

# Center for International Studies



## 2009 Annual Report

## **D) INTRODUCTION**

The Centro de Estudios Internacionales (Center for International Studies, CEI) set out in 2009 with an ambitious agenda. Our inter-linked goals for 2009, to contribute to the construction of a new model of development and resistance to promote economic justice in the Central American region, and to the transformation of direct and structural violence in diverse communities, remained the central focus for all our efforts and advanced CEI's overall mission of social and economic justice, transformation of violence and solidarity. As 2009 draws to a close, we pause to reflect on the progress we have made in working towards these goals and where we have encountered new challenges and opportunities along the way.

As was clear as 2008 came to a close, one of the great strengths of CEI's work in 2009 has remained our ability to create a platform and enabling environment to support the work of our allies-- emerging, marginalized social movements and groups that lack the capacity to reach their full potential when working alone. Supporting the activities of our partner organizations, complimented by focused, participatory research led by CEI and which includes our partners, we have been able to multiple everyone's contribution towards economic justice and the transformation of violence. Our political strategy has influenced our mission – urging us to promote synergies between sectors and within spaces for social resistance – in order to bring about a more comprehensive transformation. We have continued to strengthen the Casa Giordano Bruno to serve as the nexus of this activity, and to make the most of this shared, community resource.

Recognizing the importance of this 'enabling environment', we have tried to be more conscious of the centrality of this function. We have created space (both physical space and time) to strengthen the capacity of our partners and to knit together their inputs so that the sum of the parts truly can become greater than the whole. In concrete terms, this has meant further limiting the number of 'stand alone' projects that can be implemented by CEI and instead focusing on those activities that integrate contributions from our partners. It has meant dedicating more time to negotiate relationships between and among partners to increase cooperation and communication. This has also encouraged us to enlist the support of a consultant to document our unique methodology in contributing to social movement building in Nicaragua as a strategy to promote economic justice and to transform societal violence. And, as always, this occurs in a fast-paced activist environment where we strive to adhere to our annual plan while also being responsive to opportunities and recognizing challenges that arise along the way.

CEI's model for political alliances transcends the traditional concept of simply being partners; rather, it means accompanying one another in a process of organizational development, the construction of a political strategy and the development of an agenda of negotiation and alliance building. In 2009, CEI's role grew in response to the demand for political and technical assistance towards this end.

Our work in 2009 has been carried out within a national and international context of great flux. Internationally, the main 'events' have been the military-led coup in Honduras

which removed the democratically-elected president from power, the fallout from the Israel offensive in Gaza, efforts to further advance the integration of Central America and the further expansion of the 'new left' in Latin America. On the last point, our Central American neighbors have been the center of global attention first with the election of a (moderate) left president for the first time in modern history in El Salvador and once again with the coup d'état of President Zelaya, a close ally of Nicaragua and Venezuela, in Honduras. The subsequent illegitimate elections in November in Honduras left the situation there unresolved from a social justice perspective as of the writing of this report. In each of these cases, we have looked for non-partisan opportunities to promote alternative thinking on how to promote economic justice and non-violence that is both tolerant and inclusive. One aspect of this has been the important experience of mobilizing the allied organizations beyond their sectoral agendas to act regionally as allies. Here, we refer to the importance of helping the groups transcend their local actions in order to acquire a sense of global struggle and work together on a common international agenda that includes gays, youth, economists and women, among others.



Nationally, new opportunities arose around the rights of sexual diversity, participation in spaces where 'free' trade was debated, strategies to prevent violence against girls and boys and the political inclusion of religious leaders. Following a concerted outreach effort, CEI and its allies have been recognized as key partners to the Human Rights Office allowing us to share lessons we

have learned in monitoring human rights abuses as they relate to new sources of violence through the work of the Network of Peace Promoters, and with partner organizations such as Casa Victoria, the Initiative for Sexual Diversity, Grupo Safo and the Network of Transgender groups.

In June and July of this year, much of Nicaraguan society was drawn into a polarized debate over how to celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the (Sandinista) revolution -- we have attempted to steer clear of polarization by promoting fresh voices such as the Youth for Dialogue, the Nicaraguan Social Movement, the Consortium for Sexual Diversity, Casa Giordano Bruno and Casa Victoria who all offer a non-partisan perspective on promoting peace and reconciliation while considering what the revolution means for Nicaragua 30 years on. Finally, we have tracked the cancellation of the US aid through Millennium Challenge Account and its replacement with aid from Venezuela as part of our ongoing focus on models of international assistance and what this means for the Nicaraguan people. The challenge has been to take advantage of the spaces for dialogue around public policies relating to human rights and violence while, at the same time, adopting a firm position that clearly presents the economic justice and resistance agenda toward the FTA and the EPAs. We have advocated that the government implement in

practical terms, and not just at a theoretical level, the position of ALBA-member countries as it relates to free trade, debt, etc.

Among our accomplishments achieved in 2009, we highlight six that demonstrate how our unique model of working in collaborations has allowed us to promote social justice throughout the year, in this ever changing environment.

- 1) **Designation of the Ombudswoman for Sexual Diversity for Nicaragua:** As a result of CEI's direct negotiations with the Human Rights Office, the need to monitor and defend the rights of the sexual diversity community were recognized and the office of a special Ombudsperson was established with a clear mission to defend and protect sexual diversity rights. This was the culmination of an ambitious research and advocacy agenda carried out by CEI and its partners that form the Strategic Group for Sexual Diversity (previously known as the Consortium for Sexual Diversity).



Through other important collaborations with the Human Rights Office, we were involved in efforts to initiate a national observatory for citizen security and to include religious communities in civic participation using a rights based approach.

- 2) **Improved government and civil society collaboration for the protection of children:** CEI responded to the Ministry of the Family (Mifamilia) reforms around child protection by establishing a *Commission for the Centers of Child Protection*, carrying out an ongoing dialogue with Mifamilia to channel communications between the Protection Centers and the government and providing training to the Centers so that they might be better positioned to work with the government reforms. This work was carried out principally by two of CEI's partners, the Casa Giordano Bruno and Casa Victoria, who were able to bring two important perspectives to this work: that of CGB's work to promote social justice within the religious community (from which more than 90% of child protection centers in Nicaragua come) and Casa Victoria's work to reduce violence towards children.
- 3) **The publication of a participatory study on international assistance and climate justice:** Carrying on from CEI's study on new models of international

assistance in 2008 and in response to the advocacy priorities of social justice movements in Nicaragua and throughout Mesoamerica, including CEI's close partners, the Nicaraguan Social Movement and Youth for Dialogue, CEI undertook a study on the connections of international assistance and climate justice. The study documented the views of government authorities and international policies and juxtaposed these alongside the perspectives of the communities impacted by climate change that have been marginalized in



environmental and development planning processes. The results of this study, available in "*Climate Justice: A Pending Task*" on CEI's website, reveal the depth of societal inequities as we confront climate change and proposes an alternative solution based on a set of social justice principles.

- 4) **The design and implementation of Schools of Political Formation** by the Youth for Dialogue and by the Nicaraguan Social Movement. The demand for and response to the political training that both organizations

made available to their members were resounding votes for the continuation of these efforts. CEI accompanied the process of both organizations, contributing assistance in methodology and content drawn from CEI's research and publications.

- 5) **A sustained dynamic of political and cultural activities for resistance held throughout the year at the Casa Giordano Bruno.** The house hosted more than eight organizations during the year, including the Nicaraguan Social Movement, Youth for Dialogue, Grupo SAFO, the Nicaragua Transgender Initiative, the Initiative for Sexual Diversity, the project Casa Giordano Bruno, Casa Victoria, and the Network of Peace Promoters. The house has become an importance reference point as a working space for all of the groups.
- 6) **Improved Online Communications:** All allied groups working with CEI, including CEI itself, now have their own web sites with content management systems allowing each group to keep their websites up to date with relevant information. Groups also had increased contacts throughout the region and communication with these groups was enhanced through up-to-date websites and blogs.

In each of these areas, whether it was sexual diversity, the protection of children, resistance to free trade policies or climate justice, CEI was able to connect these issues to a broader debate on social justice and the transformation of violence and establish links among the work of each partner organization. This led to new collaborations, such as the contributions that CGB was able to make on child protection, drawing from its experience working with the religious community. At the level of international solidarity,

we also worked together as demonstrated by the unified advocacy effort of all of CEI's partners when denouncing global injustices in Palestine and, closer to home, in Honduras.

CEI was also able to connect national work to a regional and global agenda, bringing international expertise to the Nicaraguan context and contributing Nicaraguan perspectives to the global search for alternatives for development, justice and non-violence. This helped lift the voice of our partners, involving them in new partnerships and regional forums. Among the various ways in which this played out in 2009, we highlight the following:

- The formation of a regional, **Central American alliance for sexual diversity**, with the Strategic Group for Sexual Diversity as an informal secretariat;
- CEI's presentation of the case "Conditionality of Spanish Foreign Assistance in favor of Transnational Business" at the **Permanent People's Tribunal in Honduras in March**; and

- The **Political Meeting of Reflection and Action in advance of the struggle of the Peoples and Movements of Mesoamerica from 20-22 November 2009, Ocotal, Nicaragua**: CEI facilitated the active participation of the members of the Strategic Group for Sexual Diversity, Casa Giordano Bruno and the Network of Peace Promoters in this important gathering that took the place of the 8<sup>th</sup> Mesoamerican Forum.



- CEI's co-hosting, along with Focus on the Global South, **an international conference held in Nepal, 14-17 December to discuss lessons learned from post-conflict reconstruction**. The gathering brought together national experts and/or written contributions from seven different countries from various stages of conflict and post-conflict within the Global South to promote a South-South exchange on the challenges in post-conflict settings.
- The participation of Uriel Carazo, member of CEI's Board and one of the three directors of the Network of Peace Promoters, in a **planning process around the reintegration of former combatants from the various sides of conflict in Colombia**, held in Colombia in August.
- CEI's visit to the **Mennonite Seminary in Fresno, CA, USA in July 2009** to organize an exchange program for 2010.

## II) ACTIVITIES

2009 was a year that began with an ambitious agenda that was outlined in our 2009 Strategic Plan. Throughout the year, the specific activities we undertook varied according to the changing context and new opportunities that arose. However, in all cases, we ensured that any activities implemented directly by CEI and in collaboration with our allied partners brought us closer to the objectives and goals outlined in this strategic plan. As such, we list those activities we undertook, grouped according to the specific objective from the Strategic Plan that they sought to achieve.

### Institutional Objectives

- 1) Transfer political, research, educational and communicational skills and capacity to (and among) partner groups

In 2009, we worked towards this objective by trying to maintain a focus on the transfer of skills and capacity while implementing all program activities. Therefore, many of these points will be elaborated more fully below but it is worth providing a brief summary here, highlighting the skills and capacities gained by each partner group.

**Strategic Group for Sexual Diversity** (formerly known as the Consortium for Sexual Diversity): Throughout 2009, CEI has convened the organizations and networks that form part of the Consortium for Sexual diversity weekly to aid in the planning and implementation of all of their activities. The 41 planning meetings held between January and November 2009 have enabled all members of the group to construct a common agenda to strengthen the sexual diversity movement in Nicaragua. Meetings have also been used to strengthen members' capacity in specific areas such as research design and implementation, communications and advocacy.



**Youth for Dialogue:** CEI supported the efforts of this youth social movement to develop and implement the 'Political Training School', which launched in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the year. CEI and Youth for the Dialogue (YXD) have integrated members of YXD into CEI's research project on climate justice and included a chapter on international assistance and climate justice within the political training school. In addition, YXD launched territorial chapters, forming community groups in various locations throughout the country, outside of Managua, where the organization already had a solid presence.

**Casa Giordano Bruno:** In the case of CGB, the staff already have considerable political, research and training skills which they have been able to share with other partner organizations within the CEI family. Therefore, "skill-building" on the part of CEI for CGB has been focused on developing

their communications capacity through the further development of their website and the dissemination of their message through other traditional and non-traditional methods of communication. CEI has also facilitated links between CGB and its member religious organizations and the activities of Mifamilia as well as the Ombudsmen for Human Rights on topics such as civic participation, citizen security, violence prevention, reconciliation and human development.

**Survivor Foundation/Casa Victoria:** CEI has facilitated links between the Ministry of the Family's 'Project Love' and the Survivor Foundation which has developed a Committee of Centers of Protection for the IV geographic region and the Department of Estelí to facilitate communication with representatives of Mifamilia. CEI has continued to provide administrative support to Casa Victoria so that it can develop a model of group and individual therapy for children who have been abused or are at risk for other reasons, based on its direct attention provided in Estelí. A major focus of this work in 2009 was the monitoring of children who were released from Centers of Protection based on Mifamilia reforms to document lessons learned.

**Nicaraguan Social Movement:** In 2009, CEI worked with the NSM in four major areas: solidarity with Palestine, research to develop a legal case for the Permanent People's Tribunal, collaborative research and verification of results on climate justice and the coordination and planning of the Political Meeting of Reflection and Action in advance of the struggle of the Peoples and Movements of Mesoamerica from 20-22 November 2009, Ocotal, Nicaragua. As in past years, CEI was able to provide technical, administrative and political support while gaining the insights and perspectives of the social movement in developing its research agenda.

CEI also provided guidance and facilitation as NSM explored the development of a new relationship with the government of Nicaragua. These efforts resulted in a series of meetings with government officials to discuss topics such as the Partnership Agreements between Central America and the European Union and the Integration of Central America. CEI has also participated in regional events (such as the People's Permanent Tribunal in Honduras) at NSM's request to share research on international assistance and free trade.

**Network of Peace Promoters:** CEI helped the NPP plan ways to become involved in local community development processes in the Northern region, working with local development councils and with local authorities to share community priorities. It also facilitated the NPP's participation as the hosts of the thematic session on militarization and peace during the Mesoamerican meeting in Ocotal. CEI was also able to share lessons learned on peace and reconciliation as developed by the NPP with Nicaragua's Commission for Peace and Reconciliation. Finally, a year long process to document the experiences of the NPP were shared at a global conference on postconflict reconstruction held in Nepal in December 2009





and will be included as a chapter in a book to be published at the start of 2010.

It is worth noting that, from the alliance between CEI and the NPP, we have been able to demonstrate complimentary methodologies: Research—Training—Advocacy—Communications and Negotiation. This has been an interesting methodological experience in that it has allowed us to move beyond simple activism toward actions that remain connected to a broader vision and political strategies.

2) Ensure the financial sustainability of each group through Transparency, Sustainability and Autonomy

Each partner organization within the CEI family will be most effective when it can secure sufficient funding to independently support its operations. However, this goes beyond fundraising and includes the promotion of the transparent use of those funds and the autonomy of each organization by identifying funding sources that do not require the organizations to compromise their vision or mission. As such, this is an ongoing effort where we focused significant energies in 2009 but that will also continue beyond this year. In 2009, CEI has achieved the following towards this objective:

- Secured institutional support to the Strategic Group for Sexual Diversity through a three year grant to begin in 2010.
- Increased contributions to running costs from the organizations based within Casa Giordano Bruno.
- Transferred skills in grant project development and report writing (both narrative and financial) to the Strategic Group for Sexual Diversity, YXD and the Survivors' Foundation.
- Reviewed accounting procedures and established a new, direct mechanism for each organization to justify/account for expenditures with a representative within the finance department.
- Reduced costs: provided space to organizations housed within Casa Giordano Bruno at preferential rates reducing the funds they spent on rent and provided communications training to partner organizations in maintaining their own website.

The economic sustainability and transparency of CEI and its partnered allies has been seen as an indication of our political and organizational strength.

**Program Objectives for Global Economic Justice**

3) Strengthen the implementation of local and regional social justice agendas

Between January and March, CEI hosted several events to link the social justice agenda in Central America with movements for justice for the Palestinian people. Activities led by CEI were focused on popular education, including cultural events, held at the Casa Giordano Bruno to introduce a wide range of people to the situation in Palestine. These activities also included workshops on 'fundamentalism and conflict in the Middle East'

with religious leaders in Managua and Carazo and the launch of a popular primer on Palestinian history and politics. Casa Giordano Bruno and CEI co-published *Palestine: Grassroots Resistance*<sup>1</sup>, which has served as a primer on the Israel/Palestine conflict, including military, social-cultural-religious, economic and historical-geographic perspectives.



CEI also participated in numerous public demonstrations of solidarity, organized by the NSM, and facilitated the participation of various partner organizations.

CEI initiated efforts to debate the role of NGOs, social movements, and solidarity donors within our work to promote social justice. Thus far, this has been mainly focused around the design of advocacy models for NSM, the Strategic Group for Sexual Diversity and the Survivor Foundation/Casa Victoria as we grapple with issues such as how we take advantage of available channels of communication to convey our advocacy messages in a way that is effective and constructive. We have documented our processes and their outcomes so that, in the coming year, we can develop a broader framework for future actions working with the government, donors and social movements in Nicaragua.

CEI's research on international assistance and climate justice (see below for more detail) has also contributed to the implementation of local and regional social agendas by laying out an alternative model for addressing climate change and environmental injustice that is based on the perspectives of local and regional social justice movements.

4) Create a community research network to monitor foreign assistance  
Through CEI's central research project for 2009, "*The Role of Different Models of International Assistance in the Promotion of Environmental Justice*", we designed a research methodology that was to include local-level monitoring carried out by members of the social movement YXD through territorial chapters in Managua, León, Estelí and Matagalpa. Progress towards the creation of such a monitoring network included the development of training materials based on the conceptual framework for the project that

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<sup>1</sup> Available on the CEI website at: <http://ceinicaragua.org/palestina-resistencia-desde-la-tierra/>

were used through political training schools. In addition, CEI co-hosted, with YXD, a workshop in October on international assistance and climate justice which included 22 members of YXD from 4 departments.

Further plans to involve members of YXD in direct community research were not possible in 2009 for two reasons: 1) Delays in the launch of the political training schools and the workshop which were both necessary pre-requisites for their involvement in research; and 2) the under-estimation of the time that would need to be dedicated to increase political knowledge and research skills among YXD members.



In the second stage of the investigation, NSM and the Regional Council of Indigenous Communities were involved in in-depth interviews and field research to verify initial results. Finally, participants in the Mesoamerican meeting in Ocotal in November 2009 also were integrated into an informal community research network through the development of the thematic ‘table’ on environment/climatic justice.

- 5) Participating in the spaces of regional and international coordination and in particular, those against free trade agreements and for environmental justice
- People’s Permanent Tribunal, Honduras, 30-31 March: CEI, with the NSM, participated in the PPT and presented the case against the conditionality of Spanish Foreign Assistance to Nicaragua which benefits transnational corporations at the cost of increasing Nicaragua’s external debt. This meeting coincided with the VII round of negotiations for the EPAs being held in Honduras. CEI participated in the parallel forum organized by the Honduran Citizen Action Coalition as well as the peaceful protest held at the site of the negotiations.
  - Popular Forum ‘Another Integration of Central America is Possible’, Managua, 20 May: CEI participated in this forum that sought alternative ways to integrate Central America, in favor of economic justice, and to establish an alternative framework for Central American/European cooperation. CEI also facilitated meetings between government representatives and representatives of NSM.
  - Coordination meeting of Central America Chapter of the Continental Social Alliance (ASC-CA), 15-16 June: CEI hosted this coordination meeting during which members of the alliance shared progress and challenges and updated collaborative strategies on work in the areas of free trade, transnational businesses, integration, agriculture and gender.

- The Second Central American Forum on Sexual Diversity, Managua, Nicaragua, 2-4 September: Hosted by the Strategic Group for Sexual Diversity, the forum brought together representatives from sexual diversity organizations from throughout Central America to discuss the results of the Nicaraguan national study on sexual diversity, advances and challenges in legislation in Central America, and lessons learned in the campaign for human rights.



- Political Meeting of Reflection and Action to advance the struggle of the Peoples and Movements of Mesoamerica, Ocotal, Nicaragua, 20-22 November: The VIII Mesoamerican Forum of the People, to be held in Chiapas, Mexico, was originally planned for these dates. However, the conditions that resulted from the Honduran coup d'etat did not make this possible and so it was replaced by two simultaneous gatherings held in Esquipulas, Guatemala and Ocotal, Nicaragua. 360 people, from Mexico, El Salvador, Panama, Honduras, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and from as far away as Brazil, Spain, Finland, Ireland, New Zealand and Argentina participated in the gathering in Ocotal under the umbrella of solidarity with the Honduran people against the coup.

CEI facilitated the participation of the following organizations and partner groups: Lesbian Group Safo, the Initiative of Sexual Diversity for Human Rights, the Nicaragua Association of Transgender, the Casa Giordano Bruno and the Network of

Peace Promoters. In addition, CEI participated on the thematic table on climate change and organized a panel on climate change where we shared and collected information to advance CEI's study on climate justice.

- Coordinating Meeting for Jubilee South/Americas, Ocotal, Nicaragua, 23/24 November: Members of this network from México, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, Panamá, Brazil, Argentina, and Nicaragua shared their progress to eliminate illegitimate foreign debt and outlined a common



agenda for the coming year to include the themes of ecological debt, climate change, climate justice and transnational corporations.

- Seminar on Post-Conflict Reconstruction from a Southern Perspective, Katmandu, Nepal, 14-17 December: Civil society experts from 7 countries emerging from conflict or post-conflict met to discuss lessons learned, particular in relation to the challenges of local actors in working with the international donor/practitioner community.

### **Program Objectives for Education and Action for Peace**

- 6) Systematize our lessons learned to formulate strategies to transform structural and direct violence

Our work in this area was divided into three main areas: an internal systematization of our ways of working on non-violence over the last 10 years that has contributed to a global study on postconflict reconstruction from the perspective of national peacebuilders, our collaboration with the Nicaraguan government, via the Office of the Ombudsman for Human Rights, to develop a national observatory for citizen security and to support the Peace and Reconciliation Commission, and initial efforts to document the unique methodology implemented by Casa Victoria to address violence against children.

Throughout the year, we documented our own experiences in addressing structural and direct violence, particularly in relation to our work with the Network of Peace Promoters. Through a combination of interviews, group sessions and a documental review of CEI's archived publications since 1991, we produced a series of products to inform our own work as we move forward as well as the work of others. These products include:

- A documentary of interviews of the experiences of the members of the NPP
- A website that presents several recorded interviews and testimonials prepared by members of the NPP as well as other peacebuilding practitioners that have worked alongside CEI over the past 15 years (<http://paznica.org/>)



- A chapter of postconflict lessons learned drawing from these interviews and testimonials presented at a global meeting in Nepal and to be included in a publication for release in 2010, alongside chapters from other countries emerging from violent conflict.

After establishing contacts with the offices of the Ombudsman for Human Rights and the Peace and Reconciliation Commission in early March, we continued to work with both offices to find ways in which CEI's experience working on issues of conflict resolution and the monitoring and prevention of violence can enrich the work of the government in these areas.

As a first step, we have developed a series of workshops for local authorities in and around Managua to enhance their ability to anticipate, manage and transform conflicts at the personal, social and collective levels. In the first workshop, held in November, participants reflected on themes such as the evolution, conceptualization and resolution of conflicts. Workshops, as well as our contributions to the development of the national observatory on national security and the peace and reconciliation commission, will continue in 2010.

Finally, Casa Victoria, the component of the Survivor Foundation that works directly with children at risk in Estelí began efforts to document its holistic model of address violence against children. Alongside providing direct services, Casa Victoria produced an internal manual for working with children at risk and began systematizing the lessons learned from group therapy sessions carried out in 2008-2009. The next step (in 2010) in this process will be to document experiences working directly with parents, tutors and

directors of centers of protection to cover the full range of services offered through Casa Victoria.

- 7) Create teams of subject experts in environmental, religious, gender, youth issues to develop new models of violence transformation

Efforts to achieve this objective include:

- The training of **47** leaders within the sexual diversity movement through 18 workshops covering topics of leadership, identity, negotiation, gender and research skills over 48 course hours.
- Training for **95** representatives from the movement for sexual diversity from Matagalpa, Masaya, Carazo and Jinotega and **161** persons identifying as transgender from Managua, Nagarote, Mateare. Trainings served the dual purposes of transmitting skills to monitor cases of discrimination and violence against this population and taking initial steps to develop a national network to monitor the abuse of human rights within this population.
- Three workshops held for more than **200** religious leaders on topics of: Religious Fundamentalism and Global Violence, Civic Participation and Human Rights and the Law of Equal Rights and Opportunities and the Prevention of Interfamilial Violence.
- Workshops for **58** psychologists and educators from child protection centers and for **32** religious leaders in the defense of children's rights.
- The development of curricular materials on environmental justice and global climate change for use in the YXD political training school and the direct training of **22** members of YXD in international assistance, climate justice and research skills.

- 8) Transform violence with government agencies such as the National Police, Ministry of the Family, Mayors and other Public Officials

In addition to our work to contribute to the development of a National Observatory of Citizen Security, CEI and the Survivor Foundation have worked to bring together the Ministry of the Family and Centers of Child Protection to aid in the effective implementation of the government's 'Project Love'. Following concerns from Centers of Protection about this new program and the lack of information available regarding its intentions, CEI has worked directly with Centers and with the Ministry of the Family to facilitate communication and be sure that the government considers the concerns of the Centers.

The Survivor Foundation formed a Commission of Centers of Protection for the IV region and held seven meetings of the Commission through which we have gathered information to share with the Ministry of the Family. We also identified areas where Centers of Protection wanted to strengthen their capacity to address the needs of children at risk, particularly those who have been victims of violence, and we have developed a series of training modules for use in trainings with Center staff. As of the end of the year, Survivor Foundation trainers taught 37 educators and 18 psychologists the first five modules and providing each with a copy of the training manual.

In Estelí, Casa Victoria held 23 working sessions with regional representatives of the Ministry of the Family to monitor the cases of children who have left the Child Protection system and to document their experiences. The monitoring of children that had been placed in foster homes or had been returned to their families continued throughout the year through home visits, meeting with tutors and meetings with parents, as well as the children themselves. The results of this monitoring were shared with Mifamilia to inform future decisions about the type of family support that is needed when children are returned to their families.

- 9) Strengthen and raise the profile of marginalized groups to become leaders for societal transformation within social movements

In addition to specific trainings that have been mentioned above, we have also worked with a smaller set of leaders from the Strategic Group for Sexual Diversity, YXD, NSM, NPP and the Survivors Foundation to develop their own leadership and organizational management skills through ongoing technical assistance and accompaniment by CEI staff. These efforts have included guidance in strategy and planning, political analysis, communication skills and administration and fundraising. CEI also facilitated partner participation (as well as accompanying this participation) in all political spaces ensuring that each organization has gained valuable experience in each thematic area. Ongoing efforts in this area will strengthen social movements in Nicaragua generally and will also contribute to the sustainability and efficacy of CEI's partner organizations.





### III) RESULTS

Through our capacity-building activities we have achieved the following:

- The **elaboration of grant reports by CEI partner organizations** (Strategic Group for Sexual Diversity, Youth for Dialogue and Casa Giordano Bruno), an area of work previously carried out by CEI staff, and an important step towards self-sustainability that encourages self-reflection during project implementation.
- **Increased communications capacity** among partner organizations, particularly the Strategic Group for Sexual Diversity and the Casa Giordano Bruno, following trainings in the maintenance of their websites.
- The training of **22** members of the YXD, **303** members of the Strategic Group for Sexual Diversity member organizations, **58** psychologists and educators and more than **200** religious leaders **as local researchers and human rights defenders**.
- Quantitative and qualitative **research design and implementation skills enhanced for the 4-member research team of the Strategic Group for Sexual Diversity** through their work with expert researcher advisors.
- The establishment of **new contacts with environmental justice groups working throughout Central America**.
- The strengthening of a **Central American alliance for sexual diversity** through ongoing communications and coordination.
- **Increased sustainability of the Casa Giordano Bruno** through the collection of operating support from three of the partner groups based on site and through a series of income-generating cultural events. As of 31 December 2009, CGB was nearly 100% supported by the partner groups and their activities, a critical achievement for the year.

In our program work, we achieved the following:

- **Designation of a Special Ombudsperson for Sexual Diversity** as a direct result of the Strategic Group on Sexual Diversity's research and advocacy.



- **Strengthened regional links** with other organizations in the areas of **sexual diversity**, resulting in coordinated solidarity actions in support of specific, timely diversity rights campaigns in Costa Rica, the participation of Central America sexual diversity activists in the XI Feminist Meeting held in Mexico in March and a second regional forum held in Nicaragua in September.
- **Strengthened links within the environmental justice movement** through research to document the impact of international assistance on environmental justice with input from five social movements or marginalized groups in Nicaragua about the impacts of climate change on their communities.
- Documentation of our **experiences in Nicaragua in transforming violence and building peace**, distributed via a video, a website and the chapter of a publication compiling the experiences from a number of postconflict countries.
- **Specific recommendations presented to the Offices of the National Police and the Ombudsmen for Human Rights** for the development of a national Citizen Security Observatory grounded in the experiences of citizens across Nicaragua.
- **Specific recommendations presented to the Ministry of Family** based on input received from the Commission of Centers of Protection in the IV region of the country and Centers of Protection in Estelí.
- The publication of “*A Look at Sexual Diversity in Nicaragua*” by the Strategic Group for Sexual Diversity and the development of a three year plan to strengthen the sexual diversity movement and promote the rights of this population based on the results of the study.
- The publication of “*Climate Justice: A Pending Task*”, a participatory study on international assistance and climate justice which reveals inequities in the current system to mitigate and adapt to climate change and proposes alternative solutions based on principles of justice.
- The publication of “*Palestine: Grassroots Resistance*”, which has served as a primer on the Israel/Palestine conflict, including military, social-cultural-religious, economic and historical-geographic perspectives.
- The completion of field research for a study on “*Pentecostalism in Transition and Globalization*”, to be published in book form in 2010.

We were unable to fully achieve expected results, as outlined in our annual plan, in three areas:

- 1) **Continued need to improve internal and external communications** at CEI and by and with its partner groups

CEI began 2009 with ambitious plans to improve communications in two areas: both our internal communications across partner groups and project areas as well as our externally directed communications. In both areas, some progress was made: the Strategic Group for Sexual Diversity assumed responsibility for their external communications following extensive trainings and support from CEI’s web consultant. Other partner groups as well as CEI itself oversaw the conversion of their websites to content management systems that would allow for the maintenance of sites by onsite staff, rather than an offsite ‘expert’ web designer. However, not all groups had fully assumed responsibility for the maintenance of their sites by the end of the year. Upon reflection, we believe that some

groups lacked sufficient staff capacity to dedicate time to web maintenance and/or were not yet able to overcome a fear of technology to fully integrate this task into their own internal work structure. As such, this remains a pending task to be completed in 2010 and one which we will approach with greater deliberation to ensure that we are able to fully transition to self-maintained websites and other communication areas by the end of next year.

In terms of internal communications, we outlined a strategy to facilitate the flow of communications across project groups and partner organizations to strengthen synergies and collaboration. Our plan included the use of technology (such as automatic updates to a central CEI blog from the web sites of each partner organization) as well as more traditional information sharing such as regular meetings.



However, over the course of the year, time to spend on these mechanisms dropped off as each partner organization became caught up in their individual organizations. During our end of the year reflection, we identified the need to refocus attention on internal communications but also recognized that a great deal of collaboration came about, sometimes in unexpected ways, following ad hoc information sharing, simply as a result of the proximity of the groups sharing a working space.

## 2) Studying the impact of projects financed by ALBA

In our annual work plan, we expected to measure the impact of projects financed by ALBA as part of our ongoing efforts to monitor the impact of both traditional and nontraditional cooperation assistance in Nicaragua. Based on the priorities of the social movements with whom we work, we decided to focus our research and monitoring efforts on international assistance as it related to climate change and environmental justice. In the early stages of our research, we determined that a comparison of ALBA assistance with traditional donor assistance in response to climate change did not make sense given the “common but differing responsibilities” that have been determined for developed versus developing countries. The rationale for this is fully explained in *“Climate Justice:” A Pending Task*.

## 3) Joint Actions among and between partner organizations

While we did have some success in this area, as noted above, we would have liked to have seen even a greater number of joint actions and activities being carried out between and among our partner organizations. However, differences in approaches and levels of organizational capacity/development at times prevented such complementarities. As we

look ahead to 2010, we will search for ways to overcome these differences, when appropriate through activities such as political formation and communications.

#### **IV) LESSONS LEARNED AND CONCLUSIONS**

In 2009, we redoubled our efforts to strengthen the work of our partners and to weave together separate but complementary actions to strengthen the social justice movement as a whole. We also cautiously moved towards a direct advocacy strategy with the Nicaraguan government, presenting proposals to strengthen existing government initiatives and new areas of work. This direct advocacy has advanced most quickly in areas of sexual diversity and violence prevention though important steps have also been made in relation to Nicaragua's regional positions on integration and relations with Europe. In fact, in the area of sexual diversity, we made unexpectedly quick progress which forced us to alter our plans somewhat; rather than focusing as much attention on capacity-building and awareness-raising with the National Police, we have instead pressed forward on the designation of a special Ombudsperson for Sexual Diversity within the Office of Human Rights, helping to define the mission for this post and assisting in the selection of the Ombudsperson.

As we have shifted our strategy to focus more directly on government advocacy, it has been encouraging to see the openness with which government representatives have received our uncensored opinions and have thought to include our experts in planning and consultation.

We have also continued to participate in regional events, being sure to link our efforts to a broader movement. However, due to constrained economic conditions, to the extent possible, we have tried to strengthen our regional links through web-based communications rather than travel. By prioritizing those events that are most directly relevant to our work and by focusing on an ongoing communications strategy between events, we feel that we have been able to remain connected while respecting our budget limitations and the environmental footprint of our travel.

During the second half of 2009, we focused considerable energy on publishing the outcomes of ongoing research on international assistance and environmental justice, the national study of sexual diversity in Nicaragua, the New Faces of Pentecostalism and "A Grassroots Perspective on Palestinian Liberation". We expect to see all of these publications strengthen social justice movements in Nicaragua, Central America and beyond in the next year, informing advocacy efforts to promote alternative solutions to ongoing injustices.

Throughout the year, our work was complemented and amplified by ongoing educational and communication activities to strengthen our partner organizations and their members.

The impressive results that we achieved this year have once again reinforced our belief that our collaborative approach to movement building for social change is helping all of us reach further than might be possible if working alone.

More broadly, CEI reaches the end of 2009 having achieved impressive results in the construction of alliances. Our continued challenge will be to work together to sustain this consensus and level of articulation among the movement.

