

ROCLA UPDATE ON THE AMERICAS

A PUBLICATION OF THE ROCHESTER COMMITTEE ON LATIN AMERICA

P R E V I E W

FALL 2018 ROCLA PROGRAMS

SEPTEMBER 5, 2018, 7PM



Credit: Lonely Planet

PERSPECTIVES ON NICARAGUA: TWO PROGRESSIVE VIEWPOINTS ON CURRENT NICARAGUAN REALITY

Dr. Arnold Matlin, ROCLA Secretary and Nicaragua solidarity activist
Michael Argaman, Ciudad Hermana and Nicaragua solidarity activist

ROCLA's first fall program will feature a debate between Dr. Arnold Matlin and Michael Argaman concerning the recent upheavals in Nicaragua. Both are long time ROCLA members with deep, historical, involvements in Nicaragua. This event will surely bring more light to the current situation in that troubled country than recent conflicting media coverage has provided. Professor Karleen West, Associate Professor of Political Science and International Relations at SUNY Geneseo will moderate the discussion. ■

OCTOBER 3, 2018, 7PM



Vigil in Rio Negro in the Baja Verapaz region where a massacre took place in 1982.

Credit: Tom Ward

IS THERE HOPE FOR MAYAN COMMUNITIES IN GUATEMALA?

Tom Ward, Chair, Guatemala Partners of Gates Presbyterian Church

With the recent murder of Maya Ixil activist Juana Raymundo, and the deaths of 14 other human rights defenders in Guatemala this year, the country is increasingly hostile for social movements seeking justice for Mayan communities. Speaker Tom Ward will share his perspective and slides on the status of Mayan communities, based on his recent trip to Guatemala to help rehabilitate indigenous villages affected by Guatemala's historic genocide and his long-term involvement in supporting Guatemalan indigenous communities. ■

NOVEMBER 7, 2018, 7PM



Wall painting in Cuba.

Credit: Merten Snijders, Lonely Planet Images

CUBA AT A CROSSROADS

Melanie Medeiros, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Anthropology, SUNY Geneseo;
Karleen West, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Political Science and International Relations, SUNY Geneseo

Cuba is in an exciting period of transition as - for the first time in nearly sixty years - someone other than a Castro brother assumes leadership for the country. What does this mean for Cuban politics and the everyday lives of Cuban citizens? Dr. Medeiros and Dr. West will present their impressions of this important time in Cuban history following their development of a partnership between SUNY Geneseo and Cuba's University of Holguin, and their recent participation in a conference on the future of Cuba. ■

*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.*

See page 7 for immigration education and action opportunities!

STANDING AGAINST VIOLENCE IN COLOMBIA

By Pendle Marshall-Hallmark

On Wednesday, July 25th, Rochester native Pendle Marshall-Hallmark held a fundraiser at the home of Gail and Peter Mott to talk about her experiences working as a human rights accompanier for the organization Fellowship of Reconciliation Peace Presence in Colombia for the past year and a half. International accompaniment is a form of nonviolent resistance to armed conflict that has been used for decades all over the world. Accompaniers travel to countries that are in the midst of a conflict or war, and physically accompany activists or human rights defenders whose lives have been threatened because of their work. Accompaniers also meet regularly with diplomatic, government, and military officials to advocate for the safety of the activists they accompany.

Long lasting peace has yet to be achieved in Colombia, despite the fact that in November of 2016, the government signed a peace deal with the militant left-wing guerilla group known as the FARC. Instead, many right-wing illegal armed groups, known as paramilitaries, have begun to seize control of areas of the country once controlled by the FARC. Since these groups have obtained new levels of power over the civilian population, drug trafficking and violence against civilians has increased. In Colombia, there is a long history of the



Doña Brigida is one of the leaders of the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó, a collective of pacifist farmers in northwestern Colombia that has been resisting armed conflict in the region for the past 21 years. The faces painted above her depict former Peace Community members who have been killed due to the violence.

country's military colluding with right-wing paramilitary groups to terrorize civilian communities that the government had labeled as "guerrilla sympathizers." Thousands of people have died or been displaced from their homes as a result of the fighting between guerilla groups, paramilitaries, and the Colombian military.

In response to the threat of violence from armed groups of all kinds, many civilians have organized themselves into nonviolent "humanitarian spaces," which forbid any kind of armed actors from entering their territory and refuse to participate in growing or selling to the drug trade. This form of nonviolent resistance has made many leaders of these communities the target of violent threats and attacks from armed groups aiming to control land for drug traffick-

ing, illegal mining or agro-industrial projects. In fact, since the signing of the Peace Accords at the end of 2016, over 300 prominent community leaders have been killed by armed groups. Many of these leaders were involved in efforts to help farming communities identify and grow legal crops instead of coca or marijuana, or to defend communities being displaced by the environmental devastation of large scale mining and agro-industrial projects.

Accompaniment recognizes that unfortunately, certain voices are listened to more than others. For example, when a leader from a small Colombian farming community speaks out about being targeted by paramilitary groups because of his refusal to produce drugs, the military does not typically improve its efforts to ameliorate public safety in the area.

When accompaniers speak about the same issue, however, their words are taken more seriously. Given the lack of trust between the Colombian military and its own people, international accompaniers can have an important role to play in conveying information about the true state of the conflict, and in keeping civilians safe. ■

Pendle Marshall-Hallmark served as a human rights accompanier in Colombia for the organization Fellowship of Reconciliation Peace Presence in 2017-2018. If you would like to learn more about FORPP or Pendle's experience as an accompanier, or if you would like to support their work, please email Pendle directly at pendlemh@gmail.com. You can also donate to FORPP at www.peacepresence.org.

CALL FOR INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR PEACE IN COLOMBIA, AGAINST STATE AND PARAMILITARY TERROR

This article was reprinted from *Alliance for Global Justice (AfGJ)* July 4, 2018 <https://afgj.org/call-for-august-7-international-day-for-peace-in-colombia-against-state-and-paramilitary-terror>.

For a copy of the letter see: <https://afgj.org/five-demands-for-peace-in-colombia>. For more information: James Jordan, James@AFGJ.org, or call +1 202 544 8336, ext. 3.

We are writing you because we are desperately concerned for our comrades in Colombia. You probably already know that last year was the worst year in well over ten years for murders of human rights defenders, eco-defenders, and popular mobilization leaders. Well, it has just gotten worse. We are getting messages from leaders in our closest partner organizations asking for help in relocation outside the country, asking for accompaniment, telling us that they are in fear for their lives. We are hearing daily of new assassinations.

We have close connections to founding organizations of the *Marcha Patriótica*, an organization that is being disproportionately targeted. Likewise, indigenous, Afro-Colombian, and campesino communities are bearing the brunt of assaults and threats. We may be witnessing a new genocide against the Left such as what took place against the *Unión Patriótica* during the 80s and 90s.

The June 17, 2018 election of Iván Duque as Colombia's president has given a green light to paramilitary and state forces who terrorize Colombia's most vulnerable com-



Credit: Alliance for Global Justice <https://afgj.org/five-demands-for-peace-in-colombia>

munities. As of July 4, at least 20 popular movement leaders had been assassinated. Duque is a disciple of death squad patron, narco-trafficker, and former Colombian president Álvaro Uribe. Duque has pledged that when he takes office on August 7th he will immediately undertake measures to start dismantling the peace accords that ended the war between the Colombian Government and the FARC-EP.

Therefore, the *Observatorio de los Derechos Humanos del Pueblo* (People's Human Rights Observatory), the *Coordinadora Americana por los Derechos de los Pueblos* (Americas Coordination for the People's Rights), Alliance for Global Justice (AfGJ), School of the Americas Watch, and *Camino Común* [called] for August 7th to be an International Day for Peace in Colombia and against State and Paramilitary Terror. There are also calls that have been issued in Colombia for national mobilizations on that day, including

by Center-Left presidential candidate Gustavo Petro.

The threats are very serious. We have seen our friends and sister organizations mentioned by name on paramilitary advisories declaring them "military objectives" and calling for their extermination. People we personally know are being followed and assaulted. Our comrades are being killed . . .

In times like these, it is essential that international solidarity activists use our privilege to step forward and speak loudly where our comrades are unable to do so, to listen to what they often must whisper, and to amplify it so that it may be heard around the world. The worst thing that can happen to our Colombian comrades is that their messages, that the struggles that they are willing to risk their lives for, should be silenced.

We must recognize that this is not just a matter of putting pressure on Colombia. The

U.S. government has never done what was needed to fully back the peace process... [U]nder the Trump administration, the pressure for Colombia to abandon the peace accords has become an active matter of White House policy. Trump met privately with far-right leaders at his Mar-a-Lago resort over a year before the presidential elections, and since then, his administration has repeatedly called for an end to programs for voluntary eradication of illicit crops in exchange for rural development and crop substitution programs. Instead, they have pushed for violent eradication and fumigation programs that have resulted in multiple killings and forced displacement. Right now they are further threatening the accords by pressing for the extradition of FARC negotiator Jesús Santrich on unsubstantiated charges . . .

We also encourage people to visit U.S. and Colombian government offices to deliver copies of the "Five Demands for Peace in Colombia" open sign-on letter, with endorsers that include Nobel Peace Prize winner Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, linguist Noam Chomsky, and former Colombian Senator Piedad Córdoba. The election of Iván Duque has already spurred a distressing increase in the murders of social movement leaders. With his ascent to the presidency, these killings will increase and the assaults on the peace process by both the Colombian and U.S. governments will continue. The only way to slow or stop this violence is through popular pressure — and international solidarity is a vital component. ■



A massive peace march was held on July 8, 2018, in Managua showing support for the Nicaraguan government. Credit: UK Morning Star

NICARAGUA MEDIA COVERAGE: LETTER TO THE GUARDIAN

Editor's Note:

The following letter was written by Nicaragua solidarity activists in England and was provided to the ROCLA newsletter editor by Dr. Arnold Matlin, Secretary of ROCLA and one of 25 international activists that signed the letter. While there have been several responses to the inaccurate international media coverage of the protests and violence in Nicaragua, this letter is particularly specific. For a lengthier and more comprehensive commentary, see <https://popularrresistance.org/correcting-the-record-what-is-really-happening-in-nicaragua/>.

Those in the Rochester area are invited to attend ROCLA's September 5 program, which will focus on the situation in Nicaragua (see page 1.)

For the past three months there has been a political crisis in Nicaragua, with opposing forces not only confronting each other in the streets but fighting a media war. *The Guardian* should be at the forefront of balanced and well-informed reporting of these events. Instead, despite plentiful evidence of opposition violence, almost all of your 16 reports since mid-April blame Daniel Ortega's government for the majority of deaths that have occurred. Your latest article ("The Nicaraguan students who became reluctant rebels," July 10) leaves unchallenged an opposition claim that theirs is "a totally peaceful struggle." Only one article (July 4) gives significant space to the government version of events.

While most of the recent violence is associated with

opposition barricades erected across the country, you still refer to a "wave of violence and repression by the government." (June 24) Not once do you refer to the numerous deaths of government supporters or the 15 deaths and hundreds of injuries suffered by the police. Nor did you report the only attack on a member of the "national dialogue" set up to try resolve the crisis, when student leader Leonel Morales was shot and left for dead on June 12; he is a government supporter. Your report from Masaya (June 12) failed to mention that the protesters had burnt down public buildings, ransacked shops and destroyed the homes of government officials. Nor did you record the kidnapping of hundreds of long-distance lorries and drivers, who spent a month in effective captiv-

ity despite efforts by their ambassadors and international mediators to secure their release (eventually achieved by the government on July 8). Your report of the shooting of a one year-old boy in "the latest round of government repression" (June 25) does not mention video evidence that he was killed by opposition youths.

The author of several articles, Carl David Goette-Luciak, openly associates with opposition figures. On July 5 he blamed the police for the terrible house fire in Managua three weeks earlier, relying largely on assertions from government opponents. Yet videos appearing to show police presence were actually taken on April 21, before barricades were erected to prevent police entering the area.

(Continued on page 5)

(Continued from page 4)

Several times you cite “human rights activists” who are often long-standing government opponents (such as Vilma Núñez, April 28, who told the BBC on July 10 that Ortega now has an “extermination plan”). You unquestioningly quote Amnesty International (May 31) even though their reports turn a blind eye to violence by protesters. You do not refer to detailed evidence that opposition groups benefit from millions of dollars in U.S. funding aimed at “nurturing” the Nicaraguan uprising (theglobal-americans.org, May 1).

On June 6 you said that “Ortega has lost control of the streets” and on June 11 that Nicaragua is “a country of barricades.” Since then the government has successfully worked with local people to restore order and remove the vast majority of barricades. Armed bands have been arrested in the process, including members of notorious gangs from El Salvador. This goes unreported.

Most of the articles refer to protesters’ demands that Ortega should simply renounce the presidency, but not that international bodies mediating the crisis (the UN, Organisation of American States and the Central American Integration System) have all rejected this as being unconstitutional and likely to produce chaos. You have given sparse coverage to the many marches by government supporters calling for a peaceful, negotiated outcome.

Recently, Simon Jenkins wrote in a different context (July 5) of “the rush to judgment at the bidding of the news agenda” in which “social media and false news are weaponised.” In our view this is precisely what is happening in mainstream reporting of Nicaragua. We call on *The Guardian* to take a more responsible stand, to challenge the abundant misinformation and in the future to provide a much more balanced analysis of the crisis. ■



Newly-elected President of Mexico López Obrador. Credit: Alexandre Meneghini/REUTERS

MEXICO'S NEW POPULIST PRESIDENT

“I call all Mexicans to reconciliation, and to put above their personal interests, however legitimate, the greater interest, the general interest,” the new president said during his acceptance speech on July 1, 2018. “The state will cease to be a committee at the service of a minority and will represent all Mexicans, rich and poor, those who live in the country and in the city, migrants, believers and nonbelievers, to people of all philosophies and sexual preferences.”

With these words, the new leftist President of Mexico, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, age 64 and known popularly as AMLO, assumed leadership of a country that continues to be plagued by the drug-related violence and corruption that increased considerably during the presidency of Enrique Peña Nieto and led to the electoral repudiation of his party, the PRI. López Obrador is also the leader of the newly formed Morena party, which won a majority in the Mexican Senate. Mexican voters also elected over 3,400 political seats at the local, state, and federal level, and voted for a new national

Congress, including 128 Senate seats and 500 seats in the Chamber of Deputies, Mexico’s lower house. He will be inaugurated on Dec. 1, 2018.

López Obrador has promised to expand pensions for the elderly, address Mexico’s inequality, provide increased funds for social programs, support grants for students, and tackle the violence and corruption of the government at all levels. He is also a nationalist who has stood up to President Trump’s determination to build a wall to shut out Mexican and Central American immigrants, but he supports the ongoing efforts to renegotiate NAFTA.

Mexico’s voters and others are expecting a lot. Given Mexico’s long-standing problems with corruption, we will see if he can deliver. ■

A THANK YOU TO ROCLA!

Editor's Note:

We reprint below a recent letter expressing gratitude from *Natividad de Jesus Chom Salas*, who grew up in Santa Maria Tzeja, Guatemala, and was educated in the school founded by Randall Shea, which ROCLA has supported for many years. *Naty* recounts the experiences of her internship as a medical doctor, spent serving patients in a health clinic in rural Guatemala.

May 25, 2018

Dear donor friends,

It is a pleasure to greet you again through this letter. I want to thank Randall Shea for translating my letter into English.

I am 2 months away from completing my current training stage, one in which I have gained much experience, doing my internship in a rural health post where I see a lot of patients. I've traveled to some remote places, and I've especially been gratified by directly helping many people. At the same time, I am seeing so much of the harsh reality of my own country that I have sometimes felt impotent in not having what the people need. We have a great shortage of medicines, and the patients lack the money to buy their own. It is very difficult when we know how to treat a disease, but the government simply wants us to adapt to the resources that we have on hand. For what purpose? So that the patients continue suffering? I've knocked on many doors in an effort to acquire medicines for my patients, sometimes with success. In spite of so many difficult moments, I have, with much effort, endured these months and I feel satisfied seeing that many of my patients do manage to regain their well-being.

Generally I visit 10 communities each month, going there only once or twice. The people are very grateful for the support, especially the pregnant women. There is so much maternal mortality in Guatemala that I am happy to support them. I explain the importance of going to the hospital, and that they can enjoy good prenatal control, and that the best thing is to put off having babies until later. In short there are so many beautiful things that happen to me in a country where there is a lack of everything and this has been a unique experience that has helped me open my eyes and my mind even more.

I come from the rural area of Santa Maria Tzeja, but the conditions there are really nothing compared to what the people I've been meeting endure and suffer day after day. The majority do not speak Spanish and many are still afraid of going to a doctor. We're struggling to do what we can, and I've learned a lot of the Queqchi language which the people speak.

In August I start my last internship in the hospital. I am already a bit nervous about returning to the fatigue of the long hospital shifts, the stress and the weight of the hierarchies that one has to work through, but always, as I've mentioned in every letter I write to you, each and every morning I get up with energy and the desire to confront the day's challenges! I am on the mountain top and I will always walk forward. I admire and love the beauty of my career, and with all my heart I want to thank you again

for your enormous help. I promise to continue fighting to be someone in this world. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to fulfill one of the biggest dreams of my life. My parents are very happy, and I think they are very right in being so, as they have suffered so much and my becoming a doctor is something with which life can reward them. I love knowing that they rejoice for me, and that makes me happy and makes me keep dreaming and working to fulfill my goals.



Natividad Chom with one of her patients.

Recently, I saw the shocking news about the death of a woman, an indigenous teenager from Guatemala, who was murdered on the border trying to emigrate and find her dreams and earn a little money. I felt very moved and shaken, because that woman is so representative of our cruel reality, and she could have been any one of us. It was very painful to know that her future was taken away. I wish all Guatemalans would have an opportunity like the one I have; for this and for everything my family and I are very grateful!

I send you all a very big hug from Guatemala,

Natividad de Jesus Chom Sales





Immigration Forum: Education for Action

Wednesday, August 22
6 PM - 9 PM

First Universalist Church of Rochester, NY
150 South Clinton Avenue
(At the Corner of Court Street)

Have you been wondering what YOU can do, here and now?
Join us for an evening of Immigration Education for Action!

Learn about the issue's history,
how immigration's national context
affects our local communities;
hear WNY (im)migrants' experiences, and
how you can work in solidarity with them
by joining high-impact, locally-based efforts.



- Register: <http://bit.ly/ImmEduForum>
- Or RSVP to rocrapidresponse@gmail.com to reserve your seat.
- Suggested donation of \$5.00
- Food provided
- Building is handicap accessible
- Sign language interpretation available upon request
- Interpretación en español disponible
- Childcare available upon request
- no smoking

Co-Sponsoring Organizations: Rochester Rapid Response Network * Alianza Agricola & Allies of the Alianza Agricola
* Rochester Greenlight Allies * Worker Justice Center of NY * New York Immigration Coalition

MEMBERS AND FRIENDS: DID YOU FORGET YOUR MEMBERSHIP DUES??



Thank you to all new members that have joined ROCLA in 2018, and all members who have paid their dues!

However, paid memberships still remain 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 have also invested in modernizing our communications, including our new website.

ROCLA does not receive any government funding, since much of what we do is to criticize the ongoing oppressions of the U.S. So, we need YOU to fund our work! ROCLA's Steering Committee has a goal of 100 paid memberships in 2018 and 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!** ■

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ROCLA UPDATE ON THE **AMERICAS**

SIGN UP FOR ROCLA'S EMAIL LISTSERVE!

In the fall, 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 will be able to use a more flexible format with more use of images. You will also receive announcements of ROCLA events and others related to our work. We don't inundate you—announcements are sent generally weekly.

We don't want to lose any of our 300 subscribers! We are setting a deadline of November 1 for everyone on the print mail list to sign up for the listserve. That means that if you are not

listed on our listserve by then, you will not be able to receive the newsletter.

To sign up for ROCLA's email listserve, please go to <https://rocla.org>, 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. All members can stay informed about ROCLA programs, upcoming events and urgent actions!

For questions, please call or email Newsletter Editor Grania Marcus: (917) 579-0199, graniamarcus@gmail.com; or Webmaster Sara Curtis: info@rocla.us.

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.

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