

# ROCLA UPDATE ON THE AMERICAS

A PUBLICATION OF THE ROCHESTER COMMITTEE ON LATIN AMERICA

COMING SOON

## ROCLA WINTER PROGRAMS

DECEMBER 5, 7PM



### ROCLA Honors 30 Years of Ciudad Hermana!

*Pot Luck Supper:* 5:30pm. Bring a dish to pass. *Presentation:* 7:30pm

*Speakers:* Michael Argaman, Ciudad Hermana Task Force; Dr. Arnold Matlin, ROCLA; Ciudad Hermana staff in Nicaragua, Martha Rojas and Ashley Sullivan.

Come and celebrate 30 years of the Ciudad Hermana Task Force's work! Founded in 1988, Ciudad Hermana continues to stand in solidarity with the people of El Sauce, Nicaragua. You are invited to join ROCLA to share a Pot Luck supper and honor Ciudad Hermana's founders and supporters and their dedicated work during the past 30 years. Learn more about the on-the-ground work from Ciudad Hermana's current staff in Nicaragua.

JANUARY 2, 7PM



### Brazil in Crisis

*Speaker:* Darien Lamén

The recent election of authoritarian demagogue Jair Bolsonaro as President of Brazil signals a deepening crisis of democracy and capitalism in Brazil. How did this become the new normal, and what are the prospects for organized resistance to the ruling elite's political and economic agendas? Speaker Darien Lamén is an educator, activist, and multimedia producer who has taught courses in Latin American culture and social history at the University of Texas at Austin and the University of Wisconsin Madison. He has spent many years in Brazil, and is currently working on a documentary about the role of liberation theology in the struggle for land reform in Amazonia.

FEBRUARY 2, 7PM



### Documentary Film: "Futbolistas 4 Life"

*Speaker:* TBA

"Futbolistas 4 Life" is about Oakland teens from immigrant families and the healing power of soccer. The documentary film takes you into the lives of two high school students, a DACA recipient who's navigating the reality of his immigration status, and an American citizen who lives in fear that her undocumented parents may be deported. "Futbolistas 4 Life" sheds light on the stress experienced nationwide by immigrant youth living in communities increasingly in the crosshairs of harsh federal immigration policies.

*All programs are held at Downtown United Presbyterian Church, and are free and open to public.  
The church is looped for those with hearing loss and is wheelchair accessible.*

# SAVE THE DATE! MARCH 22, 2019



THE 31ST ANNUAL  
RICE & BEANS DINNER  
AND WHITE DOVE  
AWARDS

# URGENT ACTION

## HONDURAN FORCED MIGRANCY RELIEF FUND

Rights Action, an organization ROCLA has partnered with for many years, is raising funds to provide humanitarian relief to thousands of migrants forced to flee Honduras because of violence and government repression, endemic poverty, organized crime, corruption and impunity. The funds will be provided to Rights Action partners in Guatemala, such as the Campesino Committee of the Highlands (CCDA), to provide clothing, shoes, food, water, medicine, and rain gear to migrants. This is a humanitarian crisis and assistance will be given whether the migrants are headed north or not.

*Donations: To support the "Honduran Forced Migrancy Relief Fund," make checks payable to "Rights Action" and write "Migrants" on the check memo-line. Send checks to Box 50887, Washington, DC, 20091-0887. For donations by credit card, go to <http://rightsaction.org/donate> and note "Migrants."*

*See page 4 for information on the Migrant Caravan.*

# RENEW YOUR ROCLA MEMBERSHIP FOR 2019

For 45 years, the Rochester Committee on Latin America (ROCLA) has built bridges between the Rochester, New York community and the people of Latin America. Through its speakers, films, newsletters, and urgent actions, ROCLA educates residents about the culture, economics, and politics of the countries of Central and South America, Mexico and the Caribbean, and the ways U.S. policies impact the lives of their people.

This past year ROCLA has had no shortage of pressing issues to respond to with our members and community, from the Trump administration's efforts to roll back relations with Cuba, the dual economic and political crises in Venezuela and conflicting media narratives, the cruel and unjust practice of separating families seeking protection at our borders, the murder of Brazilian human rights leaders, ongoing and increasing violence in Mexico and Colombia, and the recent social upheavals in Nicaragua. While many of these issues will continue to be of grave concern in 2018 and beyond, ROCLA has also celebrated initiatives such as ROCLA's long-term solidarity with Cuba, solidarity delegations to Latin America as a means of creating a better world, and indigenous Andean wisdom as a means to support nature and mitigate climate change.

In 2018, ROCLA also supported directly affected groups and solidarity organizations that are fighting for justice

and human rights in the global south and the United States. At ROCLA's annual Rice and Beans Dinner in April 2018, we celebrated our White Dove Award winners—international winner Dr. M. Brinton Lykes, and local award winners the Alianza Agricola and UR DREAMers. Our awardees work with 54 Maya women traumatized by sexual violence and severe human rights violations who survived the Guatemalan



civil war, with undocumented NY farmworkers fighting for their rights and for access to driver's licenses in New York State, and with DACAmented and undocumented students who are fighting for passage of the DREAM Act and standing with other vulnerable students. They are all showing us the way to bring justice and human rights in Latin America and the U.S.

But none of ROCLA's work this past year would have been possible without our members! We extend a thank you to all new members that have joined ROCLA in 2018, and all members who continue to sustain ROCLA's work.

We are writing to you today with a reminder that it is now time to renew your membership for 2019! We

rely on your membership contributions to fund ROCLA's donations to grassroots and solidarity organizations in Latin America and the U.S. ROCLA also keeps its members informed and updated through its quarterly newsletter 'Update on the Americas', urgent action announcements and monthly programs so that you too can act on behalf of justice. This year we have also invested in modernizing our communications, including our new website (<https://rocla.org>) and regular announcements on our Facebook page!

ROCLA does not receive any government funding since much of what we do is to criticize the ongoing oppressions of the U.S. in Latin America. So, we need YOU to fund our work! ROCLA's Steering Committee has a goal of 100 new members, and we have not raised the cost of annual membership. Regular memberships are still \$30 and we have added another category of membership for students and those with limited incomes at \$20.

*You can now begin or renew your ROCLA membership online! Visit our website <https://rocla.org> and click on the side button 'Support Our Work.' You can also make your check out to MJEF/ROCLA and mail it to: Kathy Goforth, 45 Lynbrook Drive, Rochester, NY 14609.*

If you are not yet a member, please consider joining ROCLA now!



**ROCLA is a task force of the Metro Justice Education Fund**  
1115 E. Main St., Ste. 207,  
Box 16 Rochester, NY 14609  
(585) 325-2560

## ONLINE NEWS LETTER COMING SOON

**PLEASE  
SIGN-UP NOW!**

Beginning in the new year, ROCLA will be moving to an online newsletter only, which will have additional features and links to expand our news about what's happening in Latin America and the Caribbean and in Latino diaspora communities in the U.S. ROCLA will save the cost of paper and postage and we will be able to use a more flexible format with more images. You will continue to receive announcements of ROCLA events and Urgent Actions electronically.

But we don't want to lose any of our 300 postal mail subscribers! So, we are setting a deadline for the New Year for everyone on the print newsletter mail list to sign up for the listserv. That means that if you are not listed on our listserv by then, you will not be able to receive the newsletter.

To sign up for ROCLA's email listserv, please go to <https://rocla.org>, and scroll down to 'Subscribe to ROCLA Email' on the bottom left side of the page, then enter your first and last name and email address in the "Subscribe" box, and click on the green "Subscribe" button. Stay informed about ROCLA programs, upcoming events and urgent actions! If you have questions, please email [saracurtis@rocla.org](mailto:saracurtis@rocla.org).



## VISIT ROCLA'S BOOTH AT THE ALTERNATIVE FAIR!!

FRIDAY, NOV. 30, 5-9 PM & SATURDAY, DEC. 1, 10-4 PM  
FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH, 220 WINTON ROAD, ROCHESTER

This year, ROCLA is expanding its offerings at the Alternative Fair! We will be offering new baskets, Fair Trade textiles from Guatemala, other Mayan items from a store in Oswego, coloring books, notecards, and many goods from Marilyn Anderson's private collection for sale. ROCLA member Esperanza Roncero will also have beautiful Peruvian textiles to buy. You can also buy copies of Marilyn's book, *Guardians of the Arts*, which makes a perfect Christmas gift.

## ROCLA NEEDS YOUR EXPERTISE!

Are you knowledgeable about a Latin American country, area or issue? Do you work with Latino immigrants? ROCLA seeks members of local organizations, advocates, teachers, college students, scholars, those who have recently lived, worked or traveled to Latin America, or work in Latino diaspora communities to share their expertise.

We invite you to contribute an article for ROCLA's quarterly newsletter, present a program at one of our monthly educational events, or comment on an important issue affecting Latino communities in the U.S. including immigration policy and migration issues. We are also searching for writers with expertise on particular Latin American countries, or U.S. policy toward those countries, who could contribute reflections or commentaries on current news issues. If you are interested or want to learn more, please contact Sara Curtis at [saracurtis@rocla.org](mailto:saracurtis@rocla.org).



Forced migration caravan leaving Ocotepeque, Honduras, Oct.15. Credit: Jorge Cabrera/Reuters

## A NOTE ON THE "MIGRANT CARAVAN"

Prior to the recent U.S. election, the Trump administration and right wing media incessantly demonized the so-called "migrant caravan" as an "invasion" of criminals, diseased people, MS-13 gang members and those who would take American's jobs.

In contrast, the Latin American Working Group (LAWG) in Washington, DC, has carefully laid out the causes of migration from Honduras and El Salvador in its study, *Between a Wall and a Dangerous Place* (2018). This study makes clear that high murder rates, gang violence, repression, impunity, poverty and the threat of corrupt security forces drives people to seek safety in the United States.

The U.S and the international community have failed to take a strong enough stand against political repression in Honduras. According to Lisa Haugaard, director of LAWG, "The United States should have denounced the killings of protesters and suspended military aid to Honduras at the first news that Honduran security forces, mainly the Military Police, brutally killed those protesting against electoral fraud after the contested November 2017 elections. What President Trump should not do is threaten to cut needed assistance for violence prevention, job training, and sustainable rural development, programs intended to address the root causes of forced migration, because he wants the Honduran government to illegally block people from fleeing the country due to violence, poverty, and political repression." Now, the Trump administration is tightening asylum rules to make it even more difficult for forced migrants to present a claim for asylum.

Arm yourself with the facts! <http://www.lawg.org/action-center> and share them with your Congressional Representatives. Also read the more detailed study cited above at: <http://www.lawg.org/our-publications>.



## VISIT TO THE BORDERLANDS—A FIRST-HAND ACCOUNT

By Bob Ames and Lew Montemaggi, members of ROCLA and Veterans for Peace

Bob Ames and Lew Montemaggi are currently traveling in the borderlands area between Tucson, Arizona and Nogales, Mexico. They came to observe life there in the context of migration and the Trump administration's ramp-up of border enforcement, the presence of the U.S. military, and the demonization of the so-called "migrant caravan" and immigrants generally. These are excerpts from their observations of their first days of their two-week stay. The text has been edited for length and information added by ROCLA's newsletter editor.

On Thursday, 11/8, we drove from our motel in Green Valley to Nogales, AZ, and walked through the checkpoint into Nogales, Sonora. Along the way we saw a shrine for José Antonio [Elena Rodriguez] who was killed in 2012 by [Border Patrol Agent] Lonnie Swartz. Jose Antonio was 16. His "crime" was throwing rocks from the street on the Mexican side at the border tower on the U.S. side. [Swartz] fired 16 shots "in self-defense" at José Antonio from the tower and hit him 10 times. In fact, the guard had to re-load his weapon during this confrontation. Last April, the guard was found not guilty on murder charges and [there was a] hung jury on the manslaughter charges. A re-trial is currently in progress.

Later, we ate lunch at a restaurant on the Mexican side. The owner had time to share with us that his business is currently very slow because of the political uncertainties of the Trump administration as the "caravan" moves North through Mexico. He added that businesses on both sides of the border are experiencing hard times with many forced to close. Commerce was free flowing between the U.S. and Mexico to the benefit of commercial establishments on both sides of the border prior to the expansion of the Border Patrol and militarization of the

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border [which have been growing exponentially since the early 2000s].

Friday, 11/9: We met Katrina from the Green Valley-Sahuarita Samaritans at the Federal District Court in Tucson. The three of us were there to observe the proceedings of Operation Streamline (OS), adjudicating migrants recently arrested after crossing without documents into the U.S. OS was [begun] in 2005 as a [criminal proceeding] to expedite the prosecution and deportation of [migrants, who are now mainly refugees from Central America. OS was designed as a deterrent to cross-border migration by saddling migrants with a criminal record.] The Samaritans observe and document these proceedings on a weekly basis.

Seventy-five prisoners are prosecuted each day while shackled hand and foot. They appear before the judge in groups of ten during which they are read the charges and their rights before they enter their pleas. The process is expedited via plea bargains previously arranged by their individual attorneys, most whom are private practitioners or federal public defenders. The standard plea bargain for a migrant caught for the first time while crossing illegally requires a guilty plea to a criminal misdemeanor resulting in a sentence of time served while awaiting prosecution, with immediate deportation. A migrant is charged with a felony if arrested for a subsequent undocumented crossing. The second violation usually results in dismissal of the felony charge, a guilty plea of the misdemeanor, and a jail sentence of 30 to 180 days. The adjudication of all 75 migrants took all of two hours with the results as outlined above.

. . . It was clear that the judge had misgivings about Operation Streamline . . . she said that adjudication of illegal entry or other immigration violations make up 52% of all federal prosecutions. These “trials” are held 5 days per week, . . . The judge felt that the upside of OS was that it reduced the amount of time undocumented immigrants spend in detention. A plea of not guilty to the felony charge could result in many months of detention pending trial, which [usually] ends with the same disposition, deportation. It was emotionally draining to witness the shackling of the migrants and the dehumanization of the entire process.

Tuesday, 11/13: We joined . . . members of Samaritans to go to El Comedor in Nogales, Sonora . . . Samaritans supports the work of El Comedor which is run by Jesuits. They serve meals to people who were just deported back to Mexico or are applying for asylum in the US. We served about 60 people, mostly young men but also families . . . Afterwards we went to the border checkpoint and gave clothing, blankets, and children’s toys to families waiting to apply for asylum. The office sees only four family units per day. The small number interviewed and the amount of paperwork required is an intentional impediment and disincentive to applying for asylum.

## THE SOUTHERN BORDER AND THE ENVIRONMENT

By *Grania Marcus, ROCLA member and former Border resident*

Militarization of the Southern border has expanded exponentially in the past two decades, and physical border infrastructure and Border Patrol assets have kept pace. The Trump Administration is now sending troops and seeks funding for a permanent border wall. Fortunately, Americans have finally started to learn more about the horrific impacts on the vulnerable people that are seeking refuge

in the United States and taking action to oppose them: countless injuries, the deaths of over 6,000 men, women and children, the destruction of families, increasing criminalization and detention of migrants and refugees, and efforts to severely limit those who can successfully apply for asylum.

But there are more hidden damages to wildlife, nature and the environment that few see or talk about. The desert environment is a very delicate ecosystem that is being increasingly destroyed by climate change that is greatly exacerbated by U.S. militarization of the border under both Democrats and Republicans. Fencing (double and triple fencing in some areas) floodlights, electronic ground sensors, towers, vehicle barriers, denuding of the deserts by increased construction and Border Patrol traffic, use of tires to drag migrant tracks to clear previous migrant footprints, and helicopters and drones have proliferated since the late 1990s severely endangering species, destroying habitats and constraining survival migration. More than 450 rare species live here – some cannot be found anywhere else on the planet. At least 700 neo tropical birds, mammals, and insects migrate through the borderlands each year.

Journalist and conservation photographer Krista Schlyer explores this in her book, *Continental Divide: Wildlife, People and the Border Wall*, published

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Photo: Krista Schlyer

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in 2013, in her continuing work on the borderlands, and in a recent interview. So does a recent scathing scientific report published in *BioScience*, which condemns President Donald Trump's proposed border wall as a major threat to animal and plant life and documents the "significant consequences for wildlife" that the existing fences, which cover more than 650 miles, have caused. Over 2,700 scientists have endorsed its conclusions.

In a July 2018 interview with *Mother Nature Network*, Ms. Schlyer discussed the effects of climate change—increasing drought, higher temperatures, stress on plants and animals—that requires increased cross-border migration of species such as bison and large cats like the jaguar and ocelot, to seek food and water in wider areas north and south of the border in order to survive. This comes at a time when fences and vehicle barriers have severely limited that migration in desert areas—walls are impassable to bison, pronghorn, deer and many other larger species.

Walls also divide populations, disrupting reproduction. One herd of pronghorn (a unique animal indigenous to North America) in Arizona started to disappear a few years after a segment of wall was built there. Scientists began watching the herd and learned that when the border barrier was built, all of the males but one were trapped on the Mexico side of the border. The only male on the U.S. side was an old non-breeding male. So suddenly the herd had no way to reproduce. Habitat destruction in South Texas wildlife refuges is causing more species to become endangered.

What most Americans don't know is that since the beginning of these border infrastructure projects more than two decades ago, environmental laws have been waived over much of the border. Both Democrats and Republicans are responsible. The damage on the border has been possible mainly due to the dismissal of environmental laws all along the borderlands. In 2005, the Real ID Act authorized the Department of Homeland Security to waive all environmental laws on the border to expedite construction of the border barrier — ALL laws.

So far 37 laws have been waived permanently on the border, including the

Endangered Species Act, the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the American Eagle Protection Act, and the list goes on. Democrats in 2017 devised an immigration reform plan that would drastically worsen the situation by adding 700 miles of border fencing, doubling the Border Patrol, and expanding the waiver of environmental laws.

Now is the time to speak out. Tell your members of Congress and the White

House that you don't want walls and further militarization of the border. Demand that they restore the Endangered Species Act and all other environmental laws that have been waived on the border. To educate them, share the beautifully illustrated story by Krista Shlyer at <http://vault.sierraclub.org/borderlands-map/index.html>. Or buy a copy of her book, and give it to your Congressional representative for Christmas during a lobby visit.

**Crisis in Mexico of DISAPPEARANCES**

? **37,400+**  
disappeared persons across Mexico.

**1,075+**  
hidden graves uncovered from 2009 to 2017.

**14** sentences only from 2006 to 2017.

**TAKE ACTION** **LAWG.ORG/AYOTZINAPA18**

See the Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública's database "Registro Nacional de Datos de Personas Extraviadas o Desaparecidas" <https://bit.ly/f0veqgZ>.  
Persio, Sofia Lottio. "Drug Violence: 2,000 Dead Bodies Found Buried in Hidden Graves in Mexico Since 2008." *Nerdyweek*, June 26, 2017. <https://bit.ly/2w0TAF3>.  
@theas. "Shadow Report on the Situation of Missing People in Mexico." May 2018. <https://bit.ly/2M0Ag2D>.

## Election of Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro Sets Stage For Coming Struggle



Supporters of Jair Bolsonaro celebrate in front of the National Congress in Brasilia. Photograph: Sergio Lima/AFP/Getty Images

By Darien Lamén

On October 28th, Brazil elected its own right wing, authoritarian populist to the presidency. President-elect Jair Bolsonaro has been compared to Donald Trump and Rodrigo Duterte. In many ways, it's an appropriate comparison. During his campaign, Bolsonaro shocked Brazil with his comments praising the country's former military dictatorship; his promise to put guns in the hands of "good guys" while leaving the "bad guys" to rot in prison; not to mention a long list of homophobic, racist, and misogynist statements.

To be sure, Bolsonaro's overtly authoritarian rhetoric and anti-establishment posturing contrasts with the more patrician style of sitting president Michel Temer. But in contrast to Trump, Bolsonaro's military officer background and his decades of experience in Congress mean he is very much a political insider. His election to the presidency has reassured the country's oligarchs (as well as the Wall Street Journal's editorial board) that the country's rightward tack will continue. In fact, his election represents the consummation of the "soft coup" that ousted the previous democratically elected president, Dilma Roussef, back in 2016. And it ensures that the radical neoliberal agenda enacted by the coup government in the last two years (including a constitutional amendment freezing all "social spending" for 20 years) will become the new (ab)normal.

So how did Brazil, a country that elected the center-left Workers' Party (PT) to the presidency for three succes-

sive terms, end up voting in an extreme right-wing candidate? And voting for him in such high numbers that he nearly won outright in the first round of Brazil's runoff electoral system?

In part, Bolsonaro's victory stems from the vacuum created on the electoral battlefield when the court system convicted the PT's charismatic presidential candidate, former president Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, on corruption charges. Whatever the merits of those charges, many have argued that the prosecution of the working class icon was opportunistic and politically motivated. After all, there is no shortage of sitting congress members from other political parties under indictment for similar charges.

Polls conducted as late as August of 2018 show that Lula would very likely have been the winner of the presidential race had his legal appeals from prison been successful. The candidate to whom the party ultimately threw its support, former São Paulo mayor Fernando Haddad, vowed to lead orphaned Lulistas in an eleventh-hour comeback. But Haddad lost to Bolsonaro in the head-to-head runoff, 44% to 55%.

The quashing of Lula's candidacy only goes so far in explaining the rise of Bolsonaro, let alone of "Bolsonarismo." The Partido Social Liberal (PSL), Bolsonaro's up till now fringe party, won an unprecedented number of congressional seats in this year's elections, quintupling its numbers in the lower house to become the second largest block after the PT.

These candidates, along with the hateful ideologies and desperate programs they espouse, have found an echo in Brazilian society that cannot be written off as merely a reaction to the PT's "progressive" track record.

Critiques of the PT from the left have long noted the party's problematic alliance with centrist political parties; their embrace of mega-events and mega-projects as forms of development that have deepened inequality and violated human rights; as well as their reliance on clientelistic programs, rather than structural reforms, to capture and demobilize autonomous social movements. In other words, the ground on which the PT built its ruling hegemony from 2003 to 2016 was unstable and full of contradictions.

Days before Bolsonaro's victory, the well-known rapper Manu Brown rattled the crowd at a pro-Haddad rally with words that turned out to be prophetic. "Once the PT no longer understands the masses, it's all over. If the PT doesn't know what they want," Brown continued, "they're going to have to go back to the grassroots and find out."

Social movements and labor will have to rebuild their capacity for mass struggle in the next few years as they fend off the attacks that are sure to come--attacks on public assistance, pensions, public universities, and nationalized industries; attacks on women, LGBTQ people, indigenous groups, people of color, the unhoused, the working poor, and on subsistence farmers and fishermen.

For many of such targets, this will be a life and death struggle. Right-wing paramilitaries like the ones suspected of murdering Rio de Janeiro City Councilor Marielle Franco in March will no doubt feel emboldened under Bolsonaro's "law and order" presidency, as will the ranchers and loggers in the Amazon whose hired gunmen kill more environmental defenders than in any other country in the world. Yet Brazil has a long and rich history of militant struggle to draw from, and in that sense, remains a source of inspiration for all of us in the fight against creeping authoritarianism and capitalist domination alike.

*Darien Lamén is an educator, activist and multimedia producer and long-time resident of Brazil. He will be presenting ROCLA's January 2019 program on Brazil's current crisis.*

METRO JUSTICE EDUCATION FUND

**ROCHESTER COMMITTEE ON LATIN AMERICA**

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ROCLA UPDATE ON THE  
**AMERICAS**

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**ROCLA MISSION STATEMENT**

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**Steering Committee:** Marilyn Anderson, Sara Curtis, Kathy Goforth, Bob and Marilyn Kaiser, Grania Marcus, Arnie Matlin, Peter and Gail Mott, Esperanza Roncero, Vic Vinkey, Tom Ward, Karleen West • **Publishing Team Editor:** Grania Marcus, Designer: Jim Anderson