



Rights Now

The newsletter of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee



Special Edition

Central American Migrant Justice

**Central American Migrant Justice
Program Overview and Its History**

**Nicaragua: A Difficult Country with
Resourceful People**

by Carol and David Holstein

UUSC'S CENTRAL AMERICAN MIGRANT JUSTICE PROGRAM



CONTEXT

Rampant violence in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador makes this region – known as the Northern Triangle – one of the most dangerous in the world. In a mass exodus of Central American asylum-seekers not seen since the 1980s, hundreds of thousands of people are fleeing the area in an attempt to escape alarming rates of homicide, gender-based assault, gang violence, and increased militarization.

For migrants who survive a difficult and often dangerous trek through Mexico, the hardships continue. Those seeking asylum in the U.S. – many of whom have repeatedly had their basic human rights violated along the way – are persecuted further by being separated from their families, charged with federal crimes, and forced into intolerable detention facilities with little access to legal representation.

UUSC PARTNERS along the migrant trail

Asociación Pop No'j provides accompaniment and reintegration help for migrant children who are deported from the United States or Mexico to Guatemala. Pop No'j also trains Guatemalan school teachers to incorporate issues of migration – including causes, risks, and procedures – in lesson plans to support their more than 2,400 migrant students.

Based in the United States, **Foundation Cristosal** protects the rights of people displaced by violence in the Northern Triangle through research, legal aid, and resettlement and integration support.

Asylum Access Mexico ensures due process for refugees and victims of violence seeking asylum in Mexico. It provides assistance in legal aid, reintegration, and employment for those staying in shelters or being held in detention facilities across the country.

Scalabrinianas Misión con Migrantes y Refugiados provides a wide range of humanitarian assistance to vulnerable migrants in Mexico. It runs a shelter, distributes medical, legal, and psychosocial support, and defends migrant rights through an extensive advocacy network.

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STRATEGY & GOALS

UUSC is responding to the Central American migrant crisis hand-in-hand with nearly a dozen grassroots organizations to provide direct aid along the migration route, to ensure due process upon arrival in the United States, and to address the root causes of injustices so that those living in the Northern Triangle will not need to flee in the first place.

Our grassroots partnerships allow UUSC to assist overlooked and oppressed populations in hard-to-reach corners of the world. Never forgetting our nation's long history of supporting Central American dictators with abysmal human rights records, UUSC is tirelessly working with our partners on the ground to protect migrants' rights and their futures every step of the way.



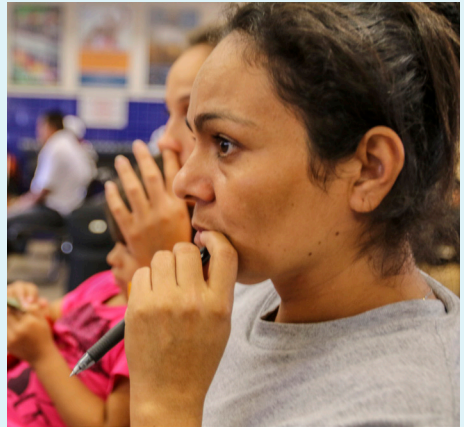
1977 to 2018

UUSC ADVANCES HUMAN RIGHTS IN CENTRAL AMERICA

In these years, UUSC...

1977 Sponsors fact-finding congressional delegations to investigate war crimes in El Salvador.

1980 Organizes a meeting for rural community organizers from Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador to exchange information on economic, political, and social issues and to form a regional support network.



1985 Publishes *A Journey to Understanding: Central America*, a comprehensive study and action guide aimed to fuel UU involvement in Central American migrant justice.

1992 Celebrates the signing of peace accords – marking the end of a 10-year civil war in El Salvador – after organizing 20 congressional delegations to the war-torn area.

1997 Advocates on behalf of human rights groups in Mexico to make the U.S. government aware of the persecution of UUSC partners and the populations they serve.

2004 Leads a delegation of members, activists, and policymakers to Guatemala to monitor national elections, where they witness the defeat of former dictator Gen. Efraim Rios Montt.

2006 Begins a 6-year long project in Guatemala to hold the Goldcorp mining company accountable for human rights violations, including water contamination and skin diseases caused by toxic chemicals.

2012 Assists with a case ordering the Guatemalan government to guarantee the human right to water before the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights.

2013 Helps convict Gen. Efraim Rios Montt by supporting forensic research into genocide committed against the Maya people under his dictatorship.





2014 Develops partnerships to help women in U.S. immigration detention access their legal rights and find the support they need.

2015 Sends its first round of Spanish-speaking and legal UU College of Social Justice volunteers to help our partner, RAICES, ensure that women and children held in Texas immigration detention receive legal advice and representation.

2016 Publishes *Waiting for Refuge: Benefits and Challenges of the Central American Minors In-Country Refugee Processing Program (CAM)*, a research report that reveals weaknesses in U.S. policy toward asylum-seekers at our borders.

2017 Holds a 24-hour vigil in front of the White House to support DREAM Action, a 22-day long effort to defend the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program and Temporary Protected Status.

2018 Participates in a delegation of faith leaders, in response to violent government crackdowns on peaceful protests in Honduras, to support Honduran human rights defenders mobilizing against the fraudulent November 2017 presidential elections.



NICARAGUA: A DIFFICULT COUNTRY WITH RESOURCEFUL PEOPLE

By Carol and David Holstein

Our children cannot believe that we go on a vacation where we need to study plus do homework. This past February, we joined 13 other Unitarian Universalists on a UU College of Social Justice trip to Nicaragua.

The course work covers quite a range, but boils down to appreciating Nicaragua's history – including a long period of deplorable actions by the United States – and increasing awareness of cultural differences from heritage as well as from economic circumstances.

Strikingly, Nicaragua is a beautiful country. It has volcanoes, huge lakes, oceans, beaches, rainforests, mountains, and kind friendly people. It also feels like a step back in time with dinners costing \$10, \$1 beers, and \$50 hotel rooms.

We spent considerable time with Fundacion Entre Mujeres (FEM), a group supported by UUSC, in Northern rural Nicaragua. Nicaragua's machismo culture, men owning the land, acceptance of violence against women, and women being relegated to chores and childbearing all produce a clear

division where men hold all the power. FEM is servicing a group of women who are largely peasants with little formal education, reflecting a mission to help marginalized people as well as recognizing women's roles in creating enduring groups, strengthening families, and creating wealth.

Basically, FEM exists to empower women. It is education about their rights. It is understanding that violence against women is not OK. Having children is a choice. It is the sharing of the household income and wealth. FEM trains women in bio-intensive gardening, maximizing the productivity of small subsistence plots. It helps women get their goods to market via a stall to sell produce. It created a co-op to sell coffee, honey, and hibiscus. Their fair-traded coffee is marketed by a Wisconsin company under the brand "Just Coffee."

The most moving story was from a woman who explained how she no longer buys onions from the market but rather sells them. But, the magical part was that by owning productive land,

she gave her daughters a future which is better than hers and provides hope.

We also visited the Guardianes de Yaoska in Rancho Grande. This group of peasant farmers is fighting a Canadian mining company B2 Gold. Thus far, they have been successful at stopping the company from setting up an open pit gold mine. They are protecting their rural farming life against a government that encourages mining with little or no safeguards.

But, their success has not come without sacrifice. They had to forego a year of school for their children as the company and government were using schools to spread the pro-mining message. Violence against protestors was always a real threat. The most stirring speech was from a man

who held up the produce he grows - *Malanga* - and stated, "This is my gold. We don't need mining here."

It is inspiring when you realize that people with little education, little money, and little power still can be successful and make a difference. Their commitment, dedication, and drive to preserve their lifestyle for the Guardians or to improve women's place for FEM is truly amazing. It provides some hope as we look at our situation in the United States and the intractability of so many issues.

The UU College of Social Justice, a program of UUSC and the Unitarian Universalist Association, inspires youth and adults to live their faith through immersion learning.

Please visit uucsj.org to learn more.



PARTNER LIST CONTINUED

FM4 Paso Libre delivers critical humanitarian aid to migrants and refugees in Guadalajara, Mexico. It keeps its migrant shelter – which offers food, showers, and clean clothes for people in transit – open 24/7. Migrants can also call their loved ones, access medical and psychological services, and request legal aid while at the shelter.

Foro de Mujeres por la Vida is a coalition made up of 17 women's groups in Honduras. Foro de Mujeres lifts and promotes women's rights while working to end widespread gender-based violence – such as forced disappearances, human trafficking, and domestic abuse – by documenting acts of violence and by sharing its research with the broader community.

Fundación Para la Justicia y El Estado Democrático de Derecho (FJDRL) ensures justice and due process for migrants fleeing the Northern Triangle through Mexico. Working to prevent extrajudicial killings, FJDRL tracks down the forced disappearances of Central American refugees traveling along the migration trail, supports the families of those disappeared, and strengthens forensic investigations and legal cases to find missing individuals.

Freedom for Immigrants expands visitation programs for immigrants in detention. It provides a pro bono hotline in all U.S. detention facilities so that migrants can contact their loved ones, connect with a volunteer or pen pal, learn about their legal rights, and, with help from a lawyer, build a case to challenge their detention.

No More Deaths is an all-volunteer ministry of the UU Church of Tucson, Ariz., that provides food, water, and medical care to immigrants on the U.S.-Mexico border. It works to change the structures and policies that lead to deaths at the border, creating a safe and secure passage of migrants arriving in the United States.

RAICES provides free legal services to refugees and immigrant children, women, and families in Texas. Within the past three years, RAICES has provided pro bono legal aid to over 7,000 Central American families seeking asylum in the U.S., and continues to represent families being held in detention.

Justice in Motion protects migrant rights across borders. Through a convening in Guatemala, advocates from the Northern Triangle, Mexico, and Nicaragua will join to discuss legal rights, education, and policy advocacy.

Since 2014, violence in Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala has led nearly 250,000 Central Americans to seek asylum in the United States.



THE STATISTICS ARE IMPORTANT. SO ARE THE STORIES.

This year, UUSC's annual fundraising and educational program, **Guest at Your Table**, features stories from UUSC partners along the Central American migration trail.

 uusc.org/guest

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