THE JUST WORD

The Ignacio Martín-Baró Fund for Mental Health & Human Rights

Supporting Community-based Activism for Mental Health and Human Rights

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Centro Bartolomé de las Casas launches Museum of the Memory

Cynthia Kennedy

t was a homecoming of sorts as I traveled to El Salvador this past May to represent the Ignacio Martín-Baró Fund for Mental Health and Human Rights at an

activity sponsored by Centro Bartolomé de las Casas (CBC), one of the fund's grant recipients. CBC, located in San Salvador, works with local communities on economic, social, psychosocial, and spiritual development. The Martín-Baró Fund has supported CBC's trauma healing project, a community-based intervention that systematically addresses the social traumas experienced by the survivors of massacres and families of victims in the communities of Aracatao and Nueva Trinidad, in the northeast region of the

department of Chalatenango. The area was one of the major conflict zones during El Salvador's 12 year civil war. I witnessed the impact of these traumas on the population when I lived and worked among them from 1999-2001.

El Salvador's civil war left its society deeply scarred. From 1979 to 1991, the civil war that pitted Marxist guerillas against government military took the lives of an

estimated 75,000 people, including Ignacio Martín-Baró and his Jesuit companions. Thousands were disappeared and a million people were displaced from their homes.

Part of the U.S. backed Salvadoran government's strategy was to defeat the coalition of guerilla forces known as the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) by attacking and undermining the civilian base population that supported them. As a result, the communities in the northeast region of Chalatenango, including Arcatao and Nueva Trinidad, were targets of multiple massacres, atrocities, and human rights violations. The United States provided \$6 billion in aid to the Salvadoran government and military during over a decade of

fighting and gross violations of human rights. The war ended only after a cease fire was brokered by the United Nations.

CBC began to systematically address the scars inflicted from the war in 2004. I had the opportunity to visit the communities of Arcatao and Nueva Trinidad that year when the psychosocial project was in its first phase and to

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hear from the participants about how it was making a difference in their lives. The first phase of the project focused on working with a group of survivors in their own healing process through the use of psychodrama,

music and art therapy, meditation, energy work, movement, and cooperative game playing. I recall a conversation that I had with a friend and community leader, Élida Rivera, in



which she expressed the physical relief that she experienced as a result of releasing the repressed traumatic memories that had been held for years in her body.

Members of the group were then trained as community mental health facilitators to work with an organization of survivors. In addition, Ron Wilhelm, professor of anthropology at Southern Methodist University in Texas, taught several of the community mental health facilitators how to conduct interviews with and to record survivors' testimonies. Relying on their prior psychosocial training in trauma healing, the facilitators spread out across the countryside to obtain testimonies from survivors of the River Sumpul massacre that had occurred in 1980. Rosa Rivera, one of the facilitators, described her experience of collecting testimonies:

It is challenging to interview the survivors. After a long, difficult journey walking for several hours to get there, then listening to all that the person has been through brings up memories of what one has also lived through. But you have

to continue because it is important work. So I breathe deeply. I do some energy work to balance myself. I always carry tissue. You have to work on establishing trust with the person and assure them of how the testimony will be used.

Special attention was paid to the survivors' verbal and non-verbal cues for signs of possible distress. The facilitators closed the interviews by teaching relaxation techniques and engaging in energy work with the survivors.

The testimonies were then transcribed from the audio recording and compiled in written form. Walberto Tejeda, one of the staff members of the CBC, shared with me that student volunteers and staff who worked on the transcription also had to pay attention to their own reactions to the material and were encouraged to engage in self care while doing the work. The first publication of the testimonies Cuarenta Días con La Memoria (40 days with the Memory) was presented at a ceremony on May 27, 2007. The first installment pairs survivors' accounts with the Christian church's 40 days of Lent. Subsequent publications are being planned to accompany other liturgical seasons.

The day of events in May, 2007, began with a celebration at St. Bartolomé Church in Arcatao. This was followed by a formal presentation

of copies of the first book in the series to the survivors who had provided their testimonies. One of the mental health facilitators, Nicolás López, led the group in a ritual of planting a macadamia seed. He likened the difficulty of the seed bearing fruit to the struggle to achieve justice and reconciliation in El Salvador. The celebration then passed to the inauguration of a community museum, Museo de la Memoria (Museum of the Memory) that displays objects of war, documents, photographs, and other evidence. Rocks from the Sumpul River where several massacres took place are arranged on the floor to spell out Memoria y Resistencia (Memory and Resistance).

I am heartened to see the impact the CBC trauma healing project is having among the people about whom I have come to care so much. In the years that I have followed the work of CBC I have been continually impressed by their capacity to analyze the social reality and respond to it utilizing methodologies that are both culturally appropriate and empowering of the people they aim to serve. I look forward to the next phases of their project which include pursuing the exhumation process, elaborating a path that marks significant sites where massacres occurred, and further publications of survivors' testimonies. I am proud that the Martín-Baró Fund has continued to support the efforts of CBC as it works for true healing and reconciliation in El Salvador.

Cynthia Kennedy, LICSW, works at Beth Israel Hospital in Boston and Project REACH, a mobile services team that addresses the traumatic impact of human trafficking. She has been a member of the fund since 2004.

Centro Bartolomé de las Casas: El Museo de la Memoria

Cynthia Kennedy

i retorno a El Salvador fue algo verdaderamente Lespecial. En mayo del 2007 viajé para representar a la Fundación Ignacio Martín-Baró para los Derechos Humanos y Salud Mental en una actividad patrocinada por uno de los proyectos que reciben fondos: el Centro Bartolomé de las Casas (CBC). El CBC está ubicado en San Salvador y se dedica a trabajar con las comunidades locales acerca de temas económicos, sociales, psicosociales, y de desarrollo espiritual. Más específicamente, la Fundación Martín-Baró ha apoyado al proyecto de sanación de trauma del CBC. El proyecto trata de manera sistemática traumas experimentados por los sobrevivientes de masacres y las familias de las víctimas en las comunidades de Arcatao y Nueva Trinidad, en el noreste del departamento de Chalatenango. Ésta fue una de las zonas de más conflicto durante la guerra civil de 12 años. Yo he sido testigo del impacto de estos traumas en la población pues viví y trabajé entre los habitantes desde 1999 a 2001.

La guerra civil de El Salvador dejó profundas heridas en su sociedad. Desde 1979 hasta 1991, la guerra civil que enfrentó las guerrillas Marxistas con la armada del gobierno tomó las vidas de 75,000 personas, incluyendo a Ignacio Martín-Baró y sus compañeros jesuitas. Miles desaparecieron y un millón de personas fueron desplazadas de sus hogares. Los Estados Unidos respaldó al gobierno del Salvador en su estrategia para vencer a la coalición de fuerzas guerrilleras, conocida como Frente de Liberación Nacional Farabundo Martí (FMLN), mediante

el deterioro de las comunidades civiles de base que las soportaban. Como resultado, las comunidades de la región noreste de Chalatenango como Arcatao y Nueva Trinidad fueron blanco de múltiples masacres, atrocidades y violaciones a los derechos humanos. Los Estados Unidos proveyeron \$6 billiones de



dólares en ayuda al gobierno y ejército Salvadoreño. La guerra terminó con un cese al fuego incitado por las Naciones Unidos después de mas de 10 años.

El CBC comenzó en 2004 a tratar sistemáticamente las heridas creadas por la guerra. En el 2004 tuve la oportunidad de visitar las comunidades de Arcatao y Nueva Trinidad cuando el proyecto psicosocial estaba en su primera fase. Al hablar con los participantes pude escuchar cómo el CBC estaba haciendo una diferencia en sus vidas. La primera fase del proyecto se enfocó en trabajar con un grupo de sobrevivientes tratando el proceso de recuperación, utilizando psicodramas, música y terapia del arte, meditación, trabajos energéticos, movimiento y juegos de cooperación. Recuerdo una conversación que tuve con mi amiga y líder comunitaria, Élida Rivera. Ella me expresó el alivio físico que

experimentó como resultado de liberar los recuerdos traumáticos que había guardado en su cuerpo durante años.

Luego, los miembros de este grupo se entrenaron para ser facilitadores de salud mental comunitaria y trabajar con una organización de sobrevivientes. Algunos de ellos se entrenaron con Ron Wilhelm, profesor de antropología de la Southern Methodist University en Texas, para entrevistar y registrar los testimonios de los sobrevivientes. Los facilitadores, apoyándose en su entrenamiento psicosocial previo, se dispersaron por las afueras de la ciudad para recoger testimonios de los sobrevivientes de la masacre del Río Sumpul que ocurrió en 1980. Rosa Rivera, una de las facilitadoras, describió su experiencia de recolectar testimonios:

Es difícil entrevistar a los sobrevivientes. Después de caminar por varias horas un largo y difícil camino para poder llegar al lugar, escuchas todo lo que ha persona ha pasado y eso hace revivir recuerdos propios de lo que uno mismo ha pasado. Sin embargo hay que continuar porque es trabajo importante. Entonces respiro profundamente. Hago algo de trabajo energético para balancearme. Siempre llevo "Kleenex". Hay que trabajar en establecer confianza con la persona y hacerle saber de qué manera se utilizará su testimonio.

Se le prestó atención especial a las señales verbales y no verbales de posible desasosiego. Los facilitadores terminaron las entrevistas enseñándoles técnicas de relajación y trabajo energético a los sobrevivientes.

Posteriormente los testimonios almacenados en formato de audiograbación fueron transferido y

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CENTRO BARTOLOMÉ de las Casas: El Museo de la Memoria continued from page 3



compilados a forma escrita. Walberto Tejeda, uno de los miembros de CBC, me compartió que los estudiantes voluntarios y el personal que trabaja en las transcripciones también tuvo que prestar atención a las reacciones que les provoca el material y se les animó a practicar técnicas de autocuidado al trabajar. La primera publicación de los testimonios Cuarenta Días con La Memoria se presentó en una ceremonia el 27 de Mayo de 2007. La primera parte compara las vivencias de los sobrevivientes con la Cuaresma de la iglesia cristiana. Se están planeando publicaciones subsecuentes para acompañar otras temporadas litúrgicas.

El día de los eventos en Mayo 2007 comenzó con una celebración en la Iglesia de San Bartolomé en Arcatao. A la misa le siguió una presentación formal de las copias del primer libro de las series, a los sobrevivientes proveedores de los testimonios. Uno de los facilitadores de salud mental, Nicolás López, guió al grupo en el ritual de plantar una semilla de macadamia. Comparó la dificultad de la semilla para poder dar fruto a la lucha para lograr justicia y reconciliación en El Salvador. La

celebración luego pasó a la inauguración de un museo comunitario, El Museo de la Memoria, el cual exhibe los objetos de guerra, documentos, fotografías y otra evidencia. Se pusieron piedras del río Sumpul en el suelo para deletrear Memoria y Resistencia.

Me conmueve ver el impacto que el proyecto psicosocial de recuperación de CBC está teniendo en la gente que ha llegado a importarme tanto. En los años que he seguido el trabajo de CBC no ha dejado de impresionarme su capacidad para analizar la realidad social y responder a ella utilizando metodologías que son culturalmente apropiadas y al mismo tiempo fortalecen a la gente que sirven. Estoy ya anticipando las siguientes fases del proyecto que incluyen el proceso de exhumación, elaborar un sendero que marque sitios importantes en donde ocurrieron masacres y más publicaciones de testimonios de sobrevivientes. Me enorgullece que la Fundación Martín-Baró haya continuado apoyando los esfuerzos de CBC ya que trabaja para lograr una sanación verdadera y reconciliación en El Salvador.

Cynthia Kennedy, LICSW trabaja en el Hospital Beth Israel de Boston y en Project REACH, un equipo de servicios móviles que trata el impacto traumático del tráfico humano. Ha sido miembro de la fundación desde el 2004.

OUR Mission &

OUR MISSION

Through grant-making and education, the Martín-Baró Fund fosters psychological well-being, social consciousness, active resistance, and progressive social change in communities affected by institutional violence, repression and social injustice.

OUR VALUES

- We believe that the scars of such experiences are deeply seated both in the individual and in society.
- We believe in the power of the community collectively to heal these wounds, to move forward, and to create change.
- We believe in the importance of developing education and critical awareness about the oppressive policies and practices of the United States and of multinational corporations.

OUR GOALS

- To support innovative grassroots projects that explore the power of the community to foster healing within individuals and communities that are trying to recover from experiences of institutional violence, repression, and social injustice.
- ◆ To promote education and critical awareness about the psychosocial consequences of structural violence, repression and social injustice on individuals and communities, while educating ourselves and the wider community about the community-based responses of grantees in their pursuit of social reparation and a more just and equitable world.
- To build collaborative relationships among the Fund, its grantees, and its contributors for mutual education and social change.

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Resisting Structural Violence and War

Celina Su

he Burmese Refugee Project (BRP), a grantee of the Ignacio Martín-Baró Fund for Mental Health and Human Rights, aims to improve the mental and physical well-being of a community of refugees hailing from Shan State in Burma (officially known as "Myanmar" by the ruling military junta). Shan State borders Thailand, and at first glance the BRP community seems far away from the dramatic monk-led Saffron Revolution protests which took place in September 2007. After all, the protests, and subsequent brutal repression, took place primarily in distant cities like Pakakku and Rangoon, far from Burma's eastern border. Nevertheless, Shan State residents and refugees suffer the brunt of the on-going military dictatorship every day.

Shan State is at war with the Burmese Army. As a result, the government has generally put the more cooperative minority groups, such as the Wa, in charge. In the north, they have also encouraged Chinese entrepreneurs to cross over the border into Burma to set up businesses. This process of ethnic cleansing is officially called Burmanization because it usually involves conversion to an "official" Burman culture. In the north, Burmanization, fueled by the opium trade and China's booming economy, quickly erased thousands of years' worth of Shan architecture (see photo, this page).

The Shan were told to give up their land and move further and further out of rapidly developing towns. They were compensated only with new, smaller plots of land which would again be taken away from them as the towns grew further. As Ekaphan, a Shan refugee working with the BRP, noted:

The Burmese [are] not just fighting us with guns; they [are] eviscerating our culture.

One of the junta's favorite weapons of structural violence is to



deprive the Shan of education. In many villages, schools have been closed, depriving the Shan both of their written script and of education, the society's strongest means of empowerment.

Elsewhere in Shan State, ethnic cleansing occurs at gunpoint. This violence has escalated since the September 2007 protests, as the junta formed the Swan Arr Shin (Possessors of Strength) forces, which are assigned to infiltrate and clamp down on organized dissent.

According to young Shan monks who came to the BRP community in November 2007, the Burmese military junta has recently stepped up its efforts to conscript child soldiers,

forcibly secuestering boys as young as ten years old. One novice named Tejaniya said:

Burmese soldiers came to my village and asked for food. They promised that if villagers carried their weapons until the next village, they could return home. But they did not keep their promise and held on to the villagers.

Other Shan novices said that soldiers stole their temples' meager food supplies in the middle of the night. Shan novice Tun told of how soldiers

came to the temple and asked the abbot if any of the monks and novices had come from Rangoon.

The abbot knew better than to tell the truth. Monks returning from Rangoon were probably involved in the protests, and would likely be killed.

The U.S. and its allies have a spotty record on Burma, which borders countries that were major U.S. allies during the Vietnam War. Thailand's Prime Minister, for instance, dismissed Burma's horrible record on human rights, quipping:

Burma is a Buddhist country. Burma's leaders meditate. They say the country lives in peace.

Only six months since the junta's violent crackdowns on peacefully marching Buddhist monks, Mr. Samak's remarks suggest that the BRP's work in combating state-imposed violence—whether structural or at gunpoint—is far from done. •

Six Projects Funded For 2008

his year the *Ignacio Martín-Baró Fund for Mental Health and Human Rights* renewed its support for six groups that had been previously supported after reviewing reports on their previous activities and their projections for 2008. Each of these grassroots organizations addresses the human rights and mental health challenges faced by communities in which they work and most strive not only to address basic needs but to transform underlying causes of the structural injustices faced by local residents. Their work is described briefly below and in separate feature articles in this newsletter.



Asociación Centro de Educación y Formación Maya Ixil (ACEFOMI)

San Gaspar de Chajul, Guatemala, \$7000

The Ignacio Martín-Baró Fund for Mental Health and Human Rights renewed its grant to the Center for Mayan Ixil Education and Development, enabling ACEFOMI to multiply the psychosocial and human rights work it has been facilitating through the systematization of its previous work and the training of additional promoters in villages surrounding Chajul. ACEFOMI works with youth and women who live in contexts of extreme

poverty and in communities that have been resettled on the sites of massacres or in villages that had been burned to the ground during more than thirty-six years of civil war. ACEFOMI has a new mental health promoter who will be working to train facilitators and leaders selected by participants in the villages' previous mental health workshops. Women from five of these 10 indigenous communities have formed women's groups to better organize themselves. Once trained, these women will facilitate workshops with others in their communities, focusing on mental health and human rights as well as on helping women to analyze and better understand the social realities that contributed to the armed conflict. As importantly, they will explore the psychological effects of war and extreme poverty on themselves and others in the community and identify their rights as indigenous women towards developing programs to minimize negative risks affecting youth and women. The grant will also allow ACEFOMI to develop popular education materials to be used in these village-level workshops.

Children's Rehabilitation Center (CRC)

Quezon City, Philippines, \$8000

The CRC is one of the few organizations in the Philippines devoted to the care of child victims of human rights violations. In past years the *Ignacio Martín-Baró Fund for Mental Health and Human Rights* has supported CRC efforts to aid children from displaced families due to military operations and natural disasters, youth who witnessed the summary execution of parents, and child political prisoners. Recently, troubling accounts have been reported of the arrest and detention of so-called child soldiers. Investigation of some of these cases reveals, however, that children have simply been rounded up from communities associated with the New People's Army (considered a terrorist organization by the U.S.) rather than being captured while engaged in combat. Detention of these children is intended to induce the surrender of parents claimed to be involved with revolutionary groups. This year's grant will enable the CRC to conduct fact-finding missions about alleged child-soldiers, visit children jailed for alleged political offenses, provide immediate medical and psycho-social support where needed, and prepare for *Children for Peace: Joining Hearts and Hands*, a peace festival for children to share their experiences and advocate publicly on behalf of their common struggles. As in the past, these activities include a three-pronged strategy: fact-finding, group-based psychosocial services, and public, human rights advocacy conducted by children themselves.

Proyecto de Salud Mental Comunitaria y Acompañamiento Psicosocial (Proyecto) San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas, México, \$5000



With a 2007 grant received from the *Ignacio Martín-Baró Fund for Mental Health and Human Rights*, the Proyecto trained indigenous, community-based health promoters in community mental health, psychosocial support and accompaniment, and in detecting and addressing human rights violations. The training workshops focused on recognizing low-intensity warfare, engaging in crisis intervention, gaining tools to respond to government attacks, and addressing alcoholism and domestic violence. Participants note that the area of mental health is new territory for them, but they are recognizing the connections between mental health, their lived experiences, and strengthening community resistance to the low-intensity warfare. The 2008 grant will sup-

port the Proyecto in reinforcing the training in community mental health promotion begun in the first year of its work as well as enable promoters to extend the work through analyzing threats to local communities' security and developing resources for the prevention of harassment of local residents by paramilitaries. They will also continue to provide psychosocial accompaniment to the indigenous communities in the area who are most at risk and targeted by paramilitary groups.

CENTRO SAN BARTOLOMÉ dE LAS CASAS (CBC)

San Salvador, El Salvador, \$7000



The CBC works with local communities on economic, social, psychosocial, and spiritual development. Their 2007 report indicated that they had achieved their primary objectives for the year, including inaugurating the Museo de la Memoria (Museum of the Memory), elaborating the booklet Cuarenta Días con la Memoria: Memoria Sobreviviente de Arcatao (Forty Days with the Memory: Survival Memory of Arcatao) and other testimonial materials, as well as accompanying the communities in the northeast region in exhumation processes (see Feature Article, p. 1, this issue). Organizers reported being particularly gratified that youth participated extensively in these inter-generational projects. With a grant in 2008, the CBC will continue this work with survivors in the

communities of Arcatao and Nueva Trinidad, developing a new level of work in collaboration with a forensic anthropological team from Guatemala. Additionally, the CBC will continue to provide psychosocial support to relatives and survivors of the exhumations. Finally, the CBC will extend its work in new directions, creating actions at the local, municipal, and national levels thereby demonstrating the work with survivors to authorities of justice, landowners in the region, and other relevant committees.

CENTER for Immigrant Families (CIF) New York City, NY, U.S.A., \$7000

The CIF is a popular education-based community organizing, education, and training center created to address the interconnected challenges facing low-income immigrant women of color. It links personal psychological well-being, health, and development to sustained organizing focused on the root causes of the challenges facing immigrant women. As in the past, MBF funds will support the *Escuela Popular de Mujeres* (*Women's Popular Education Program*). The Escuela engages low-income immigrant women of color in a process of individual and collective empowerment, reflection, leadership development, and organizing for change. It has helped women break the silence and begin to combat workplace abuses, domestic violence, and other human rights violations. One of its programs, the *English Literacy Project*, is a free, 9-week English literacy program with free childcare that attempts to meet several interrelated goals: to respond to women's expressed needs for English language skills while also empowering them through a popular education approach; to make their lives and challenges more broadly visible; and to build leadership skills among participants. Women emerge from these sessions more united and with enhanced self-confidence in their self-expression and ability to take action in the face of challenges. The leadership training program has been extended to include skills-building training around public speaking, outreach, and media, and to discuss local gentrification and how best to address it. The 2008 grant also will help CIF strengthen its internal structure and enhance its capacity to sustain its programs while meeting its organizational goals and objectives.



The Burmese Refugee Project Thailand, \$6500

The Burmese Refugee Project works with ethnic Shan refugees who have fled into Thailand to escape persecution by the Burmese military junta. Unable to obtain official refugee status in Thailand, they are marginalized and persecuted, and have few prospects for employment, healthcare, or education (see Project Report, p. 5, this issue). The BRP has had remarkable success in mobilizing and organizing the community around sanitation and public health conditions and literacy. Most of the children have overcome great obstacles to attend school, and many are now excelling. Since *Ignacio Martín-Baró Fund for Mental Health and Human Rights* grants from 2003 to 2005, the BRP has succeeded in attracting individual donors to support its basic community development and solidarity work. A 2008 grant from the Fund will make possible a new initia-

tive to increase several culture-specific components which are seen as essential to maintaining community morale and cohesiveness, and preparing its members for the hoped-for return to Burma when political conditions improve. The BRP is based on its organizers' observations that cultural disconnection is a significant component of mental health problems appearing in the refugee community – including substance abuse, problem gambling, teen pregnancy, and low self-esteem among children. It therefore will incorporate a respected Shan refugee monk as a core member of the BRP. He will offer Shan culture-based workshops for the children and community-building activities for families, as well as working with the existing Thai staff to increase their awareness of and sensitivity to Shan cultural issues. The BRP will also train two peer educators from the community to work with young people, particularly on reproductive health issues.

Boston and Denver Bowlers Strike for Justice

Kelly L. Rabenstein & M. Brinton Lykes

he Ignacio Martín-Baró Fund for Mental Health and Human Rights bowl-a-thon took place in both Boston and Denver. In Boston, bowlers and their supporters gathered on Sunday, April 6 at Lanes and Games in Somerville, MA while teams organized by Kristen Kraus, an alumna of Weston Jesuit School of Theology,

and her husband Jon, gathered in Denver, Colorado, for a first Western bowl-a-thon on Sunday, April 27. Contributions raised by these Eastern- and Westernbased teams and their supporters will exceed last year's total of \$30,000!

2008 was a year of many firsts. Walberto Tejeda, a member of one of our grantee organizations, Centro Bartolomé de las Casas in El Salvador (see Feature Article, p. 1, this issue), had his first experience on the lanes in the Boston bowl-a-thon. Bowlers and Fund

supporters learned more about the CBC and its multiple community-based educational and mental health programs at several Boston events: a potluck dinner, graciously hosted in Cynthia Kennedy's home, and presentations by Walberto at Boston College and other local NGOs. We thank Walberto and the CBC for extending our partnership to include a wonderful week together.





As always, the bowl-a-thons brought together many people and their sponsors to support the Fund's grantees in a creative and fun way! A special thanks to Kristen and Jon for extending our Strike for Justice "across America". Thanks to all who bowled in Boston and Denver – and to our generous supporters. ◆