



LATIN AMERICA WORKING GROUP

*Action at Home for
Just Policies Abroad*

2011 ANNUAL REPORT

When it comes to standing up for human rights and justice in U.S. policy towards Latin America, we don't let anything stand in our way.

That's why we took action against the U.S.-Colombia free trade agreement, even though the governments and chambers of commerce of two powerful countries were allied against us.

That's why we're advocating for the United States to control the flow of assault weapons into Mexico, although powerful interests tell us to look the other way.

That's why we continue to press for travel for all between the United States and Cuba, even though entrenched interests challenge our every move forward.

Thanks to working with you and our Latin American civil society partners, the Latin America Working Group is able to break new ground and help create more fair U.S. policy toward Latin America every year. Together, we convinced the President to restore people-to-people travel to Cuba. We held up the passage of the trade agreement until the Colombian government made improvements

in protecting human and labor rights. We convinced the State Department to call on the Mexican government to prosecute military human rights abuses in civilian courts. And, fighting for what's right to the best of our ability means refusing to be afraid sometimes to lose. Because we know in our hearts what is right.

So do you—hundreds of thousands of people across the nation who not only care about what happens in the United States, but also about what happens around the globe. More and more of you are joining us to call for just foreign policy towards Latin America and the world. For us, it's an honor to work with our Latin American and U.S. partners, and with you.



Cover: Banner created by members of the Chicago Religious Leadership Network to send a message of hope and solidarity to peace communities in Colombia during the Days of Prayer and Action.

PHOTO BY CRLN

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.



LAWG staff and a delegation of Mexican migrant rights defenders visit the Department of Homeland Security.

PHOTO BY BEN LEITER.

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS*

- AFL-CIO Solidarity Center
- Alliance of Baptists
- American Jewish World Service
- 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 World Service
- Colombia Human Rights Committee
- Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach
- Conference of Major Superiors of Men
- Cuban American Alliance Education Fund
- Disarm Education Fund



A group of Cuban pastors meet with Representative Jeff Flake to talk about the impact of the embargo on the Cuban religious community during a delegation organized by LAWGEF.

PHOTO BY EMILY CHOW

2011 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Cuba: Travel for All

- Successfully pressed the White House to take executive action to expand travel to Cuba. In January 2011, after a two-year campaign by LAWG with a broad-based coalition, President Obama directed that new regulations be issued that granted general licenses (requiring no application) for educational, religious and cultural groups; re-instituted specific licenses (with application) for people-to-people travel; allowed for remittances from non-family members to Cubans, and approved expansion of direct charter flights from more U.S. cities to Cuba.
- Gained 15,968 signatures on a Change.org petition targeted to President Obama asking him to “end the unjust and unfair ban on travel to Cuba.” We were recognized by Change.org as an example of a “well-targeted campaign” for our petition “Tell Congress: Restore the Right to Travel to Cuba,” which received 15,067 signatures.

- Published the on-line brochure “How-to Travel to Cuba” to make new travel regulations understandable and user-friendly, share upcoming opportunities to travel to Cuba and promote taking full advantage of the new openings for legal travel to Cuba.
- With the Washington Office on Latin America and the support of Oxfam America, published *The Human Cost: Cubans and Cuban Americans talk about their lives and the U.S. embargo*, which translates the debate over Cuba policy into human stories—what the U.S. embargo means for daily lives of Cubans.

Promoting Justice for Mexico and the Borderlands

- With a coalition of U.S. and Mexican human rights groups, convinced Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to publicly press for reform of Mexico’s military justice system so that human rights violations by soldiers are tried in civilian



Executive Director Lisa Haugaard meets with Mexican actor Diego Luna to discuss the bi-national campaign against gun smuggling from the United States to Mexico.

PHOTO BY BEN LEITER

Episcopal Church

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,
Global Mission

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,
Washington Office

Fellowship of Reconciliation Task Force on
Latin America and the Caribbean

Global Exchange

Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA

Institute for Policy Studies

Jesuit Refugee Service/USA

US Jesuit Conference

Lutheran World Relief Office of Public Policy

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

Mennonite Central Committee

Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate,
Justice and Peace Office



A participant in the migrant rights caravan, which traveled through southern Mexico this past summer, calls for an end to violence against migrants.

PHOTO BY JULIANA MORRIS.

courts. In July, Mexico's Supreme Court ruled that all human rights abuses committed by the military against civilians should be tried in civilian jurisdiction—a “milestone in the history of the human rights struggle,” as one of our Mexican partners put it.

- Partnering with Mexican civil society and movie star Diego Luna, we support a campaign urging President Obama to curb arms trafficking to Mexico. The campaign has gathered nearly 30,000 on-line signatures. In July, the President met one of our demands: Require gun dealers to report to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) the sale of multiple assault rifles.
- Organized a delegation of five courageous Mexican migrant rights defenders here in Washington to shed light on how policies and conditions on both sides of the border have contributed to a surge in violence against and kidnapping of migrants, as well as an increase in threats against migrant rights defenders.
- Published *A Cautionary Tale: Lessons from Plan Colombia for U.S. Policy towards Mexico and Beyond*. This report with partners WOLA and CIP illuminates for policymakers and the history books why high costs in human rights and limited results show that Colombia is not a success story to be replicated in Mexico.

Colombia: Standing with the Victims of Violence

- Organized coalition efforts against the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement, bringing together labor, environmental, human rights, faith-based and fair trade groups in a nationwide campaign. Motivated activists to send 13,000 emails to Congress, carried out over 40 hill visits, collected more than 11,000 signatures on a petition and coordinated four call-in days. Provided information, photos and stories of slain activists to members of Congress for the floor debate. The agreement passed, but with a strong debate about labor and human rights, and only after an agreement by the Colombian government to protect union leaders at risk and to improve respect for labor rights.



Program Associate Vanessa Kritzer checks out a piece of street theater in Seattle that compares the Colombia, Panama, and South Korea free trade agreements to a used car.

PHOTO BY COLETTE COSNER

National Council of Churches
National Security Archive
NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby
Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala (NISGUA)
Oxfam America
Peace Brigades International, USA
Presbyterian Church (USA)
Presbyterian Peace Fellowship
Project Counselling Service
Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights
School of the Americas Watch (SOA Watch)
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas
Sister Parish
STITCH
TransAfrica Forum



Students at Cesar Chavez High School in Washington, DC show off the artwork they made for Colombian communities during the Days of Prayer and Action.

PHOTO BY KATHRYN WOOTEN

- Called on the Colombian and U.S. governments to protect land rights leaders who are at risk. Went on a fact-finding trip to the Cordoba/Sucre region where returned communities face paramilitary violence and, with Lutheran World Relief, published a report called *No Relief in Sight, Land & Violence on Colombia's Northern Coast*. Organized the writing of a high-profile letter to highlight 20 slain land rights leaders and spell out how governments can and must provide protection.
- Co-organized the *Days of Prayer and Action*, in which grassroots and church groups across the country educated their communities about the conflict in Colombia, wrote postcards to their legislators, and created banners for Colombian communities to send them the message that they are not alone—we are here to work with them *Hand in Hand for Peace*.
- Collaborated with Lutheran World Relief and Witness for Peace to tour the art exhibit *Remember Me: Voices of the Silenced in Colombia* and discuss U.S.-Colombia policy with people in Seattle, Portland, and DC—including an event in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Defending Human Rights in Central America

- Convinced members of Congress to send a “Dear Colleague” letter about murders of and threats against human rights defenders, journalists, LGBT community members and activists in Honduras. Then, worked with grassroots organizations to persuade no less than 87 members of Congress to sign, sending a strong message to the State Department and the Honduran government that human rights matter in Honduras.
- Traveled to Guatemala on a GHRC delegation to investigate rising levels of violence against women and to assess the political climate before the presidential elections. Put pressure on the U.S. and Guatemalan governments to support human and women’s rights, justice in court cases from the genocide, and land rights for rural communities.



Quilt created by Blanca Nieves Meneses and featured in the Remember Me exhibit to honor her four daughters who were disappeared and murdered by paramilitaries in Colombia.

PHOTO BY LUTHERAN WORLD RELIEF.

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
U.S. Jesuit Conference
US/Labor Education in the Americas Project
US Office on Colombia
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.



LAWG Staff (left to right): Vanessa Kritzer, Mavis Anderson, Katrina Weeks, Lisa Haugaard, Emily Chow, Jenny Johnson (with her new daughter Willa!), Katherine Trujillo, Ben Leiter.

Acknowledgments

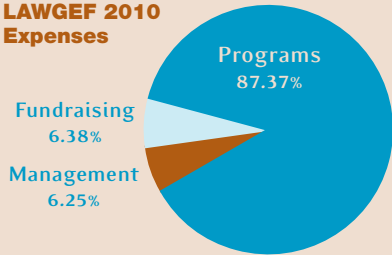
Many thanks to the following foundations and organizations for their contributions to the LAWGEF's public education work: Foundation to Promote Open Society, Ford Foundation, Christopher Reynolds Foundation, Moriah Fund, Arca Foundation, Stewart Mott Charitable Trust, Oxfam America, Oblate Charitable Fund, and United Church of Christ. We also thank Atlantic Advocacy Fund, Catholic Relief Services, ELCA Global Mission, Lutheran World Relief, American Jewish World Service, Presbyterian Church (USA), Church World Service, Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers and the many other organizations that have contributed to the LAWG, as well as the numerous generous individuals that contribute to both organizations.

Finances

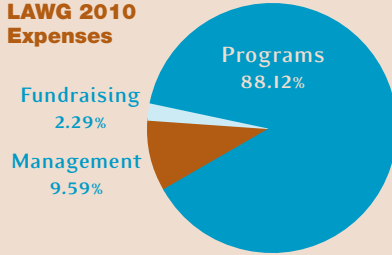
LAWGEF's 2010 income of \$242,804 came primarily from foundations, as well as from individual donors and nongovernmental organizations. Expenditures for 2010 were \$462,603. A two-year grant from 2009 and other carry-forward funds made up the difference. Contributions to the LAWGEF for education activities are tax-deductible.

LAWG's income of \$251,731 in 2010 came from contributions by coalition partners, including humanitarian agencies, nongovernmental and faith-based organizations, funders and individual donors. Expenditures for 2010 were \$185,981. Contributions to the LAWG are not tax-deductible.

LAWGEF 2010 Expenses



LAWG 2010 Expenses



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- sign up for our newsletter, *The Advocate*;
- join our e-mail listservs on Cuba, Colombia, Mexico and U.S./Mexico border issues, 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.



Dancers take to the streets in Old Havana, Cuba.

PHOTO BY MAVIS ANDERSON

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