

ROCLA UPDATE ON THE AMERICAS

A PUBLICATION OF THE ROCHESTER COMMITTEE ON LATIN AMERICA

ROCLA IS CHANGING

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HELP STOP EFFORTS TO ROLL BACK RELATIONS WITH CUBA!

Join the ROCLA Cuba gathering
June 26, 7pm
Downtown Presbyterian Church

This year, ROCLA is responding to IFCO/Pastors for Peace's request to local solidarity organizations to help educate our communities about the current Trump administration's efforts to roll back the steps President Obama took toward normalizing relations with Cuba. To counteract the Trump administration's

regressive policies, attendees at ROCLA's June 26 at 7 PM gathering will learn what needs to be done to achieve truly normal relations between the U.S. and Cuba. A delegation will also visit our local legislators.

As part of Pastors for Peace's U.S. community tour, filmmaker and professor Jennifer Wager will join ROCLA to share the good work that IFCO has been doing for more than 50

years in Cuba. That work includes the Latin America School of Medicine, a project of Pastors for Peace in Cuba, which provides low cost medical education in return for its graduates' commitment to serve as doctors in underserved communities. ROCLA will also show Producer Jennifer Wager's inspiring documentary film, *Dare to Dream: Cuba's Latin American Medical School*, about the school and the work of its graduates.



URGENT ACTION PETITION

To be delivered to **Kirstjen Nielsen, Secretary of Homeland Security**

Kirstjen Nielsen, abandon the cruel, costly, and unjustified practice of separating families seeking protection at our borders, including those who are fleeing persecution in their home countries. Children belong with their parents in safe communities, not locked up in detention centers.

Background:

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) under Secretary Nielsen's leadership has been tearing children apart from their parents to scare others from coming to our borders.

There's no justification for this practice. These families and children aren't threats to our safety. They're often fleeing unspeakable violence and persecution in their home countries. Many are from Central America, home to some of the most dangerous countries in the world.

The administration has claimed that they must separate children from their parents to protect them. But policies exist for protecting children—and separating them from their parents is not the way. There's no security crisis either. Border apprehensions are at decades-low levels, according to the government's own data.

It's cruel to punish parents who are doing everything they can to protect their children and to punish children by depriving them of their parents. Separating a child from a mother or father only leads to more trauma for all. Losing a child is every parent's worst nightmare.

DHS shouldn't play politics with families to try to discourage people from seeking protection, and there's no legal basis for doing so either. Family unity is one of our core values and is reflected in our laws. Our government has a responsibility under U.S. immigration law to hear a person's immigration or asylum case, not to try to scare them away from asking for help . . .

Petition sponsors:

Al Otro Lado, Alianza Americas, Amnesty International USA, Kids in Need of Defense, Latin America Working Group, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, MomsRising, National Immigrant Justice Center, and Women's Refugee Commission.

To read the full petition and sign it, see: https://petitions.moveon.org/sign/tell-secretary-nielsen?source=c.em.cp&r_by=5758107



International White Dove winner Dr. M. Brinton Lykes.



Members of the Alianza Agricola and UR Dreamers celebrate winning the Local White Dove Award.



Drawing by Maya woman affected by violence: "I am like a bird. I can fly with large wings." Credit: M. Brinton Lykes



Luis Jiménez, President of the Alianza Agricola, discusses their Western NY organizing work.



Haydi Torres García, member of UR DREAMers, talks about the importance of passing the DREAM Act.

ROCLA CELEBRATES 45 YEARS IN SOLIDARITY WITH LATIN AMERICA!

On April 6, 2018, members and friends of the Rochester Committee on Latin America (ROCLA) gathered to celebrate at the annual Rice & Beans Dinner, enjoyed bidding at the live and silent auctions, listened to guitarist John Wiesenthal playing a variety of pieces from Latin American artists, and especially, learned from the moving presentations of this year's

White Dove Award winners—International White Dove Award winner Dr. M. Brinton Lykes, and Local Award winners the Alianza Agricola and UR DREAMers.

Their presentations inspired all present to persevere in standing in solidarity with those who have suffered soul-crushing oppression and who are fighting for justice. Our speakers' work with 54 Maya women survivors of sexual violence and severe

human rights violations during the Guatemalan civil war; with undocumented NY farmworkers fighting for their rights and for access to driver's licenses; 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.



John Wiesenthal, guitarist, plays for Rice & Bean Dinner guests.

ROCLA WELCOMES NEW STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS!

The ROCLA Steering Committee is pleased to welcome Geneseo Political Science Professor Karleen West and grassroots organizer Sara Curtis of the Worker Justice Center of New York to the Steering Committee! They have immediately gotten to work for ROCLA and are using their considerable skills to grow its member base.

Both have lived and worked in South America for extensive periods, Karleen in Ecuador and Sara in Chile, and are bilingual Spanish/English speakers. They have connections in Ecuador, Chile and elsewhere in South America with directly affected groups. They will help expand ROCLA's knowledge of issues and organizing efforts on the ground in Latin America, and inform ROCLA's decision-making regarding its annual donations to organizations and individuals, including ROCLA's choices of its White Dove Award winners.

Karleen and Sara will also signifi-



Dr. Karleen West

cantly enhance ROCLA's social media and online presence, and both have wide contacts in the academic and social justice organizing communities that will help ROCLA attract new members and speakers for ROCLA's programs. Sara



Sara B. Curtis

is working on building a new ROCLA website that will be user friendly and have more features, pages, video and photos. See the article below for more information on the new ROCLA website and web address.

A NEW ONLINE ROCLA NEWSLETTER IS IN THE WORKS!

For the last two years, the ROCLA Steering Committee has been discussing moving to an online-only Update on the Americas newsletter. Now we are taking steps to do that—our next newsletter will be published in August and will be online-only, and we are excited to be able to make that possible.

ROCLA will be joining many organizations, including Metro Justice, our fiscal sponsor, in modernizing how we provide information to our members and readers. This will permit ROCLA to make more varied content available to our members and readers in color, reduce the use of paper, significantly lower the cost, and allow us to make the newsletter more interactive and appealing, such as including more photos and videos, providing working links to longer or related articles and the ability to sign up directly for events, make payments on line, and let interested readers sign up for ROCLA's email listserv.

The Steering Committee recognizes that a few readers may not have computers or smartphones to read the newsletter on line, but when we have inquired in the past, no one has objected to stopping the printed newsletter. ROCLA will be sending postcards to our entire mailing list shortly, where you can record your email address so you can be added to our email list. We will evaluate the decision to move to an online newsletter in 1 year. Please contact Grania Marcus, Newsletter Editor, with any questions: graniamarcus@gmail.com. We will also provide a means to provide your feedback in the new newsletter.

INTRODUCING ROCLA'S NEW WEBSITE . . .

The ROCLA Steering Committee decided at its January 2018 Planning Meeting that updating ROCLA's website was a key priority. The Steering Committee agreed that we wanted it to present more effectively the variety of educational, advocacy and financial support work that ROCLA engages in. We have hired Sara Curtis to create the new website, which will have a redesigned homepage, an easy way to sign up for ROCLA's listserv, a button to donate, enhanced descriptions of ROCLA's work, more photos and videos, easier access to content such as newsletters, curated links to social justice and civil society organizations, and more!!

Sara has already created the basic architecture of the website and the Steering Committee is helping provide ideas and content. She also has secured a new domain name, which is <https://rocla.org>. You can check it out, but there is much more to come. We are on our way to a better, more modern web presence, but **WE NEED YOUR HELP!** If you have content you would like to include, recollections, photos, interviews, oral histories, etc., please contact Sara: sara.curtis.wjcnj@gmail.com.



REMEMBERING ROCLA FOUNDER AND ACTIVIST, MAX LEVINE



On April 9, 2018, the Rochester Committee on Latin America (ROCLA) lost one of its founders, Maurice (Max) Levine, at age 98. Friends and family remember Max, along with his wife of 75 years, Henrietta,

as doing “all they could to make our country and our world a better, safer, more-equitable place to live in,” and as having a “passion for truth, justice and peace and standing with the poor and dispossessed.” In short, for decades they were a “dynamic duo” whose commitments have never wavered.

Max was a successful manufacturer’s representative, union organizer, civil rights activist, and Viet Nam War protester, but he also extended his fights for human rights and justice to supporting the Cuban Revolution, opposing the Pinochet regime in Chile, which overthrew the fledgling democracy of Salvador Allende in 1973, the polar opposite of U.S. policy, and helping found ROCLA to widen the fight against U.S. interventions in Latin America and the Caribbean. These interventions were frequent, destructive and encouraged the extreme human rights violations of Latin American right-wing governments.

Max was the activists’ activist because he not only had the ideas—he did the work. Max can personally claim credit for the fact that over 100 Cubans have bicycles in working order. When Max would say, “Let’s get a bus for Cuba!” we knew he was thinking about—and ready to get to work on—all the details: location, cost, insurance, inspection, tires, the driver, how to remove the seats, how to collapse the donated wheelchairs so they’d fit in. He knew how many cartons fit in a school bus, because he’d packed and labeled them all.

It is rare to see the faithfulness to his ideals that Max lived, and the decades of hard work he devoted to making them happen—ROCLA members and friends that worked alongside Max will not forget him.



ROCLA JUNE 6 PROGRAM

Esperanza Roncero, Professor of Spanish, Nazareth College
“The Eagle and the Condor: Indigenous Wisdom for Social and Environmental Justice”
Wednesday, June 6, 7pm,
Downtown Presbyterian Church, 121 N. Fitzhugh St.

In this unique program, Professor Roncero will share the indigenous wisdom she learned living in the Andes for many years. There, spirituality and everyday life are one and the same. Everything in the Andes is based on relationships—relationships to other humans, to animals, the mountains, to the sun and moon, to plants. Andean wisdom is based on a profound spirituality that manifests itself from humans’ interaction with Mother Earth. In this spirituality, the Western world finds a path to a better future, while Native Americans in the U.S. and Canada find in it a mirror and an extended hand.



THANK YOU FROM KIDS FOR COLLEGE

Dear members of ROCLA,

On behalf of the students in Kids for College, your very generous donation to our program is very much appreciated. Rest assured that this is vital to the higher educational goals of these young people who are under increased pressure in pursuing their dreams and in their daily lives. Just over the past week, three of our families have lost parents into the immigration system and the DACA debacle is causing increasing fear and frustration among the entire community.

Donations to Kids for College this past year went not only to cover educational costs, such as books and art supplies, but we also brought Cesar Vargas, the first undocumented lawyer in New York State and the founder of the Dream Action Coalition, to our So-dus group for a very powerful monthly guest speaker program discussing ways to reach goals using his personal experience as an example. That evening, we hosted him for a community lecture as well. Our students were both energized and uplifted by this very important experience.

Our students have been active in lobbying for the rights of their families, their peers, and themselves by engaging in discussions with elected officials (sometimes not so pleasant an experi-

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ence) at the state and federal levels and lobbying for civil rights and DACA. They have also become known for their community service projects.

Once again our students are leading the way to their future with great success. Already we have had students accepted to Alfred State, RIT School of Engineering, RIT Game Design and Engineering, John Jay College for Criminal Justice, and MCC. Our students now in college are excelling in their programs and are gaining phenomenal world experiences.

Again, your donation means the world to these young men and women, enriching their lives and making for a bright future.

John L. Ghertner, MD

Kids for College



The family of mayoral candidate José Remedios Aguirre mourns him.

MEXICO: NOTES ON VIOLENCE

2017 was Mexico's deadliest year since the government began keeping such records 20 years ago, 29,168 homicides, including those of human rights defenders and journalists. A 2018 *Artículo 19** report documented 1,986 aggressions against journalists in the past five years. 48 percent are attributed in the report to local, state, and federal government officials, and 8% are thought to be perpetrated by organized crime groups. Impunity for these crimes is the norm. Some 35,000 individuals have disappeared since 2014, including the well-known disappearances of 43 Ayotzinapa students. In just one week in May 2018, 3 political candidates have been murdered. Excessive local level use of force against human rights defenders persists. Violence is a central issue in the July 2018 presidential election.

See the Latin American Working Group's recent update of the human rights situation in Mexico for more detailed information: http://lawg.org/storage/documents/LAWG_Update_on_the_human_rights_situation_Mexico_April_2018.pdf

* *Artículo 19* is a non-governmental organization in Mexico City that works to protect journalists and freedom of expression in Mexico.



Marielle Franco, Brazilian fighter for women and the poor. Photo Credit: Renan Olaz (Câmara do Rio)

BRAZIL: THE MURDER OF AFRO- BRAZILIAN HUMAN RIGHTS LEADER MARIELLE FRANCO

On March 14, 2018, armed men gunned down Rio de Janeiro councilwoman Marielle Franco and her driver in her car in the center of Rio. She had just left an event that she organized about black women's empowerment. Her death, deemed a "professional" assassination, touched so many people that supporters organized vigils and protests in more than 20 cities across Brazil.

Although her murder remains unsolved, many suspect it was carried out at the behest of the police, who Franco frequently criticized for their violence and brutality against poor black favela dwellers. Just over 50 percent of Brazil's population of 200 million is Afro-Brazilian, but they account for 2 out of every 3 murders. Police violence and murder of black favela residents is rampant.

For Afro-Brazilians, Franco proved that a black person from a favela could be educated, have dignity and fight against the social injustices that black Brazilians suffer from every day. For women, she proved that they could overcome sexism and machismo in Brazil. "She died because she was a combative black woman," said Lua Nascimento, an Afro-Brazilian college classmate of Franco's who attended a protest on her behalf in Salvador, Brazil.

To read the entire article, go to: <https://www.theroot.com/say-her-name-marielle-franco-a-brazilian-politician-w-1823812564>

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ROCLA UPDATE ON THE **AMERICAS**

MEMBERS AND FRIENDS: DID YOU FORGET...

...your membership dues? While some new members have joined ROCLA—thank you to all!—paid memberships in general are below the usual number for this time of year. 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, urgent action announcements and monthly programs, so that you too can act on behalf of justice. This year we are also investing in modernizing our communications, including our new website.

ROCLA does not receive government funding, since much of what we do is to criticize the ongoing oppressions perpetrated by the U.S. So, we need YOU to fund our work! ROCLA's Steering Committee has a goal of 100 paid memberships in 2018. Also we have not raised the cost of membership. Regular memberships are still \$30 and we have added another category of membership for students/limited income at \$20. Please 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 MISSION STATEMENT

Founded in 1973, the Rochester Committee on Latin America (ROCLA) seeks to build 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. ROCLA also supports directly affected groups and solidarity organizations that are fighting for justice and human rights in the global south and the United States. ROCLA encourages its members and the Rochester community to advocate for U.S. policies that support human rights and reverse the often-oppressive history of U.S. involvement in Latin America. ROCLA stands with Latin American diaspora communities and ally organizations in the United States in advocating for farmworker rights, a fair and humane immigration system, and racial justice.

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