

CHRISTIAN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Managua, Nicaragua

Fall 2004 News Bulletin

Contents: The Least The Last and The Lost – page 1 and 2
News-in-Brief – page 3
How you can help – page 3
Lawyer-to-Lawyer Trip 2004 – page 4

THE LEAST THE LAST AND THE LOST

I'd like you to take a moment to relax and take a journey back into your memory. I'd like you to think about the first time that you learned about the constitution and the rights that it guarantees. If I may be so bold, I'm going to assume that this is not an easy task for you. I feel at liberty to make this assumption because it was very difficult for me to do. In fact, I'm still not quite sure that this is actually when I first emerged from Plato's allegorical cave into the world of realization that comes from learning that we have the opportunity and right to live in a justly governed society.

It happened while I was sitting in my Junior High history class listening to a lecture about the "founding fathers" of the United States Constitution. That day, I was given the gift of knowledge. Granted, I was very young and did not yet fully realize the weight of the gift I had just received; however, the fact remains that from that day forward, my knowledge of the existence of a national law and a basic understanding of the workings thereof became such a part of my world that I rarely if ever thought about it. I was eleven.

I think it is safe to say that in North America this is a fairly common story. We tend to take for granted the fact that we are legally granted these "certain inalienable rights" and taught how to use them at a very young age. Thankfully, the number of places in the world with legal access to these same rights is rapidly increasing. Nicaragua happens to be one of those places. However, many Nicaraguans are very much unaware of their rights and they crave to know, at the most basic of levels, to what rights their law entitles them.

Now I'd like you to take yourself to Nicaragua. You're sitting in the upper room of a restaurant located in a city in the North Western part of the country. It's always hot here. Therefore, even though it is the middle of the rainy season, the air coming from the window nearby still carries with it the heat and dust of the midday sun. Four lawyers from the Christian Center for Human Rights (CCDH) are teaching

before you. Seated all around you are Nicaraguans from all walks of life. You see men and women hardened from years of personal and political upheaval and change.

As you sit there, you gaze across the table at a Man whose skin is dark and leathery from many years working under the rays of the hot sun. His hands are wide and calloused from many days of toiling with the earth. As you watch him a question enters your mind. You begin to wonder why this man, a farmer from some remote village working from day to day to feed his family, would leave work for an entire day just to learn more about the Nicaraguan constitution. Then it hits you, like a great blinding flash of light, you realize that this man is here because he doesn't know. He's never been told. No one has ever made him aware of the law of the land. Yet, because he cares about his country and his fellow Nicaraguans he wants to understand. He wants to know more about how to pursue this law. He wants to learn so that he may work together with his neighbors to make their beloved country into a more just place for their children.

Just a few days ago, my eyes were opened in exactly this way. This realization came to me as Alan, one of CCDH's lawyers, finished distributing copies of the Nicaraguan constitution and proceeded to explain that each person there was "holding the supreme law of the Republic in their hands." My first reaction was shock at how basic his teaching seemed. However, when I gazed back at the farmer and saw the attentive look on his face, his posture slightly forward as the movements of his body began to reflect his mind's engagement of what Alan was saying, I realized that Alan's message was not too simplistic at all. In fact, I feel confident that that moment was the first time that the full weight of the possibility of wielding the power of the constitution in one's hand had ever crossed that man's mind. That man was more than fifty-five when he first learned of his legal privileges. I was eleven.

As the training continued, the CCDH lawyers proceeded to explain that the new promoters needed to do more than just read the constitution. Rather, to realize dynamic change they must read it, understand it, put it into practice, and share it with others. Judging by the enthusiasm of the farmer seated across the table from me, I don't think this will be a problem. People like this farmer, and there are many, want dynamic change. They don't expect it to be easy and they're willing to work for it. Through trainings like these, CCDH is giving them the tools to do just that.

What a wonderful work for the people of God.

NEWS-IN-BRIEF

- During this quarter, CCDH held three human rights seminars which resulted in the addition of 38 new promoters.
- The Houses of Justice received over 350 new cases this quarter of which over 200 were resolved while the rest are still in process.
- In June, Bob Vryhof officially assumed the role of PCD Alliance Liaison and began coordinating PCD work in Nicaragua including the Lawyer to Lawyer program. Bob recently graduated from Calvin College with a degree in Business and Political Science and plans to attend law school after spending two years in Nicaragua.
- CCDH leadership participated in a course on the Jane Vela style of adult education to assist them in giving more effective seminars to new and existing promoters. This training has resulted in dynamic improvements to their training methods and the effectiveness thereof
- CCDH was selected by CRWRC to receive this years CRWRC Justice grant to purchase educational materials and offer justice training seminars for local human rights promoters.
- Mark your calendars! The 2004 Nicaragua Lawyer to Lawyer visit is coming up November 14 to 22.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Partners for Christian Development (PCD) is encouraging attorneys in North America to partner with the Christian Center for Human Rights (CCDH) through the Nicaragua Lawyer to Lawyer Project. Attorneys involved in the Nicaragua Lawyer to Lawyer project may choose to: 1) Receive this electronic newsletter every three months and pray for the work of CCDH; 2) Make a service and learning visit to Nicaragua to provide important international endorsement to the work of the Houses of Justice; 3) Help contribute to the financial support of the Houses of Justice.

If you want to receive this newsletter or would like more information about a service and learning visit or some other aspect of the work of CCDH, please write Bob Vryhof at rvryhof@hotmail.com. If you would like to financially contribute to the work of CCDH, please send your check to Partners for Christian Development, 2850 Kalamazoo Avenue S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49560 and designate your check for "Nicaragua Lawyer to Lawyer Project."

In Canada, make the cheque out to CRWRC, with: "PCD Nicaragua, Lawyer to Lawyer" written on the memo line. It should be sent Attn: Henrietta Hunse.

LAWYER-TO-LAWYER 2004

Nicaragua

November 14-22, 2004

Purpose:

- Gain a better understanding of the Christian Center for Human Rights, especially it's Houses of Justice program.
- Provide support and encouragement to attorneys associated with the Christian Center for Human Rights.
- Use your skills and experiences to provide guidance and training to Nicaraguan lawyers.
- Learn how Nicaraguan lawyers live and work.
- Learn about the legal system in Nicaragua.
- Give the Christian Center for Human Rights more credibility by showing that they have a broad support base in North America.

Activities:

- Join CCDH lawyers as they resolve cases in the field.
- Discussion panel with Christian Legal Society: Spend an evening conversing with a newly formed Christian legal society in Managua.
- Justice Seminar: participate in an informal workshop with Nicaraguan lawyers working on cases that reflect the type of work that CCDH does on a daily basis.
- Visit the church that Norman Marengo (CCDH Director) pastors.
- Dinner at the homes of CCDH lawyers: get to know them outside of their work.
- Visit House of Justice: Spend a night outside of Managua and visit one of CCDH's most active and experienced Houses of Justice.
- Visit a prominent Nicaraguan Judge for a private lecture on the state of justice and grass roots participation in Nicaragua.
- Tourist Activities: Visits to volcanoes, tropical rainforests, the beach, open air markets, and prominent landmarks in Managua.

Logistics:

Arrive Sunday Evening November 14 and leave Monday Morning November 22. Lodging will be in a comfortable hotel of US standards located on the South side of Managua. Hotel amenities include pool, internet access, cable TV, and restaurant. You will be responsible for covering your own expenses.

The costs are estimated at \$600-800 round trip airfare and around \$100 per day for all other expenses. All expenses, except for airfare will be paid for you in Nicaragua and charged to you by Partners for Christian Development. *Consult your travel agent or the internet for exact costs and for booking flights. This trip is tax-deductible through Partners for Christian Development. Contact Darlene Hodyna at darlene@pcd.org for more information.*

What is the Christian Center for Human Rights (CCDH)?

CCDH is a Christian organization comprised of lawyers who volunteer their time and are dedicated to the protection of human rights in Nicaragua. CCDH has two focuses. The first is to provide civic education seminars all over Nicaragua to train lay human rights promoters. Since July 2001, CCDH has trained close to 2000 people and nearly 1000 of those have become active human rights promoters. The second focus is to establish Houses of Justice where promoters work under the supervision of a lawyer. The Houses of Justice have office hours where clients can come to file complaints of abuses. Currently there are eight houses of justice throughout Nicaragua that have been involved in resolving over 2000 cases.

What is Lawyer to Lawyer?

Lawyer-to-Lawyer is an opportunity for North American Lawyers and others interested in human rights to become involved in the work of CCDH in Nicaragua by supporting the Houses of Justice.

What's Next?

If you are interested in more information or want to sign up for the Lawyer to Lawyer Tour, please contact Bob Vryhof at rvryhof@hotmail.com or robertvryhof@yahoo.com.