



Friends Peace Teams

Peacebuilding *en las Américas*

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July 30, 2014

To Friends Everywhere

Many people in the US have expressed dismay, confusion, and even fear about the numbers of unaccompanied children fleeing countries in Central America, particularly Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala, where there is a high incidence of poverty and violence.

Honduras has one of the highest murder rates in the world at this time. Our partner groups have pointed to political unrest and violence, especially in Honduras, after a coup d'état against President Zelaya who was democratically elected. The country's conditions have only worsened during the two US-supported regimes following Zelaya's ouster.

US foreign policies and actions also supported the civil wars in Guatemala and El Salvador. Two hundred thousand people died or went missing in the civil war in Guatemala and there are estimates of between 70,000 and 80,000 victims of the same circumstances in the civil war in El Salvador.

None of these countries have recovered from these political disasters and in their wake these countries have experienced failed economic recovery, while gangs and drug cartels have taken over. The Drug War imported hundreds of thousands of weapons to add to those left from the civil wars--over 300,000 of these weapons have gone missing from the Army in Honduras alone. Violence has taken a huge toll on the stability of families.

Gangs and other operatives of organized crime literally rule in many poor communities. For example, the mayor's office of San Salvador had to negotiate with the gangs that run the extortion scheme at the Terminal de Oriente (Eastern bus terminal) to make changes to this public place. In Guatemala, over 60 bus drivers were killed while driving their routes because of not having paid extortion. Kidnapping and human trafficking are also common activities of illegal groups, and there have been cases where children as young as 12 years old have been forced into guarding groups of captives.

It is no wonder to us, after hearing stories of violence from participants in our Alternatives to Violence Project--AVP and Community Based Trauma Healing workshops, that children and adolescents are fleeing these countries to escape violence and in the hope of finding some semblance of security.

While Friends Peace Teams' Peacebuilding en las Americas (PLA) hopes that the United States can provide safe sanctuary to these children and adolescents, we are aware that the US has not signed on to the UN Rights of the Child Convention, joining only Somalia and South Sudan in the group of member states not signing the document. Nevertheless, we hope that the U.S. can provide a safe humanitarian response.

In the midst of all this, PLA will continue our mission to actively work in those countries with local partners and communities to decrease violence and build communities where people can live peacefully.

Won't you join us and our partner groups in Central America in helping to reduce the crime/violence in these countries and build safe communities so that there is no longer a need for children to travel hundreds or thousands of miles just to survive? Please see information below on making contributions to our work.

Each of our partner groups have decided to focus on working with youth in the upcoming year, and have already had workshops with students, teachers, parents, and gang members in a youth detention facility.

It is sad to note that immigrants also have to be protected from violence within our country, from authorities and civilians alike. Please let lawmakers and public officials know that the violent treatment these children have received in some detention locations is both unacceptable and un-American.

Also please show support for public officials who call for kind and just treatment of the children, and support the many civilian offers and demonstrations of safe shelters for these young people. Here are some examples:

There is a temporary shelter now in Las Cruces, NM (run by the Catholic Diocese) and the community has responded with clothing, food and transportation to the airport or bus station. People are also providing food for those traveling long distances across country and items such as toys for the children. At our Peace Village camp this week the young people also wrote some welcome cards to these victims. It is hopeful to see people working together.—Vickie Aldrich, Las Cruces NM

On July 23rd, a Trail for Humanity walk from Merced, California to the border with Mexico started in Merced. Mothers and their children are walking to protest the treatment of women and children crossing the border. One young mother was walking with four of her children. It was very moving to see the fire in these young people. Check them out at <https://www.TrailforHumanity.org>—Rolene Walker, California

We suggest that we all become more informed about the history of Central America, especially the US government and corporate involvement, and form relationships with people in our communities who are from Central America.

PLA will begin posting detailed information from our partners on the FriendsPeaceTeams.org website as soon as possible.

Support our work! Donations can be made through the DONATE button on the FPT website (go to PLA), or by check to Friends Peace Teams, PLA, 1001 Park Ave., St Louis MO 63104. We appreciate your prayers and hope to hear your feedback and local responses to this issue. Email: PLA@FriendsPeaceTeams.org or write to the address above.

Yours in Peace—Para la Paz,



Val Liveoak, Coordinator
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Other resources: <http://www.refugees.org/assets/images/our-work/uac-flyer.pdf>