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A Caravan for help, for information, for closure

by Vicki Kline

COMMENTARY

TUCSON, Arizona -- The Caravan for Peace with Justice and Dignity is not just like any other protest. Its members are not merely picketing. Its members are not people with a distant idea of the impact of their demands.

Its members are parents, brothers and sisters, grandparents, friends: each participant carries the name and face of an individual, or many individuals, whose lives have been lost, or who have disappeared, in the War on Drugs. Its members are loved ones of the 60,000-plus dead or missing people throughout Mexico over the last six years.

As I absorb the signs and speeches during the Caravan's recent visit to Tucson, a woman approaches me. She hands me a "Missing" flyer. Her 24-year-old daughter, Georgina Ivonne Ramírez Mora, was last seen May 30, 2011, in Mexico City. "Can you please share this? Spread it as far as you can," she asks me. I take it. Thank her for sharing with me. Wish her well. What else can I do?

Others search for missing siblings. Children search for their fathers. Some stand in memorial to killed loved ones, whose bodies have been identified and laid to rest. The Caravan is a platform for a demand for immediate policy change. But it's more than that: it's a last-ditch cry for help, for information, for closure. It's an opportunity for families to tell their stories, to stand in solidarity with one another, to strengthen families of victims who haven't yet garnered the courage to speak out. And most importantly, to educate the people of the United States, who they believe have very little concept of the real-life consequences of the War on Drugs.

Here in Arizona, we've seen the "national security" efforts aimed at controlling the flow of drugs and weapons across the United States-Mexico border. We've seen how these efforts have created nothing but

insecurity. We've seen how they've fortified the wall between our countries, placed weapons into the hands of insufficiently trained forces bi-nationally, and how they've criminalized migrants and residents on both sides of the border. We've seen how corporate entities continue to profit from these policies. Our Drug War policies, shared between governments, have created a battlefield on which people are swept into choice-less decisions. On this battlefield, migrants are turned into commodities by smugglers, organized crime groups who own and patrol migration routes, and by our own U.S. immigration authorities who use migrants as pawns in their efforts to capture higher-level criminals.

Lupita Guerrero, mother of Carlos Reynaldo LaMadrid, stands before a packed Southside Presbyterian Church. Her son was killed by U.S. Border Patrol agents in Douglas, Ariz., last year. He was shot in the back.

Through tears that fall while she demands justice for her son's death, she also speaks about having found community and some peace. This peace, she says, comes from having met Araceli Rodriguez, another member of the Caravan.

Ms. Rodriguez had spoken earlier in the day of her son Luis Angel, a federal police officer, who, with six other police officers and a civilian, was killed Nov. 16, 2009. He was 23 years old. The pain experienced by Ms. Rodriguez has propelled her to speak publicly: "If one day we will have evolved, we will no longer need rocks to make fire. In matters of Security, we will know that one day we've evolved if we can count on communication to create dialogue."

After each Caravan member speaks, the others cry out to them, "No estás sola! You are not alone!" To them, they've figured out the secret: Alone, in isolation, people who have experienced trauma will tend to cower, stuck in their own individual experience of pain, frozen in time.

Together, with others behind them, they shatter the fear and silence that attempts to keep them from connecting the dots on each of their situations; connected to one another, they stand strong.

Linked by their pain, they reject the fear that holds so many back from seeking justice, from taking action.

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The kind of violence that the Caravan members desire to end has nothing to do with guilt or innocence. It has to do with international policies stripped of humanity, with effects that shatter lives and destroy entire communities. This violence has to do with dreams deferred.

It is violence that propels people from their homes, in search of peace, in search of a tiny bit of space in which to create a new life. They seek the end of the violence of poverty created by profiteering trade agreements, unorganized governments, corrupt officials. They seek the end of violence by organized criminals who stand to gain from the failure of democracy. They demand the end of violence by policies created here in the United States and perpetuated by the ignorance and indifference of our people. They bring their stories here to change that.

I close my eyes and think about a friend in Nogales, Sonora, whose sister has been missing for more than a month: Elizabeth, heading for the North, last heard from in Tamaulipas, Mexico. I try not to let him see the look on my face as I think of Tamaulipas, the site of the massacre of hundreds of people, many believed to be migrants. I tell him I'll light a candle to St. Anthony, patron saint of lost things, and keep her in my prayers.

The candle is lit as I write. What else can I do?

[Vicki Kline, a Catholic Worker and professional social worker, is currently exploring the intersection between vocation and career in the borderlands. She can be reached at victoria.kline@hotmail.com.]

To follow the Caravan on its journey throughout the United States, go to www.caravanforpeace.org. To support the search for Georgina Ivonne Ramírez Mora and others, go to www.facebook.com/donde.esta.ivon.

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