

**Presentation of the Latin American Concerns Committee**

**PYM Plenary Session July 17, 2018**

**CURRENT IMMIGRATION CRISIS**

**Root Causes of Migration**

When I was a child and went to the field to work, my father used to take a fist of earth in his hands and repeated: "**Ala 'ja re' ri qa k'aslem, ja re 'ri nu ya' ri qa q'utun, ri qa wäy Manta ri loq'oläj ulew roj man yoj k'aset. Ru ma 'ri' ma yoj tikirta nqa ya kan la q'a ulew**" - Son, this is our life, this is what gives us the food, our tortillas. If it were not for the sacred earth, we would not live. That's why we should not separate from her.

In the Mayan worldview, man needs the earth, not only as a possession but as an integral part of his very being. For that reason, the separation of our people from their land, from their family, from their roots is something that causes tremendous pain in individuals, families and entire communities. Understanding this is sometimes difficult for other cultures but is a tremendous truth for us.

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A few weeks ago, the Vice President of the United States visited Guatemala as part of a tour to several Latin American countries. The presidents of Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras were present at this meeting. The main message that our presidents heard was a threat not to come to the United States or to face the consequences:

**"This exodus must end," "Tell your people that coming to the United States illegally will only result in a hard journey and a harder life."**

I believe that the authorities of this country have made a great effort to stop and criminalize the arrival of more migrants to this country. Millions of dollars are invested for this purpose, but I wonder **how much money and effort is invested to know the roots and reasons of the migratory problem?** The vice president of the US also said in his statement:

**"Just as we respect your borders and sovereignty, we insist that you respect ours," Pence said. "Our nation needs your nations to do more."**

Then, he demanded that our governments fight corruption, violence and drug trafficking to reduce inequalities in our countries.

However, has the US government forgotten that they themselves have a great responsibility in what is happening now in the countries of Latin America? Has it been forgotten that the US government has carried out a progressive and methodical intervention in these countries since the beginning of the 19th century with the installation of large companies that have taken advantage of the resources of Guatemalans.

Has it been forgotten that large areas of land were taken from entire communities to be granted to North American industries for the production of bananas, coffee, sugar and other products? He forgot that when our people wanted to raise their voices and claim these rights, we were called communists and lots of money, weapons and military training (to not say murder training) were sent to our countries to **"save us from communism"**

We are now accused of doing very little to control drug trafficking in our countries and that we must do more. But how much is done here to avoid the use of drugs, those same drugs that in their way to the Us leave so much pain and death in our countries?

How to talk about providing equality and opportunities for development when this capitalist and imperialist system has promoted that a small group in Latin America have lots of privileges and has accumulated enormous wealth, leaving the vast majority without what is necessary to live. How to talk about development if, in most cases, the first world societies do not share with us the access to technologies and knowledge that is developed here and, on the contrary, we are only given small crumbs to silence our voices.

I know that what has happened in all this time has not been the responsibility of all the residents of this wonderful country and that, as happens in our country, a few have created great fortunes of all this inequality and have caused many to suffer in other parts of the world. However, it is also true that we all have a collective responsibility for what happens in our world. The religious society of friends puts a lot of emphasis and reflection on the internal light that should guide our steps and act correctly. That is wonderful and I must say, Quakerism is one of the most authentic Christian spiritualities I have experienced, but is it

enough? During these days we have been questioned about our leaving our comfort zone and witnessing into a troubled world. After a deep discernment these words of Jesus come strong to my spirit:

**14 "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill can not be hidden.15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven "Mathew 7**

It is true, as friends, we have fought a lot to achieve that inner light, but are we taking the additional step to radiate that light, to share it with others and illuminate our world? Am really I doing what is needed, what the Spirit needs me to do in order to illuminate this darkness, this painful darkness that is being put onto many that come here with the only purpose of looking for a better life?

Miguel Ángel Costop, Director Progresa (Guatemala Friends Scholarship Program)

## CHARLA SOBRE MIGRACIÓN --- ESPAÑOL

Cuando era pequeño e íbamos al campo a trabajar, mi padre solía tomar un puño de tierra en sus manos y repetía: **“Ala’ ja re’ ri qa k’aslem, ja re’ ri nu ya’ ri qa q’utun, ri qa wäy. Manta ri loq’oläj ulew roj man yoj k’aseta. Ru ma’ ri’ manaq modo nqa ya ta kan la q’a chulew”** - Hijo, esta es nuestra vida, esto es lo que nos da el alimento, la tortilla. Si no fuera por la sagrada tierra, no viviríamos. Por eso no podemos separarnos de ella, de nuestra tierra.

En la cosmovisión maya, el hombre necesita de la tierra, no solo como una posesión sino como parte integral de su mismo ser. Por esa razón, la separación de nuestra gente de su tierra, de su familia, de sus raíces es algo que causa un tremendo dolor en las personas individuales, las familias y comunidades enteras.

Hace unas semanas, el vicepresidente de los Estados Unidos visitó Guatemala como parte de una gira a varios países de Latinoamérica. En esta reunión estuvieron presentes los presidentes de Guatemala, El Salvador y Honduras. El

mensaje principal que nuestros presidentes escucharon fue una amenaza para no venir a los Estados Unidos o atenerse a las consecuencias:

**“This exodus must end,” “Tell your people that coming to the United States illegally will only result in a hard journey and a harder life.”**

Creo que las autoridades de este país han hecho un gran esfuerzo en parar y criminalizar la llegada de más migrantes a este país. Se invierten millones de dólares para este propósito, pero yo me pregunto ¿Cuánto dinero y esfuerzo se invierte para conocer las raíces y razones del problema migratorio? El vicepresidente de US dijo además en su declaración:

**“Just as we respect your borders and your sovereignty, we insist that you respect ours,” Pence said. “Our nation needs your nations to do more.”**

Luego, él exigió a los gobiernos combatir la corrupción, la violencia y el narcotráfico para reducir las desigualdades en estos países.

Sin embargo, ha olvidado el gobierno de los US que ellos mismos tienen una gran responsabilidad en lo que pasa ahora en los países de Latinoamérica? Se ha olvidado acaso que el gobierno norteamericano ha realizado un progresivo y metódico intervencionismo en estos países desde inicios del siglo 19 con la instalación de grandes empresas que se han aprovechado de los recursos de los guatemaltecos.

Ha quedado en el olvido que se quitó grandes extensiones de tierra a comunidades enteras para concederlas a industrias norteamericanas para la producción de banano, café, azúcar y otros productos? Se olvidó ya que cuando nuestros pueblos quisieron alzar la voz y reclamar tales derechos se nos llamó comunistas y se envió dinero, armas y se entrenó a militares en nuestros países para “salvarnos del comunismo”?

Se nos acusa ahora de que hacemos poco por controlar el tráfico de drogas en nuestros países y que debemos hacer más. Pero cuánto se hace aquí por evitar el consumo de drogas, esas mismas drogas que a su paso dejan tanto dolor y muerte en su camino hasta acá?

Cómo hablar de proporcionar igualdad y oportunidades de desarrollo cuando este sistema capitalista e imperialista ha promovido que algunos pocos en

Latinoamérica tengan grandes beneficios y acumulen la riqueza y dejen a la gran mayoría sin lo necesario para vivir. Cómo hablar de desarrollo si en la mayoría de los casos no se comparte con nosotros el acceso a tecnologías y conocimiento que aquí se desarrolla y por el contrario solo se nos dan pequeñas migajas para callar en algo nuestras voces.

Yo se que lo que ha sucedido en todo este tiempo no ha sido responsabilidad de todos los residents de este maravilloso país y que al igual que sucede en nuestro país, unos pocos han creado grandes fortunas de toda esta desigualdad y han hecho que muchos sufran en otras partes del mundo. Sin embargo, también es cierto que todos tenemos una responsabilidad colectiva por lo que pasa en nuestra sociedad. Como sociedad religiosa de los amigos se hace mucha reflexión sobre la luz interna que debe guiar nuestros pasos y actuar correctamente. Al pensar en esto recuerdo aquello que Jesús dijo en el evangelio de Mateo:

**<sup>14</sup> “ustedes son la luz del mundo. Una ciudad construida sobre una colina no puede ser escondida. Tampoco se enciende una lámpara para esconderla debajo de una olla. Más bien se coloca en un candelero para que ilumine a todos en la casa. Del mismo modo piensan que su luz brille ante otros para que al ver sus obras glorifiquen a su Padre que está en los cielos.” Mateo 7, 14-16**

Es cierto, como amigos hemos luchado mucho por lograr conseguir esa luz interior, pero ¿estamos dando el paso adicional para irradiar esa luz, para compartirla con otros e iluminar nuestro mundo? ¿estoy haciendo realmente lo que se necesita, lo que el Espíritu necesita que yo haga para iluminar esta oscuridad, está dolorosa oscuridad que se posado sobre tantos que han venido aquí con el único propósito de tener una mejor forma de vida?

Miguel Ángel Costop, director Progresas

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Patricia Portillo  
Latin American Concerns Committee  
In charge of the Undocumented Student Scholarship Project  
Sacramento Friends Meeting

On Sunday morning I spoke about my experience being left behind in El Salvador, as a 12-year-old during the war. One year of family separation at such a pivotal

time in my life left irreversible damage in me. The reason that I am OK today is that I was reunited and cared for by my parents and my siblings.

At age 13, I was smuggled in the trunk of a car. There wasn't any hope of political asylum or refugee status. Men, women, and children were fleeing war as well as extreme poverty.

In the 80's and 90's due to the US government's financial and political support of the war in El Salvador and Guatemala, the US denied refugee status to people coming from those countries.

Without appropriate resources, some of these immigrants, young boys in particular, finding themselves in a strange country and looking for a place to fit in, joined gangs as a way of forming community, which turned violent within a system that did not recognize their basic needs.

After we left El Salvador there was a tremendous sense of loss for the many places where I walked on a daily basis, for the rain, the smell of ripe mangoes and for jocotes, for teachers, friends, and for my cousins. In the next five years I would often wake up from a horrifying often-times recurring nightmare, which I would do my best to forget once I got up to go to school. I couldn't bear to watch the news at night because they took me back, back to the time and places where I heard shootings, bombings, smelled bodies decomposing and where twice my cousins and I had to leave the house and go hide in the wilderness in the dark so that the armed men at the door would not see us and be tempted to rape us.

I have visited El Salvador since I left. A couple of things come to mind regarding the injustices that I saw. When I look around, it is easy to distinguish the children who have relatives in the US and the ones who don't, because being same age, the ones who don't have relatives in the US, are much smaller than the one who do.

We went to visit my sister's friend. Her brother owned a small warehouse supplying seeds and small tools to nearby farmers. As she explained to us, her brother had to fire someone recently, and just a few days later they got a threatening call demanding money or the owner would be killed. This practice is so common that you if you plan to own any type of business, no matter how

small, you expect that you will have to pay some (if not a lot) of extortion money, commonly called “rent” to organized gangs, gangs which will not hesitate to take someone’s life to exert their power. Everyone is constantly on high alert everywhere. The level of fear is as high as I remember it as a child.

My friend (who by the way earns \$300 a month as a teacher) would not allow me to go visit her in her neighborhood out of fear that something would happen to me.

We were shocked to see how expensive it was to live there. And, today a gallon of milk costs \$4.79 and a dozen eggs \$1.85. An average salary is \$415 (if you happen to have a job) and a mortgage interest rate is 8.3%.

When you look around, you see malls, City Bank, McDonald’s, and you may get a sense that things have changed, but it doesn’t take long to realize that things have not changed much. There are many maquiladoras (sweat shops) and call centers and access to higher education is hard to come by. This is the environment where violence is a vicious cycle that ends up hurting women and children the most, because they are the ones with the least amount of any kind of power.

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From Pacific Yearly Meeting, Faith and Practice

How do we attend to the suffering of others in our community, in our state and nation, and in the world community?

Community is a place where the connections felt in the heart make themselves known in bonds between people, and where tuggings and pullings of those bonds keep opening up our hearts.

Parker Palmer

I volunteered for 15 years in a free clinic in Los Angeles for Central American refugee children. As the immunization nurse, I diligently asked for their

vaccination records, as I wanted to avoid unnecessary vaccinations. A woman and child from El Salvador came without any records. I asked if they might have just left the records at home. She responded, Yes, in El Salvador. We fled from our home in the middle of the night with only what we were wearing. There was much in the news about similar stories, but this was different. This was witness to the violence right there in front of me and it has not left me.

My career was in Child Welfare otherwise known as Child Protective Service. My office in Los Angeles covered a major Central American community and I was supervisor of a bilingual unit of social workers.

You have heard from Patricia a moving account of the pain and scars from being left behind as her mother and sisters sought safety in the US. Thankfully, their reunion was successful. There are thousands of these stories of child/parent separation. A parent travels to the US in hopes of providing a better future for the family and with the best of intentions, leaves their child with a grandparent or aunt, what can go wrong. A lot. Eventually those children leave their relatives and are reunited with their parents in the US. The years of separation take a toll on the parent-child bond. The family is broken. Many, too many end up in the CPS system with the child yet again separated from parent for their safety. A plan is made between CPS and the family with the goal of safe reunification. And while counseling and other services usually are successful, some families tragically are never able to overcome the damage that has been done. And the family remains broken.

I imagine you heard the recent news story about the Guatemalan boy who went into foster care as an infant and at age 5 was adopted by his foster parents over the objection of his mother.

After moving to Sonoma County, I worked as a Juvenile Court Investigator. It is common for immigrants with limited resources to rent houses together with a

different family living in each room. I received the case of a one year old that was placed in foster care. Her mother had been sent to jail when the police raided her home and arrested everyone. Someone in the home was involved in criminal activity. But this child's mother wasn't involved. She was merely working and trying to support her child. No charges were ever filed against this mother. But at the time Sonoma sheriff was cooperating with ICE and because she was at the jail, an immigration hold was placed on her and she was deported leaving her child behind. This child could have ended up adopted here and never reunited with family. In Los Angeles, our practice in such cases was to contact the appropriate consulate and request a social study be done to assess suitability of placement with relatives. After receiving the social study we then would ask the court for an order to return the child to family. That hadn't been done before in Sonoma County but it did become their practice. If the exploration of reunification with family in the country of origin were a regulatory requirement, fewer immigrant children would be permanently severed from family. By the way, the child I mentioned remained in placement for almost 2 years, but I was able to reunite her to her family in Morelia, Mexico.

In 2014, this yearly meeting organized around the migration of unaccompanied children after their plight was very much in the headlines. We gathered and subcommittee of Latin American Concerns was formed. It was active for over a year meeting twice a month. Maryanne Michaels and I accompanied a child through to asylum status. I learned from our child of the conditions where she was housed for her first month. Sleeping on a filthy floor with no blanket, no medical care, freezing temperature—it was called the refrigerator, highly chlorinated water to drink. She was a teenager and repeatedly expressed concern for the suffering of young children and pregnant teenagers imprisoned with her. They say that children are only in these federal detentions for a couple days. She was there for over a month. Those conditions constitute child abuse. These federal and private prison facilities need to comply with the usual regulations and standards that are required in other facilities that house minors.

The current headlines of children being separated from their parents at our border have caught our attention. We are deeply pained and brought to tears by the faces of these innocent children and their grieving parents. Loving parents came to the United States with hopes of protecting their children from violence and/or escaping from the kind of no hope, no way out poverty that results in malnutrition, stunted growth, untreated health issues and a life of brutal slave labor. These families came to us out of desperation and at great expense and risk, only to find their children ripped from their arms. Where is the humanity?

**“When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.” Leviticus 19:33-34**

I have been encouraged by the mobilization of efforts to end this horrendous act of cruelty and blatant violation of human rights perpetrated by our government. And while we must take action to end this new policy, the serious trauma to children and families that has been part and parcel of immigration from Mexico and Central America has been going on for years.

As we heard from Miguel, The root causes are not being addressed and threats from our political leaders are not how meaningful change happens.

As Friends we are called. It was in elementary school that I was called to Guatemala when my First Day schoolteacher at Montebello Friends Church left for the mission field in Guatemala. I have been blessed with work in the Guatemala Friends Scholarship Program. I see first hand how education works as a successful and powerful implement of change by addressing root causes of injustice.

Our callings are many and varied and there is beauty to that. Whatever the calling that you pursue, we are asking that at this time and place for you participate in some action on behalf of immigrants and refugee seekers from Latin America. It can be writing a letter or 10 letters. You are hearing about asylum can be requested at “points of entry”. Not true 8 US Code 1158 of asylum law states that “Any alien who is physically present in the United States...may apply for asylum.” That deserves its own letter. It can be joining a demonstration. Raising money for Dreamer scholarships. Making a donation to an agency involved in this work. Offering sanctuary or sponsorship to a refugee OR assisting others that are providing sanctuary or sponsorship. Be a witness in immigration court. Join a Rapid Response Network. There are many meaningful ways to participate. This is a time when we may be most effective in bringing about meaningful change. Now before this concern fades from public attention. Many of you are already deeply engaged. Thank you.

We will be posting A CALL TO ACTION on the PYM web site. We will be listing resources and suggestions. If you are involved in this work already or know of resources in your area, let me know and we will add to the list. Please join us.

**“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” Matthew 25:35**

Can I hear PRESENTE?

Donna Smith, Redwood Forest Meeting, Co-clerk, Guatemala Scholarship Comm.  
Clerk, PYM Latin American Concerns Committee