

jallalla

the democracy center magazine

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northern winter, southern summer

The Power of Citizens

a view from the global south

Rewriting Bolivia's Constitution
From New Mexico to Montenegro: Citizen Action
Challenging Global Violence
U.S. Elections '08: Latin American Voices

"CITIZEN POWER"



Welcome to the second issue of our annual magazine from Bolivia, *Jallalla*.

In the United States, 2008 promises to be 'the year of the politician.' Candidates for the Presidency alone will spend more than \$1 billion this year trying to convince voters to go their way. That's enough money to take every person in Bolivia out to lunch every day for four months, or to finance the War in Iraq for 36 hours.

Yet, with so much focus on politicians and what they do, it is easy to forget that what really makes a difference, from California to Cochabamba, is what *citizens* do. From peacemaking to battling global warming, it is citizens, not politicians, who are taking the lead.

Friends who work for the cause of immigrant rights have discouraged me from using that word – citizen. They tell me that it is used to label newcomers as something less. But being a citizen is about something more than our nationality. It is about more than where we live. The moment we choose to make a difference, to take a stand and get involved in changing the world – in that moment, we are all 'citizens.' And in a world that is becoming more integrated each year, making a difference is now something we must do globally as well.

This issue of *Jallalla* is dedicated to the power of citizens, the ability of each of us to make a difference.

As before, a main focus of this magazine is Bolivia. It is where we live and work and it is a place that continues to inspire the world with its activist style of citizenship. While 2006 was marked by the hope of new leadership here, 2007 was a year of hard political conflicts. In this issue we look at the current state of things in this country we call home. We examine how Bolivians have tackled the difficult task of writing a new constitution. We look at the nation's struggles with environmental crises, both imported and homegrown. We also explore what 'feminism' means here, consider the ritual of the *Q'owa* (koh-wah), and offer some updates on issues that have put Bolivia in the global news.

But just as The Democracy Center's work reaches out globally, so this second issue of our annual magazine goes global too. In the pages that follow, we spotlight some of the work we have been doing with citizen groups around the world – from Uganda to the Balkans.

We interview a 'citizen hero' of ours, a brave and gentle woman who has taken up the plight of refugees from the U.S. War in Iraq, and highlight the stories of two 'social entrepreneurs' who are bringing creative change to their communities on opposite sides of the earth. We look at the global movement for non-violence, and introduce an important new Democracy Center campaign, *Voices from Latin America*, which aims to bring a very different perspective into that big election-fest scheduled up north in 2008.

At The Democracy Center we take citizen power seriously. All over the world we have been invited by people who have made that brave step into activism, to help them take that step in the most effective way possible. From the high plains of New Mexico, to the green hills of Montenegro, in political worlds that seem to bear little resemblance to one another, we find something that is always the same. People want to exercise their right to shape the public choices that affect their lives. They take the time to understand those issues; they come together with their neighbors; and often at great risk, they act.

Citizen power – it's the stuff that makes democracy something so much more than just elections. It's the stuff that makes democracy live and breathe. And it is the people who practice it, all over the world, that keep us inspired. Thank you, as always, for your interest and support.

Jim Shultz
Executive Director
The Democracy Center



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j'allalla: the word

In Bolivia, the term j'allalla (pronounced hy-ya-ya) has many definitions. It is a salutation, a blessing, a call to arms, and even a call to drink. Widely used in both Aymara and Quechua, j'allalla can be roughly translated as an imperative: "May it live!"

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The Democracy Center Staff
From left to right: Elliot Williams, Leny Olivera, Jim Shultz, Lily Whitesell, Aldo Orellana, and Melissa Draper

The Democracy Center

The Democracy Center works globally to advance social justice through a unique combination of investigation and reporting, training citizens in the art of public advocacy, and leading international citizen campaigns. Based in Cochabamba, The Democracy Center has been a leading international voice from Bolivia since 1998, staffed by a dedicated group of international and Bolivian activists, researchers, and writers.

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Visit our website for more information on the authors and the subjects covered in this magazine.

2007: Bolivia at a Difficult Crossroads

The year 2007 in Bolivia showed us just how difficult a road it is when a country begins to move in a new political direction.

The first year of the new administration of President Evo Morales was marked by big beginnings that symbolized hope and long-sought change. An inauguration ritual was held by indigenous leaders at an ancient and sacred site. The government issued a national decree to reassert the country's control of its gas and oil. A Constituent Assembly was elected to rewrite the nation's constitution.

In Morales' second year in office, however, deep fault lines – divisions drawn by ethnicity, ideology, politics, socioeconomic differences, and regional interests – kept the country in constant conflict.

In January, violence over Bolivian politics broke out in Cochabamba. Rival backers of the MAS government and the local governor let their disputes spill into the streets, leaving three men dead and scores of others wounded. The Democracy Center lost three large windows in the hail of thrown rocks, as we filed reports from the scene.

Bolivia's intensified political conflicts have taken place in two arenas. One has been in the realm of traditional political institutions, where the Congress and the Constituent Assembly have debated major changes in land rights and natural resources, rewriting the nation's Constitution, and other controversial topics. The other struggle has taken place on the streets. MAS backers, their opponents, and a host of others have turned issues – ranging from regional autonomy to a proposal to relocate the national capital – into political confrontations and violence. The backdrop to these conflicts has been the underlying battle between the Morales government, and the wealthy, conservative sectors of the population who lost their political power when Morales took office.

These conflicts have also reflected a battle over what "democracy" is in Bolivia. It is a word that has been used frequently the past year. The economic elite have used it as a rallying cry to oppose the deep changes proposed by the government. Those who do not share the elite's power or its interpretation of democracy have questioned what it means for the rest of the nation.

In 2007, Bolivia celebrated 25 years of democracy, following the military dictatorships of the 1970s. Many of us who come from the nation's marginalized populations believe that we must take back the word democracy. We must understand what kind of democracy we defend, what kind of democracy we have, and what kind of democracy we want to build.

For Bolivia, the past year has been not only about the process of political and social change within the country, but Bolivia's relationship to global forces as well, especially economic, political, and environmental forces.

Bolivia has joined its Latin American neighbors in search of new economic models. In 2007, Bolivia turned down loans from the International Monetary Fund. Now along with Argentina, Venezuela, and Brazil, Bolivia has set out on a course free of IMF pressure. This includes alternative frameworks for trade: avoiding environmental exploitation; treating water as a common good, not a commodity; seeking investment in natural resources without giving away ownership; and taking into account economic differences between countries. Instead of embarking on the trade equivalent of an uneven boxing match – a 19-year-old lightweight against 300-pound experienced boxers – these "people's trade agreements" prioritize citizen well-being and development over private profits.

As the most indigenous nation in the Americas, Bolivia has also had an important and visible role in strengthening and revitalizing indigenous identity globally. Many Bolivians celebrated when the United Nations passed a resolution in September affirming the rights of indigenous peoples, including the right to self-governance. The resolution was considered a victory among Bolivia's indigenous peoples and was echoed in local demands for indigenous autonomy. While a significant advancement for the global community, the resolution is only the first step along the path towards full recognition and justice for indigenous peoples.

On the environment, Bolivia has emerged as a focal point for the effects of global warming triggered mainly by the energy and consumption practices of the wealthy economies of the north. This year, floods in the country's eastern lowlands destroyed people's homes, livestock, and crops. In the highlands, glaciers are disappearing at ever greater rates. Bolivia, too, has its share of homegrown environmental problems. All this has led to greater environmental consciousness and a growing effort for a more harmonious relationship with nature, within Bolivia as well as outside its borders.

Bolivia enters a new year facing significant challenges, especially from erupting political conflict over constitutional reform. The way forward cannot be defined by a single government or just one party. To apply a phrase used by social movements, it is the simple and hardworking people of Bolivia that must now take on the work of building, as the Zapatistas of Mexico say, "a world in which many worlds may fit."

In the articles that follow, we offer a deeper look at these topics, what they mean for Bolivia, and what they teach all of us about a country in a difficult transition.

Bolivia's Struggle for a New Constitution

If there is one characteristic that distinguishes Bolivia from its Latin American neighbors, it is its diversity. It can be seen in the country's geography. At one end, the nation's eastern lowlands are covered with Amazon rain forests. At the other, barren highlands, two miles high, stretch flat to the horizon, dotted by llamas and small towns. That same diversity is reflected in Bolivia's people. It is a nation home to more than 36 separate indigenous peoples, many of whom trace their roots, their languages and their customs back centuries, to the time before even the Incas populated these lands.

It is that same diversity that has turned the task of rewriting the nation's Constitution into an explosive social battle.

The Demand for a Constituent Assembly

The demand for a new Constitution finds its seeds among the nation's indigenous majority. For many of these communities the movement to rewrite the country's most fundamental rules is about righting Bolivia's long history of political exclusion and marginalization. The majority indigenous population did not have the right to vote here until 1952. "Our proposals have been worked not for one year, but for the 500 years [since Spanish colonization]!" claimed Esperanza Huanca, an indigenous delegate to the Assembly.

Bolivia's Constitution was originally drafted in 1825, in an era driven by the mentality of foreign colonization and in which the indigenous population was robbed of land and denied rights as citizens. For decades, rewriting that Constitution and re-founding the Bolivian state was both a dream and a demand of many of its indigenous peoples.

For much of Bolivia's history, indigenous resistance took a cultural form, focusing not on politics but on protecting their languages, cultures, and identities within the confines of their communities. Starting in the 1960s, however, the nature of indigenous resistance began to find an explicitly political voice. Indigenous peoples across the country started demanding the right to self-governance – to live according to their own norms, customs, and beliefs.

Later the rise of indigenous political identity played a role in a series of protests and events that turned national

politics on its head – from the Water Revolt to the Gas Wars that ultimately toppled former President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada. In 2005, with the MAS party's Evo Morales' victory as Bolivia's first indigenous President, the demand for a Constituent Assembly became a central issue. In July 2006, delegates were elected in a nationwide vote and that August the Assembly began its work in Sucre, Bolivia's judicial capital.

Writing a New Constitution – The Major Issues

Bolivia's Constituent Assembly saw its task as looking far beyond traditional constitutional issues of how government should be organized. From the start, the Assembly declared that it had a mandate to make dramatic changes on an array of issues central to the nation's economic and social future. Chief among these have been indigenous rights, autonomy, and land reform.

On indigenous rights, the Assembly debated a set of proposals to recognize Bolivia as 'plurinational', that is one nation made up of many, most especially the vast Aymara, Quecha, Guaraní and other indigenous peoples. Through indigenous autonomy, each would be formally allowed clear rights to control their land, operate their own systems of community justice, and elect their leaders in traditional ways.

A related issue and one of the most divisive is regional

autonomy. This was a proposal driven by leaders in Bolivia's oil and gas-rich eastern lowlands. For them, 'autonomy' translated into regional control over those gas and other natural resources, positions heatedly opposed by MAS' and Morales' base in the indigenous highlands.

Another explosive issue before the Assembly was land reform, an issue with deep roots in Bolivia's history. Indigenous peoples, on the one side, see redistribution as part of a historic fight to gain – or regain – land rights. Wealthy landowners, on the other, reacted to these reforms with fear and alarm. They called on the government to respect private property rights and steadfastly opposed the Morales government's plans.

Lastly, Morales and his detractors battled bitterly over a proposed change from MAS to allow Presidential re-election.



Indigenous representatives bring their demands to the Constituent Assembly

courtesy of Leny Cuiviera

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Focus on the Environment:

Melting Glaciers and Disastrous Flooding

The Chacaltaya glacier is a thick layer of ice that stretches across the rugged scalp of a mountain that rises more than 17,000 feet above sea level. The glacier dates back tens of thousands of years to the last ice age. For as long as people have lived in Bolivia's capital, La Paz, Chacaltaya glacier has been a source of water and life. But if geologists are right, by 2015 the last of the glacier will melt into a final drop of water and disappear. This is what global climate change, set in motion by energy use a hemisphere away, means for Bolivia's highlands and its people.

No one knows for sure what the ultimate consequences of the melting of Andean glaciers will be. But they will likely be devastating for many Bolivians. Chronic droughts over the last 30 years have already driven thousands of impoverished farmers to leave their homes for Bolivia's capital and its rapidly growing sister city, El Alto. As much as 60% of the water used by La Paz and El Alto is glacier-fed. Without the glacier water, the people who live in these two cities, and hundreds of small highlands towns, are left with an uncertain future.

While climate change means lack of water for some, it means too much water for others. This past year, massive floods put hundreds of thousands of acres of the nation's lowlands under water. More than 70,000 families lost their homes, and dozens were killed as a direct result of the rising waters. People lived on wooden rafts and diseases ravaged lowland cities and communities. Schools were closed and people fled to the cities, trying to escape the disaster. The Bolivian government called a state of emergency as a result with damages estimated in the tens of millions of dollars.

The floods – the worst in Bolivia in 40 years – are a direct result of El Niño, a weather phenomenon that brings warm winds and ocean currents across the Pacific Ocean to South America. These currents pound Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador with unusually hot weather, then floods. Many experts link the greater frequency and intensity of El Niño in South America with global warming.

Bolivia, like most countries in the world, has contributed its own damage to the environment. One need look no further than the rapid deforestation in the Amazonian basin. However, the life of the average Bolivian uses seven times fewer resources than the average American – a direct result of the unchecked habits of consumption and energy use a hemisphere away. At the same time, it is low-income nations like Bolivia that often bear the biggest brunt, and possess the fewest resources to adapt.

A Leaking Landfill in

To be sure, not all of Bolivia's environmental

skies. In Cochabamba, one of the direst environ-
Tucked in between the rolling hills of Cocha-
hundred families called K'ara K'ara. Originally ho-
rich farmlands, it is now mostly abandoned. For t-
trash from the burgeoning city of Cochabamba.
400 tons of trash are added daily.

From the start, the Cochabamba landfill has
no attention paid to standard environmental safe-
impermeable layer was put in underneath, allow-
be absorbed into the earth. The contamination -
even arsenic – has reached K'ara K'ara's groundw-
neighbors for washing dishes and bathing childre-

Over the last ten years, the people of K'ara K'
gastrointestinal, and skin problems. According to
children bear the worst of the consequences. Th-
afford to move anywhere else – have to live with
permeate every corner of their community and h-

In 2000, K'ara K'ara was declared an environ-
environmental institutions, ecologists, and nation-
that the landfill be closed. However, the mayor's
administration to another. No new site has been
still a far off goal.

Local residents, environmental organizations
the mayor's office. If negotiations are stalled, the
sole entrance to the landfill as trash overflows the
as going far deeper than closing that landfill or ev-
caused by it. They have demanded hands-on pu-
member of the regional environmental group FC
involved in the planning and development proce-
social consequences, from design to construction

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a practice currently prohibited in Bolivia, but demanded by Morales backers.

A Twisted Path Toward Reform

The path of the Constitutional reform has been one full of conflicts, and detours that have threatened to end it altogether. Not long after the Assembly began, a heated debate broke out over the procedures that would govern its work. While there was clear agreement that the final document would require 2/3 approval for passage by the Assembly, MAS opponents demanded that all procedural matters and each



courtesy of Aldo Orellana

individual article be subject to a 2/3 vote as well. MAS adversaries argued that this was to "protect democracy." MAS claimed it was a plan to let minority parties scuttle the whole process. Before a compromise was finally reached, the dispute spilled into the streets nationwide, including a bloody confrontation in Cochabamba in January that left three men dead.

In March, the Assembly's commissions finally settled in to work and, not surprisingly, MAS and its opposition, and in particular PODEMOS, fought heatedly over the key issues. Yet, these issues were debated by people who had never

Snapshots from Bolivia

the Heart of Bolivia

challenges come from abroad through the mental problems is literally right under foot. Cochabamba's outskirts sits a small town of three miles from a thriving agricultural community and in the last twenty years, K'ara K'ara has taken in the waste. The landfill is now a tower of garbage to which

has been constructed and operated with virtually no safeguards. Unlike Bolivia's other major landfills, no one is collecting all the liquid that leaks from the landfill to the ground – including lead, aluminum, chromium, and mercury, which is still used by the garbage dump's workers.

K'ara have begun suffer from respiratory, and studies done in the community, K'ara K'ara's residents those that have stayed – mostly people who can't escape the smell, rodents, and insects that now infest their homes, thanks to the nearby landfill.

environmental disaster by a commission of national and local authorities. The governor ordered the national office has continued to drag its feet from one day to the next. The identification and closure of K'ara K'ara's landfill is

and citizens' groups are currently in talks with the government. They have a tactic that rarely fails – blockading the road to the city. However, the advocates see the problem as not even winning a case to mitigate the damages. Public participation in any proposed fix. One FOCOMADE said, "We want people to be involved in any public project with environmental or social impact."

Where Politics Fails and Citizen Action Fills the Gap

On one hand, these environmental disasters – the Chacaltaya glacier and the K'ara K'ara dump tell very different stories. One is a global problem that comes from the skies, and the other is a local problem that leaks through the ground underfoot. Yet, there is an important common thread that connects the two.

In both cases – global energy use and a Bolivian landfill – political leaders have taken the easy route, even in the face of solid science and clear environmental warnings to do otherwise.

In both cases, it is the poorest communities and the most impoverished nations that are forced to live with the most severe results. A glacier can disappear completely in Bolivia and the nations that caused it face no consequences. A landfill leaks poison into one marginalized Cochabamba neighborhood, and the rest of the city is unwilling to address the problem.

In both stories – one global, one local – the absence of political leadership means that the only way things will truly change is through community and citizen action. Just as the neighborhoods around a Bolivian landfill have needed to organize to demand solutions, so citizens need to organize globally to demand solutions to a planetary environmental crisis.

In both cases, it will be public pressure that makes the difference. In K'ara K'ara, the authorities in charge are clear and the consequences of inaction are obvious and life-threatening. However, although citizen organizing and action has been ongoing and effective in getting to the negotiating table, local authorities have not been responsive.

On a worldwide scale, even experts are unsure of all of the potential consequences of climate change, and no one knows who will be affected until it's too late. Activists in wealthy nations, however, have something else working in their favor. Their authorities are more likely to respond to public opinion. Once advocates make an issue relevant in public debate, it's a matter of time – and strategic, sustained civic engagement.

As John Zambrana, president of FOCOMADE, said, "When we realize we are directly affected by the contamination of our environment; that is when we get up and start pressuring [our local and national governments] for a solution."

It is a declaration that applies globally as well.

Lily Whitesell and Aldo Orellana

before been so integrated into real authority. Assembly member Nelida Faldin from Santa Cruz said, "We never would have imagined that a domestic worker or a farm worker would be sitting down next to a landowner [at the negotiating table]."

A year after its start, the Assembly commissions had drafted 717 Articles. But just as the Assembly looked like it was headed to the final stage, the process was sidetracked by yet another political conflict, one that came by surprise.

Civic leaders in Sucre demanded that the Assembly take up a proposal to move the nation's capital from La Paz to Sucre. Calling the proposal unnecessarily divisive, the MAS majority refused to bring the proposal to debate, setting off mass protests in Sucre, often violent, that shut down the Assembly for more than a month. In late September, the MAS government, seeking to get the process moving again, convened a summit of political leaders, obtaining

compromise on some issues, but leaving others unresolved.

In late November when the Assembly tried to reconvene, protests in Sucre erupted once more, leading MAS to move the body's meetings to a protected military facility, which in turn led to a boycott by the opposition parties. When MAS approved a draft Constitution without the opposition's presence, the Sucre violence escalated, leaving three men dead, and setting off a new round of general strikes and resistance from MAS opponents.

As we go to print, it remains unclear what will come of Bolivia's deep struggle over constitutional reform. Bolivia is at a moment in its political history that is simultaneously powerful, dangerous, and inspiring. A nation is seeking to redefine aspects of its basic identity. Whether it can do that without breaking into further violence remains an unanswered question.

The Democracy Center Staff

La Q'owa: A Taste of Bolivian Culture



The Q'owa offering is set out with coca leaves for the ritual, and then burned over coals as a reciprocal gift for the *Pachamama*.

Walking through the streets of Cochabamba on the first Friday of any month, one is struck by a pungent aroma wafting through the air and trails of smoke sneaking out the doors of small stores. This is the scent of the Bolivian ritual of the *Q'owa* (koh-wah), and a reminder of one of the ways in which many Bolivians still hold fast to ancient traditions.

The ritual takes its name from a plant commonly found in the Bolivian *altiplano*. As the *q'owa* plant is burned, the smoke carries its incense-like smell through the air. Cultural practices like the *Q'owa* ritual trace the historical roots of the Quechua and Aymara peoples from centuries ago to the present day. Similar ceremonies are still observed, especially in the western highlands and valleys.

In the countryside, where this tradition originated, the *Q'owa* is a communal practice to give thanks to the *Pachamama* (Mother Earth). As Andean cultural expert Enrique Rocha indicates: "All that we need we obtain in our surroundings... from the earth where the *Pachamama* resides." The *Q'owa*, then, is a way to ask for balance and harmony in the earth, between the land and the community, and among people. It is offered in hope of a good harvest or to remedy problems and maintain equilibrium with crops. The *Q'owa* is also performed as a blessing for important occasions in life – from the construction of a new home to the start of a wedding ceremony.

The celebration of the *Q'owa* is also a popular tradition in some Bolivian cities. In Cochabamba's vast 30 square-block open market, *La Cancha*, women fill long rows of stalls selling small collections of charms made of sugar. Each unique charm stands for some distinct hope – love, good health, safe travels, achievement in school, and success in business. They will eventually be burned during the *Q'owa* atop small metal stands resembling tiny barbeques.

A full *Q'owa* ceremony begins with people chewing coca leaves together, to symbolize the harmony between all those

present. The ritualist who guides the ceremony calls forth the *Pachamama*, *Inti*, and *Killa* (the Earth, Sun, and Moon), and other protective spirits to join in. When the fire is hot enough, the charms, along with items such as handfuls of quinoa and other local grains, seeds, eggs, and llama wool are added. With a smell like powerful incense, the *q'owa* plant is a necessary ingredient. Rocha also points to its restorative qualities: "It is an Andean mint, an aromatic element...the fragrance of this herb when burned purifies the atmosphere just like mint tea purifies our body."

Before long, the smoke of the fire and scent of the *q'owa* plant fill the air. During the *ch'alla*, the final stage of the *Q'owa*, each person pours alcohol on the four corners surrounding the fire. These corners represent the north, south, east, and west of the Andean territory and a further connection to the land. While a typical *Q'owa* in the city may end here, a full celebration to inaugurate a new home or office continues on with traditional music and dance well into the night.

Above all, the *Q'owa* is about bringing people together. According to Rocha, it is "not a process of adoration or idolatry to the divinities, but a relationship of reciprocity with all the elements of nature." The objects burned symbolize this reciprocity with the *Pachamama* and the community. The fire itself is a representation of the remaking of the world. It is a return to the beginning or birth, without any negativity and with everything in equilibrium.

Although there is great variation in the practices of the *Q'owa*, the ritual maintains the same essence: it is a complementary process between the people and the *Pachamama*; a continuation and strengthening of the relationship of respect that has existed since the beginning of time. For Enrique Rocha, "[the *Q'owa*] is an *ayni* (reciprocal obligation) that [we] receive and have to give, a process that never ends."

Feminism from the Ground Up

Machismo is a phenomenon that runs deep in many cultures around the world, including in Bolivia. Feminism, however, is another powerful current that has its place in Bolivia's history, one whose story is rarely told and often misunderstood.

Too often, feminism is confused as just the female version of *machismo*, an ideology that places one gender above another. From my experience with women's groups in Bolivia, feminism is not an expression of women asserting their superiority. Rather, it promotes a society where men and women live together, free of oppression and the imbalances of power that so often define their relationship to one another. The concept does not focus on women only; it is one that addresses both men and women in their everyday lives.

Nor is feminism a concept imported from the North. As far back as the 1920s, Bolivian women were organizing in the capital of La Paz. Under the women's union *Federacion Obrero Feminina*, women florists, cooks, and vendors banded together to make concrete demands for their right to do business in the markets and have access to public transportation. They also pushed for autonomy for women's labor organizations under the umbrella of the general Bolivian workers' union. This organizing was a genuine reaction of Bolivian women to the discrimination they faced every day.

As Bolivia became the testing ground for foreign neoliberal economic policies in the 1990s, a parallel wave of foreign non-governmental organizations (NGOs) arrived in Bolivia as well. Some of them, operating under foreign banners of "gender equity," began pushing foreign visions of what feminism should mean in Bolivia. Those visions, however, came from traditional NGO hierarchies and not from feminists working at a community level. As a result, some of their plans didn't match what many Bolivian women actually wanted.

One example is a 'development project' sponsored by the European Union, aimed at supporting rural women weavers by helping them gain access to foreign markets. While that aspect of the project was well received, it was tied to another goal that the EU project called "women's empowerment." They sought to push the women beyond weaving, into also assuming management responsibilities for the project. Many responded by saying, "We're mothers, wives, cooks, weavers, farmers and shepherds, you think we want to administer the project as well? The men should participate too."

To be certain, women in Bolivia face a long list of challenges – social, economic, and cultural – that feminist leaders here do want to see addressed. However, the political space to address those issues has been repeatedly taken up by other popular demands and battles that dominate Bolivia's

political horizon.

During the brutal dictatorships of the 1970s and 1980s, women's issues were shut out of the debate. With the oppression on the streets, violence and discrimination against women in the home increased. Even groups opposing the dictatorships accused feminists of being foreign agents intent on rupturing working class unity. In the 1990s, ongoing social conflicts over issues such as coca, water rights, and foreign-driven economic reform also left little political space to address relations between men and women.

While the leadership in the coca unions and other social movements included many powerful women, class and sectoral concerns occupied their attention. In 2003, during the Gas War, even the more established urban feminist groups broke along lines of class and politics when 100,000 people marched on La Paz. The space available to address women's rights and the relationships of power between men and women has been directly related to the level of security and political polarization in a country.

Women's rights, however, should not be seen as a topic isolated from social and political issues. The challenge is for Bolivians to bring these deep-seeded issues of discrimination and violence against women into each of their struggles. Social movements, NGOs and the government alike need to address women's equality, not just in their public rhetoric, but also in their internal dealings, so that equality becomes an integral part of how their work is carried forward.

Work on women's equality is advancing in Bolivia. A first-ever national Women's Social Forum was designed by grassroots organizations to bring together a spectrum of women's groups from around the country. Efforts such as these can help outline a clear women's agenda in Bolivia. They can also help break down the walls that still separate many women's groups from one another, further building these 'conversations from below' that will allow Bolivian women to define their own road forward.



An indigenous woman leader from a Tarabuco community

B o l i v i a

As we go to print in late 2007, Bolivia seems dominated by politics and deep social divides over power. However, politics alone does not define this country. Bolivia's people define their nation with their diverse backgrounds and interwoven lives. In these two pages, we offer some glimpses of what makes Bolivia the amazing place that it is, as well as some of its disparate elements. We see the contrast between a packed Catholic church and women reading coca leaves. There are *Chacarera* dancers who put on their costumes for parades and indigenous musicians who wear their traditional dress every day. The photos also show daily life in the arid Andes highlands, valleys and in the green Amazonian tropics. The credit for these images goes to Umair Badeeu (UB) and Galen Moran Mook (GMM), two talented photographers who visited in 2007 to document Bolivian life through their lenses.



n Photos

Top left: The *Chacarera* is a dance from Bolivia's eastern cowboy territory, the Chaco. In this photo, *Chacarera* dancers display their technique during the August *Urkupiña* Festival (GMM). **Bottom left:** A girl plays in the Amazonian tropics as budding August leaves mark the beginning of spring. She accompanies her parents to the field each day, alternately helping and playing in the lush green environs (UB). **Top middle:** Farmers on the 'Island of the Sun' in Lake Titicaca carefully cut one of their precious few trees for boatbuilding and for their homes. The branches will be shared among the community to fire their adobe stoves (UB). **Center middle:** Santa Cruz's central Catholic cathedral filled by the faithful to hear the mass (GMM). **Bottom middle:** A man walks down a lonely street in Tarata, a small town in the Cochabamba valleys (UB). **Top right:** At the Festival of the Virgin of Copacabana, women offer to read coca leaves to predict luck and fortune (UB). **Bottom right:** Musicians from a small highlands town prepare to play *Italaque* music, which features *sikuris*, or long panpipes, and drums, for the June winter solstice. The celebration took place in *Tiwanaku*, the site of ancient ruins from the culture of the same name (GMM).



Bolivia in Brief: AN UPDATE ON ISSUES IN THE NEWS

Coca: Bolivia Tries a New Approach

The coca leaf has been a part of Andean history and culture for centuries. Globally, however, it is more commonly known as the base ingredient for cocaine. With a *cocalero* leader in the nation's Presidency, Bolivia has taken a different approach to this paradox. Two key changes mark the new direction of the Morales administration policy on coca.

The first is a shift from forced crop eradication to voluntary limits. The forced eradication strategy, favored by the U.S., led to the persecution of thousands of coca farmers and was met with fierce resistance. The new government's cooperative strategy is based on communities self-enforcing agreed-to limits on how much coca families can grow. Although coca production increased nationally in 2006, the Bolivian government met its eradication targets in regions where the new strategy was implemented, without the violent conflict of the past.

The second part of the government's approach focuses on developing new foreign and domestic markets for coca outside the ever-present cocaine market. The Morales government's 'alternative products' strategy brings the

leaf's traditional health benefits into in modern products – tea, toothpaste, soap, nutrition bars, and a variety of medical items.



The 'alternative development' strategies pushed by the U.S. starting in the mid 1980s pressured coca-growing families to switch entirely to different crops – bananas, palm hearts, and others – at great risk and with repeated failure. The new approach, instead, recognizes that many growers teeter on the edge of poverty. It encourages them to experiment with other crops from a base of sustainable income from coca, which can be industrialized into other, legal goods.

For Bolivia to export coca products, first the coca leaf must be removed from the United Nations' list of illicit substances. Alongside heroine and cocaine, coca has been banned from global export since 1961. Although international health professionals have advocated such a change for many years, the United States continues to impede any movement on the issue. It does so even as the US Embassy in La Paz serves coca tea to visitors and has formally recommended it for altitude sickness. The UN Convention is up for amendment in 2008.

The current government has recognized that coca is an integral part of Bolivian society. With a policy of "*coca, sí; cocaína, no*" it seeks to balance that with a desire to lessen the country's role in the global drug marketplace. Putting people's right to a viable livelihood first, the government has taken the first step in doing just that.

Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada: A Former President Faces New Legal Challenges

It has been more than four years since former Bolivian President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada was ousted by popular protests in October 2003, fleeing to a self-imposed exile in suburban Maryland. The rebellion against Mr. Sánchez de Lozada came during public demonstrations in opposition to his plan to sell Bolivian gas at bargain prices through Chile to the U.S. and Mexico. More than sixty people were killed by troops sent out by the then-President to suppress the protests.

Sánchez de Lozada now faces serious legal assaults on two fronts – one criminal and one civil. In the criminal case, brought by Bolivian prosecutors, Sánchez de Lozada faces a new extradition decree issued in September 2007 by the Bolivian Supreme Court. Families of the victims have been campaigning for his extradition since 2003.

The second legal challenge, a civil lawsuit in the U.S. court system, was also filed in September 2007. Ten families of those killed in the 2003 protests are seeking compensatory and punitive damages. The suit has been brought by the Center for Constitutional Rights and lawyers from the International Human Rights Clinic at Harvard Law School on a pro bono basis.

The support Sánchez de Lozada has received from the Bush administration, including years of ignoring Bolivian legal requests, makes it unlikely he will be forced to return to Bolivia for trial. The new civil suit serves as another avenue for the many Bolivians looking for justice to be served. "The ongoing impunity for [Sánchez de Lozada] is an assault on our dignity, on our sense of our value as human beings," said Juan Patricio Quispe Mamani. Soldiers under the former President's command shot Mamani's brother in the back on Oct. 12, 2003. "The United States needs to fulfill its promise as a nation which cares about human rights and justice."



Road Trips

A Look at Our Work Around the World



In Uganda, community organizers gather under a sprawling mango tree, plotting strategy as they monitor how the local government spends public funds.

In the new Balkan republic of Montenegro, environmental advocates working with the United Nations debate the best way to protect a river from devastating development.

In Santa Fe, New Mexico, a workshop brings together environmental activists, Pueblo tribal leaders and others to compare notes on how to wage effective lobbying campaigns in their state legislature.

These are a few of the places and people that have been a part of The Democracy Center's work recently, providing advocacy training and support to communities all over the world. From the former Soviet Union to Brazil, from Tanzania to California, here's a glimpse at citizen activism gone global.

Citizens Take On Public Budgets

In countries both rich and poor, few public decisions affect people's lives as directly as how governments raise and spend public funds. Will public schools be given enough money to provide every child with a decent education? Will public health clinics have the funds they need to provide care to those who need it?

Does the money destined, on paper, to those schools and clinics actually make it all the way there, or does some of it get

pocketed by public officials along the way?

Budget issues are fundamental in a democracy, essential to fighting both poverty and public corruption. Yet, public budget making remains one of the most secret aspects of what governments do. In dozens of countries, the real numbers are hidden and there is no formal opportunity for public review and comment on budget proposals. Not even legislators, much less citizens, have any kind of voice in the process.

In alliance with the International Budget Project, a worldwide network of civil society groups, The Democracy Center has worked for more than a decade to help citizens crack open the budget process to public participation. We've written citizen guides on issues such as using budgets to advance human rights. We've studied and reported the lessons learned about citizen budget work in Brazil and Croatia. But most important, we've helped groups develop effective strategies to force budget issues into public debate.



The Democracy Center has a library of free advocacy materials, available at our website:

www.democracyctr.org

What does it take to bring citizen power into the closed-door world of budget making? In many countries the first step is to fight for public access to the numbers. Then, with that information in hand, citizens learn to analyze the stories behind the data and champion changes in budget policy. Activists in Mexico won a major increase in funding for maternal health care. In South Africa, citizen budget work led directly to more public support for children in low-income families. These are just a few important victories among many.

As one of our Brazilian friends told us, "Budgets are about translating power into numbers." Citizen work on budgets is about using knowledge of those numbers to put power into the hands of the people, and to press the case that budgets address people's basic needs.

Teaching Effective Activism: Strategy Comes First

Citizen activism is essential to real democracy. It is also a scarce resource that shouldn't be squandered. Around the world, as The Democracy Center works with groups to deepen their advocacy skills, the first thing we tell them is this – *before you do anything else, create a solid strategy.*

What is advocacy strategy? It is the activist's roadmap, a

plausible path that takes you from where you are on an issue to where you want to be. What that path looks like is utterly different depending on

the local context. Activists in Kazakhstan decided that the best way to influence their prickly President on public health issues was through his wife. In South Africa, at apartheid's end, activists struggled with how to transform the energy of resistance into the work of advocacy in a new democracy.

A few years ago, The Democracy Center published a citizen's guide to policy and advocacy, *The Democracy Owners' Manual: A Practical Guide to Changing the World* (Rutgers University Press, 2002). In that book, and in all our trainings, we encourage citizen activists to ask themselves a set of questions that break advocacy strategy down to its basics (see box). And from what we hear, it's working. One of our friends wrote back a few months ago, "Your advice on advocacy issues has caused the Government to complain twice...so I think we are doing pretty good!"

Jim Shultz

Seeds of Change:

Social Entrepreneurs Across the Globe

Usually, the word “entrepreneur” conjures up the idea of a person who sees a demand in the economic marketplace. In that demand, the marketplace entrepreneur finds opportunity for profit and assembles the resources, capital, and market know-how to take the risk of making that vision real.

Not all demands, however, can be met by the marketplace. Not all opportunities are defined as a return on investment.

Health-care for the rural poor of India. Solar-powered irrigation systems in northern Brazil. New models of education to rehabilitate young girls trafficked in Nepal. These are also demands, and each has also proven to be an opportunity. But, as in the marketplace, it takes at least one individual to be the spark, one person who will lead the way. This is the work of ‘social entrepreneurs’ - people who bring the same gifts of vision, skill, and risk-taking to a different set of challenges. Their motivation: social change.

A Bank for Rural Women, by Rural Women

Chetna Sinha found her challenge in the drought-prone region of western India. Most women in this region had little if any assets against which they could borrow money from local banks to grow their small businesses, as seamstresses or market vendors. In a region traditionally known for its cattle and animal raising, these rural skills were being lost and many women were becoming increasingly powerless.

A university business graduate, Sinha left the mega-city of Mumbai in the 1980s to become a farmer in rural Maharashtra. Sinha realized the situation was dire. In the mid 1990s, she began organizing women to gather enough capital to start a small bank, one that could make loans to women like the shepherds and day laborers that traditional banks turned away. Loans were not enough, however, so the bank expanded its work. It offered its clients training about how to stay healthy, strengthen their business, and develop the financial skills they needed to succeed. As a result, vegetable vendors now grow crops without using expensive pesticides. Farmers use cell phones to share vital information on crop prices. Cattle herders have created shared cattle camps to protect their herds in times of extreme drought. The bank’s newest innovation: a business school for rural women.

None of these innovations sprang from the private marketplace. Each of them was a seed planted by the skills of entrepreneurship and matched with a deep understanding of community values.

New Uses for an Ancient Leaf

Half way around the world, Bolivian Jorge Hurtado’s challenge had to do with a small green leaf: coca. It is a plant that has been used for thousands of years in Andean cultures for medicinal uses. However, in places like the U.S. and Brazil, coca is

best known as the raw ingredient of cocaine.

As a child in the mining city of Oruro, Hurtado saw the terrors of alcohol abuse on the street outside his home. He also watched locals chew coca to help them work long hours in the nearby mines. Cocaine, and problems of its addiction, did not appear in Bolivia until much later, in the 1980s. In school, and later working directly with coca farmers in Bolivia, Hurtado

realized the power of coca as a medicinal plant and its potential to wean addicts off cocaine, in a healthy and inexpensive way.

Hurtado was determined to fight a small but growing drug addiction in his own country, and to raise the profile of coca’s traditional uses. With a degree in psychiatry and a small bit of capital, he opened the Center for Treatment of Drug Addiction in La Paz, where he takes drug addicts through a series of exams, teaches them to chew the coca leaf effectively and monitors their progress. Institutions in France and the Netherlands have already begun to adopt his addiction-fighting methods.

The leaf, however, has continued to be demonized at an international level, as if it were a drug. But international misunderstanding about coca has hampered Hurtado’s plan to get the leaf more widely distributed to fight cocaine addiction in other countries. A 1961 UN Convention still lists the coca leaf as a substance banned from global export, alongside heroin and processed cocaine. While he lobbies internationally to lift the ban, he has also found a creative way to raise awareness of coca in his native Bolivia. In 1997, Hurtado founded the Coca Museum in La Paz, where Bolivian and foreign tourists can learn about the history of coca and how outsiders transformed the leaf into a white powdered narcotic.

Business entrepreneurs may be a winning formula for technology start-ups, small enterprises and other niches driven by profit in the marketplace. But the basic needs of the poor, and tackling social problems like drug addiction, require leadership of a different sort.

Government action, while essential, still leaves urgent gaps. In places like India, social entrepreneur “start-ups” have offered the seeds of example that governments can learn from. The approach Sinha’s bank has taken in helping rural women get title to their land has been adopted by the state government of Maharashtra. Drug rehabilitation centers in France are using Hurtado’s method to treat cocaine addicts without hospitals and anti-depressants. Social entrepreneurs, like these two, passionate and connected to the root of social challenges, plant seeds for change that can grow from one small project in one little-known corner of the world, into ideas and projects that burst beyond borders and make a real difference in people’s lives.



One of the clients of social entrepreneur Chetna Sinha’s bank

Word on the Street

We asked eight Bolivians the question, what impact does the United States have in Bolivia? Some answered on a personal level, some at the political. All had plenty to say.



Pablo Ramos
Industrial Chemist

We are very affected. We are constantly bombarded by their marketing, their politics. In a more indirect way, we are affected by their movies that are shown on all the television stations in the country, which begins to change even the ways we think.



Doña Maxima
Domestic Worker

Some Bolivians go to the United States to work, and they come back, and are able to build a house, or provide for their families. Some Americans, too, come to Bolivia, to learn about Bolivian culture. Why do you think it is that here, some say, "Gringos, get out," and there, "Get out, Bolivians"? I don't get it. For me, we are all equal.



Mónica Medina
University Student

The United States' influence is not direct. Their influence, above all through ideology, is brought to Bolivians bit by bit. The United States' ambassador, for example, favors some groups over others. He has relationships and influence with the right-wing politicians and the big business owners of the east who control the economic powerhouse of the country. We feel their influence in the right's ideology.



Anonymous
Nutritional Counselors

We admire the United States a lot – it's very big, it's one of the most powerful countries in the world, and its technology is very advanced, almost as much as China, Korea, or Japan. It seems beautiful, from everything we've see on T.V. – the diversity of its people, its cities, the land. The United States makes a big impression on us; we would like to be able to go there one day. If we had the chance, we wouldn't need to think twice.



Victor Rojas
Architect

In the economy, the United States has a huge impact. Hiding behind a mask of "aid", the United States actually puts the brakes on our progress. They give you one, but they take two. For the first time, my country wants to begin to walk without the influence of another country. We may have lost that one, but we have taken back the two.



Rosario Cruz Aufrère
Professional Grandmother

To tell you the truth, I feel terrified by what is happening right now in Bolivia. I ask the United States, please, don't let this country that I love so much become another Cuba!



Leonor Reynaga Flores
Vegetable Vendor

In Bolivia's economy, the United States doesn't have much effect. But that could change; we could export, say, fruit from the tropical regions. Like we used to export coca [as cocaine], no? How we wish we could export pineapples, bananas, palm hearts. Right now, we're already exporting palm hearts to other countries, but not to the United States.



Ricardo Coca
University Student

The United States affects my life through its politics. As a Bolivian, I think that Bolivia has become a dump for all of the United States' garbage. I see examples everywhere – the used clothing business, genetically modified foods, and others. Also, the politics of coca eradication affects the entire Chapare region. Unless we do something about it, the United States will keep doing its damage for our entire lives.

Voices from Latin America

Bringing Perspectives from Abroad into the U.S. Elections

Like most dark chapters in history, the U.S. War in Iraq teaches us an important lesson. U.S. foreign policy is not something that we can leave solely in the hands of our politicians. Although citizen engagement is easier to muster on issues just around the block, from education to health care, Iraq teaches us that we as citizens have to take a strong and direct interest in what our nation does abroad. Citizens need to question what their governments tell them and, when foreign policy takes us in the wrong direction, we must take responsibility to change that course. When we fail to do so, the results, as we have learned anew, can be disastrous.

An important part of developing this citizen engagement in U.S. foreign policymaking is listening to what people in other countries have to say about the impact of our policies on them. It is not a surprise that mistrust of the U.S. has spiked in nearly every region of the world. It also doesn't have to be that way.

In Latin America, the U.S.'s closest world neighbor, nearly nine of ten people gave the Bush administration a grade of poor or fair in recent region-wide polling. On issues ranging from trade to migration, U.S. policies affect Latin Americans in deep ways, and it is essential that people and politicians in the U.S. begin to listen to the views of those who live to their south. On many issues, U.S. policy affects people in this region of the world more than it does people who live in Indiana, California or Wyoming.

Voices from Latin America is an effort by The Democracy Center and our friends both north and south to bring Latin



Thousands of viewers worldwide have seen The Democracy Center's YouTube submission on coca

American perspectives directly into the U.S. election debate in 2008. Throughout the year we'll be putting together new and creative ways to help Latin American groups understand the elections to the north and how they can reach a U.S. audience. We launched the project in November 2007 by working with Bolivian colleagues to submit a question on the coca issue for the YouTube Republican Presidential Debate, a video that has been viewed by thousands of people worldwide. We'll also be working to help draw U.S. public attention to the issues that most link the U.S. and Latin America and to help build citizen-to-citizen bridges to take effective action on those issues.

Here's a look at some of our plans ahead:



Video: Live from Latin America

We'll be using the power of homegrown video to bring Latin American perspectives to a U.S. audience, including a video competition dedicated to the ways in which Latin American lives are affected by U.S. policy.



Website: All About the U.S. Elections, En Español

We are building a website where interested citizens from Latin America can follow the U.S. campaign, and weigh in on the issues, in Spanish.



Citizen Campaigns: Building Bridges

We'll be diving deep into our communities in both the U.S. and Latin America to help build new bridges on citizen campaigns dealing with trade, human rights, the environment, and other issues that cut across national borders.



Media: Spotlight on Latin American Issues

Throughout the year we'll be using our global audience and our work with the international media to highlight and analyze the U.S. issues and debates that most affect the lives of people in Latin America.



Surveys: Opinions from the South

We'll be working with Latin American pollsters to take the pulse of citizens in the region, to bring to U.S. attention what they have to say about how the U.S. can rebuild torn relations.

Join our 'Voices from Latin America' project at The Democracy Center's website.

Jim Shultz

 www.democracyctr.org

The Peacemaker: An American Woman's Journey With the Iraqi People

I first met Cathy Breen in 1991, in Bolivia, where she was a lay missionary with the Maryknoll order of the Catholic Church. She lived here humbly in a small adobe house. A nurse by training, Cathy mostly dedicated herself to helping her neighbors with their immediate needs. Years later, in the run-up to the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Cathy traveled to Baghdad to bear witness and report what she saw back home. She was on the ground and under the bombs during "Shock and Awe". She was also there for the toppling of Saddam and the chaos and violence that followed. She now works with the huge community of more than 700,000 Iraqi refugees. These are her words from an interview in November 2007 from Amman, Jordan.



Cathy Breen in Jordan

Here's the story of one family I know. The father was kidnapped in Iraq, tortured in unspeakable ways, and held for ransom. His family paid \$10,000 to have him released. The kidnapers would have killed him. The U.S. interviewer asked the wife, "Why did you pay the ransom? Why did you support terrorism?"

The U.S. says its target is 12,000 this year [out of a total of more than 2 million refugees in the region]. Why can't we have a special five-year visa? We've made refugees of these people. I think that other countries, like Bolivia, need to take in Iraqi refugees to bring shame on the U.S. in they eye of the world. What do I do here? I help people fill out forms that will get denied.

What message do you most want to communicate to the U.S.?

Our [U.S.] interference has caused great problems for the Middle East. We have our tentacles everywhere and we are charging ahead. We always know what's best. It's so glaringly arrogant. I hope we [who are working here in Jordan] have a far-reaching effect, to get people to understand that we are one family, that what happens to other people's children happens to our children. I used to say that the dead in Iraq had just become numbers. Now they aren't even numbers. We just read U.S. troop death tolls now.

I do draw hope from Iraqis, and strength. I have more rage and rancor than they do, they who have suffered so much. I do see miracles, a husband and a wife left today to go to reunite with family in Detroit. Everyone was so excited.

But people here don't see an end to our war. One newspaper here just wrote, "more innocent victims [are] falling every day." If we're not deeply disturbed then there is something wrong.

Cathy Breen's personal reports from Jordan can be found at Voices for Creative Nonviolence (www.vcnv.org). To offer direct support to Iraqi refugees, she recommends two groups: The Iraqi Student Project and Electronic Iraq.

How did you end up working in Jordan and why have you stayed?

We used to pass through Jordan on our way into Iraq. But then, in early 2004, it became too dangerous to go back, not for us so much as for the Iraqis who were associated with us. Because of that and because people were already fleeing to Jordan, that seemed to be a calling where we could offer peace. I [am] here in the Middle East as a peacemaker. More and more I have the conviction that we need to be witnessing what's happening here. I was here when Lebanon was being bombed. We just don't have the same sense of proximity in the U.S. We also need to show another face of our country [the U.S.] to the Middle East. I never miss an opportunity to tell people here that while I am just one person, I represent hundreds of thousands of others back at home [who feel the same way].

What is life like for the more than 700,000 Iraqi refugees in Jordan?

Jordan has the highest per capita refugee population in the world. Every sixth person on the street is Iraqi. The resentment is growing. The deprivation of the Iraqis is growing. They are running out of money. The vast majority is here illegally. They aren't allowed to work. Most of their children aren't in school.

When I stepped off the plane here last September I began hearing stories of people, of families here, being interviewed by U.S. Homeland Security as part of seeking entry into the U.S.

Jim Shultz

Beyond Violence

Last May I had the opportunity to gather with 80 people from more than 20 countries for a global meeting on non-violence. Hosted by the School for International Training in Vermont, we lived together for three weeks. What we shared in common was our experiences of violence and we worked to understand, together, the ways to work beyond it.

The most difficult stories people shared were about the rape of women during periods of civil war in Africa. Often these atrocities occurred even in our own houses – supposedly the safest places to be. I remember the terrible experience shared by a man from Sierra Leone who had to witness the rape of his sister by more than five men.

They had given him the choice, either he rape his own sister or watch them do it; later the sister committed suicide.

Another heartbreaking story was that of a woman from Cambodia who valiantly retold incidents of her life during civil war, something people still feel the effects of daily. From a very young age she lived amidst violence. With eyes full of tears, she recalled her sisters who died while protecting her and about her great uncle

who lost his arms, legs, and sight but today continues living.

We heard about the conflicts in Iraq, Palestine, Sudan, Colombia, Haiti and other nations where violence has forced people leave their homes and become refugees, living in appalling conditions. We saw images of children killed, burned and gravely injured in inhumane and indescribable ways.

Against the backdrop of these horrors we focused our attention together on one of the most important universal questions of our time: What can we do to avoid atrocities like these and move social and political conflicts 'beyond violence?'

The Search for Other Ways to Resolve Conflict

Social and political conflict, in itself, is not the root cause of such violence. Conflict occurs all the time in society, and it is from these conflicts that we generate important changes. The problem is when conflicts are resolved with violence, spawning a cycle that reproduces more violence – from family relationships to wars.

Some of the world's most admired social leaders have deliberately provoked conflict in order to force a community or nation to address an injustice that it would prefer to ignore.

Martin Luther King, Jr. put it elegantly in his famous 1963 *A Letter from Birmingham Jail*. He wrote, "Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored".

But how do we provoke such conflict without also provoking violence?

As individuals we can respond to violence in three different ways. We can be passive, responding with fear perhaps, but no action. In the face of a brutal dictatorship, many will be frozen by their fear or indifference to accept the abuse that comes and hope for the best. We can also respond *with violence*, to arm ourselves and respond in-kind. We may well believe that this is the only way to stop the violence against us, but we may instead just trigger an even more violent reaction. Or, we can respond actively, but with *non-violence*.

Active non-violence is a strategy with a long history and a widely admired record of successes. It begins with a set of principles: that life is sacred; that we can utilize the power of truth, love, and justice; that we have the

power to change suffering and injustices, personal and social; and that what we want to destroy are injustices and not the people committing them. It then builds on those principles with key rules for action.

First, it means acting in concert with other people; it means organizing. Non-violence, when it has worked, from Birmingham to Bombay, has been carried out by large numbers of people working together. Second, it means preparing those who will participate. There are clear risks involved in many such situations and those involved need to know deeply the purpose of the action and the strategy behind it. Third, be it by sitting down at a segregated lunch counter or marching to the sea to gather prohibited salt, action nonviolently means to refuse any provocation to attack in return, and to size the high moral ground with every move.

Here in Bolivia, as social conflict erupts again over the direction our country will take, finding a way to bring these principles and tactics to our own conflicts has become more important than ever.



Delegates from more than 20 countries discuss non-violence strategies

Leny Olivera

