LATIN AMERICAN CONCERNS COMMITTEE
REPORT TO PACIFIC YEARLY MEETING ANNUAL SESSION 2017

In 1997, PYM Annual Session established a standing Latin America Concerns Committee to gather and disseminate information to Pacific and other Yearly Meetings regarding Friends groups and service projects in Latin America with special attention to Casa de los Amigos in Mexico City, El Salvador Project and Guatemala Friends Scholarship Program. The intention is to support rather than replace spirit-led projects already supported by Monthly Meetings, Worship Groups and individual Friends.

LACC has met three times since last annual session. This Annual Session we are assisting Dr. Marco Antonio Lopéz Galicia, Executive Director of Casa de los Amigos, in attending. He will be presenting an Interest Group to inform PYM about the many programs at the Casa and report on last years 60th Anniversary celebration. During an Affinity Group time, he will offer an Interest Group titled “Light: A discussion of thanatology, Quakerism/Faith and Practice, and Yoga”. His specialty is the study of final affairs/death and yoga. His talk will include his experience of Light in Quakerism.

In response to Child Refugee immigration issues in 2014, LACC formed a subcommittee. LACC has discerned to lay down the separate subcommittee and fold that work into the committee as a whole.

SUBMITTED BY Donna Smith, Clerk

The following are reports of the work of Casa, El Salvador Project and Guatemala Friends Scholarship:

Casa de los Amigos Activities Report, fiscal year 2016

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It has been almost a year since we started a new phase in Casa de los Amigos, with the arrival of the new director, Marco Antonio López, “Toño” for friends, who was chosen for his background to direct the Casa with the approval of the Asamblea.

We now have a three year plan in place that has given us direction and a horizon towards which we are moving. It has given us goals to direct our efforts to continue service, hospitality, peacebuilding, community, the protection of the environment, and living a spirituality inspired by Quakerism. With these efforts we can provide a place of welcome and hope to the guests who visit us and for the migrants and refugees that we support. The year’s work has included active listening sessions with everyone involved in the Casa, transparency about resources and information, as well as reference to Quaker principles of Integrity, Community, Unity with Nature, Equality, Simplicity, and Peace. Through it all we have been working with the guidelines of the Asamblea of the Casa, which has the authority to guide the direction of the Casa.

Thank you very much to our Quaker and other friends who supported us this year. The Casa is possible thanks to their support. It is the work of good intentions and of Quaker inspiration, as we defend human rights and build a world of understanding and peace. Below is a summary of this year’s accomplishments.

1. **Hospitality Program.**
This year we had a change in Hospitality Coordination. Lis Reséndiz is now the Hospitality Coordinator, after years of involvement with the Casa, and has been doing strong, good work, promoting hospitality and an atmosphere of being at home. We are reviewing our hospitality model and will have changes for 2017 that will permit us to bring better service to our guests. We received diverse groups: from Haverford, a Quaker university doing a migration field study, to human rights groups such as “la Caravana de Madres” that are looking for their disappeared migrant children. Among other relevant collaborations, some of the activities were:

- Housing 9 groups doing learning tours; about 60 students came to live with us during their tour.
- Support to 24 organizations for their meetings in the Casa facilities.
- Strengthening of our hosting process.
- Our breakfast, which is open to the public for 35 pesos, was able to support more than 60 migrants and refugees that have had breakfast for free every day.
- We hosted 1897 guests and had 2620 visits from persons who participated to the House activities.
- Thanks to the San Diego Friends Meeting we could repair our historic building, by investing about $ 500,000 Mexican pesos.
- We celebrated the 60th anniversary of the Casa during 5 days in October, 2016. Approximately 300 persons visited us for this occasion.
2. **Volunteer Program.**

This program is one of the most important for the Casa, a chance to receive those who want to have an experience of service. In 2016 our model expanded to a formative experience based on the testimonies of Quakerism, with the idea that a transformative experience can make them agents of change in their communities and places of work. During learning tours with Redlands and Haverford Universities, students from the United States could learn about the realities of migration, refugees and economic justice of the country. We continue with the formative experiences of the volunteer team. This year we had a total of 24 volunteers; 11 full time (foreigners and Mexicans), 4 external volunteers, 3 doing their social service requirement, 1 for internship and 4 during the summer. Of our achievements we’d like to highlight:

- Participation in the Casa de los Amigos spring picnic, with participation of about 70 persons.
- Creation of the Volunteer’s Care model based on the Quakers values.
- 5 community-building activities with volunteers (birthdays, meals and a team integration activity). 17 persons of the staff participated in the activities.
- 4 work projects generated by volunteers: a project to strengthen Tochan, a migrant shelter with which we are associated; a project to investigate installing a green roof for the Casa; a project concerning spirituality in the Casa; a project to improve our reception space and techniques; and an environmental program.
3. Human Mobility Program.

This year, the program experienced great changes in concept and operation. Conceived at first as the “Peace Programs”, concentrating on migration, economic justice and the environment, now it relates to the distinct types of the worldwide flow of people: the migration phenomenon, the asylum applicants and refugees, as well as the people requiring humanitarian support. It has been re-named “Human Mobility” in order to recognize the global analysis of what International Law designates as the “migration flows and mixed movements”.

In 2016, thanks to the support and the donations of our Quaker friends around the world, from our sympathizers and donors, Casa de los Amigos turned itself into the best place to receive people seeking for asylum and refugees. We built a new model called “healing-caring hosting”. We believe that in 2017 we will be able to achieve even better results that will benefit migrant people and refugees.

During this year we consolidated our association with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Mennonite Central Committee, Quaker Hilfe and the Internacional Organization for Migration of the United Nations. Results included:

- Support for the Monseñor Romero Committee, which is the direct administrator of the “Tochán” shelter.
- Support for three “local integration” activities, such as intercultural walks at Casa Refugiados, benefitting 40 caring-hosting guests.
- Participation in an International meeting in Guatemala with the Mennonite Central Committee, in order to generate a program of action for 2016.
- Caring-hosting of 60 migrants, refugees and asylum solicitors, from nationalities such as: Haiti, Cameroon, Togo, Venezuela, Iraq, Iran, Jamaica,
Congo, Nigeria, Senegal, Democratic Republic of Congo, Pakistan and Russia, including women, families, children, transsexual persons, extra-continents and people without Spanish language skills.

- Participation in 4 networks of impact: a. network of the Mennonite Central Committee Members; b. network of migrant and refugee shelters of Mexico City; c. Pacific Yearly Meeting and the Latin-American Affairs Committee, to generate a “good practices” exchange with our Quaker friends from the United States (where at annual sessions we made a presentation) and d. Impact Network about Migration in Mexico City, in conjunction with iipsoculta and the American Friends Service Committee.
- Dispensing 50 packets of basic food supplies for economic migrants who arrive at our door.
- Meetings with associates of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.


This year, Economic Justice turned into its own program. We had challenges in the program implementation since it was delegated to coordinators and volunteers that alternated for its implementation. Nevertheless, during the year we pursued the following activities, with these results:

- Strengthening of the “point of sale” in the Casa, with participation of cooperatives. We collaborate with: Pankizaske, Flor de Mazahua, Las Patronas, and Cimarronez. During the year approximately 500 products were promoted with the guests of the Casa.
- Five presentations of “cinemoneda” about themes related to economic justice, environment consciousness and migration. About **80 personas** attended these presentations during the year.
- Involvement with the “Red Tlaloc” and “Feria Multitruke Mixihuca”, which practice an alternative economy model (solidarity economic exchange) between consumers and producers, using an alternative money called mixiuhas.
- Integrating a **new associate** for the solidarity point of sales, IIPSOCULTA, with products coming from villages of Puebla and Guerrero.
- **Hosting the multitruke Mixihuca fair** in Casa de los Amigos during the 60th Anniversary of the Casa, engaging approximately **100 persons** among associates and Casa visitors.
- **Participation** in the activities of the “Eco-Systemic Dialogs” in the Modern Art Museum, in December 2016. We shared about the work of the Casa in front of **70 persons** approximately. Knowledge about auto-sustainability models was exchanged with other organizations.
5. **Environment.**

This year we created the Environment Program, where we are proposing actions that are practical as well as pedagogical, recognizing the crisis of environmental pollution and our ecological footprint. In 2017 our priority will be to base our work on the United Nations Guide for Sustainable Development, 2030. The year included these activities:

- Turning kitchen waste into compost, care of the plants and green spaces, and maintenance of the water captation system and of the solar hot water heater.
- Petition to a friendly enterprise in order to obtain solar energy cells in 2017.
- Green Roof Project, which will be presented to Quaker meetings in the United States in 2017.

6. **Peace and Spirituality.**

Quaker social action is the fruit of the faith and practice of the Friends. This relationship reveals the meaning of the actions of Casa de los Amigos, to give a context that transcends the routine character of the actions undertaken by the members of the community. This is one of the fundamental goals of this program, as well as promoting in the community social action and the universal values that sustain it. The program of Peace and Spirituality is one of the pillars of our work. These are this year’s results:
• Celebration of International Quaker Day, the 2nd of October. 18 persons participated during the diverse activities, including refugees’ hosts. The day was ended with a shared meal.

• Three meetings of conflict resolution listening space.

• Attendance of the Director of Casa de los Amigos at the Quarterly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends in South California.

• Participation in the 60th anniversary of the Casa.

• During the days 19 and 20 of November we took part in the XLI General Reunion de los Amigos in México, an event of about 70 persons. This involved the coordination of hospitality to house and care for the event participants. The Casa team was represented at the event, including helping to write the epistle.

We share the status of projects to be developed for Casa de los Amigos:

1. **Casa de los Amigos: El Libro.** The book project was not presented in the time agreed upon by exdirector Nicolas Wright. It does not seem clear whether this is a project of the Casa or a personal project. He was asked to submit a formal end date and to submit a financial statement of donations collected, to be presented at the 2017 Asamblea meeting.

2. **60th Anniversary:** the 60th anniversary of the Casa was celebrated during the days 19, 20, 21, 22 and 23 of October 2016. A lot of friends accompanied us, we calculate that we had the visit of approximately **300 persons** in total during the 5 days. The logo of the 60th anniversary was designed and we recommend using it in 2017, 2018 and 2019 in order to make visible lifetime of Casa de los Amigos. We also received as a donation by SCQM EUA a commemoration video of the 60th anniversary:
3. **San Miguel de Allende house:** The repairs of the San Miguel de Allende house, given by Marylu Mattson, were started. Approximately $40,000 Mexican pesos were invested in 2016 for repairs, with a similar investment in 2017. The Casa expenses for 2017 are calculated at $350,000 pesos, among legal work on the title, payment of services, benefits and property. The proposal of making this project sustainable rests with the Asamblea, which will decide its use.

![Image of San Miguel de Allende house](image)

**Casa de los Amigos received an important donation, we received from Marylu Mattson and Linda Day a generous donation that will give place to the Quaker Center Fundation of International Peace “Marylu Mattson and Elena González” in San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato.**

4. **Proposed productive project for the point of sale at Casa de los Amigos number 134:** The project of an international meeting and promotion of peace and Quakerism will be presented in 2017 offering food, coffee, services, gallery, sale of books, sale of economic justice products and serve as a forum for the community.

5. **Educational project proposal “Quaker University of Mexico”:** It is proposed to create the educational project of higher level studies so that with prior processing and authorization of the Registry of Official Educational Validity (RVOE), the Law Degree with a humanistic approach can be taught, based on Quaker values, without affecting the activities already established in the House.
6. Change of Statutes of the House: The changes and modifications to the Statutes of the House have been managed, in which the Quaker inspiration, the human rights defense component and the educational component were incorporated in the social object.

7. Positioning the House as a historic building. This quarter we began the work to position the House as historical place of the city. We will take advantage of the recognition of artistic place by INBA, and a series of tourist tours are being programmed to the House. As part of possible actions, a promotional video that appeared on national television, you can consult the video at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sy1q0dFSs7I

2. Participation at 3 high level reunions from members of ACNUR where Casa de los Amigos distinguished itself by presenting impact results in the way that the asylum seeker are managed in the Casa.

a. Website and Social Network.

En 2016 we re-started our Facebook page with 4338 followers. We updated the Spanish webpage of the Casa. The update of the English page is pending. Likewise the communication medium of “Lo que pasa en la Casa” (“What happens in the Casa”) was re-started, resolving problems with the host server (wa subscription of 60USD per month). At the end of December 2016 we reached 5000 followers of the Casa on Facebook, the social network where we follow up the daily activities of the Casa.

b. Lo Que Pasa en la Casa (What happens in the Casa).
The document “Lo que pasa en la Casa” was published, being sent to the Constant Contact contacts (attached). During 2016 we sent 2 documents about what happens in the Casa received by 4900 contacts. We now have about 4900 contacts backed up. We also sent during December the information about the activities of this term to the friends and donors of the Casa. (annexes)

All of the information of this report has been provided by the staff of Casa de los Amigos in their respective working themes and if necessary it was completed by the Executive Director. This report corresponds to the period from 1st of January 2016 to 31st of December 2016.

Mexico City, 20th of February 2017.

Dr. Marco Antonio López Galicia.
Executive Director

EL SALVADOR PROJECT

Director’s Report: Robert Broz

I approach this report joyfully, eager to share news of several wonderful developments – a new component of our University student loan
program, a service learning trip to El Salvador July 23-August 2, the addition of several promising students to our loan recipient group thanks to your generosity in 2016, impressive progress by the students we assist, and even a surprise donation from a young man we supported years ago! As always, I’ll give you my perspective “from the ground” on events in El Salvador. I hope you’ll enjoy reading my report, just as I enjoy my part in an on-going conversation with you, my kindred spirits.

**Expanded programs, thanks to your generosity!**

I confess that I often dread the months of January and February, when my days fill with project work that includes meeting with loan applicants and their families (sometimes visiting their homes) to be well informed as I face difficult selection decisions. I also meet with and approve students from four projects who apply to stay in our coed student house, financed in cooperation with several groups. Managing the student house usually requires renovation of furnishings, painting, other minor house repairs, and computer maintenance, all of which are my responsibilities. After selecting the limited number of applicants we can support, we hold a meeting to orient both new and continuing students about project policies. Some of this work is emotional and stressful, especially in years when budget restrictions require us to reduce spending. This year was different! Two things happened that launched the year with joy for me and others, making me feel truly blessed about what I do.

In mid-January, the El Salvador Projects Treasurer reported that for the first time in many years donations had exceeded our expectations. Normally I fear that the budget I proposed in November will have to be reduced at our January meeting, but for the first time in over six years your generosity
enabled us to cover that budget without tapping the small reserve we have had to nibble down in the recent past. Without prompting, two Committee members suggested that we increase the 2017 budget to support new students we would otherwise have had to turn away. At my request, a modest fund was approved to support the science lab in the school in El Barío, which has not been fully equipped or well used since its construction several years ago. For some time, I have dreamed about strengthening high school academics in El Barío by improving the conditions of the school. Now, I believe, we can take steps to do just that!

Why did donations increase in 2016? Some of you may have given more than usual to honor the memory of my mother, Carmen Broz, who died in 2015. Some may have decided to give now, knowing the need, rather than to leave funds in a bequest for a future donation. Some may have felt a yearning for positive action after reacting with shock and disbelief to the 2016 elections. Whatever the explanations, by enabling us to support more students you’ve filled the year ahead with promise and made my work more rewarding and less stressful. Thank you!

A welcome voice from the past, and an unexpected gift

There was yet more news ahead, to lift my heart and soul. Soon after our January committee meeting I received a Facebook message that seemed
much like the suspicious messages that are all too common, bringing risk of identity theft and other scams. It was from a man whose name I did not recognize at first, claiming to be a Salvadoran living in Louisiana. He asked for my phone number, saying “Mister Broz, I need to talk to you.” Politely, I asked how he knew me, and how I might be able to help him. He replied that he was Chamba, a student we had allowed to stay in the student house 2007-2009, although he was not supported by any of the sponsoring groups. He was working full-time and studying on his own at night to become an electrician, he was from a village in the Suchitoto area, and he knew students in the house. I recalled that after finishing his two-year technical degree, the strain of a full study schedule and reduced employment hours prevented him from continuing on his dream of becoming an electrical engineer at the National University, so he left for the U.S. hoping for financial betterment. To my surprise, he had contacted me to offer help, not to ask for it! Chamba told me he was grateful for the time we allowed him to live in the student house, that he follows the projects through our Facebook page, he is doing well as an electrician in Louisiana, and solo quiero apoyar un poco (“I just want to help with a small donation”). The next day I received $1000 through a Western Union electronic transfer! That very week we invested the money in eight new mattresses and some much-needed computer upgrades at our student house. I thought this would be the most appropriate use of his donation, as our house now has 22 students from 4 different programs plus one or two like Chamba who are not in any of the programs but need a good place to stay while studying in San Salvador.

Perhaps you can imagine how I am still glowing from this unexpected support from a Salvadoran immigrant who benefited in a small way from our work years ago. When we received Chamba’s donation, I was working on the final selection of our 2017 university students, repairs to the student house, and many other project-related responsibilities. Now, weeks later, I continue to feel the energy of seeing how our work can change people’s lives in such a direct way. It has helped me stay inspired.
Experience with community service for every student we support

I have openly shared the heartening news of our increased budget and Chamba’s unexpected gift with the communities here in El Salvador, our loan recipients, other students living in the student house, and groups involved in programs similar to our own. I have seen smiles from those I hope will be Chambas of the future, those who will continue our work by helping others when and where possible. This boost to my spirit has made it easier to implement some changes for the students we support, improvements I decided to pursue after my visit to the PROGRESA program in Guatemala last year (a Quaker-founded program that is much like our own, but older).

Our student meeting on February 5th began with a brief presentation by each of the 17 students. I announced our increased budget that enabled us to approve the seven new students, explained our selection process, and described how Chamba’s unexpected support led to my upbeat mood. In this first student meeting, we detail the requirements for each student and our obligation as a program to provide their financial support, with access to the student house and academic assistance if needed. This year I also asked them to reply as honestly as they could to a couple of questions: “Would you accept a required 40 hours of social work as part of the annual requirements of our program? And if so, do you have a project that you would like to do?” All 17 students agreed that it would be a good requirement, and several had ideas for projects. One student asked if the work could help to pay off the no-interest student loan we provide. A fourth-year medical student expressed a need to do the project between semesters, due to the time required for rounds at the hospital. Hoping for this kind of positive response, I had printed a summary with dates and deadlines, a consultation period, and basic information required to have a project approved and evaluated. I had set a financial value for the 40 hours, to be deducted from the student’s loan balance, and I had proposed a monetary prize for the best project (to be evaluated by the 17 students, and by me as Director).

The first deadline for consultation and project approval was March 31st. I
was not sure what to expect, but in early March I started receiving proposals. Some were so complete that they needed no added information. Others needed some minor adjustments. By March 31st all 17 projects had been submitted and approved. They range from implementing recycling in a village to teaching how to prevent sexually transmitted diseases. (Yes, this is the 4th-year medical student’s project!) Students plan to work with youth groups on environmental issues, tutor both within and outside of local schools, and help in a recent adult literacy program supported by our city hall and the Ministry of Education. After initially doubting my ability to start this facet of our program, and worrying that it might be opposed by our students – who are already required to do hundreds of hours of social and professional practical work supervised by their universities – I am now hopeful that these small projects can make positive changes within the communities of Suchitoto, as well as add to the personal and professional development of our loan recipients. Here is a photo of student Laura Monge, whose project
tutoring 1st-3rd graders in the village of Copapayo started in April. I hope to share updates and more photos in our next newsletter, so that you can see firsthand how our students carry out their ideas in their communities.

A community celebrates a student’s success

Although my work is often stressful, it is always rewarding. Still, in some years I get an emotional overload, and the start of 2017 has been exceptional in many ways. Despite some personal problems – minor health issues, strained family finances with two of my children now studying at the university level and a declining economy – I continue to feel blessed, knowing that what I do with your support makes a real difference, and this in a world where so much seems to be failing. On April 1, feeling like a proud father, I attended the graduation of Mirna Yamilet, one of my favorite students over the past years and almost like a daughter to me. Mirna asked me in March if I would accompany her at her graduation. Knowing this is a privilege for which each student receives only two tickets, I made sure she would not prefer to have her sister or an uncle join her mother at the event. I knew that Mirna’s father had passed away when she was just 12, but I expected her tickets to go to her mother and the older sister with whom she stayed while studying in San Salvador. Mirna assured me that she wanted me to attend her graduation. I was proud to meet her teachers and see fellow students watching her from afar as she received her diploma. It is not unusual for me to be invited to graduation parties, usually held in the villages the students come from, but over the years I think I have been to only three graduations at the universities. I think Mirna felt just as proud, introducing me to her peers and coworkers as the person who made her studies possible and the one who was always there when she needed help.

After the graduation in San Salvador we went back to Mirna’s family home in one of the most remote villages of Suchitoto, one of the 82 that I had never visited. The community of El Chuagüiton (which I believe the
name means *place with lots of puddles*) is situated between two small rivers without bridges that can isolate the village during the rainy season. After knowing Mirna and her mother for eight years, I finally met the rest of the family – uncles, aunts, sisters, nephews, nieces, and cousins. I think they make up most of the village of about 40 families! Before we departed Mirna thanked everyone involved with her studies, giving a prepared speech and not forgetting anyone, including her brother who left for the U.S. three years ago and sent her money to finish her studies, and yes, Roberto Broz and Palo Alto Friends Meeting, as well as personal thanks to her sponsor from Grass Valley, California. Mirna graduated with a

Laura Monge

Robert, Mirna and Mirna’s mother, April 1, 2017 University campus

Mirna with some of the family, El Chuagüiton, Suchitoto

degree in Business Administration, and since January has been working in a program that lasts one year with the Ministry of Hacienda (the local equivalent of the IRS). There is a chance that she may be hired after the year is over, but even if she is not the experience will make it much easier for her to find work in the future. Mirna did her thesis on work practices and workers’ rights here with the municipality of Suchitoto. I
hope you enjoy the photo as much as I enjoyed being part of Mirna’s graduation!

This year’s graduating class at the National University of El Salvador (UES) was dedicated to commemoration of Monsignor Oscar Arnulfo Romero, who was assassinated on March 24, 1980, a date historians consider the start of the 12-year civil conflict in El Salvador. This quotation from one of his masses spoke clearly to my Quaker upbringing: “Let us form in the heart of the youth the sublime idea of loving, of preparing to serve, of giving to others.”

**Service learning trip, July 23-August 2, 2017**

I want you to know that we are planning our seventh service-learning trip to El Salvador (July 23- August 2). A big change this year is that our U.S. coordinator, Nate Secrest, is a past trip participant whose experience includes three of our trips and a total of five visits to El Salvador. As I write this report, we have 12 confirmed participants and will most likely close registration on June 1st (our normal deadline, and most likely after you receive this newsletter). I am happy to announce that a scholarship grant of $1,000 was awarded for the trip by the Youth Fund of Pacific Yearly Meeting. Even so, two participants may still need help financing the trip. If you are interested in sponsoring a trip participant, please contact Nate at secrestnm@guilford.edu for more information. This will be a multigenerational trip with participants as young as 10, an exception we made for a family of four who will all be on the trip. (Normally, the minimum age is 13.) As in the past, we will work in the community of El Barío; this year teaching English, learning Spanish, and working on the installation of water in the high school science lab as well as some needed road repairs. We will also visit the agricultural coop of Santa Anita, where we hope to start the construction of a small building to house a local police outpost and move them away from the daycare center they currently use.

As I am sure you are aware, crimes due to gang activity increased to the worst levels in El Salvador’s history in recent years, and in 2015 this tiny country was named by the U.S. State Department the most violent
country in the world where there is no active war. This announcement led to a decrease in tourism, as well as visits by delegations and solidarity groups like our own, causing economic problems throughout the region. I do want to let you know that we have always done everything in our means to reduce risks to participants in our delegations, by using private transportation and working with the communities where we have been engaged since the early 1990s. Fortunately, participants on our trips have never experienced any violence, with our only problems being some health issues common to most developing countries. Moreover, in the past year violence has declined in El Salvador. Expect follow up reports on the trip from Quaker youth at quarterly and yearly meetings in California, as well as reports and photos from Nate and me in our November newsletter and on our webpage.

Photo of Moseño Quote at Graduation in UES

Nate Secrest Service-Learning Trip 2011, El Gigante, Morazan

**El Salvador bans mining, protects community health**

I am glad that recent events permit me to close my report on a positive note. Many of you have probably heard that little El Salvador made international news just a short while ago by becoming the first country in the world to pass a law banning all metals mining. This remarkable development came after almost a decade-long law suit by Pacific Rim Mining, which El Salvador won after revoking permits to the company to
mine gold using modern methods and chemicals that would have contaminated the drinking water supplies of several communities in the department of Cabañas. Pacific Rim was asking for 250 million dollars for projected losses due to not being able to extract and sell the gold. The World Bank tribunal’s decision was based in part on evidence that Pacific Rim manipulated their work in El Salvador, even at one point registering in the U.S. to be able to use articles in CAFTA (Central American Free Trade Agreement) to their benefit. From 2002-2009 Pacific Rim, working with allies suspected of receiving kickbacks to help get the project underway despite so much local resistance, had been accused of targeting leaders of unions and communal organizations protesting the mining in Cabañas. Although no concrete evidence could be found, it is assumed that they ordered the assassination of at least one activist. The World Bank ruled against Oceana Gold, the owner of Pacific Rim, and ordered them to pay 8 million dollars to the country to cover part of the legal fees spent defending their interests in this 7 1/2 year law suit. The slogan in El Salvador is “No to mining, yes to life.” Soon after the World Bank made the announcement last October, the National Assembly started working on the new law passed earlier this year to ban all mining in El Salvador, a country that has never had any substantial amounts of minerals suitable for mining.

**Access to water as a basic human right**

Another first may be right around the corner for El Salvador, and it’s all starting here in Suchitoto where my family and I live! Recently, with the President of Nestle saying that he does not feel that water rights should be controlled, and with reports out about the company’s 10 billion dollars in annual sales of bottled water and that Nestle owns 70% of the bottled water companies in the world, the Suchitoto City Council is preparing to pass a local ordinance declaring access to water as a human right. On May 28, voters within the municipality will be asked to sign and check a simple ballot (yes or no) to start the process and ultimately pass the municipal ordinance. This is the first hopeful step toward eventual action by the national assembly to make a right to water national law. The process is difficult, requiring a new law to be presented and
approved in one assembly’s term and then ratified in the following term. When I heard the idea from our Mayor, Pedrina Rivera, in early April, I told her that if Suchitoto and then El Salvador are successful in this process the news will be much bigger than the recent ban on mining and perhaps governments around the world will follow suit. If passed, the law will have many impacts. In El Salvador water is always scarce during the six-month dry season, causing many municipal water systems to ration water to the public while multinational corporations like Coca Cola and La Constancia SA (local beers, bottled water, and juices), both now owned by Anheuser-Busch, suck local aquifers dry to continue to produce their products and make large profits.

I end my report wishing to express how I try to let the Inner Light lead my life, in both good times and bad times, and thanking you all once again for your faithful support of the El Salvador Projects – for opening life opportunities for determined young people from poor villages in the Salvadoran countryside, and for smoothing their way and mine.

Peace to all, Robert Broz

GUATEMALA FRIENDS SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM (PROGRESA)

See accompanying file “Latin American Concerns Report Part 2”