



# LATIN AMERICA WORKING GROUP

*Action at Home for  
Just Policies Abroad*

## 2016

### ANNUAL REPORT

**Compassion. Fairness. Justice.** That's what I think of when I envision how our relationship with our neighbors in the Americas should be. And how we should treat the migrants and refugees who arrive at our border.

That's far from where the national debate led this year. So it's up to all of us to stand up for compassion. And that's what we did this year.

Together, we convinced the White House to expand opportunities to access asylum for Central American children, teenagers, women and men fleeing deadly violence—though the steps taken are not nearly enough. We stood by Colombia's victims of violence and increased U.S. support for the peace process, although Colombians still need to hammer out their disagreements to end fifty years of war. We enlisted Congress's help in urging justice for human rights defenders in Central America, as in the case of beloved Honduran indigenous and environmental activist Berta Cáceres.

And we chipped away at pieces of the embargo on Cuba, with momentum for change securing the first commercial airline flights between our countries—and freedom to import the coveted rum and cigars.

Next year, we'll work together to move our nation's foreign and immigration policy closer to justice, fairness, and—most of all—compassion.

*Cover: Daniella, Emma, and former LAWG intern Sofia hosting migrant rights defenders from Mexico and Central America in Washington, D.C.*

PHOTO BY EMMA BUCKHOUT.

*Lise Haugeard*

## WHO WE ARE

**T**he Latin America Working Group serves a coalition of nongovernmental, religious, grassroots, labor, environmental 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 LAWG, and educational activities by LAWGEF.



*Crowds dressed in white gathered to witness the signing of the Colombia peace accords in Cartagena, Colombia.*

PHOTO BY LISA HAUGAARD.

## PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS\*

AFL-CIO

AFL-CIO Solidarity Center

Alliance of Baptists

Amazon Watch

American Jewish World Service

Center for Economic and Policy Research

Center for Global Education at Augsburg College

Center for International Environmental Law

Center for International Policy

Church of the Brethren

Church World Service

Colombia Human Rights Committee



*Emma and migrant rights defenders at the Suchiate River near the Guatemala–Mexico border in Ciudad Hidalgo, Chiapas, Mexico.*

PHOTO BY DANIELLA BURGI-PALOMINO.

## 2016 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

### Protecting Migrants' Rights and Human Rights in Central America

- Coordinated advocacy to highlight the United States' flawed response to Central American refugees, working with national humanitarian, immigration, foreign policy, and grassroots groups. This led to some shifts—still baby steps—in expanding programs to allow Central American refugees fleeing deadly violence access to asylum.
- Organized a Shadow Summit in New York City around the UN Summit for Refugees and Migrants and President Obama's Summit on Refugees urging the United States to lead by example and improve U.S. policies at home and abroad for Central American refugees.
- Organized a letter with more than 200 organizational signatures calling for justice in the case of slain Honduran indigenous and environmental activist Berta Cáceres, which catalyzed pressure that led to some advances—though much more is needed.

- Worked with the Coalition against Impunity of Honduras to help them share concerns with U.S. policymakers regarding the abysmal state of human rights in their country, leading to members of the U.S. Congress calling for action for change.
- Published a report on violence in El Salvador, *No Easy Way Out*, which was circulated widely to press and public.
- Focused attention on extrajudicial executions by police and military in El Salvador and grave abuses by the Honduran Military Police against journalists, social activists, and community members.
- Ensured tough human rights conditions on U.S. assistance to Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador, and documented compliance with these conditions to strengthen congressional and public oversight.



*Mural at La 72 Hogar-Refugio for Migrants in Tenosique, Mexico.*

PHOTO BY EMMA BUCKHOUT.

Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach  
 Conference of Major Superiors of Men  
 Cuban American Alliance Education Fund  
 Disarm Education Fund  
 Environmental Investigation Agency  
 Episcopal Church  
 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,  
 Global Mission  
 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,  
 Washington Office  
 Global Exchange  
 Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA  
 Institute for Policy Studies



*Billboard of Cuban revolutionary Celia Sánchez seen in the Granma Province of Cuba.*

PHOTO BY MAVIS ANDERSON.

## Cuba: End the Embargo

- With our thousands of online partners and colleague organizations, succeeded in moving U.S.-Cuba policy forward toward normalization of relations by encouraging President Obama to take further executive action. These included: allowing joint U.S.-Cuban medical research projects; allowing pharmaceuticals developed in Cuba by Cubans to be FDA-tested and sold in the United States; removing restrictions on U.S. citizens importing Cuban merchandise (including cigars and rum) in accompanied baggage for personal use; and waiving the waiting period for ships that have traded with Cuba to dock in the United States.
- Supported legislation in Congress to end the travel ban and the trade embargo on Cuba. While that legislation is still pending before Congress, many new bipartisan co-sponsors and supporters were added. We anticipate continuing to move this legislation forward in the next Congress, which must act to finally end the embargo and travel ban.

- Celebrated the resumption of direct commercial flights to Cuba, direct mail service between our two nations, and the signing of accords on environmental protection, marine sanctuaries, public health and biomedical research, agriculture, counternarcotics, trade, and travel security—many of which we had supported through grassroots action and social media campaigns.
- Excelled at a lively social media program on Facebook (EndtheEmbargo, with nearly 40,000 “likes”), Twitter (@endtheembargo), and with our active email network of thousands of Cuba policy advocates.
- Collaborated with an increasingly diverse group of organizations, business and agriculture groups to make our voices heard in Congress, representing the will of the American people to end the embargo and normalize relations with our island neighbor.
- With broad participation, succeeded in encouraging the United States to abstain from the annual vote on a Cuban resolution before the United National General Assembly condemning the embargo. The 2016 vote was: 191 in favor, 0 opposed, and 2 abstentions.

Jesuit Refugee Service/USA

Lutheran World Relief Office of Public Policy

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

Mennonite Central Committee

Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate,  
Justice and Peace Office

National Security Archive

Oxfam America

Peace Brigades International, USA

Presbyterian Church (USA)

Presbyterian Peace Fellowship

Robert F. Kennedy Center for  
Justice and Human Rights

## Colombia: Standing for Peace and with the Victims of Violence

- Successfully increased U.S. diplomatic support for the Colombian peace process and planned U.S. financial support for peace accord implementation. Organized support for a bipartisan letter from 63 members of Congress expressing support for the peace process. Helped organized visits by Colombian human rights advocates to speak to U.S. policymakers about human rights and the peace process. Supported efforts by victims associations and other civil society groups to put the process back on track following the results of the October referendum.
- Increased visibility for associations of families of the disappeared, hosting events in Washington, D.C. with the U.S. Institute of Peace and participating in a conference in Berlin, Germany. The associations of families of the disappeared and human rights groups won an important victory with the inclusion of an agreement on the disappeared in the peace accords.
- Produced an eye-opening infographic on the human costs of Plan Colombia, highlighting the human rights impact once the United States began heavily funding the war, which we distributed during the 15-year anniversary of Plan Colombia.
- Expanded and improved our Colombia News Brief, which has played an important role informing policymakers, activists, and the public in this rapidly changing political moment.



*Lisa with Gimena Sánchez-Garzoli (WOLA) and Camilo González Posso (INDEPAZ) in Cartagena, Colombia.*



## Promoting Justice for Mexico & the Borderlands

- Strengthened the demands of family members of the disappeared and victims of torture in Mexico by highlighting the obstacles they face in achieving truth and justice and calling for civil society to be included in the design and monitoring of Mexico's disappearance and torture laws.
- Exposed the flaws in the Mexican government's investigation of the 43 disappeared Ayotzinapa students by briefing congressional offices, supporting congressional letters, and leading action alerts urging U.S. support for human rights protections and an end to impunity in Mexico.
- Raised awareness on Mexico's failure to ensure Central American refugees' access to protection by coordinating delegations of migrant rights defenders in Washington, D.C. and informing Congress and the administration of Mexico's weak asylum system. We visited Mexico's southern border with migrant shelters workers and other partners and published a series of blogs documenting the impacts of Mexico's migration enforcement on those fleeing violence from Central America and the lack of access to asylum in Mexico.

Sisters of Mercy of the Americas

United Church of Christ

United Methodist Church,  
General Board of Church & Society

United Methodist Church,  
General Board of Global Ministries

US-Cuba Cultural Exchange

U.S. Jesuit Conference

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: Daniella Burgi-Palomino, Mavis Anderson, Lisa Haugaard, Andrea Fernández Aponte, and Emma Buckhout.*

PHOTO BY BEATRIZ GARCIA.

- Worked with border-based partners to advance meaningful dialogue with Customs and Border Protection (CBP), especially around increasing accountability and transparency for use-of-force abuses, improving screening for protection, especially for families and children, and ensuring the return of migrant belongings.

## **Acknowledgments**

Many thanks to the following for their contributions in 2016 to LAWGEF's public education work: Foundation to Promote Open Society, Ford Foundation, Moriah Fund, Christopher Reynolds Foundation, Stewart Mott Charitable Trust, Lutheran World Relief, Oblate Charitable Fund, United Church of Christ, AFL-CIO, Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States, and Washington Office on Latin America.

Many thanks to the Open Society Policy Center, ELCA Global Mission, Mennonite Central Committee, Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, Oxfam America, Alliance of Baptists, Presbyterian Church USA, and many other organizations that have contributed to LAWG, as well as to the many generous individuals contributing to both organizations.

*A special heartfelt thank you for the bequest of Scott Ewing. We will always remember Scott Ewing's kindness, thoughtfulness and generosity.*

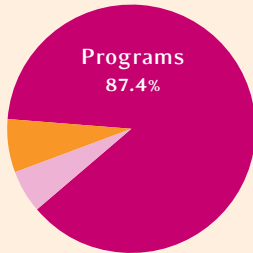
## Finances

LAWGEF's income of \$587,578 in 2015 came from foundations as well as from individual donors and nongovernmental organizations. Expenditures for 2015 were \$453,145. Some multiyear grants from 2015 are being carried forward to cover 2016 expenses. Contributions to LAWGEF are tax-deductible.

LAWG's income of \$93,210 in 2015 came from contributions by coalition partners, including humanitarian agencies, nongovernmental and faith-based organizations, funders and individual donors. Expenditures for 2015 were \$101,009. A multiyear grant received in 2013 was carried forward into 2015 to cover 2015 expenses. Contributions to LAWG are not tax-deductible.

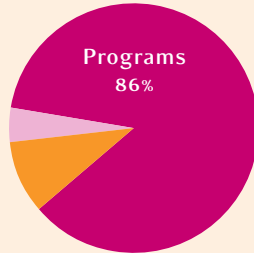
### LAWGEF 2015 Expenses

Fundraising  
6.8%  
Management  
5.8%



### LAWG 2015 Expenses

Fundraising  
4.3%  
Management  
9.7%



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See our website to:

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



*Daniella and Emma at the UN Summit for Migrants and Refugees in New York City.*

PHOTO BY EMMA BUCKHOUT.

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