

# THE JUST WORD



## THE IGNACIO MARTÍN-BARÓ FUND FOR MENTAL HEALTH & HUMAN RIGHTS

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### POST-TSUNAMI PSYCHOSOCIAL RELIEF EFFORTS IN SRI LANKA

Erzulie Coquillon

The tsunami that devastated parts of Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Thailand, India, the Maldives, and Africa on December 26, 2004 was the worst in 40 years. The death toll is estimated at 250,000 and the number of displaced persons far larger. Indonesia and Sri Lanka were hardest hit; on the western tip of the Indonesian island of Sumatra, the closest inhabited area to the epicenter of the earthquake, more than 70% of the inhabitants of some coastal villages are reported dead. In Sri Lanka, at least 31,000 people are confirmed dead, thousands are missing, and up to one million people are homeless.

In a recent conference in Bangkok, mental health experts estimated that up to nine in ten survivors of the tsunami are likely to suffer from psychological trauma, and the mental health damage could last years. Somchai Chakrabhand, head of Thailand's Mental Health Department, said that "about 30% of people in tsunami-hit areas showed signs of moderate post-traumatic stress disorder, such as being unable to sleep or look at the sea. Another

20% were 'very significantly affected,' he added, 'displaying symptoms such as an obsession with waiting for the return of their loved ones.'" (BBC News, February 2, 2005, Trauma Risk for Survivors). "Without the necessary help... the long-term effects could be as devastating as the tsunami itself," Chakrabhand told the BBC. Yet, as we suggest here, this is only a "partial story."

Psychosocial workers in crisis situations argue that individual and small group psychotherapy is limited in its ability to address the myriad social and communal implications of disaster or war, including the rupture of social relations and institutions, the fracturing of communities, and the shifting roles of survivors. Moreover, they acknowledge that recognition and affirmation of local survivors' skills, traditions, and practices fosters survivors' psychological healing in the initial phases of reconstruction and lays the groundwork for long-term development (Dittman, 2005). Indeed, the Sri Lankan government, reflecting this awareness, expressed a preference for food and

medical supplies from international donors rather than psychological aid.

In January, Dr. Athula Sumathipala, chief of the psychosocial desk at the Sri Lankan government's Center for National Operations, told *The New York Times* that "We believe the most important thing is to strengthen local coping mechanisms rather than imposing counseling." This sentiment, which has been echoed by Western researchers including some who work with the projects and programs described in this issue of our newsletter, is reflected in the words of Ignacio Martín-Baró when he wrote about the foundation for a people's mental health lying "... in the existence of humanizing relationships, of collective ties within which and through which the personal humanity of each individual is acknowledged and in which no one's reality is denied" arguing further that "the building of a new society, or at least a better and more just society, is not only an economic and social problem; it is essentially a mental health problem" (Aron & Corne, 1994).

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These concerns are especially relevant for Sri Lanka, which only recently emerged from prolonged civil war. Sri Lanka is a small, ethnically and religiously diverse nation; Ceylon and Indian Tamils make up about 17% of the country's population, and 74% of the population is Sinhalese. Most Sinhalese are Buddhist; most Tamils are Hindu; the 1978 Sri Lankan constitution, while assuring freedom of religion, grants primacy to Buddhism. For more than 20 years a civil war between the Sri Lankan government and Tamil separatists known as the LTTE or Tamil Tigers destabilized Sri Lanka; while a cease fire is now in place, fears of a resurgence remain.

Tamils have historically been concerned with the country's unitary form of government, and feared that the Sinhalese majority would abuse their rights. Beginning in the 1950s, a series of controversial moves by the government sparked charges of discrimination from Tamils, and led to ongoing incidents of communal violence. These incidents occurred throughout the mid-1970s, at which time Tamil politicians began to promote the development of a separate Tamil state—"Tamil Eelam"—in areas traditionally held by Tamils in northern and eastern Sri Lanka. Separatist political groups developed, including the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE or Tamil Tigers). 1983 saw the largest wave of communal violence in the country's history, as hundreds of Tamils were killed or displaced in retaliation for murder of 13 Sinhalese soldiers by the LTTE.

India became involved in the fighting between 1987 and 1990, after which time the conflict between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government reignited, and human rights violations were committed on both

sides. Other than a brief cessation of violence in 1995, heavy fighting was ongoing through 2001. The LTTE and the Sri Lankan government declared unilateral cease-fires in December of 2001, and in February 2002 the two sides agreed to a joint cease-fire accord. Although the LTTE withdrew from the negotiation in April 2003, an informal peace process continues and the 2002 ceasefire has been observed (<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5249.html>)

Many survivors of the tsunami in Sri Lanka are attempting to navigate this legacy of conflict and a threat of its renewal as well as the natural disaster. For those who have lived for years with the memories of those "disappeared" at the hands of LTTE or government forces, the disappearance of a loved one as a result of natural disaster takes on new dimensions. For some, the disturbance of ritual and the absence of a corpse to confirm a loved one's death can suspend or freeze the grieving process. In addition, the natural disaster may have disturbed or destroyed communal spaces such as temples and schools in which survivors of tragedy mourn the dead, make meaning of their losses, and reconnect to the social network, rituals, and traditions from which they draw personal meaning and identity (Somasundaram, 2003).

Aid workers are challenged to address the complex stressors experienced by survivors with an awareness of the impact of a history of conflict and the legacies of poverty on the population. Successful efforts will also be grounded in community needs and facilitate community members' capacities to deliver resources – local as well as those provided by the international community - within their

cultural context in order to secure stable, long-term rehabilitation. Thus, when counseling is appropriate in such contexts, it is best done in conjunction with indigenous healers, with an emphasis on the individual or group's survival of the crisis, rather than on perceived pathology. The Sri Lankan government has made public recommendations aimed at discouraging foreign counseling services working independently of local agencies post-tsunami and encouraging research that is beneficial to the local community (see Araceli Garcia del Soto & Lina Cherfas article, this issue). ♦

<http://www.cdfa.org.au/>

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5249.html>

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# SRI LANKA: DISASTER RELIEF IN A CONTEXT OF CONFLICT

Araceli Garcia del Soto and Lina Chermas

**Editors' Note:** The December 2004 tsunami captured the world's attention and generated wide-spread and world-wide responses. A small number of previous Martín-Baró Fund grantees as well as "Friends of the Fund" live and work in communities affected by structural violence and/or war and were also deeply affected by this natural disaster. The current newsletter explores some of the complex issues, generated by the tsunami its effects and on communities struggling with ongoing or post-war conflicts. We welcome your thoughts and comments; please email [coquillo@bc.edu](mailto:coquillo@bc.edu).

—Erzulie Coquillon, M. Brinton Lykes, Maria deJesus

*“Any abstract consideration, even when it is referred to human problems, is useless when alleviating people’s suffering.”*

(Sábato, 2000)

Such a statement takes on special relevance given the effects of the recent tsunami in Southeast Asia. The wake of the tsunami brought worldwide calls for aid, which has been pouring in especially to Sri Lanka and Indonesia, the hardest hit nations. The aid comes in the form of material supplies as well as personnel – qualified professionals with prior experience in the area along with well-meaning volunteers with less experience.

Some people in Sri Lanka have, paradoxically, observed the difficulties resulting from the influx of foreign aid. Though the efforts are largely well intended, the impact on the political situation has been grave. There have been questions and widespread criticism regarding the distribution of aid and coordination of both foreign and local initiatives, most importantly exacerbating long-standing disagreements between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The former claim authority over all incoming aid and reconstruction, not wanting to give the “rebels” the legitimacy of directly receiving international funds, while the latter contend that the government will ignore the needs of the North and

East (much of which is effectively controlled by the LTTE) and prioritize rehabilitation of the south. Both recognize the absolute necessity, political and practical, to cooperate with each other if any reconstruction is to be accomplished, but after a nineteen-year conflict and a three-year tenuous ceasefire this is proving quite difficult. The conflict thus adds an extra layer of complexity when dealing with the issue of the foreign aid surge into the country.

Some observers claim that the relief supplies are not being efficiently distributed to those who need them most, partly because of the general transportation and communication difficulties in Sri Lanka, and partly due to profound gaps in coordination among local and foreign personnel. Considering the global outpouring of monetary support for the rehabilitation efforts, this is somewhat frustrating, especially for the local professionals who are familiar with the situation, whose work is sometimes hampered by the additional challenge of managing foreign assistance. Maybe “wanting to help” is not enough when really working together with the affected population. This might be a good example of Jean-Jacques Gabas’s (2003) con-

cern: “When will the people from the South help us, from the North, to improve and analyze our lives and our social structures? When will there be a real exchange of opinions, works, and writings among the two worlds?”

Along these lines, the Sri Lankan government, assisted by local professionals, has publicly made two recommendations as part of a package of post-tsunami emergency regulations: to prevent foreign workers from exclusively doing trauma counseling, and to monitor all local and foreign research, trying to make sure that any research conducted will really benefit the affected local populations. This has been very controversial among the foreign “experts” on psychosocial, relief work who claim that they just want to help and assume that their methods are appropriate for the situation. However, these seemingly “tough” measures speak to the desired impact of the foreign assistance on the tsunami-affected nation. When the Sri Lankan government asked for foreign intervention, no coordination mechanism was established to ensure that the incoming assistance would maximally benefit the country by also taking into account the capacities of the local professionals and affected populations themselves, and their

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clearly superior knowledge of the scenario. Instead of a situation where local needs and capacities are *supplemented*, perhaps they are being *duplicated*, or worse yet, replaced by outside assistance.

It is unclear who is responsible for the shortcomings in coordination and strategy. Perhaps listening more closely to the local voices may be what is missing, the crucial step before sending in relief supplies and personnel, both on behalf of the Sri Lankan government and the foreign relief agencies. After all, Sri Lanka is not uncharted territory for international assistance, as agencies have been there for quite some time to support people affected by the conflict. And in such a scenario a more targeted, coordinated relief effort based on informed needs assessments may not be too much to ask.

If the main goal of psychosocial work is to empower the affected population, the linkages between emergency response and long-term development must be made early on in the aftermath of the tsunami. Even in this very difficult context, the voices of the people should be guiding the response to the needs, without forgetting sustainability and the work to enhance rights that had been taking place prior to the tsunami.

Psychosocial workers should take advantage of their differentiated knowledge of the needs when formulating their guidelines and work in coordination with other development professionals as they have currently attempted in Sri Lanka (see <http://tsunamihelprilanka.blogspot.com/2005/01/psp-guidelines-to-provide-psychosocial.html>). In summary, the situation in Sri Lanka

shows us, again, the need for careful and serene consideration of the psychosocial interventions linked to planning in emergency situations. ♦

*Gabas, J. (2003). Norte -Sur¿Una Cooperacion Imposible? Bellaterra.*

*Sábato, E. R. (2003). La resistencia, Buenos Aires: Seix Barral.*

*Araceli Garcia del Soto and Lina Cherfas are affiliated with the Solomon Asch Center for the Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict at the University of Pennsylvania. They have been engaged in psychosocial accompaniment and collaborative community research with Sri Lankan organizations including the Psychosocial Support Programme (PSP) and the Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies (CHA) since 2003.*

# FOCUS ON SOUTHERN ASIA

## BANGLADESH

*Population:* 141,340,476 (July 2004 est.)  
*Life expectancy at birth:* 61.71 years (2004 est.)  
*Ethnic groups:* Bengali 98%, tribal groups, non-Bengali Muslims (1998 est.)  
*Religions:* Muslim 83%, Hindu 16%, other 1% (1998 est.)  
*Languages:* Bangla (official, also known as Bengali), English  
*Government type:* parliamentary democracy  
*GDP:* purchasing power parity - \$258.8 billion (2003 est.)



## MYANMAR (FORMERLY BURMA)

*Population:* 42,720,196 (July 2004 est.)  
*Life expectancy at birth:* 56.01 years (2004 est.)  
*Ethnic groups:* Burman 68%, Shan 9%, Karen 7%, Rakhine 4%, Chinese 3%, Indian 2%, Mon 2%, other 5%  
*Religions:* Buddhist 89%, Christian 4% (Baptist 3%, Roman Catholic 1%), Muslim 4%, animist 1%, other 2%  
*Languages:* Burmese, languages of minority ethnic groups  
*Government type:* military junta  
*GDP:* purchasing power parity - \$74.53 billion (2003 est.)

## INDIA

*Population:* 1,065,070,607 (July 2004 est.)  
*Life expectancy at birth:* 63.99 years (2004 est.)  
*Ethnic groups:* Indo-Aryan 72%, Dravidian 25%, Mongoloid and other 3% (2000 est.)  
*Religions:* Hindu 81.3%, Muslim 12%, Christian 2.3%, Sikh 1.9%, other groups including Buddhist, Jain, Parsi 2.5% (2000 est.)  
*Languages:* English is the most important language for national, political, and commercial communication; Hindi is the national language and primary tongue of 30% of the people; there are 14 other official languages: Bengali, Telugu, Marathi, Tamil, Urdu, Gujarati, Malayalam, Kannada, Oriya, Punjabi, Assamese, Kashmiri, Sindhi, and Sanskrit.  
*Government type:* federal republic  
*GDP:* purchasing power parity - \$3.033 trillion (2003 est.)

## INDONESIA

*Population:* 238,452,952 (July 2004 est.)  
*Life expectancy at birth:* 69.26 years (2004 est.)  
*Ethnic groups:* Javanese 45%, Sundanese 14%, Madurese 7.5%, coastal Malays 7.5%, other 26%  
*Religions:* Muslim 88%, Protestant 5%, Roman Catholic 3%, Hindu 2%, Buddhist 1%, other 1% (1998) est.  
*Languages:* Bahasa Indonesia, English, Dutch, local dialects (Javanese spoken most widely)  
*Government type:* republic  
*GDP:* purchasing power parity - \$758.8 billion (2003 est.)

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## MALAYSIA

*Population:* 23,522,482 (July 2004 est.)

*Life expectancy at birth:* 71.95 years (2004 est.)

*Ethnic groups:* Malay and other indigenous 58%, Chinese 24%, Indian 8%, others 10% (2000 est.)

*Religions:* Muslim, Buddhist, Daoist, Hindu, Christian, Sikh; Shamanism is also practiced in East Malaysia

*Languages:* Bahasa Melayu (official), English, Chinese dialects (Cantonese, Mandarin, Hokkien, Hakka, Hainan, Foochow), Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Panjabi, Thai. Indigenous languages are also spoken in East Malaysia; the most widely spoken are Iban and Kadazan.

*Government type:* constitutional monarchy

*GDP:* purchasing power parity - \$207.8 billion (2003 est.)

## MALDIVES

*Population:* 339,330 (July 2004 est.)

*Life expectancy at birth:* 63.68 years (2004 est.)

*Ethnic groups:* South Indians, Sinhalese, Arabs

*Religions:* Sunni Muslim

*Languages:* Maldivian Dhivehi (dialect of Sinhala), English

*Government type:* republic

*GDP:* purchasing power parity - \$1.25 billion (2002 est.)

## SRI LANKA

*Population:* 19,905,165 (2004 est.)

*Life expectancy at birth:* 72.89 years (2004 est.)

*Ethnic groups:* Sinhalese 74%, Tamil 18%, Moor 7% between Burgher, Malay, and Vedda 1%

*Religions:* Buddhist 70%, Hindu 15%, Christian 8%, Muslim 7% (1999 est.)

*Languages:* Sinhala (official and national language) 74%, Tamil (national language) 18%, other 8%

*Government type:* republic

*GDP:* purchasing power parity - \$73.7 billion (2003 est.)

## THAILAND

*Population:* 64,865,523 (2004 est.)

*Life expectancy at birth:* 71.41 years (2004 est.)

*Ethnic groups:* Thai 75%, Chinese 14%, other 11%

*Religions:* Buddhism 95%, Muslim 3.8%, Christianity 0.5%, Hinduism 0.1%, other 0.6% (1991) est.

*Languages:* Thai, English, ethnic and regional dialects

*Government type:* constitutional monarchy

*GDP:* purchasing power parity - \$477.5 billion (2003 est.)

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*Note:* Kenya, Seychelles, Somalia, and Tanzania were also affected by the December 2004 tsunami.

*Source:* CIA The World Factbook, <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/th.html>

# PROJECT UPDATE: EMERGENCY GRANT TO SLUM DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY

*D. Benjamin*

The December 2004 tsunami that hit the coastline of Chennai in India affected thousands of fishing people whose only source of livelihood was the sea. Many of the affected families were temporarily accommodated in the nearby St. Antony's Girls Higher Secondary School where they were given food, clothing and shelter by the Chennai Corporation. Unfortunately, the aid distribution was often confusing and ineffective. In order to ensure that those affected received adequate aid, the Slum Development Society (SDS) came forward to help.

The Slum Development Society helped victims to find alternate sites for living and working, gathered the youth of the affected areas and made them guardians of the aid materials provided to the people, cleaned the coastline and the area around the Srinivasapuram slum dwellings, distributed food packets provided by the Chennai Corporation, and cooked three days worth of food for the people of Srinivasapuram. The materials needed for this purpose were all paid for by gifts from many donors including the Martín-Baró Fund.

The Slum Development Society's interventions have been multifaceted, including providing for the pressing physical needs of victims, and providing information to both victims and aid agencies. Among the Slum Development Society's efforts that have been practical in nature are the construction of tents for dwellers; purchasing, with aid from the Martín-Baró Fund, school uniforms and school bags for students, saris and night clothes for women, and three month's worth of toiletries for all victims; and arranging for a mobile relief van to take victims to the hospital,

transporting food and clothing, and distributing food packets.

While attending to the immediate concerns of the victims, the SDS is also actively engaged in advocacy efforts, including gathering statistics about the victims and supplying them to government agencies such as Thasildhar, RTO, to speed the provision of relief; compiling a list of missing and dead persons and delivering it to the Relief Committee in Chennai, to assist people eligible for compensation; sending a brief report on the prevailing conditions in the tsunami-affected areas to various funding agencies abroad, in an effort to raise assistance for relief work; and supporting protest demonstrations and strikes by women's associations to draw the attention to the need for aid from the government.

The Indian government allotted Rs.4000 (\$86) to each family and an amount of Rs.1,00,000 (\$21,800) was put in the bank as a fixed deposit in the name of the family heads who died in the tsunami disaster. Unfortunately, this amount cannot be taken out and used for family expenses. The state government also requested relief from the central government, which promised loan facilities with 35% subsidy; negotiations on this continue. In addition, the government has promised the construction of alternate housing for the tsunami-affected victims. However, even if separate areas are allotted, many people are unwilling to move from their own areas because their children have already been admitted



Photo by A.k. Kimoto, 2004

in nearby schools, or because hospitals, places of worship, and transport facilities are nearby. Since the government has not yet secured basic amenities for many affected families, daily protest meetings have become a regular feature of life in Chennai. Several NGOs, including the SDS, have urged the government to address the fishing community first and to provide them with food, shelter, and clothing.

Despite the government's efforts to provide aid, much remains to be done to ensure the economic well-being of families affected by the December tsunami. The people of Chennai still require materials such as fishing nets, boats, sewing machines, and spare parts for rickshaws to help them to earn a steady income to meet their day-to-day needs. ♦

*D. Benjamin is Founder and President of the Slum Development Society, an organization founded in 1987 to address the human rights and mental health needs of the Dalit, or undercaste, in rural Tamil Nadu. The Ignacio Martín-Baró Fund for Mental Health and Human Rights has funded the Slum Development Society in 1998, 2000, 2002, and 2003.*

## RETURNING AND NEW PROJECTS

### ASOCIACIÓN CENTRO DE EDUCACIÓN Y FORMACIÓN MAYA IXIL, SAN GASPAR DE CHAJUL, GUATEMALA.

The Martín-Baró Fund renewed its grant to the Center for Mayan Ixil Education and Development, which works with youth and women in the rural town of Chajul and surrounding villages, an area profoundly affected by more than thirty-six years of civil war and entrenched poverty. Over the past year, despite some resistance by husbands and fathers in the communities, 150 women and youth participated in monthly mental health workshops, sharing their experiences during the war, working through their fears, and developing support networks.

Gaspar Ijom, workshop facilitator, reports that participants have begun to incorporate concepts of human rights into their world view, and have experienced "a new self-understanding." The new grant will allow ACEFOMI to extend the work to 4 other villages and to work even more actively in the town of Chajul.



### BOARDING SCHOOL HEALING PROJECT, SOUTH DAKOTA, USA.

During the 19th and well into the 20th century, Native American children were forcibly abducted from their homes to attend boarding schools, where they were systematically humiliated, abused, and stripped of their language, cultural traditions, and family connections. The devastating impact of these experiences continues to affect tribal life today. The Fund renewed its grant to The Boarding School Healing Project, which seeks to document and raise consciousness about these abuses so that Native communities can begin a process of healing. The Project plans to expand its work to all South Dakota reservations in the coming year, as well as developing video documentation. Other goals for next year include completing the documentation process on all reservations, holding annual meetings for survivors of boarding schools, introducing legislation on boarding school abuses in the U.S. Congress, and beginning the organization of a national conference.

### BURMESE REFUGEE PROJECT, THAILAND.

The Burmese Refugee Project (BRP) has been working in northwestern Thailand with ethnically Shan refugees from Myanmar (formerly Burma), helping them to gain access to education, health care, and legal services. These services are essential to the refugees' quality of life and human rights, and are otherwise denied to them by the Burmese and Thai governments. The Martín-Baró Fund grant provides stipends for two local full-time social workers who provide cultural, recreational, and educational activities for the children and serve as advocates for refugee families. Grant money also provided for emergency health care and mandatory school uniforms and school books for the children so they could attend school with their peers. The BRP encourages the educational aspirations of the children through an oral history project that encourages them to interview their parents and grandparents and learn of their history and culture in Burma. Over the next year they hope to continue this work and focus on leadership development and capacity-building to increase the likelihood of sustainability of the project.



## RETURNING AND NEW PROJECTS

### CENTRO BARTOLOMÉ DE LAS CASAS, SAN SALVADOR, EL SALVADOR.

This project works with local communities on economic, social, psychosocial and spiritual development. During the past year its staff and volunteers initiated psychosocial work with women survivors of massacres and families of victims in the Salvadoran community of Arcatao, Chalatenango. They trained 15 women and 3 men as community mental health facilitators to work with an organization of survivors systematically addressing social trauma through such activities as the creation of a book of survivors' memories, a "journey" of memories, a collective mural and community museum, and exhumations of victims. This psychosocial work is part of a wider community process through which survivors will work to vindicate the past and seek justice in the future. With this year's grant from the Martín-Baró Fund, the Center will continue psychosocial accompaniment and facilitation of public sharing of experiences of survivors of exhumation processes. They will also initiate healing workshops for survivors in the northern zone of Morazan.

### CHILDREN'S REHABILITATION CENTER, QUEZON CITY, PHILIPPINES.

Philippine children and families have been the victims of decades of conflict, poverty, and economic displacement – and most recently of massive human rights violations connected with the Arroyo administration's US-backed war on "terrorism." Supported in the past by the Martín-Baró Fund, this year's proposal from the CRC would extend psychosocial services in the areas of Eastern Visayas, Southern Tagalog, and Northern Luzon and provide psychosocial, medical, nutritional, and educational assistance to 21 child political prisoners. Programs for children emphasize play therapy, and arts and cultural performance. The CRC also offers counseling for adults, and encourages them to find alternative solutions in challenging government policies of terror in their communities. In addition, the CRC will train 45 frontline human rights workers regarding the psychosocial needs of children and their responses to state violence. Finally, the CRC is planning an October Children's Month and a December Human Rights Day with child participants.



### CENTER FOR IMMIGRANT FAMILIES, NEW YORK CITY, USA.

Center For Immigrant Families' organizing model focuses on the needs of low-income immigrant women of color, using a popular education model which emphasizes the centrality and importance of people's own knowledge, experiences, histories and cultures. The women they serve have community experience, and been uprooted, lost homes and abuse and exploitation. "As we share our migration stories," report the Center's members, "we come to understand the different issues and challenges affecting us structurally, rather than in terms of personal 'failings.'" The Center will conduct three cycles of community-based workshops on *Culture, Migration, and Community Organizing* (each consisting of 10-12 sessions over a period of three months) for two low-income immigrant neighborhoods in uptown Manhattan, Washington Heights and Manhattan Valley.

### RWANDAN WOMEN'S PEACE LEADERSHIP PROJECT, RWANDA.

The 1994 genocide in Rwanda shattered the country's political infrastructure and economy, devastating a country already weakened by the structural adjustment policies of the International Money Fund and the World Bank. Rwandan women suffered some of the most profound physical and psychological effects of the conflict. In collaboration with *Pro-femmes*, an umbrella group of 40 Rwandan organizations, the Karuna Center for Peacebuilding, a non-profit organization based in Amherst, Massachusetts, US will implement Phase II of a project to train staff members to become trainers in conflict resolution and reconciliation. Seminars will include the use of inter-communal dialogue and other techniques for rebuilding communal relations and promoting social healing. This work seeks to promote the healing and recovery of Rwandan women from the trauma of loss and rape, through cooperative projects that promote social healing. Other goals are to promote the development of a culture of peace in Rwandan social, political, and economic life; increase the capacity of Rwandan women's organizations to help rebuild interethnic relations at the grassroots level; and to train Rwandan women's organizations to incorporate conflict resolution skills in all aspects of their work.

# MARTÍN-BARÓ FUND NOVEMBER EVENT

*Eliza Bliss-Moreau*

On November 16, 2004 the Ignacio Martín-Baró Fund welcomed Maria Elena Letona, Director of Centro Presente, and Robert White, former Ambassador to El Salvador and President of the Center for International Policy, to speak to supporters of the Fund.

Letona discussed the work of Centro Presente, a non-profit organization that works to empower Latin American immigrants to take hold of their futures both locally and nationally through the development of leadership skills and by fostering civic participation. Centro Presente provides basic educational services such as English as a Foreign Language instruction and literacy and citizenship classes, as well as legal aid to individuals in need.

White, who served as Ambassador to El Salvador in the early days of US involvement in the Salvadoran civil war in the 1980s, addressed a question fundamental to the Martín-Baró Fund: How can human rights survive in an age of terror? White pointed out that during the 1980s despite requests for negotiations, the Reagan administration responded to the Salvadoran people with military force. In the process the US violated international law and damaged the trust of its allies. Even after the US backed Salvadoran military assassinated Archbishop Oscar Romero, government ministers, the Jesuit professors at the University of Central America, and

civilians, the United States continued to support them. This support “meant that counterterrorism would take the place of human rights as a priority in US foreign policy,” according to White.

White illustrated parallels between the war in El Salvador and the war in Iraq. As in El Salvador, US action in Iraq has defied

ed that human rights can survive in an age of terror if the United States begins to “address the root causes of terrorism” and stops “describing governments [it does] not like as terrorist.”

Following White’s keynote address, Eliza Bliss-Moreau and Cynthia Kennedy, program committee members of the Martín-Baró Fund, shared stories and reflections about the work of Centro Bartolomé de las Casas, a project supported by the Martín-Baró Fund which they visited during a Boston College-sponsored trip to El Salvador last summer.

Centro works with civilians who have survived many of the war’s atrocities that White described. Father Kevin Burke, of the Weston Jesuit School of Theology, gave a closing reflection. After the presentations, attendees stayed to mingle

and chat at a reception with live jazz, wine, and hors d’oeuvres.

*Eliza Bliss-Moreau is a PhD student in the Department of Psychology at Boston College. Eliza’s research is focused on how early development in threat filled environments (such as urban poverty and war) influences life-long affective and emotional reactivity.*

*The Martín-Baró Fund would like to thank Blanchard’s Jamaica Plain for their ongoing support of this event. ♦*



international law and alienated allies. The US built a “coalition” to help “liberate” the Iraqi people. The mission was supposedly accomplished in Iraq long before most of the war related atrocities even occurred. Despite Bush’s declaration of victory, the death toll continues to rise in Iraq today.

White emphasized his belief that “all abuse begins with the abuse of language.” The language and rhetoric that is used to describe the world and its many conflicts and atrocities shapes public opinion and directs US action. It is imperative that the language selected adequately describes the situation at hand. White suggest-



## NOTE FROM THE COORDINATOR

Guadalupe López Tovarez

Last year, the Ignacio Martín-Baró Fund for Mental Health and Human Rights (MBF) celebrated 15 years of work in support of community-based organizations throughout the world. On this occasion, members of the MBF reaffirmed their commitment to maintain and expand the promotion of Ignacio Martín-Baró's legacy, and hired me as a consultant to the fund to initiate the building of an infrastructure to carry out its work.



In early February, we conducted a planning meeting with all of our active members. It is a pleasure to work with our group of volunteers, half of whom are long-time members and half of whom are bright young individuals who bring to the fund new energy and enthusiasm. There can't be a better mix of volunteers to move the MBF to another level. For the next three years the MBF is committed to expanding its educational activities, reaching out a larger audience, systematizing its grant-making process, continuing support for community mental health projects locally and abroad, and promoting networking and exchanges among our grantees and colleague organizations.

We know from experience that organizations such as the MBF are essential to maintaining a broader movement for social change. We invite all of our readers and supporters to join us in this new and challenging phase of the Ignacio Martín-Baró Fund. ♦

## MISSION STATEMENT

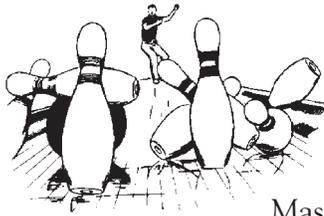
The Ignacio Martín-Baró Fund for Mental Health and Human Rights was created to foster psychological well-being, social consciousness, and active resistance in communities affected by institutional violence, repression, and social injustice. We believe that the scars of such experiences are deeply seated in both the individual and society and, therefore, seek to support projects that explore the power of community to collectively heal these wounds and move forward. As an organization based in the United States, we have a special responsibility to support groups in regions harmed by U.S. policies and addressing problems created or aggravated by those policies.

Through grants, networking, and technical support, the Fund seeks to encourage the development of innovative, grassroots community projects that promote progressive social change and community mental health. In pursuit of this mission, the Fund's goals are:

- ♦ To develop a holistic perspective for understanding the connections between state and institutional violence and repression, and the mental health of communities and individuals;
- ♦ To support innovative projects that explore the power of community to foster healing within individuals and communities trying to recover from experiences of institutional violence, repression, and social injustice;
- ♦ To build collaborative relationships among the Fund, its grantees, and its contributors for mutual education and empowerment; and,
- ♦ To develop social consciousness within the United States regarding the psychological consequences of structural violence, repression, and social injustice.

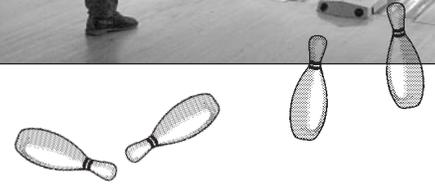
Editors: Erzulie Coquillon, M. Brinton Lykes, Maria de Jesus, Contributors: Ben Achtenberg, D. Benjamin, Eliza Bliss-Moreau, Lina Cherfas, Erzulie Coquillon, Araceli Garcia del Soto, A.K. Kimoto, Joan Liem, Guadalupe López Tovarez. Distribution: Alden Jackson. **PLEASE SUPPORT OUR WORK.** Letters, inquiries, contributions can be sent to: **Martín-Baró Fund**, P.O.Box 2122, Jamaica Plain, MA, 02130, [www.martinbarofund.org](http://www.martinbarofund.org). Checks payable to: FEX/Martín-Baró Fund, tax deductible to the full extent permitted by IRS code. Thank you.

# Bowl-A-THON Update



On April 3, the Martín-Baró Fund held its Annual Strike for Justice Bowl-a-thon fundraiser. Over 10 teams participated, comprised of Boston College and University of

Massachusetts-Boston graduate students, Martín-Baró Fund Committee Members, and a number of new and long-time supporters of the fund. Together, this dedicated group, along with hundreds of supporters who pledged to support them, raised over \$20,000; enough to fund three projects next year. We are again grateful to Lanes and Games in Cambridge for their generous collaboration with the Fund. Thank you to our supporters for a fun and successful event! Keep an eye out for next year's event and join us if you can. ♦



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