



CUSLAR NEWSLETTER

COMMITTEE ON U.S.-LATIN AMERICAN RELATIONS, ITHACA, NEW YORK, USA

Volume XXXVIII, Issue 1.

Free — Donations welcome

April 2012

Mexican priest and human rights leader Alejandro Solalinde: 'Migrants signal global changes'

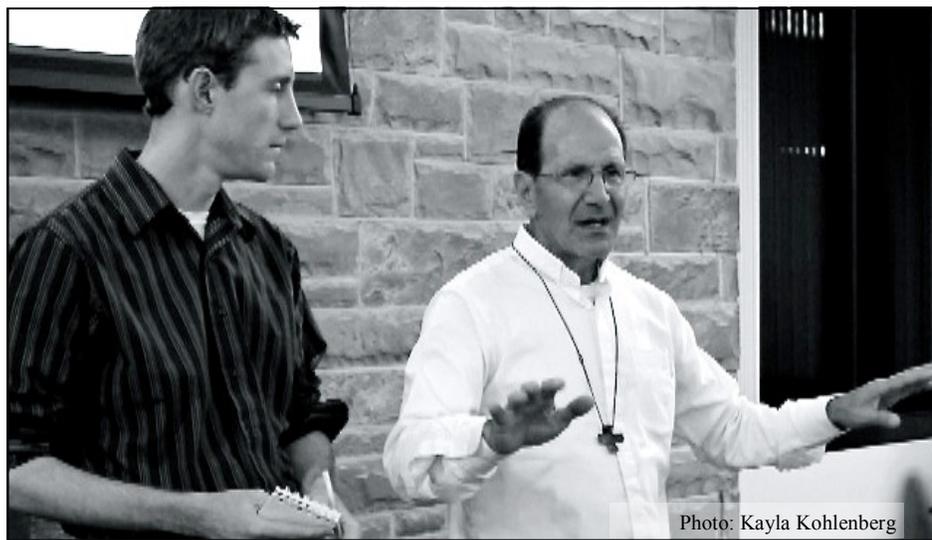


Photo: Kayla Kohlenberg

Father Alejandro Solalinde, priest and human rights leader, right, speaks to students and faculty at Ithaca College February 13 about the dangers Central American migrants face while crossing Mexico. Solalinde's U.S. speaking tour was sponsored by CUSLAR and the Cornell University Latin American Studies Program and included stops at Cornell University, Ithaca College, First Baptist Church of Ithaca, Hobart and William Smith Colleges, St. John Fisher College, Nazareth College, Union Theological Seminary, Rutgers University, Lehman College, New York University and the Philippine Forum. At left is CUSLAR Coordinator Tim Shenk, who served as Solalinde's interpreter for the 13 public presentations February 12-17.

by **Tim Shenk**

Father Alejandro Solalinde, a gentle priest from southern Mexico, hardly looks like a man who would warrant four armed bodyguards and an order of protection mandated by the OAS Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

Yet Solalinde is a marked man because of his challenge to organized crime and sharp critiques of the Mexican government. He also has strong words for the Catholic Church, who he says isn't doing enough to protect the rights of Central American migrants traveling through Mexico. He himself runs a migrant shelter in Ixtepec, Oaxaca, where every week hundreds of travelers find rest, food, clothing, medical care and information for the next leg of their journey to the United States.

CUSLAR and more than a dozen other institutions sponsored Solalinde's February 2012 speaking tour in New York and New Jersey, where he stressed that migrants are signaling a fundamental change in society.

"Migrants are a mirror by which we can understand how our society treats the most vulnerable among us," Solalinde said.

"Migration is the movement of the poor. Two hundred million people are on the move in the world today, forced from their homes by economic and political systems that don't allow them to provide for their families in their countries of origin."

Solalinde founded "Hermanos en el Camino" migrant shelter in 2007 after becoming aware of the constant stream of Central Americans riding northward atop freight trains through Mexico. An insidious industry has developed to prey on these travelers: organized crime, immigration agents and even federal law enforcement collude to beat, rob, kidnap, extort and traffic migrants with little accountability from sending or receiving countries.

Extrapolating from estimates of the Mexican National Commission on Human Rights, each year over 22,000 migrants are kidnapped and tortured until loved ones in the United States wire \$2,000 to 5,000 in ransom. This violent form of extortion of the poor is surprisingly profitable because of low risks of repercussions, as Mexican authorities rarely pursue justice for unauthorized transients.

Solalinde reports seeing increasing numbers of women and children travelers and says women are the most vulnerable. Many women get contraceptive shots before leaving home, well aware that six in ten women on the migrant route through Mexico are raped and can be trafficked as sex workers.

In 2010 Solalinde himself was the first ever to file a legal complaint against *Los Zetas*, after members of this powerful drug cartel assaulted a group of migrants. "I didn't expect to wake up the next morning," he recalled. "But when I wasn't killed immediately, I realized common criminals aren't calling the shots for *Los Zetas*. Those decisions are being made way up the political chain."

How does Solalinde sustain hope in a context of such violence and corruption? "I see the face of God when I look at migrants," he said. "They travel with nothing more than the clothes on their backs, but they're carrying strong values: deep love of family, irrepressible courage and care for one another. I believe migrants will re-found the United States as a home for true democracy."

Solalinde sees dialectical relationships at work and insists that "the movement of the poor" is the motor pushing history forward. At the same time as they suffer unspeakable injustice, migrants trigger increased levels of consciousness as more and more people respond to the stories of violence with indignation and solidarity.

"With their footsteps, migrants are signaling the end of an era," Solalinde says. "They're leaders in ushering in a new era — an era in which we as a global society will value human beings over money."

LEARN MORE!



Video, transcripts of presentations, additional articles and related info on Father Solalinde's visit and CUSLAR's study of the Root Causes of Migration are available on our website:

cuslar.org

Forced Migration: Consequences of Free Trade

For years, the debate on immigration has centered on prevention policies and deportation, on prejudice and fear. The mainstream rhetoric of immigration, however, does not recognize the root causes of migration and the structures causing “the forced movement of the poor,” as Alejandro Solalinde calls it.

by Kayla Kohlenberg

Most migrants who travel to the United States do not leave their homelands and families voluntarily: this is forced migration.

Free trade agreements between the U.S. and developing countries were meant to increase trade, foreign direct investment, and exports, to raise incomes and stimulate modern development. Instead, the implementation of free trade agreements has increased rural and urban poverty, decimated many local markets, and forced many people to relocate to search for work.

After the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, legal immigration to the U.S. increased by 55 percent, and illegal immigration is thought to have increased by at least that much.

The opening of trade under NAFTA flooded the Mexican market with an 18-fold increase in cheap U.S. subsidized grain, destroying much of the rural economy of Mexico, and eliminating more than two million Mexican farming jobs.

DR-CAFTA, the 2006 and 2007 free trade agreement for Central America and the Dominican Republic, has also destroyed much of the local economy, especially agriculture. In the first year of DR-CAFTA’s implementation,



Photo: Ireneo Mujica Arzate

Many Central American migrants travel through Mexico to the U.S. on the tops of freight trains. They have found fewer opportunities in their home countries since NAFTA and DR-CAFTA.

11,457 jobs were lost in El Salvador alone.

The governments of most Latin American countries will not, or cannot, help improve these conditions. Sanctions from lending institutions limit the actions of the Latin American governments as the countries become indebted, and many Central American governments tacitly encourage out-migration to the U.S. as a source of income. In El Salvador, remittances have become one of the highest sources of revenue in the country, accounting for \$3.6 billion annually.

Now, according to Witness for Peace, Mexico imports \$1.5 million worth of food every hour, while in the same hour, 30 Mexican farmers migrate to the U.S. to search for work, unable to survive anymore in their home economy. Despite the

dangers of migration though, the benefits of migration can be life-changing. A factory worker makes an average of \$7 to \$9 per day in Mexico, approximately what an undocumented worker may make per hour working in the United States.

Solalinde asks, “What are these migrants, these young people, telling us with their actions? They are telling us that the regional authorities in Central America are corrupt. Migrants are telling us that the powerful institutions of Central America, like the Catholic Church, have done little to change the situation of the poor.” Unable to rely on institutions, and facing violence and threats from corrupt authorities, gangs such as the Zetas, and drug warfare, millions of migrants are forced northward in search of a better life.

Shattered Families: Migrants in the U.S.

by Kayla Kohlenberg

Arriving in the United States does not mean an end to the dangers migrant families face. During 2011, the U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement deported 397,000 undocumented immigrants and detained almost the same amount, many of whom are parents, whose U.S.-citizen children are placed in the care of Child Protective Services.

Though the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 16 states the explicit human right to family unity as the “natural and fundamental group unit of society... entitled to protection by society and the State,” families are often separated for long periods of time with no rights and no way to contact each other.

The Applied Research Center’s 2011 study “Shattered Families” shows the devastating effects immigration law can have on families in the United States. Immigration policies and laws are based on the assumption that families “will, and should, be united,” but juvenile dependency courts often terminate parental rights, allowing no legal recourse for the



See the full “Shattered Families” report at arc.org/shatteredfamilies.

families to reunite themselves.

Carol Delgado, Consul General of Venezuela in New York, is one of 16

consuls working to reunite families whose children have been placed in foster care after a parent’s detention. “There are very strong interests at work to keep these children in foster care where someone is profiting off of their situation,” she told Solalinde during his February visit to the U.S. Despite many capable family members desperate to retain custody, we have not yet been able to extricate a single child from the U.S. foster care system.”

To prevent the shattering of families, federal, state, and local governments must create explicit institutional policies to protect detained parents and their children from prolonged separation.

Kayla Kohlenberg is a senior Politics major at Ithaca College and a CUSLAR intern.

The CUSLAR Newsletter is a publication of



CUSLAR

COMMITTEE ON U.S.-LATIN AMERICAN RELATIONS

316 Anabel Taylor Hall
Cornell University
Ithaca, NY 14853

(607) 255-7293

cuslar@cornell.edu

Coordinator / Editor: Tim Shenk.

CUSLAR is an affiliate of the
Center for Transformative Action (CTA).

This publication is a product of CUSLAR
and does not represent the position of
Cornell University on the subject matter herein.

Special Report from Mexico on the Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity**Peace movement demands demilitarization, justice for victims of violent crime**

by Janice Gallagher

While mainstream press in the U.S. claims that drug violence has sunk Mexico into lawlessness and corruption, the real story is how a national Mexican movement for peace and justice is gaining momentum and shaping public debate.

The Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity (MPJD) was formed in May 2011 after renowned Mexican poet Javier Sicilia's son was killed by drug traffickers. Sicilia's son's death channeled public outcry about the growing violence in Mexico and launched the country's first-ever national human rights movement.

Over 150,000 people from all over Mexico converged on the central plaza in Mexico City after a three-day march.

Since then, the MPJD has met with President Felipe Calderón twice, prompted the government to launch a new agency to attend to victims of disappearance, and is now pushing for a "victims' law" that would widely broaden legal protections and recourse for victims of drug war violence.

The MPJD's focus has been twofold: ending the militarized response to the drug trade, and pursuing justice for victims of violent crimes.

Since September 2011 I have been engaged in participant observation with the MPJD. I accompanied them on a 21-city caravan throughout Southern Mexico last September, where 650 people on 15 buses met with existing social movements in Chiapas and Oaxaca and emerging groups of citizens and victims in Acapulco and Veracruz. Since then, I have accompanied the documentation team, tracking cases, traveling to meet with state-based human rights groups, and attending planning and coordination meetings.

In just six months I have seen a shift in the national conversation about victims of the drug war. While Calderón continues to claim that over 90 percent of the more than 50,000 violent deaths the government has documented since 2006 are due to victims' involvement in the drug trade, the MPJD's work challenges this perception. By opening public spaces for victims to share their testimonials, a much more complex picture has emerged. Young people, social activists and other vulnerable populations are often victims of a web of organized crime groups collaborating with, or acting



Photo: Janice Gallagher

Since its inception in 2011, the Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity has mobilized hundreds of thousands of people throughout Mexico, calling for an end to the militarized response to the drug trade and pursuing justice for victims of violent crimes.

with the acquiescence of, state forces with little legal recourse: it is estimated that only 1.2 percent of all crimes committed in Mexico lead to a conviction.

Man killed after denouncing son's disappearance

The case of one MPJD activist, Nepomuceno Moreno, is illustrative. I met Nepomuceno last September when we were both participating in the Southern Caravan. Don Nepo's 17-year old son, Jorge Mario Moreno León, had been disappeared on June 30, 2010. Jorge had left a nightclub with friends, had an altercation with some armed men, and after fleeing to a nearby convenience store, was disappeared. Through Don Nepo's own investigative efforts, he found that his son's cell phone records showed he received a call from the State Attorney General's office shortly after his disappearance. In addition, Don Nepo had received a ransom call from the police. This confirmed to him the involvement of state officials in his son's disappearance.

Don Nepo continually denounced the state's involvement in his son's disappearance, despite receiving several threats from armed men. Don Nepo was shot to death in broad daylight while

driving his truck near his home in Sonora, Mexico on November 28, 2011. There has been little progress into the investigation of his killing.

The impunity for perpetrators of violent crime, together with the government's insistence that the best way to curb the cartels' power is by encouraging military and police to use violent *mano dura* strategies, motivates the MPJD to continue its struggle. In addition to pursuing national legislation, they are working with state-based movements and NGOs for justice in state courts.

U.S. Peace Caravan planned

The MPJD is planning a 2012 U.S. Caravan, seeking to address root causes of the drug war. Beginning in mid-August in San Diego and making its way to Washington D.C. in mid-September, the MPJD's U.S. Caravan will highlight the harmful effects of the United States' prohibition on drugs, the havoc caused by weapons sent from the U.S. to Mexico, the importance of border policies that respect human dignity and the need for a non-militarized response to the drug war. While the route is still being defined, the MPJD plans to make major stops in Los Angeles, Chicago, Washington and perhaps New York City.



Photo: Janice Gallagher

Mexico's national movement for peace and justice was spearheaded in 2011 by poet Javier Sicilia, left, after his son was killed by drug traffickers. Here, Sicilia and others mourn victims of violent crime in Mexico.

Janice Gallagher is a CUSLAR Advisory Board member and a Ph.D. student in the Department of Government at Cornell University.

If you or someone you know can provide housing, financial support, or publicity for the MPJD U.S. Caravan, please contact her at janice@documentacionporlapaz.mx.

CUSLAR in the news**Dudley honored at White House**

Photo: Mary Jo Dudley

Mary Jo Dudley, center, Director of the Cornell Farmworker Program and CUSLAR Advisory Board member, is congratulated by President Barack Obama, left, upon receiving a Cesar Chavez "Champion of Change" Award March 29 at the White House for her work in improving the living and working conditions of farmworkers and their families in New York State.

On March 29, Mary Jo Dudley was one of ten "Champions of Change" honored at the White House in a ceremony coinciding with the birthday of Cesar Chavez.

Dudley, a faculty member in Development Sociology at Cornell University and Director of the Cornell Farmworker Program, highlighted the vital role of farmworkers in the U.S. economy and society: "When people take an apple off of the shelf, I want them to have this picture in their mind," she said in her

remarks at the White House, holding up a photograph of a farmworker with a basket of apples. "Here is a person who works long, hard hours to feed his family and ours -- and he has the extra stress of being improperly documented in a 'border state' where he could be arrested anytime he leaves his house."

Dudley's work focuses on educating farmworkers and their employers on health, safety, cultural, and immigration issues and by conducting research that examines the contributions of farmworkers to the economic and social

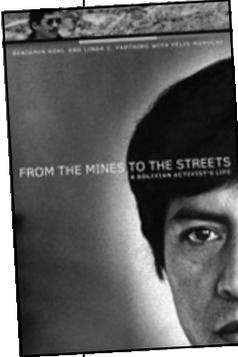
fabric of New York State.

When asked to reflect on Cesar Chavez's legacy, Dudley made reference to a television interview she did with Chavez when she was Coordinator of CUSLAR, remembering both his care and his resolve: "His legacy means looking at a difficult issue we're facing and saying, *si se puede* -- yes, we can do it," she said.

Dudley was honored with leaders who have embodied Chavez's values, including service, innovation and respect for all life.

Written by CUSLAR

Longtime CUSLAR members Benjamin Kohl and Linda Farthing have authored a layered, compelling book with Félix Muruchi on the last 60 years of social struggle in Bolivia, relying heavily on rich interviews with Muruchi. *From the Mines to the Streets: A Bolivian Activist's Life* (University of Texas Press, 2011) is receiving accolades from reviewers:



"Felix Muruchi's narrative makes a significant contribution by providing an insightful view of Bolivian union and social movements in the second half of the twentieth century.... It demonstrates precisely how the personal experience introduced in the autobiography enriches the analysis of social processes."

- June Nash, Distinguished Professor Emerita in Social Anthropology, CUNY Graduate Center

Help us build the "Written by CUSLAR" online database by submitting links or digital copies of your articles, essays, books, poems and blogs on the broad range of issues important to CUSLAR, to cuslar@cornell.edu for our review, and add to this growing hub of knowledge.

CUSLAR summer language classes

Improve your Spanish or Portuguese this summer in CUSLAR's six-week classes, or try out the new "Spanish for Families" class with creative, child-friendly lessons!

Classes begin in Ithaca, NY on June 25.

Email cuslarlanguages@gmail.com or check cuslar.org for more information.

11TH ANNUAL CISPES - CUSLAR

JOLIE CRISTINE RICKMAN

Spanish
for
Activists
Camp

SUMMER 2012

SPANISH CLASSES, WORKSHOPS,
PANELS, MUSIC AND MORE

ITHACA, NY

TAKE ACTION!**1 Million Signatures for Genuine Immigration Reform**

Join the national campaign to achieve genuine immigration reform and stop deportations. Julia Camagong, U.S. representative of the International Migrants Alliance and Co-Executive Director of Philippine Forum in New York City, said: "A genuine immigration reform should stop the illegalization and criminalization of undocumented immigrants. It should fix the backlog of visa processing to expedite family-based petitions to swiftly reunify families. We are tired of quick fix-it schemes that do not address the real issues of immigrants who are forced to leave their countries because of unemployment and poverty."

Download blank petition sheets here:
<http://www.ecuamigrante.com/millondefirmas.html>

Solalinde: 'Take care of your section of the riverbed'

Father Alejandro Solalinde says people often ask him, "What can I do to help migrants?" Solalinde says, "It's often too easy for people to give from their pocketbooks and not from their hearts. I challenge people to get involved with a cause for human rights where they live.

"Migration is like a mighty river flowing south to north," Solalinde says. "The authorities can try to divert the current, but they'll never stop the river. We're all responsible for the section of 'riverbed' where we are. I'm doing my job in Ixtepec, and it's your job to take care of the 'riverbed' wherever you are."

Join CUSLAR's study/action group on Root Causes of Migration and find additional resources at

cuslar.org

cuslar@cornell.edu
607-255-7293

