

focus

Newsletter of the Office of the Americas

October, 2001

Volume 18 / Number 3

OFFICE OF THE AMERICAS EIGHTEENTH ANNIVERSARY

Dear Friends:

Eighteen years of OOA! Can you believe it? Little did we know in 1983 that we would be functioning for so long - and there's still much to do.

On the following pages you will read **Office of the Americas in Action**. Hopefully you will continue to support our work. But now let us present to you:

OOA'S HONOREES FOR 2001

BISHOP SAMUEL RUIZ GARCIA

Samuel Ruiz Garcia is Bishop Emeritus of San Cristobal de las Casas, in Chiapas, Mexico. Bishop Ruiz is a three-time Nobel Peace Prize nominee, and human rights activist. When the Zapatista Revolution began in 1994, Bishop Ruiz accepted the role of mediator between the rebels and the Mexican government. His selection was a result of his forty years of service to the people of Mexico. The rebels were certain that while he did not support the armed struggle, he would represent their interests with fairness. One of the key players in the quest for peace in Mexico, Bishop Ruiz signed the Peace Accords at San Andres in 1996. Bishop Ruiz, now retired from his diocese, continues to serve the international ministry by promoting solidarity with the people of the world, peace with justice and dignity, and a full respect for human rights. Bishop Samuel Ruiz Garcia is a co-president of the International Secretariat in Solidarity with the people of Latin America.

Bishop Ruiz' award will be presented by **MARTIN SHEEN**, West Wing President of the United States!

ARIS ANAGNOS

Aris Anagnos was born in Athens, Greece and came to the US in 1946. Aris has been active in many community affairs, principally in the field of human rights around the world, civil rights, civil liberties, social and economic justice, and the Peace movement. He served on the Board of the ACLU of Southern California for over 25 years, including a two-year term as President. Aris was among the founders of the Humanitarian Law Project of the

International Education Development Fund and is currently Executive Vice President of So California Americans for Democratic Action. Aris, and Carolyn, his wife of many years until her death in 2000, were very active in the solidarity movement opposing wars in Central America. Long known for their enormous generosity, in 1989 they established the Peace Center, which houses various peace and human rights organizations, free of charge.

Aris' award will be presented by **ANTONIO VILLARAIGOSA**, former Speaker of the California State Assembly and lifelong human rights activist.

MEDEA BENJAMIN

Medea Benjamin is founding director of human rights organization, Global Exchange. Her most recent work has centered on California's energy crisis. She heads a powerful coalition of consumer, environmental, union and business leaders working for clean and affordable power under public control. Medea's work has also focused on improving the labor and environmental practices of US multinational corporations, and the policies of the WTO, IMF, and the World Bank. Medea is a key figure in the anti-sweatshop movement, having spearheaded campaigns against the giant sports shoe company Nike and clothing companies such as the GAP. While critical of unfair global trade policies, Medea has promoted "fair trade" alternatives that are beneficial to both producer and consumer. In 1999, San Francisco Magazine named Medea to their "Power List" as one of the "60 Players Who Rule the Bay Area."

Medea's award will be presented by **ANGELA SAMBRANO**, Executive Director of CARECEN.

We hope you will join us in paying tribute to our honorees by attending this celebration.

Please note the **new location** for our anniversary celebration:

University Synagogue
11960 Sunset Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA West of the 405 at Saltair

(please see "ANNIVERSARY" on page 4...)

MAY PEACE PREVAIL ON EARTH

As we go to press, we receive the horrible news of the terrorist destruction in New York and Washington, D.C. We offer condolences to the thousands of families affected by these acts of war.

Some of the media have said that this is a new Pearl Harbor. We don't think the analogy is well suited. This is a time for the **GLOBALIZATION OF PEACE MAKING**. The United Nations was established to be part of an International Peace System. Historically the U.N. is a new system. It has many flaws but it also has great potential. Rather than lashing out at "targets" which include innocent civilians and creating a huge international conflict, we must empower the United Nations by means of our economic and political support for its peace making mechanisms. We had hoped that the U.N. would have been the agency to mediate between Palestine and Israel. We had hoped that the UN would have been allowed the jurisdiction that it required in the conflict with Serbia. Now is the time to support the Charter of the United Nations and its Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We must not permit the recent acts of terror to lead us into further international and domestic disasters. Hundreds of billions spent on Star Wars would not have prevented the disaster of September 11, 2001.

THE COALITION FOR WORLD PEACE

With the help of many like-minded people we immediately established THE COALITION FOR WORLD PEACE on Friday, September 14. We called for a large peace vigil at Griffith park which took place on Sunday, September 16. We were overwhelmed with the turn-out and the demand for apprehending the guilty without retribution and vengeance on innocent civilians. A second Vigil for Peace was called for Thursday, September 20th at 5:00 PM at Pershing Square. More will follow.

Here is our statement.

In the wake of Tuesday, September 11th's tragedy, let us unite to express our need and desire for peace. Our compassion for innocent lives lost fills us with grief. We are hurt and we want our community to come together so that we can heal.

We urge our fellow citizens and national leaders to show the world our capacity for reflection, a reasoned response, and restraint. We believe that in a world of violence, no one is safe. While the people responsible for Tuesday's atrocities must be brought to justice, justice and revenge are not synonymous. Vengeance breeds vengeance. It is not just to single out and punish any group of people for the murderous acts of a few individuals. Prejudice only escalates the spiral of hatred that leads to these attacks. If there is any hope for us to create a world where peace prevails, we must each face the challenge that this moment presents us. This is our call to practice compassion in the face of vengeance.

As members of the global community, we pledge to redouble our efforts to build bridges of love, respect and understanding around the world. As we stand on the brink of disaster beyond imagination, we call on

each other to bring an end to violence everywhere and create a future of peace and justice for all humanity. We are one planet, and peace can only reign where justice lives.

Some sanity from the mass media

Bob Herbert, *New York Times*, September 17, 2001

Thousands rallied in response to the tragedy, including the firefighters who were among the first to arrive and who perished by the hundreds. And in that immediate, courageous, cooperative and compassionate response is embodied the very meaning of a great and free nation. On its best days, that is the face America turns to the mirror.

But in the rage that inevitably follows a murderous attack, there is a need to be wary of other, less noble responses. Americans are understandably eager for revenge. But a blind rage that snuffs out the lives of innocents with even more efficiency than the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon would only shame this nation and would not make it any more secure...

The greatest concentration of suffering during this past week has been in lower Manhattan and its surroundings. You cannot stand near that scene for any length of time without experiencing the silent scream of all those who died and all those who loved them. And yet that is where we have exhibited the very best of ourselves.

Terrorism can be fought globally and locally in ways that do not diminish us as a nation, that do not make us afraid to look in a mirror, that do not lower us to the level of the murderous zealots who reduced so much of lower Manhattan to ruins.

*** **

Please indicate on the enclosed response form if you wish to be part of our Urgent Action email Network

coalitionforworldpeace@yahoo.com
afghanwomensmission.org
amnesty-usa.org
unicef.org

OFFICE OF THE AMERICAS IN ACTION

CUBA

We participated in an unusual press conference at THE CONGA ROOM to support the Cuban Musicians who are attending the Latin Grammy Award Celebration here in Los Angeles.

Many musicians were present expressing their disdain that a small group of Cuban exiles living in Miami continue to attempt to exclude these artists from the United States.

NO TO THE FREE TRADE AREA OF THE AMERICAS

Mr. Bush wants to push through Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) which will extend and expand all the negatives of NAFTA to the thirty-four countries in the Americas. This means no safeguards

for human rights, labor rights or the environment. There was no public participation in drafting this FTAA agreement. One of the many harmful elements of the FTAA is the privatization of health care, hospital care, child care, museums, libraries and social assistance. The bill to promote fast track authority for Mr. Bush to implement the FTAA is HR 2149 and is called The Trade Promotion Authority Act. Please contact your Congressperson asking for a NO VOTE on HR 2149.

The massive international demonstrations against NAFTA, FTAA and the WTO are not anti-globalization events.

LARGEST GUERRILLA WAR SINCE VIETNAM

A report this month from the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) maintains that the United States substantially increased military and intelligence assistance to Latin America and formed alliances with brutal and corrupt armed institutions during the 1990's. The report says that the moral solvency of the United States is questionable. Very few U.S. citizens are aware that their country is involved in the largest guerrilla war since Vietnam. "Hundreds of U.S. troops, spies and mercenaries are on the ground in Colombia and neighboring countries."

A SOCIAL PSYCHOSIS

The Star Wars, Space Corps, space lasers, "new models" of nuclear destruction, support for land mines, germ warfare, denial of global warming, betrayal of the anti-ballistic missile treaty, no arms control on the weapons of mass destruction which kill 1,000 people a day (military rifles), abandonment of the nuclear test-ban moratorium, destruction of the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty, to name a few, represents the profound socially psychotic performance of this ill selected administration. We must protest. We must resist.

NICARAGUA DELEGATION

We were a delegation of ten organized to evaluate the pre-election climate in that suffering country. The U.S. Ambassador in Managua, Oliver Garza, has made threatening noises about further military interventions if the Sandinista Party wins the election. We will prepare a 30 page report and make it available to the national media for background briefings on Nicaragua prior to their November elections. Contact our office if you would like a copy of this report.

After evaluating the situation in Managua, we broke up into two groups. Our group went to the Atlantic Coast and focused on Bluefields. In this isolated Caribbean area of Nicaragua we hear English, Spanish, Miskito, Sumo and Creole. This is the poorest area of the poorest country in Latin America after Haiti. The people want the necessary autonomy to suit their unique culture.

The peaceful transition which took place in February of 1990 was a unique example of an armed revolutionary movement (the Sandinistas) yielding power to an opposing party at the ballot box. This civil act has had repercussions throughout Central America and has led to civil, though often questionable politicking, without the violent currents of the past. The Sandinistas

must be given credit for creating this civil atmosphere in Nicaragua.

While impressed with the civil political scene we were struck by the horrible social conditions of Nicaragua. As we experienced a deluge of tropical storms on the Caribbean Coast, the north-west of Nicaragua was suffering a terrible drought. It became so bad that the famished people marched to Managua demanding food. I was reminded of the Irish "potato-famine of the 1850's. There was plenty of food in Ireland at that time but the British would not let the Irish use it. The food was for export to England. Similarly in Nicaragua there have been excellent crops in many areas of the country but the iron fist of "Globalization" and the policies of the World Trade Organization have required exports to the U.S. while some of their our citizens are dying of starvation.

President Aleman is competing with the old Somoza Regime in blatant corruption. He has even tried to continue his reign beyond the law of one term; five years and no reelection. How, after this miserable performance, could a successor from the same party possibly be elected? For the same reason that Mrs. Chamorro was elected in 1990. There is great fear of another U.S. intervention if the Sandinistas win. Our embassy is exploiting those fears just as they did in 1990. Even worse, Mr. Bush is appointing discredited dinosaurs from the Iran/Contra Mercenary War such as: Elliot Abrams, John Negroponte and Otto Reich.

It is wonderful to see the clear and open political criticism within and without the Sandinista Party. Many Sandinistas would have preferred another candidate rather than Daniel Ortega. Many are angry at Ortega for signing a Pact with President Aleman which effectively eliminates numerous parties from the electoral system.

Together with the frank and honest criticism of fellow party members, we think that most of them will stand behind Ortega on election day. For example We met at length with the famous rebel leader Dora Maria Tellez who formed a party that she believed to be more in accord with the goals and objectives of the Sandinista Revolution than the current FSLN. Later that day she signed an agreement with Ortega saying that she would direct her party members to vote for him in November.

COLOMBIA DELEGATION

OOA collaborates with Witness for Peace on an Environmental and Labor Delegation to Colombia from January 15-27, 2002. Registration closes on November 1, 2001. Contact Gail Phares
email: <RPhares105@aol.com> Phone: 919/856-9468.

** Recent book signings for: Guerrillas of Peace on the Air, Blase Bonpane, Red Hen Press, Los Angeles, 2000.

- Dutton's Brentwood
- Skylight Books
- Midnight Special
- Upcoming: The Book Connection, Sunday, October 21, 2001 at 3:00 PM
10932 Pine Street
Los Alamitos, CA
562-430-5578
<www.bookconnect.net>

** OOA is working with CARECEN to produce a video history of the solidarity movement. So much has happened so fast in the past two decades that we must attempt to maintain an accurate historical account.

** Lisa Smithline, Lois Davis and Theresa Bonpane assist Homies Unidos in preparation for their annual fund-raiser. There was an article in The Los Angeles Times Westside Edition for Sunday, September 9th regarding the "Summer of Peace"; a camp for youth at risk which was very successful.

**OOA addresses the Los Angeles Unified School Board and Superintendent on the subject of "Defunding the Junior Reserve Officer's Training Corps."

** OOA worked for the victorious passage of the Santa Monica Living Wage Ordinance. This was a history making event for labor. The Living Wage Movement is being imitated throughout the United States. The effectiveness of the ordinance is demonstrated by the vicious response of the business community. With an arsenal of lies and deceptions business interests are trying to abrogate the law.

Our local SMART organizers are on the job to see that this does not happen.

** We were fortunate to spend an evening with the exiled former governor of El Choco, Colombia, Luis Gilberto Murillo. We met hundreds of people from this African/Colombian area while on a delegation in Colombia. They were gathered in a stadium in Turbo in the Department of Antioquia.

ANNIVERSARY (...continued from page 1)

Our general program from 7:30 to 9:00 PM will be preceded by a very **SPECIAL RECEPTION DINNER** which will be attended by our honorees, Presenters and Celebrity Guests. This year the reception area is much larger and will be more special than ever.

THE OOA HOLIDAY AUCTION will be greatly expanded this year and will be open from 6:30 to 7:30 PM.

OOA'S ANNIVERSARY JOURNAL OF HONOR. You may request a message of your choice to these courageous people for publication in our Anniversary Journal. The deadline for these printed remarks is October 26th.

Join us for an inspirational and motivational celebration on Saturday, November 10, 2001.

In Solidarity,

Theresa and Blase Bonpane

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall deflect more missiles than the Star Wars defense system ever will.

UPCOMING

SEVENTEENTH ANNUAL LATIN AMERICAN ENCUESTRO

"Our Undeclared Wars in Latin America"

Keynote by OOA

Saturday, October 6, 2001

from 10:30 AM to 4:30 PM

Registration begins at 9:30 AM

Throop Memorial Church
300 South Los Robles Avenue
Pasadena

For further information call Ted Shapin
714/633-0922.

"BEHIND THE U.S. PLAN FOR COLOMBIA"

A documentary film in progress by Gerard Ungerman and Audrey Brohy. These dynamic filmmakers will show their film "Hidden Wars of Desert Storm" which is narrated by John Hurt. They will explain their recent trip to Colombia and their plans for the new documentary. This is a fund-raising event at the home of Frank, Jane and Emily Dorrel

Saturday, October 13th at 6:30 PM

Call 310/838-8131 for further information or directions.

To order a copy of "Hidden Wars of Desert Storm" call 818/487-2879 or email: <freewillprod@prodigy.net>

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF SENIOR CITIZENS

OOA presentation on
"The Nicaraguan Elections and
current U.S. Foreign Policy."

Thursday, October 25th at 2: 00 PM
at the Claude Pepper Center
(310/559-9677)

1762 South La Cienega Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90035

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT SANTA BARBARA

OOA presentation on
"Reflections on Liberation Theology and the Catholic Church in the Americas."

Thursday, November 1, 2001, 4:00 PM- 5:30 PM.
Contact Professor Mario Garcia, 805/893-4074.