



Movimiento por un Economía Solidaria en las Américas (MESA)

Iglesias Trabajando juntas por una Economía de la Vida

Mouvement pour une économie de solidarité en Amériques (MESA)

Églises travaillant ensemble pour une économie de la vie

Movement for a Solidarity Economy in the Americas (MESA)

Churches Working Together for an Economy of Life

Ciudad Juárez Comunicé

From October 1 to 3, 2008, representatives of MESA met in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, to investigate the impacts of trade agreements in that city and the continent. Inspired by a theological vision of God's economy, a household table where all belong and are welcome, MESA brings together representatives of churches and faith-based organizations from Canada, Mexico, Central America and the United States of America to educate and raise awareness among the citizenry, and advocate on issues related to just trade and sustainable economics.

MESA representatives met with inhabitants of Lomas de Poleo, a community currently under siege by a powerful local businessman. This businessman wants the land of Lomas de Poleo and is intent on driving out this small community of 200 families. There have been several legal rulings on this disputed land in favour of the community of Lomas de Poleo. Not deterred by legal rulings, this businessman has built a fence around the community and placed armed guards at the only entrance who only permit residents to enter. During the meeting with representatives of MESA, the community representatives received an emergency call telling them that armed guards had begun to demolish their homes. They rushed back to Lomas Poleo and were terrified to find that two houses had already been destroyed. In the third home a man mounted on a horse and armed with a rope and gun was ready to lasso the remaining residents, including a child, from the last room standing in that home, The local police refused repeated and desperate calls to investigate. Unfortunately this struggle for life and land in the face of neoliberal mega projects is a reality that is repeated throughout Latin America.

MESA representatives visited the site where eight murdered women were found in a vacant downtown lot, today marked by pink crosses, now a potent symbol associated with the city. At the Pasos del Norte human rights center, we also met with women from "That Our Daughters Return Home" who told heart-breaking stories as sisters, daughters and mothers of disappeared and murdered women in the city. Estimates of numbers of women killed over the past few years run between 300-400 women, with very of these murder cases successfully prosecuted.

MESA representatives met with representatives of labour and maquiladoras (assembly plants) where the average wage including bonuses is about 2,500 pesos (US\$250) a month and the estimated basic cost of living for a family of four is approximately 8,000 pesos (US\$800) a month¹.

¹ The minimum wage is 52 pesos or about USD 5.20 per day. Add to daily or weekly wages the relevant bonuses for arriving on time, for example, and the average daily wage is about 125 pesos per day, or two and a half times the minimum wage. This indicates the terribly low minimum wage, and also indicates the inadequacy of wages to meet basic costs of living. 8,000 pesos is the estimated basic cost of living for a family of four, not including meat or milk products in the diet. As a result, most families have children beginning their careers in the assembly factories as soon as possible, usually applying at 15 years of age,

MESA representatives heard about human rights advocacy in a city where the murder rate as of October 3, 2008 was already 1,048 people, where federal troops in Humvees and mounted machine guns come into the city along with signs declaring they are here to help, and a recurring theme is a lack of investigation, the absence of political will and the inability of courts to bring perpetrators to justice, in other words – impunity.

MESA representatives also received a compelling presentation from Raúl Morena, Professor of Economics at the University of San Salvador, on corporate and government plans for large-scale infrastructure projects throughout the region as part of the Plan Puebla Panama. These planned megaprojects further threaten local communities and will irrecoverably destroy ecosystems and the biological diversity within them.

Here along the historic Camino Real where fences, gun crosshairs, and boundaries are potent signs of exclusion. Many of the challenges of North and Meso-American integration stand in painful contrast to an inclusive table, the vision of the Gospel. Through worship, reflection and dialogue, the MESA representatives brought the suffering and hope of the people of Ciudad Juárez into their hearts. Drawing on the perennial hope of the Gospel expressed in Rev. 22:2 *for the healing of the nations*, MESA representatives pledged to work for healing and an economy in the service of life for all.

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earlier if possible so that three or four family members might meet their family's basic needs. Tragically, in a city of 2,000,000, only 15,000 kids graduate from public elementary schools.