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December 20, 2021

Dear CRLN Members and Friends,

“For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future.’” — Jeremiah 29:11

As the end of 2021 draws near, it can be hard to hold onto hope. That’s true globally, as we enter into a new ‘Omicron variant’ phase of the nearly two-year-old Covid pandemic, and as we reflect on the disappointing global response to the increasingly obvious climate crisis. It’s been particularly true for our partners in Central America, Colombia and Cuba, where the impacts of Covid and climate-change have been exacerbated by the appalling effects of hurricanes Eta and Iota, and of an increasing tendency to authoritarian and repressive government across the whole region. It’s also been true for the migrants who are another focus of CRLN’s work. That’s why we continue to work in hope – the hope that our faiths call for - not passive hope, but the active hope that knows that a better future is possible *if* we, alongside our many partners, continue to work for it.

Let me remind you of the mission statement that guides us: ***“CRLN builds Partnerships among social movements and organized communities within and between the U.S. and Latin America. We work together through popular education, grassroots organizing, public policy advocacy, and direct action to dismantle U.S. militarism, neoliberal economic and immigration policy, and other forms of state and institutional violence. We are united by our liberating faiths and inspired by the power of people to organize and to find allies to work for sustainable economies, just relationships and human dignity.”***

The work of that mission has continued apace in 2021, even as meetings for advocacy and organizing and education continued to be mostly virtual (we’re all Zoom experts now!). Our sanctuary work continued strong, and I can personally attest to the challenges we’ve met in partnership with some of the families I’ve had the pleasure to meet. The disappointing immigration policies of the Biden administration – of whom we had hoped for so much more! – has meant that legislative advocacy on that front has continued to be vital, as it has, too, in solidarity with our partners in Latin America.

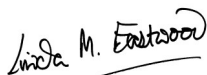
Those of you who attended our Annual Gathering – virtual again this year– heard about one current focus, “Colombia –¡Defensores de la Paz Resisten!” – “Colombia: Peacemakers Resist!”. You can review that event at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JmgUmFZEP5w> and view the program book with several informative articles at <https://bit.ly/ProgramBook2021>.

This year marks the fifth anniversary of the November 26th 2016 signing of peace accords between the Colombian government and the FARC guerrilla group, after decades of armed conflict. The accords included detailed agreements on reform of land rights, on rural development, on truth, justice and reparation for victims, on ethnic and women’s rights, on re-integration to society for demobilized guerrillas, and more. The promise, however, has been fulfilled only in very small part. Meanwhile, conflict continues with and between other guerrilla and paramilitary groups, meaning that displacements, disappearances and violent death are still significant realities in much of the country, not least for environmental and human-rights defenders. Frustration has grown with the lack of peace-accord implementation, as also with Colombia’s structural economic and social inequality (second only to Haiti in this hemisphere). That frustration boiled over this year

in street protests met with armed violence by the state; justice for those abuses is slow in coming. Our Annual Event keynote speaker, Danilo Rueda, Executive Secretary of Colombia's *Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz*, gave a moving exposition of those issues, and requested our ongoing accompaniment in both advocacy over US policies (for example "no" to aerial fumigation of coca crops; "yes" to talks with the ELN guerrilla group) and with direct messages of support to threatened social leaders. We're forming a new Colombia Human Rights and Solidarity Group to strengthen our efforts on this front; let us know if you'd like to learn more about the group by signing up at <https://bit.ly/CRLNColombia>.

Today's world continues to present major challenges for all those who work for justice and peace – for societies in which people can live in harmony with each other and with their environment. CRLN's partnership with those struggling for liberation continues to be vital. We are grateful for the part which each one of you has played in these efforts. None of this work can continue without you, our members and friends, our supporters. We rely on organizational, congregational and individual support, along with some foundation support. We ask you, then, to demonstrate your support once again in the form of a year-end contribution, a sign of your ongoing commitment to CRLN's work for human rights, justice, and peace. With your help and solidarity, we continue to journey in hope, active hope that works to bring liberation and transformation to create a more just and loving world.

Sincerely,



Linda Eastwood
CRLN Board Chair

Please make an online donation at www.crln.org/donate, or send us a check payable to CRLN to the Chicago Religious Leadership Network on Latin America at 5655 S. University Ave., Room 23, Chicago, IL 60637. Your contributions are tax-deductible. Please also consider providing a legacy donation to CRLN in your will; our full legal title is: Chicago Religious Leadership Network on Latin America.