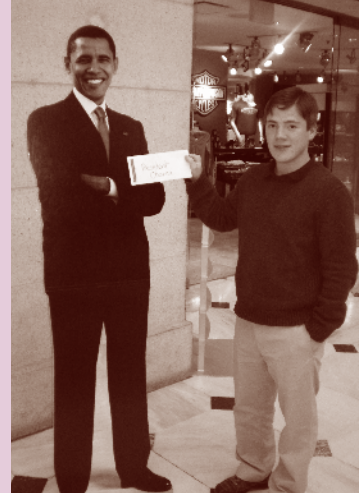
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See our website to:

- sign up for our newsletter, *The Advocate*;
- join our e-mail listservs on Cuba, Colombia, Mexico and U.S./Mexico border issues, and Venezuela, low-volume e-mail alerts that let you know what you can do to call for just U.S. policies;
- order or view on-line our special reports;
- make a contribution.

Action at Home for Just Policies Abroad



LAWG staffer Travis Wheeler "delivers" our letter on U.S.-Latin America policy to Obama. ©Paulo Gusmao.