



Photo: Rural Coalition

Participants in a circle during reflection session.

ORGANIZED WOMEN OF THE LAND GATHER IN MEXICO (FROM PARTICIPANTS REPORTS COMPILED BY STEPHEN BARTLETT)

Sharing perspectives, initiating new friendships and envisioning a future for people of the land were the goals of this gathering of women of the land in Mexico that took place from Oct 31-Nov 6, 2007. Thanks to a generous gift from the offering of the Presbyterian Women at their last Assembly in Louisville, KY, Agricultural Missions and the Rural Coalition partnered to make this gathering possible. Twenty five women from the U.S., Grenada, Honduras, El Salvador, Ecuador and Mexico spent five days together in Mexico City during the Day of the Dead celebrations and in Oaxtepec, a beautiful retreat center for workers run by the Social Security administration of the country.

In Mexico City's Zócalo (the enormous Central Plaza) the group witnessed surprising forms of protest by indigenous people displaced from ancestral lands as well as more traditional but extravagant forms of celebration to mark the Day of the Dead. Taking a public bus, the group then traveled to Oaxtepec for the days of programming organized by the planning team. Each participant spoke about their organization, the issues impacting them in their respective countries, and the group sought a cohesive analysis and perspective on the multitude of challenges faced by rural communities.

Among the many challenges expressed were: corporate control over agriculture has bankrupted family farmers and international financial institutions continue to impose their unjust neo liberal policies and trade regimes; land, water (in many places increasingly scarce) and seeds were being "expropriated" from people who live from the life of the soil; economic disruption has led to forced migration of peoples;

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exclusion, exploitation are on the rise; the industrial model of production, food processing and distribution/marketing are overturning sustainable ways of life; sexism and discrimination against women is on the rise; the prison-industrial complex of privatized incarceration is extending to the mass detention of immigrants; the world's 'superpower' is leading the world in waging war on the land and its peoples.

However, despite the intense emotions of sharing each other's pain, there was also a sense of direction and hope. Educational and advocacy work about sustainable farming, as well as the defense of the common goods of nature (land, water, seeds) are ongoing, with hands on training, mentoring and creative partnerships developing, from Georgia, Wisconsin and North Dakota, USA, to the island nation of Grenada, to the Garifuna communities in Honduras and among indigenous peoples across Abya Yala. Anti-racism trainings all the way to ecological recycling and farming practices are catching on and taking root, as their importance becomes more evident with each passing day. The shared values of Respect for the Creator/Creation and respect for oneself as a woman, the organized defense of each group, the growing sense of responsibility not only to the present generation but to those to come seven generations hence. The group affirmed their commitment to work together for their communities with mutual respect and solidarity, and, yes, tenderness in their hearts. That powerful combination of values cannot easily be silenced.

The women ended each session with this quote: "When spiders unite they can tie up a nation; When women unite, we can change a nation; when women organize and network together, they will achieve a changed nation!"

Participants from Grenada, Georgia and Wisconsin during group session working on topic, "Imagining Communities as Women Envision Them to Be."



Photo: Rural Coalition

We look forward to how this process of strengthening ourselves through such creative gatherings of women may continue to grow. Look for educational materials to be developed from the work accomplished in Oaxtepec, that can help educate people of faith, especially women, about the important voices rising up with their songs of the land, and the actions they call us to, held up by the Great Spirit, God! ■

The organizations represented at this gathering were as follows:

The Southern Rural Black Women's Initiative For Economic and Social Justice (SRBWI), USA

The Federation of Southern Cooperatives, (FSC), USA

GRENCODA, Grenada

CEDESA, México

Alma de Mujer, Indigenous Women's Network, USA

Coordinadora de Mujeres Ikoots, Oaxaca, México

Women, Food and Agriculture (WFA), Iowa, USA

ORNI, Puebla, México

Family Farm Defenders (FFD), USA

National Family Farm Coalition (NFFC), USA

Lideres Campesinas, California, USA

International Institute for the Cooperation Amongst People (IICP), El Salvador

OFRANEH, Honduras

Red Nacional de Biosalud, Riobamba, Ecuador

Presbyterian Church (USA)/Women's Unit

Rural Coalition/ Coalición Rural, México, USA

Agricultural Missions, Inc (AMI), USA

FAIR FOOD CHECK-OFF LIST

Yum! Brands/Taco Bell Corporation...Check.

McDonalds Corporation... Check. Burger King...pending.

Fair Fast Food and Retail Fair Food Nation...pending.

The Coalition of Immokalee (CIW) and the Alliance for Fair Food took the struggle for fair food to target #3 of Fast Food Nation, Burger King Corporation, in Miami at the November 30 shareholders meeting of that burger corporation. Allies converged from across the nation for a 9-mile march and rally at Burger King headquarters, followed on Dec 1 with a conference "Our World, Our Rights" and Concert for Fair Food, in other words: networking, workshops, plenaries and an "off the chain" good time. AMI was there, with a delegation from Kentucky and points en route! Burger King's latest ploy to play for time is to spin a deceptive image of an alleged bulwark of non-cooperation from the Florida Tomato Growers Exchange (FTGE). This and other communications from Burger King execs show signs of defensive actions, literally "digging in of booted heels", strong evidence that the campaign is progressing, inexorably building legitimacy and strength.

For more information, consult www.ciw-online.org To link to actions that took place in Louisville October 12 and in Miami, see:

http://www.ciwonline.org/Louisville_BK_WF_action.html

AMI Joins with the PCUSA and the Councils of Churches To Rebuild Rural Communities After the Civil Wars

Winston G. Carroo

Both Liberia and Sierra Leone have recently ended their long civil wars. In Liberia, this conflict lasted 14 years, from 1989 to 2003, during which an estimated 150,000 of its 2.8 million people died, 750,000 fled to neighboring countries and 1.2 million were internally displaced. Sierra Leone's civil war lasted 11 years, from 1991 to 2002 and while reliable statistics are difficult to obtain, it is estimated that tens of thousands died and 2 million of its 6 million people were displaced. It is hard to find a village or a town, an ethnic group or clan, a family or individual that was not affected by these concurrent wars. These conflicts also destroyed the physical and social infrastructure, resulting in an almost complete lack of social services, shattered economies and rampant poverty, scattered citizenry and decimated communities.

Rural communities that were not easily defended by the governments were particularly vulnerable. Many were completely abandoned as citizens fled the fighting and became refugees. Tens of rural villages were burnt to the ground by all parties engaged in the fighting. Homes, businesses, farms, schools and even churches were looted and torched.

The conflicts have ended in both countries, democratic elections held and internationally recognized governments installed, but the ability of the governments to readily address the pressing problems of reconstruction is severely limited due to a lack of financial and human resources and the absence of functional public and private sector agencies. The rural refugees returning to their villages found complete destruction and have to start from scratch in rebuilding their lives, livelihoods and communities, with little or no external assistance.

In both countries, the Councils of Churches played very significant roles in ministering to the needy during the conflicts, were instrumental in mediating the peace agreements and are now being called upon to assist in the reconstruction of the societies. The Liberian Council of Churches (LCC) and the Council of Churches of Sierra Leone (CCSL) have long histories of social development activities, serving both the spiritual and physical needs of the rural and urban poor. In the years before the wars, their programs included rural development activities aimed at improving the lives of the rural population. With this history and credibility, both Councils are well placed to play important roles in the reconstruction of their countries. But the Councils themselves were not immune from the destruction suffered by other sectors.



Photo: Winston Carroo

Both lost infrastructure, personnel and resources as well as operational capabilities. Responding to the calls to assist with the reconstruction presented very difficult challenges.

The Presbyterian Church (USA), through Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA), Self Development of People (SDOP) and the Presbyterian Hunger Program (PHP), has maintained partnerships with both Councils prior to and during the conflicts. These three agencies have now come together to assist the Councils in their efforts to undertake the challenges of the reconstruction, with particular emphasis on rural communities. AMI, for the past five years, has worked in both countries to enable and facilitate community development efforts in several rural areas through training, technical support and financial support for agricultural production, micro credit and related activities. This work, done through the Sustainable Agriculture and Development Program of the United Methodist Committee on Relief, represents a successful a model for post disaster reconstruction that can be adapted for use in this instance.

In consultation with the Councils and with the support of the PCUSA, AMI is currently in the beginning stages of a two year program whose primary goals are to assist the Councils and their member churches in developing their program management capabilities and to increase the agricultural production and economic status of selected rural communities. These goals will be met through a combination of management training for personnel of the Councils and their members, training of farmers in appropriate production methods and providing short term funding support for production and related activities in communities that have received training. ■

FLOC Seeks Justice from R.J. Reynolds Tobacco

Joseph Keesecker



Photo: Joseph Keesecker

On Sunday Oct. 28, Agricultural Missions joined its partners, Farm Labor Organizing Committee and National Farm Worker Ministry, in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, to call on RJ Reynolds Tobacco to enter into a cooperative system with farm workers and growers who produce their crop. About 400 farm workers, representatives of religious and labor groups, students, and others ages 1 to 80 marched on the headquarters of Reynolds American calling on CEO Susan Ivey to meet with FLOC leaders to resolve conditions of tobacco field workers that

produce its products. The group gathered at the Lloyd Presbyterian Church, near Reynolds headquarters. The church was deemed "...an appropriate place to launch the new FLOC campaign, since it is a historic center for the Civil Rights Movement in this region of North Carolina".

Tobacco farm workers suffer horrendous conditions in the fields and camps. One worker carried a sign that said, "I picked your tobacco leaves in 100 degree heat this summer, now can we talk?" In front of the main entrance to company headquarters, participants laid flowers on a makeshift altar in memory of six heat-related deaths of workers in the tobacco harvest since 2005. In contrast to the poverty of farm workers, Reynolds American CEO Susan Ivey reports that in 2006 its net income rose 16.1% to 1.21 billion dollars, with shareholders receiving 43% return on their investment!

Emphasizing FLOC's commitment, President Baldemar Velásquez said, "FLOC is called upon to challenge the deplorable conditions of the tobacco workforce who remain voiceless, powerless, and invisible to mainstream America. FLOC will campaign until RJ Reynolds commits to joining us in addressing this national shame. They have the money and the power, but we have the time and nothing to lose. We will be here until Reynolds joins us in realizing justice for its tobacco field workers." Velásquez said he had asked the corporation to meet with FLOC to talk about the conditions of farm workers picking its crop. He was told "we have decided not to meet with you."

Virginia Nesmith of the National Farm Worker Ministry, Michael Livingston of the National Council of Churches, Joe Keesecker of Agricultural Missions, and other religious leaders called upon Susan Ivey of Reynolds American to meet with FLOC. Alongside other labor leaders, Will Duncan of the AFL-CIO presented President John Sweeney's support for the FLOC cause, and James Andrews of the N.C. AFL-CIO shared personal experience growing up in the tobacco fields, calling on all to support the FLOC campaign. ■

Baldemar Velásquez asks supporters to write RJ Reynolds and urge its leaders to meet with FLOC:

**Susan Ivey, CEO
Reynolds American, Inc.
200 Forum Pkwy.
Rural Hall, NC 27045**

For more information see :

FLOC SEEKS JUSTICE FROM RJ REYNOLDS TOBACCO
on the FLOC website (www.floc.com).

NEWSBRIEFS

Repression Under Pretext of 'War on Terror' Flails the Americas

Stephen Bartlett

ARGENTINA

On November 15-16 at the Judicial Federation building in Buenos Aires, Argentina, social movement organizations held an international seminar on how civil society can respond effectively to the abuse of new legal tools, the so-called "anti-Terrorism laws" being passed and selectively enforced across the hemisphere. Participants of the event visited detained Paraguayan farmers in the Prison of Marcos Paz, the underdog actors in chronic festering land disputes in that former dictatorship.

BRAZIL

On Sunday October 21st in Paraná State, at approximately 1:30 pm, after the reoccupation of the area, which took place in the early morning, more than 40 gunmen of a heavily armed militia organized in a fake security company called "NF Segurança", invaded the 'Acampamento Terra Livre' (Free land Camp), in an area of transgenic experiments, and openly executed Valmir Mota de Oliveira, commonly known as Keno. The other injured, Gentil Couto Viera, Jonas Gomes de Queiroz, Domingos Barretos, Izabel Nascimento de Souza and Hudson Cardin, were taken to hospitals in the region. Izabel was in a coma but has recovered. Unfortunately, she lost one of her eyes due to a gunshot.

NEW YORK CITY

In indignant response on November 8, Agricultural Missions joined organizations from across the world in a protest against Syngenta, demonstrating in front of the Swiss Consulate in New York City. See: http://www.viacampesina.org/main_en/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=456&Itemid=1 for an article and photos on the Via Campesina website, including Joseph Keesecker holding the Via Campesina banner.

BOLIVIA

In Bolivia the hope-filled Constitutional Assembly meeting in Sucre has been besieged by violent right wing thugs, and the indigenous leader of the Assembly disrespected with racist slander on the street. Recently one of the opposition leaders cars was stopped and searched and found to contain an Uzi machinegun. On the Colombia-Ecuador border recently some 2,000 Colombian and 500 Ecuadorean women marched to protest the armed conflict and call for non-violent economic justice measures to solve decades of intractable violence.

CENTRAL AMERICA

In Central America social movements including partner organizations of Agricultural Missions have been the targets of official or extra-judicial repression practices. In El Salvador CRIPDES protesters of water privatization schemes were arrested and charged as terrorists. In Honduras COPINH and OFRANEH members were charged on fraudulent grounds, because they were actively opposing extraction of resources from collectively held lands. In Guatemala, a wave of violence has taken the lives of common citizens and politicians during the recent Presidential election campaigns, as well as targeted activists such as the union organizer Marco Tulio Ramirez for SITRABI, a banana workers union in the Izabal region whose struggles with Del Monte corporation and other banana transnationals AMI profiled as part of the 2005 Rural Justice Tour with veteran organizer Selfa Sandoval.

MEXICO

In various parts of Mexico, the Fox and now Calderón administrations have used the Mexican military and paramilitary forces to repress grassroots resistance to economic policies and projects that would disenfranchise whole communities of their lands and the resources of their lands, from Atenco, to Oaxaca to Chiapas. Mexico is #2 for the number of military personnel being trained at the School of the Americas in Ft. Benning, Georgia, second only to Colombia. Fortunately, Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador have stopped sending members of their militaries to that school for counter insurgency and repression of popular social movements.

The demographic pressures and human trafficking from Mexico northward have created their own vortex of violence, which came home to AMI partner Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC). On April 9, 2007 FLOC organizer Santiago Rafael Cruz (28), originally from Oaxaca but more recently an organizer with FLOC based in Toledo, Ohio, was found beaten to death in the new FLOC office in Mexico, devoted to educating Mexican workers of their rights before their journeys to the U.S. as "guest" workers in North Carolina agriculture. FLOC was threatening the status quo of rampant and unscrupulous human traffickers and their corrupted allies among police and government officials. Cutting through the culture of impunity in Mexico to seek justice is an uphill battle.

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UNITED STATES

Closer to home, under Homeland Security Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), mass raids, detentions and forced deportations of undocumented workers and their families are the predominant form that social repression is taking within the U.S. Ironically this is occurring as rhetoric flies about threats to national security, and the migration of "terrorists" into our country, the same justification used across the hemisphere. Targeting workplaces with on-going union struggles (coincidence?), ICE paramilitary style squads have come to define the immigration strategy of enforcement only, militarization of the border, and traumatic criminalization of those lacking papers. For that millions of people have come to be scapegoated as "illegal," an epithet that should one day be known as the "I" word for Latinos, for its racist content. While our economy demands half a million laborers, only 5,000 visas are allowed for that category of worker and there is a 5-15 year backlog, making that visa virtually useless. A beefed up and streamlined "guest worker" (read exploitable 'bracero') program seems to be the end game goal of such policies, once the labor crunch starts to bite in the agricultural and construction industries. In the meantime, human and civil rights activists across the country are battling unconstitutional and punitive proposed local and state ordinances designed to exclude and punish the undocumented, largely hard-working and law-abiding victims of our own broken immigration system. Such a civil rights advocacy effort is ongoing in Louisville, KY, with AMI staff contributing to bipartisan lobbying efforts in Louisville Metro Council.

Whether the violence is being perpetrated against progressive, democratically elected governments such as in Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador, or is being wielded by governmentally-funded and directed military or paramilitary forces, as in Colombia, Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala and dare we say it, the U.S., among other countries, repression of social movements is on the rise. As the fissures and contradictions of the widening wealth and power gap become more acute, violence seems to be the response. How will we, from the relative safety of our homes and offices, respond? How will our gratitude for the life God has provided us be translated into acts of compassion and solidarity?

Those interested in participating in AMI's advocacy and solidarity work in relationship to denouncing acts of repression, and, literally calling off the dogs please contact Stephen Bartlett (sbartlett@ag-missions.org) and get on our urgent response human rights list. ■

Rev. Dr. Willis T. Goodwin

PRESENTE!

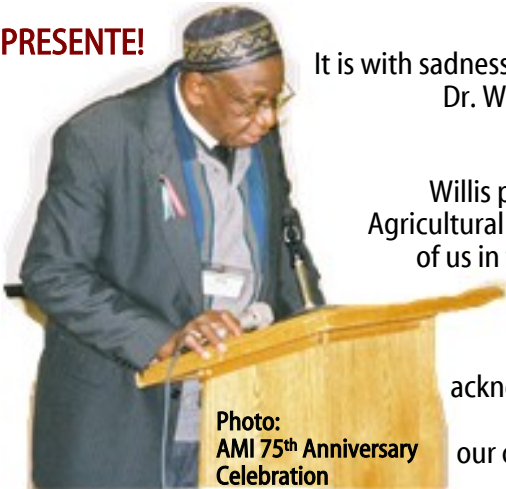


Photo:
AMI 75th Anniversary
Celebration

It is with sadness we announce that our brother Rev. Dr. Willis T. Goodwin passed from this life December 10, 2007 evening.

Willis played a vital role in the evolution of Agricultural Missions, especially as he helped all of us in the AMI organization, recognize the racism in our institutions and practices to struggle with building an Ag-Missions that squarely faces, acknowledges and challenges the reality and the evil of racism in ourselves, our churches, our society and our world.

To say he will be missed is to put it too lightly. He helped build strong foundations and his passing leaves a hole in our lives exactly the size of this giant of men, this pastor, this lover of God and God's Creation.

We will add Willis to the names we remember and proclaim him PRESENTE in the life and struggle of all those who work for justice, peace and a world in which people can live with dignity and grace, **HE IS STILL WITH US!**

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON RACISM & GLOBALIZATION

Agricultural Missions, Inc. and the Federation of Southern Cooperatives are organizing this very important event. The conference will be held at the ELCA Headquarters in Chicago, IL. Further details will be posted on our website soon.

"The work of justice and peace cannot be effectively achieved unless we commit ourselves to work intentionally against the age-old sin of racism."

Battle of the "BULGE" in Behemoth Farm Bill?

Stephen Bartlett

There is something ironic about the current Farm Bill battles occurring in the U.S. Senate. In the Congress of a nation whose agricultural policy, along with that of Europe, has helped either over-feed or under-nourish nearly 2 billion people on the planet, in about equal proportions, we see the display of ego-enhanced and sometimes girthy (how many skinny?) Senators donning their rhetorical shields and swords (certainly not plows and pruning hooks) to hash out how \$100 billion is to be spent, and how much of that money will help them get re-elected either through "pork" or corporate campaign donations. That which we consider progress within the bill and from among its 300 !! some amendments came to the table primarily as the result of long-term education and uphill lobbying efforts by under-funded and out-gunned organizations and coalitions of organizations, some of them partners of Agricultural Missions: to wit, the Building Sustainable Futures (BSF) Campaign and the Diversity Initiative and their member organizations, including the rural Coalition and the Federation of Southern Cooperatives, as well as the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture, not to forget the work of the Farm Bill Religious Working Group, or the regional Farm Bill Task Force operating here in Kentucky.

Agricultural Missions did a Farm Bill & Food Sovereignty Tour this spring, with speakers from the Landless Movement of Brazil (the MST), and the indigenous Mapuche nation of Chile, in conjunction with indigenous movements in Ecuador and elsewhere, together with local farmer spokespersons of the Community Farm Alliance and urban agricultural groups in Ohio and Missouri. Groups close to the grassroots spent many hours across the country educating people about the basic issues being debated in the Farm Bill, how they impact on commodity dumping abroad, and on the healthfulness and distribution of food across the nation. The issue of how to keep family farmers on the land is at the core of this struggle, and as the debate has unfolded, we have not succeeded in making significant structural inroads toward solving that problem: ie eliminating most subsidies and simultaneously enacting a price floor above the cost of production, a grain reserve and some sort of "supply management" system (words anathema to political correctness in D.C.). With agro fuels front and center in this year's debate, and commodity prices at new highs due to demand for ethanol production, the whole debate becomes all that more complex, and all the easier to hide hypocrisy and greed. Full tanks with empty stomachs? For how long will humanity tolerate such a prospect?

Who will benefit from the agro-fuel craze, only corporate giants like Archer Daniels and Midland? Or as one of the Senate amendments attempted; family farmers, even those discriminated against by USDA! In an economy that favors big fish devouring little ones, can a rhetoric-rich program that supposedly will bring greater "national energy independence" stand a fighting chance in debate against a program that would guarantee that family farmers have part ownership and control over the production of energy from farm crops?

What of enforcement of anti-trust laws as regards vertically-integrated agribusinesses? Will the Livestock Title come out of the debate with some teeth and a ban on packer ownership of hogs? Or will the rules of the game be weighted toward disenfranchisement of producers associations in need of justice when they are passed over for contracts? More or less money for Conservation Program?

Will there be any cap on income for those receiving subsidies? If there is, will that be enough to stop commodity dumping abroad and ease the push for undocumented migration into the U.S.? Will cloned food be legalized? Country of origin labels required? Will the U.S. public continue to be guinea pigs in a long-term experiment on the effects of industrially produced, genetically modified, feed lot diseased food on the human organism? Will the structurally impoverished of our society continue to receive sufficient food stamps, school lunches and WIC supplements?

At press time Farm Bills have been passed by both Houses of Congress and now move to Conference Committee to produce a final version next year. With the Farm Bill likely to be stalled or tied up like rolls of blood sausage well into 2008, we can only continue to monitor the fiasco and engage the phones and faxes at strategic moments. Will the Farm Bill be tied to withdrawal of troops from Iraq? Stem-cell research? And if something finally passes both houses, will it be vetoed with a stroke of a lame-duck pen? Tune in to the next episode of this unfolding soap opera "Tainted victuals on the tables of the rich, tainted leftovers for the poor." Or shall we make it a documentary entitled: "Soil Erosion and Mad Cowboy Disease: the Fall of the U.S. Empire?"

For less glib and more detailed information, consult:
<http://www.sustainableagriculture.net/action.php>
<http://www.nffc.net/>
<http://www.globalfarmer.org/>
<http://www.ruralco.org/>





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BLACK BROWN SOLIDARITY

Countering the Divide



Understanding the
realities for farm workers
and food industry workers...

Overcoming divisions...
for further social justice
in society...



AGRICULTURAL MISSIONS, INC.



2008
ANNUAL MEETING
STUDY SESSION

BLACK-BROWN

SOLIDARITY



Countering the Divide

HOSTS

National Farm Worker Ministry
Farm Labor Organizing Committee
Justice at Smithfield Campaign of UFCW
The Beloved Community Center of Greensboro
Southern Faith, Labor & Community Alliance

LOCATION

Franklinton Center at Bricks, Inc.
Whitakers, North Carolina

DATES

February 28-March 1 (Study Session)
March 2 (Board Meeting)