



# C • R • L • N

Chicago Religious Leadership Network on Latin America

## 2021 Highlights

### Cuba

#### City Council Resolution

In the summer of 2019, CRLN joined the campaign to pass a Chicago City Council Resolution opposing the U.S. embargo against Cuba. CRLN members called/emailed and visited their City Council legislators. On February 24, 2021 the City Council passed **R2020-612** unanimously. The Resolution urges Congress to pass legislation that ends the 60-year-old US embargo of Cuba and calls for President Biden to rescind the intensified measures taken against the island by former President Donald Trump. Chicago joined thirteen other cities with similar resolutions.

**Illinois General Assembly Resolution** - In February of 2021, the Chicago Committee to Normalize Relations with Cuba began a campaign to get a similar resolution passed at the state level. State Representative Robyn Gabel (18<sup>th</sup>) introduced a resolution similar to the Chicago City Council Resolution in the IL House of Representatives in April of 2021. CRLN contacted the offices of downstate representatives based on a target list prepared by the Committee. **HR 0254** passed on May 30, 2021 by a vote of 63-45. Resolutions similar to HR 0254 have passed the Alabama and Michigan State Senates, and both houses of the California and Minnesota state legislatures.

**114 Legislators Urge the Biden Administration to Prioritize the Humanitarian Crisis in Cuba** - CRLN members worked hard urging their legislators to sign on to a Dear Colleague letter delivered to President Biden on December 16. IL Rep. Rush was a lead sponsor and Reps. Schakowsky, Kelly, Davis, Garcia, Newman and



Casten signed on. The letter asks the Biden administration to suspend U.S. regulations that prevent food, medicine, and other humanitarian assistance from reaching the Cuban people, to remove all restrictions on family and non-family remittances, and to fully re-staff the U.S. Embassy in Havana and resume consular services in Cuba. Additionally, members are asking President Biden to roll back the Trump administration's measures that restrict travel to Cuba, since they make it more difficult for Cuban-Americans to visit and reunite with family on the island and limit mutually beneficial dialogue between the U.S. and Cuban people. Full text of the letter is available at: <https://bit.ly/CubaLtr>

### Colombia



Our Annual Event keynote speaker, **Danilo Rueda**, Executive Secretary of Colombia's **Comisión Inter-eclesial de Justicia y Paz**, talked about the challenges faced by peacemakers in Colombia five years after the signing of the historic peace accords between the Colombian government and the FARC guerrilla group. 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 reintegration 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.



He 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. Responding to the call from Danilo Rueda, CRLN has begun a new collaborative project, the **Colombia Human Rights and Solidarity group**. The purpose of the group is to support the efforts of the Comisión Intereclesial, as well as the work for justice and peace of indigenous and black communities in Colombia. You can learn more about the group by signing up at <https://bit.ly/CRLNColombia>.

If you missed our Annual Gathering, you can watch it on YouTube at <https://bit.ly/2021CRLN>

Learn more about Colombia at <https://bit.ly/ProgramBook2021>

#### Letter to Secretary of State Antony Blinken

CRLN signed on to a letter directed to Secretary of State Antony Blinken prior to his trip to Colombia. The letter urged him to use the opportunity to press the Colombian government for the implementation of the peace accords and for actions on critical human rights issues, including improving the dire situation of human rights defenders, advancing the rights of Afro-Colombian and indigenous people, addressing the needs of poor and landless farmers, and confronting the serious problems of police brutality and racial injustice.

**Illinois New Way Forward Act** - Beginning in the fall of 2018, CRLN members began to attend the Kankakee County Board monthly meetings to speak against the Jerome Combs Detention Center, which was being used as an immigration detention center. It was a hard effort. People had to be up by 4:00 am to be at the morning meetings on time. During August of 2019, our member congregation Tzedek Chicago hosted a prayer service outside of the detention center. This was for Tisha B'Av, a commemoration of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem during the year 70. About 300 people attended. We helped put a spotlight on the issue. During October of that year, Congressman Garcia and other public officials from the Chicago area made a surprise visit to the center. These actions helped inspire the Illinois Way Forward Act, which passed on May 31, 2021 and was signed by Governor Pritzker on August 2, 2021. Among its provisions, the law prohibits state or local governments from signing contracts with the federal government to detain immigrants.



**Sanctuary Working Group (SWG)** - The pandemic put many things on hold, but it did not diminish our work for justice. Members of the Organizing Committee decided to dedicate time, energy, and resources to helping immigrants and asylum seekers being released from detention during the pandemic. That initial response has developed into the SWG. It remains part of our Organizing Committee's work. This year the United African Organization and staff from the Chicago Children's Legal Center and Refugee One have joined. The SWG helps us forge ties with the people who are being directly affected by anti-immigrant policies.

**The 45,000 Quilt Exhibition at Chicago's City Hall** Congregation Hakafa in collaboration with the City of Chicago and CRLN brought an immigration quilt to the city from August 2- August 20. Board members, friends and CRLN members joined city officials on August 2 at 10:30 am at City Hall. Visitors were able to see the six panels of the quilt for City Hall for 18 days. Entitled, the 45,000 Quilt, the number refers to the average number of people who were in immigration detention during 2019, and it honors them and those in detention now. Created by more than 60 artists and immigration activists from across the United States and one from Mexico, the purpose is to show the injustice of immigration detention while we continue to work toward humane solutions.



**Our Lady of the Snows** - CRLN built a new and very fruitful relationship with Our Lady of the Snows, a key congregation in the Midway Airport area. We conducted four Know-Your-Rights trainings there through the spring, summer, and fall. We are currently working on organizing a legal clinic at the church with a community partner, Latinos Progresando.

**Election Observation Mission to Honduras** - In November, CRLN participated in an International Election Observation Mission to Honduras in partnership with Centro de Estudio para la Democracia (Center for the Study of Democracy, CESPAD). It was a great opportunity to participate and reconnect with the work in the country. The historic elections saw the victory of the first woman president in Honduras. Since the US sponsored coup of 2009, as well as the publicly recognized fraudulent General Elections of 2017, expectations are high for a different, left, socialist president like Xiomara Castro. However, shortly after her inauguration as president, the political context is tense as the alliance that brought her to victory is battling for control of key positions in government and congress.



**Legislation** - The Honduras Solidarity Network and Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective lead the efforts in a national coalition in support of two bills: Berta Caceres Human Rights in Honduras Act in the House and the Honduras Human Rights and Anti-Corruption Act of 2021 in the Senate. Both bills reflect much of the work of the solidarity and human rights community in the United States in support of the people of Honduras. The bills address corruption, human rights abuses by the military, police, private security guards and death squads, as well as government cooperation with drug trafficking gangs and economic exploitation and privatization exacerbating poverty and inequality.

**Defending Nature** - The Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala (NISGUA) and the Canadian network Maritimes-Guatemala Breaking the Silence Network (BTS) asked for CRLN's support directly because of the historic connections with religious groups in the Chicagoland region. A welcome letter was sent to the newly appointed Bishop José Cayetano Parra Novo of the Diocese of Santa Rosa de Lima in Guatemala encouraging him to maintain the church's long-standing commitment in the defense of nature in southern Guatemala. For ten years, the church has played an important role in accompanying the peaceful resistance to the massive Escobal silver mine. Since the announcement of the change in bishop, there has been considerable concern among our local partners in Guatemala that the diocese's long-term commitment to such work could significantly shift.



**El Salvador "Dear Colleague" Letter** - CISPES organized a "Dear Colleague" letter to Rep. Panetta expressing concern about political violence, intimidation and corruption in El Salvador and calling for a peaceful electoral process, denouncing attacks against the democratic achievements of the Salvadoran Peace Accords, and affirming the U.S. commitment to defending human rights, peace and democracy in the region. CRLN's supporters and network members were mobilized and with their work we did our part in encouraging Rep. Schakowsky and Rep. Garcia to sign on.