



About Us

Sombrilla Refugee Support Society is an Alberta-based, Non-Governmental Organization. It was founded in 1985. Today, Sombrilla continues to develop partnerships with Latin American NGO's that share its values in order to assist them in their development.

Sombrilla's Mission: To empower the marginalized communities and people in Latin America so that they may assert their economic, political, environmental, cultural, and social rights; which enables them to improve the conditions and quality of their life in a just and sustainable manner.

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Summer 2005 Newsletter

Returning to the Garden in Entre Ríos By Gustavo Blettler

Entre Ríos (*between rivers*), is a small province in Argentina, reduced equally in size and in industrial development. Historically, it has focused on agriculture and livestock, which has resulted in scarce employment opportunities and increased emigration of the local population. In addition to these endemic problems there are further problems founded in the current situation that Argentina is facing. These include the devaluation of the currency, delayed salary payments, and unemployment that is reaching alarming levels. It has become normal and tolerated that large sectors of the population depend directly on social assistance to survive. The problem goes beyond the structural poverty, which is almost endemic to the region, and is now affecting a new group that is known as the "new poor." These are people who are suffering from a variety of problems, including malnutrition, poor housing and others. However, the "new poor" still hold on to their memories of a better life. I would dare to affirm, even under the risk of making a bold statement, that this is the sector of the population that makes up the principal beneficiaries of this program; this sector of the population that has been made poor and who has been forced to abandon their dreams.

The Return to the Garden Program is being implemented in Argentina by way of Caritas Paraná and it was created with the intention of supporting our brothers and sisters with the most need by providing technical and financial support for small garden and animal raising projects. The "spirit" of the program is to assist those with the most need to escape from poverty, based on their own decision and effort. It is for this reason that the work and



Sombrilla's Executive Director, Rodrigo Loyola, with Gustavo Blettler and project beneficiaries

will of the beneficiary is essential for the program to achieve success. The resources provided by the program are linked directly to the effort put forward by the beneficiary, so as to ensure that support is scaled in direct proportion to the measured progress of the beneficiaries work. Today, when only ten months separate us from the beginning of the program, we can say, with much pride, that many people have improved the quality of their lives thanks to the more than fifty family, community and school gardens that are scattered throughout the Entre Ríos province.

It would be ungrateful and unjust to finish without mentioning that the program was developed initially in the hearts of people that are sensitive and committed to those who are being denied their basic necessities; people who understand poverty as a type of violence and understand effort as a path to overcome. Canadians, Chileans, and Argentineans with a profound sensibility in common, who share the reality of their brothers in the South, who channeled all their effort and energy by way of Sombrilla so as to support the Return to the Garden Program.

Gustavo Blettler is the Program Coordinator for Sombrilla's Argentina School and Community Gardening Development Project (Return to the Garden Program)

Ethnicity and Development

By Rodrigo Loyola

The main development priorities of Sombrilla are: poverty reduction, primary healthcare, basic education and agricultural development. All very large goals when it comes to sustainable development in the underdeveloped nations of Latin America. When analyzing steps towards these goals project managers and coordinators need to take into account all possible social factors that may deter progress of true development. One of these factors not often talked about within development projects is ethnic discrimination or racism. This important social factor can prove to be a considerable inhibitor to any project.

I chose to highlight this topic due to my recent trip to Argentina to monitor our School and Community Gardening Development Project. I have always known that Argentina had a high population of European descendants but when I arrived in Buenos Aires I didn't feel that I was in Latin America at all, I felt more like I was in Paris, France. I don't want to give the wrong impression, there are Mestizos (people of both Spanish and Indigenous racial characteristics) however they are a 20 per cent minority, who live outside the Buenos Aires core, although are now migrating to the capital in search of work. In the province of Entre Rios, which is directly North of Buenos Aires, is where Sombrilla is currently supporting the first of its South American projects.

The first few days of my visit I dedicated to saying absolutely nothing and listening intently to the stories of those who are involved in the project. To my fascination and dismay I listened to what in my perception are very discriminatory remarks regarding Mestizo people. But before I carry on about the issue it is important to understand the current cultural historical context of Argentinean society.

The Spanish conquest of Argentina was not like most of the Latin American countries, solely due to its size. The conquerors worried only about the port capital and not about the interior that is, until after the wars of independence and the rich natural resources of the country needed to be exploited. The Mestizo population, the result of Spanish mixing with the local Guarani indigenous population, led to a culture of people whose primary economic activity was raising cattle. As a result of the first and second world wars many Europeans began migrating to Argentina and specifically to the interior where they could set up colonies, towns based on the European model. These people brought with them a lifestyle dedicated to agriculture. Soon barbed-wire fences went up all over Entre Rios and the local cattle raising Mestizo population found themselves in conflict with the new comers.

The Europeans managed to establish ownership of land and as a result most became wealthy, while the Mestizo population never accomplished this condition. The majority of the Mestizo people had to then rent land or else become squatters on public lands. This is the current context that existed before the Argentinean financial crisis. What effects did the financial crisis have on the Mestizo population? Well not much, they were already accustomed to living under structural poverty. The people who were really affected were the middle class who had savings, the majority of these people of European descent.

Now enters Sombrilla, supported by its community base, to implement a garden project in Entre Rios, Argentina. The majority of the Agricultural engineers leading the project are of European descent while most of the people they are helping, although not exclusively, are Mestizo people. Now getting back to the discriminatory comments. Through my observations I noticed that the old stereotypes of Mestizo people that had been developed by the European descendants was still an issue to be overcome. At every meeting I went to with local agricultural engineers I began to express my concern and suggested options for them. As a result of the monitoring trip new social indicators will be added to the project that will focus on eradicating ethnic discrimination by introducing community development methodologies. We will concentrate on breaking down the old concepts of European vs. Mestizo or "us" and "them" to a new way of describing community solely as: "we". By overcoming this challenge we will solidify not only how people within Entre Rios think of themselves, but how they think of their country, their continent and finally the world. Likewise, if we can realize this, we can ask the same questions about Canadian society. After all, "we" are the global community working towards that other world that is possible.

Sombrilla's 2005 Annual General Meeting

In October, Sombrilla will be celebrating its 18th AGM in Edmonton, Alberta. We encourage all of our readers to visit our website often during the coming months for further information on the date and location of the AGM. Sombrilla encourages all those who are interested in its work to attend the AGM.

Guatemala's Femicide

By Swamy Denisse De León Contreras

Guatemala, the country of eternal spring, a beautiful country full of green majesty, a multicultural, multilingual and multiethnic country whose beauty is increasingly dulled by the horror of war, suffering, marginalization, racism and male chauvinism. Its history is written in all its aspects with blood. Speaking of its history is to refer to before, during and after the 36 year Armed Conflict. I make reference to its history so that we will not forget the bloody history that Guatemala has lived for more than two centuries.

Today, 9 years since the signing of the Peace Accords, Guatemala remains immersed in pain, agony, suffering and fear. Violence against women has increased at an alarming rate since 2002. It is the primary mechanism of domination and imposition of power. It submits women to involuntary action, feeling and thought. It subordinates women by way of fear; a reality that has demonstrated its existence through history.

According to studies by the country's Human Rights Ombudsman, Guatemala is the fifth highest ranking country in which more women die by violent deaths, proportional to the total population. In a press conference, Sergio Morales, the Human Rights Ombudsman, is quoted as saying "if the current tendencies remain the same in Guatemala, the country could soon rank second in the world."

The online magazine *Hablemos*, January 2005, describes the following statistics: "the increase in female homicide since 2002 has increased from 5.52 to 8.66 women killed for every 100,000 people in 2004."

The current statistics for 2005 are not clear because the National Civil Police, PNC, have reported fewer deaths than media sources. According to media reports, from 2002 until June of 2005 there are a total of 1500 female deaths that have been reported, the majority of which have been deaths by excessive violence. From January 2005 to June 2005, 312 women have been brutally killed. The majority of the women killed are housewives, students, professionals, and are overwhelmingly from poorer sectors of the population.



"She had been raped, her hands and feet tied with barbed wire, she had been strangled and put in a bag - they kept on telling me not to get so worked up"

Rosa Franco
Mother of Maria Isabel Franco,
murdered in December 2001

"The State's failure to bring to justice those responsible for the atrocities committed during the internal armed conflict or to provide reparations to the victims and their families has left a terrible legacy. The continuing general pattern of impunity has meant the perpetrators of past human rights violations have evaded criminal prosecution and has contributed to a spiralling level of violence in society and continuing human rights violations."

Source: Amnesty International: Guatemala: No protection, no justice: Killings of women in Guatemala

They are women with low-paying jobs, women who work as maids, and who work in small businesses or factories. Another group consists of migrant workers coming from other Central American countries, while others have been members or former members of gangs. Another group has been women who are employed in the sex trade. The age range of the women who are falling victim to these horrible deaths is ranging from 14 to 86 years old.

To date, not one person who is responsible for these killings has been charged. Guatemala continues to suffer from the loss of 1500 women and young girls who have been killed and the Guatemalan authorities have not even taken the interest necessary to stop these crimes or to investigate who is responsible.

The fact that the Guatemalan government has lacked the interest to even engage in this issue, speaks to their complicity, and role as a principal actor in this national problem. Mothers who have lost daughters have arrived at local police stations to lay charges and the police investigators have not even reacted or even initiated the proper investigations. This demonstrates the negligence, despotism and abuse which provokes the re-victimization of mothers on behalf of the state and judicial authorities.

Martín-Baró warned about the division of society by way of an "ethical mirror" which makes either side consider themselves in terms of "them" and "us", "the good" and "the bad". Each group being separated by an insurmountable abyss, in which common sense cannot exist. In which a lie hides reality while simultaneously strengthening the idea that the only solution for violence is to meet it with more violence. "Almost without noticing we have accustomed ourselves to the idea that institutions are exactly the opposite of what they were created to represent: those who are to safeguard our security have converted themselves into the principal source of insecurity, those who are given the responsibility of justice support abuse and injustice; those who are to lead and give direction to us are the first to deceive and manipulate us.



Latin America's New Voice By Álvaro José Loyola

Sunday, July 24th marked the unveiling of Latin America's new satellite based television channel based in Caracas, Venezuela. A multilateral partnership between the governments of Venezuela, Argentina, Cuba and Uruguay, Telesur will aim to provide Latin America with television programming from a Latin American perspective. The goal is to support the process of Latin American Integration.

"To see ourselves is to know ourselves, to know ourselves is to respect ourselves, to respect ourselves is to learn to care for ourselves, and to care for ourselves is the first step toward our integration"

Source: www.telesurtv.net

The main proponent of this initiative has been Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, whose government has contributed 70 percent of Telesur's financing and owns 51 percent control of the channel.

The television channel intends to displace *CNN en español* as the primary news network for Latin America. In contrast to this US based Spanish news agency, Telesur intends to provide programming relevant to the Latin American community, from a perspective that is contextually appropriate for the majority of people living the reality of Latin America.

In stark opposition to Telesur, the US House of Representatives passed an amendment calling for the U.S. to begin broadcasting its own channel into the region in order to battle the new television channel. President Hugo Chavez responded saying: "we will take measures to neutralize the attempt."

Domestically, Telesur represents Chavez's attempt to equal the playing field with the Venezuelan media establishment; whose coverage of Venezuelan reality grows increasingly strident. There are specific concerns relating to the media's questionable links to unconstitutional forces that have attempted to destabilize the Venezuelan state in recent years.

Leaving all debate aside, it is clear that the implications of this new channel in Latin America are very important. In a time when the governments of Latin America must increasingly define themselves in the face of increased economic and political hegemonic integration, Telesur represents an alternative that speaks to Bolivarian ideals; an alternative process that supports national and regional projects that hold the development of Latin America as a core value. As Latin America struggles to leave behind the mass graves and disappearances that characterized the era of military rule, it is necessary for visionary leaders to emerge with these types of projects. Civil society, both within Latin America and throughout the world, recognizes the importance of governments that truly believe in their countries development.

In much the same way that the CBC represents the Canadian attempt to promote cultural sovereignty and Canadian perspectives on world events, Telesur will attempt to do the same for those living the reality of Latin America. As Canadians, we should clearly recognize the need for this.

Sombrilla's New Public Engagement Strategy By Desiree Schell

Although I have only very recently taken on the role of Event Coordinator at Sombrilla, we have been busy organizing a very exciting year. At a recent strategic planning meeting, it was decided that the Public Engagement Committee's goals for this year would be to increase the awareness and support of our organization. We chose strategies that will broaden our membership base, increase the involvement of current members, and attract volunteers. We have planned a holistic approach; In September we will present a movie dealing with an issue of importance to Latin America, in October we will host a debate on the topic of that movie, and in November we will hold a workshop offering practical methods of responding to the issues addressed in the movie and the debate. Then we will do it all over again, starting with a different issue. We strongly feel that in order for people to become truly involved in Latin America and in Sombrilla, they must become aware of all sides of an issue, and be provided with the tools to become engaged.

In addition to these activities, we are also planning a gala! This will be a wonderful opportunity for all of Sombrilla's past, current and future supporters to connect and share an evening of experiences and entertainment. We would love both members and non-members to be a part of these activities; anyone interested is welcome and encouraged to call the office and volunteer. Whatever time or skills you have to contribute would be much appreciated!

Keep watching our new-and-improved website at www.sombrilla.ca for all the details on our upcoming events!

The 2006 Social Forum of the Americas Caracas, Venezuela

Preparation has already begun for the 2006 Social Forum of the Americas in Caracas, Venezuela. Forum planners are currently conducting a "thematic consultation" in which interested members of Civil Society can participate in formulating the areas of intervention that the Forum will have.

The Forum will be held between January 24th and 29th, 2006 in Caracas, Venezuela. For all of those who are interested in attending or supporting the forum, information can be found at:

<http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/>

2005 Heritage Days Festival Edmonton, Alberta

Sombrilla would like to thank all those volunteers who came out to support Sombrilla at the 2005 Heritage Days Festival in Edmonton, Alberta. Sombrilla especially thanks the organizers of the Peruvian Pavilion who generously donated space for Sombrilla to sell its fair trade merchandise. Sombrilla is very interested in maintaining an excellent working relationship with the Peruvian community in Edmonton.

Sombrilla also extends its gratitude to all those who supported Sombrilla by purchasing the fair trade merchandise that was on sale. The entire weekend raised approximately \$850, of which all will be used to purchase new products from cooperatives in Guatemala and Argentina. Sombrilla encourages all those who are interested to keep informed with respect to future events.

Urgent Appeals - Guatemala

During this past year, the increased number of public demonstrations including the opposition to mining activities, the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), and others has been met with increased insecurity within Guatemala. Specifically, human rights activists and community organizers are becoming victims of assassinations and threats. Sombrilla is asking its readers to take action on the following issues:

1. HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST ASSASSINATED – Alvaro Juárez, 64 years old, was assassinated on the night of July 8. According to the Unity of Protection for Human Rights Defenders, he was eating dinner with his wife at his house in San Benito Petén when heavily armed men arrived at the door. His wife went back into the kitchen. Then she heard shots. When she returned to the room where her husband had been, she found him dead.

Mr. Juárez played a leadership role in the Alliance for Life and Peace and was also a member of the Association of the Displaced of the Petén. He was working on issues of development related to health, education, land, housing, and humanitarian assistance. He was also working against impunity in the Petén and often denounced injustice, corruption, and abuses of authority committed by the National Civil Police.

The Association of Displaced of the Petén is a member of the Alliance for Life and Peace, a network of organizations that has been carrying out campaigns against the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) and against the construction of hydroelectric dams in the Petén.

2. COMMUNITY ORGANIZER THREATENED - Mario Antonio Godínez López, the General Coordinator for the Association for the Promotion and Development of the Community (CEIBA), received a fax on July 7 that threatened not only him but the organization for which he works. Since receiving this fax Mario Godínez has gone into hiding.

Mario Godínez has recently coordinated and strengthened work against mining concessions authorized for nineteen communities in Huehuetenango. He has also been very active in the struggle against the Central American Free Trade Agreement. His organization participated in the demonstration against CAFTA in March that left one campesino with injuries requiring the amputation of a leg, and one teacher dead, the victim of an extrajudicial execution. CEIBA is supporting the Campesino Unity Committee, a co-plaintiff in the law suit related to the teacher's murder. On March 16, the day after the demonstration, unidentified, armed men went to Godínez's office and asked for the director of CEIBA or the deputy director of CEIBA. Mario Godínez was not in the country at the time.

NOTE: Sombrilla has worked closely with CEIBA during the past four years as they provide training for Reproductive Health Promoters in the communities of the CPR. CEIBA has been an important partner which is why Sombrilla feels closely linked to this issue.

For more information and for requested actions please visit the Sombrilla website at: www.sombrilla.ca

Developments in Honduras

By Dave Hubert

El Cipres and Las Flores are two of the five villages in the province of Cortez, in Honduras, where Accion Christiana por la Paz (ACP) is active. ACP is the Honduran partner of Christian Peacemakers International (CPI) one of the partner agencies covered by the Sombrilla umbrella. Developments at El Cipres/Los Flores are indicative of things that are occurring throughout the local area.

- **Community store:** Fourteen families in Las Flores took out a micro-loan of 20,000 Lempira (about US\$1,200.) to buy inventory for their own co-operative store. The loan was repaid in eight months, and now the community has the convenience of its own small retail store, and the profit from the store goes to the people in the village.
- **Tilapia:** A pond for raising tilapia was dug at the experimental farm operated by the project in El Cipres. The first crop of tilapia has been harvested. To acquaint the community with the tilapia, each of the 70 students at the El Cipres elementary school was given a fish to take home. The rest of the tilapia was sold to recover the cost of the fish food.
- **Silos:** Fifteen 28 gauge sheet metal silos were manufactured in the conference center at the experimental farm by a youth trained by the project. These silos were sold to peasants who took out 1,300 Lempira micro-loans (US\$68) to purchase them. The peasants will store maize in them when it is harvested. The silos will keep the corn dry and free of insects and rodents. The corn will be stored for three to five months until the price doubles near the end of the six month growing cycle. The peasants plan to repay the cost of the silos in three six month growing cycles.
- **Botiquines:** Both El Cipres and Las Flores have recently received OTC medications to supply small community *botiquines* (dispensaries). The *botiquines* respond to illnesses like diarrhea, colds, tooth aches and minor injuries. In August each of the *botiquines* will be equipped with a Spanish edition of Where There is No Doctor.
- **Scholarships:** Two women from El Cipres have obtained scholarships to enrol in a public health nursing program. They will serve as volunteer nurses when their training is completed. The nursing program will be offered on weekends in the nearby town of Santa Cruz.
- **Peace building:** During our last visit to the project in May, the Board of ACP, including Julia Munoz and Reyna Hernandez, Board representatives of the villages of El Cipres and Las Flores respectively, asked for resources to address the problem of domestic violence and violence against women and children. This is part of the peacemaking commitment the Board of ACP has undertaken.



Gardens much like these will be implemented in the rural CPR communities of Chajul

Guatemala: Dental and Nutrition Project

UPDATE:

Staff and volunteers are hard at work ensuring that next year brings ADIM-CPR, our long-time partner in Guatemala, a new project that builds on the results we have achieved by way of two consecutive primary health care projects.

Continuing in partnership with the group Kindness in Action, based out of St. Paul, Alberta, both Sombrilla and Kindness in Action intend to implement a new model for dental training in the rural CPR communities of Chajul. Working with an already well established local project team, the project will train community dental health promoters by way of a structured module based training program.

Furthermore, this initiative will include a nutrition component that focuses on family gardening and seed banking as a means to decrease rates of malnutrition in the northern area of Chajul.

If you are interested in acquiring more information on this initiative, or are interested in supporting it, please contact the Sombrilla office.

Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA): A Costly Victory

By Erwin Pérez for Incidencia Democrática

www.i-dem.org - July 28, 2005

The fragile economic situation of Guatemala due to low investment, poor fiscal management, and the low possibility of increasing national production, added to by the fact that an increasing number of families are falling into poverty, makes one think that the free trade agreement between the Dominican Republic, the United States, and the countries of Central America approved last night in Washington, will not have the positive impact that people associate to it. It grows increasingly difficult to believe that the dramatic situation of our current economy will change with the implementation of this new agreement. One only needs to observe the U.S. House of representatives, who enjoy much more competitive advantage, had to engage in long debate and conflict in order to ratify the trade agreement.



The simplest analysis that can be done of the results of last night in Washington is that in light of being the country with the most benefits from the trade agreement, it encountered difficulties in passing the agreement. If the U.S., being the one of the largest economies of the world, did not approve of the agreement by overwhelming majority, how is it possible for the countries of Central America to have hope that the trade agreement will come to resolve the problems facing their economies? Within any analysis it is important to highlight that the economic vulnerability that affects Guatemala, will hinder the ability of its traditional *criollo* commercial class to compete effectively with U.S. transnational corporations. It is after all, only giving the benefit of the doubt to local Guatemalan entrepreneurs, in the hope that they will attempt to improve and expand their production, increase their local investments and consequently create more employment in Guatemala.

The reality of CAFTA is that there is no room for mistakes. If the opening of borders permits an increased amount of foreign products into the local market, the natural result will have foreign competitors destroy an already weak national entrepreneurial sector, that is, except for those strong companies that belong to oligarchic families of Guatemala. However, even those companies have never demonstrated an interest in developing Guatemala, but instead have focused on investing outside of it.

In terms of the Guatemalan family, the situation becomes increasingly difficult. During the last year and a half there has been a steady increase in the price of the basic basket of goods, which includes the minimum requirements to meet the basic protein and energy needs of a family of six members. This increase has been of 97.29 Quetzales during the last 12 months.

The criteria upon which to evaluate the positive impacts of approving the CAFTA are quite honestly hard to identify; even for those who consider its ratification a victory; because the results of the vote demonstrate an important division in U.S. politics. 217 votes in favour are not particularly comfortable in the face of 215 votes against the passing of the agreement. Statistically this represents a virtual tie.

In political terms it is perfectly reasonable to affirm with absolute certainty that this has been a costly victory for the Bush administration and its free trade agenda. This process demonstrates that there exist fears and resistance to further opening of the U.S. economy to international markets. The political costs for the rest of the countries who are participating in this trade agreement are also important. Violent protests in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala, are a sign of these costs. In addition to this, the shameful attitude of the Central American leaders, who supposedly are our "heads of state," who decided fly to Washington to lobby in favour of this trade agreement, will surely prove costly. It seems unlikely that this approach towards CAFTA will be forgotten during the next presidential elections.

Bishop Ramazzini meets with World Bank and Glamis Officials

The Social Justice Committee of Montreal is pleased to acknowledge the success of the visit to Canada of Bishop Alvaro Ramazzini. He met with NGOs and church groups in Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto, and with Canadian government officials, to discuss aspects of a controversial mine project in Guatemala.

The Bishop took part in a public panel discussion on June 1 at Concordia University, with representatives of Glamis Gold and the World Bank, which is providing financing for the mine. In the panel discussion, James Schenck, Manager for Sustainable Development for the Glamis' Marlin project in Guatemala, committed to dialogue and offered access to the mine site to Bishop Ramazzini and any persons of the Bishop's choosing. This would include Dr. Robert Moran, a critic of the mine's environmental impact assessment who has been unable to visit the site.

"I am very happy with this trip to Canada. All of my objectives were met. I am particularly happy about the possibility of future dialogue both with Glamis and the Canadian government." Bishop Ramazzini said. "I look forward to taking up the offer to visit the mine, and the Canadian government's offer for a meeting with Ambassador Lambert in Guatemala."

Social Justice Committee coordinator Derek MacCuish, who moderated the panel discussion, said he appreciated the willingness of Glamis Gold and World Bank representatives to come to Montreal to engage in a public dialogue.

The Social Justice Committee sponsored Bishop Ramazzini's visit to Canada, in partnership with the Peace and Conflict Resolution Series at Concordia University.

Many thanks to our long time partners:



Youngsters from the community of Santa Clara, in the county of Chajul, Guatemala

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