

2010 Semiannual Bulletin



*Todos los derechos para todas las mujeres
todo el tiempo*

...

All rights for all women always

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Working for the advancement and defense of sexual and reproductive rights in Mexico

Centro Las Libres is a non-profit organization that works to ensure that all women and children in the state of Guanajuato know and realize their inherent human rights as well as promoting sexual and reproductive health through the distribution of information and resources to women, youth and marginalized communities. Along with a network of national and international volunteers and collaborators, specialists in law, psychology, health, social work and education, Las Libres works to provide comprehensive support to the surrounding communities through the following activities:

- Empowering women and youth in disadvantaged rural and urban communities through ongoing training workshops and education.
- Engaging young leaders and expanding their impact through Las Libres' Youth Health Promoter's Network.
- Providing comprehensive legal and psychological counseling for victims of sexual violence and rape.
- Advocating for and defending the rights of victims of sexual violence and rape, particularly access to legal abortion.
- Promoting a social and political atmosphere where women's human rights and gender equality are respected.
- Coordinating workshops for women's and human rights organizations throughout Mexico to share knowledge and experiences with the intention of increasing the development of similar programs.
- Creating a library documenting the history of violations of human rights and the conditions and situations of women and children in the State of Guanajuato from 2000 to the present.

Through these various efforts, Centro Las Libres has implemented several promising projects to promote the defense and realization of human rights for all women in Guanajuato.



Members and Volunteers

Verónica Cruz Sánchez

Director

Verónica Cruz Sánchez grew up in Guanajuato and has fought for women's rights from the moment she realized her privilege as a part of the middle class in Guanajuato. When the state legislature banned abortion in 2000, including in cases of rape or incest, Verónica organized hundreds of women to protest in the streets, and as a result a month later, the governor vetoed the ban. She co-founded Las Libres in 2000, has a background in social work, leads educational workshops for people of low socioeconomic statuses of all ages, and advocates for the defense of the rights of all women in Guanajuato.

Rosalía Cruz Sánchez

Administrative Coordinator of Material Design

Rosi has been collaborating with Las Libres since she was a university student. The majority of her time is spent creating and giving workshops in the communities, designing informative materials and controlling the webpage, as well as other administrative tasks. Out of the various ways she is involved with Las Libres, she enjoys the workshops the most, because it gives her an opportunity to personally interact with the women and learn about their experiences.

Paulina Torres

Lawyer- Specialty in Legal Investigations and Research

Paulina was introduced to the organization through a small fair they conducted in San Luis de la Paz, Guanajuato, where they were collecting signatures on behalf of an effort to make a state law that provides women with access to a life free from violence. Besides being involved in the effort to reach the state government about this law, (Guanajuato is the only state that does not have a law in place like this one) Paulina's work mostly centers around monitoring the media for events related to the subjects of Las Libres, requesting government reports about crimes committed against women and fact-checking them against local media, and researching how to bring one case of a women in Guanajuato before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. One of her most significant moments while working with Las Libres has been her realization that while the Mexican judicial system does not function in the most positive way, she and others still have the power to change things for the better.

Gabriela Ortiz

Lawyer- legal consultant and litigation of women cases

A friend of Gabi's introduced her to the organization while she was working on her thesis years ago. Currently, Gabi is working towards the release of seven women who are unjustly imprisoned in Guanajuato. She considers the release of the first woman from the prison and the knowledge that she helped this happen, a feeling that she doesn't have words to express, to be the best and most meaningful moment she has experienced so far while working with Las Libres. Gabi will continue to work for the freedom of these women because they have been punished for crimes that they never committed they are being deprived of their freedom.

Mónica Maciel Méndez

Lawyer- legal consultant and litigation of women cases

Moni serves as a lawyer for Las Libres and is concentrating her efforts towards the release of the seven women in the prison. Moni first heard about Las Libres when the organization conducted a workshop in the community where she lived. The moment of the release of the woman from the prison was an extremely significant moment for her as a part of Las Libres. Moni believes that it is extremely important to work towards the release of the women because they have no one else on their side to fight for their release.



Members of Centro las Libres after a workshop in San Jose de la Luz. From left to right: Wendy, Jessica, Mónica, Señora Luz, Gabriela, Rosalía.

Regina Santos

Psychologist – Specialty in women and children

Regina was introduced to the organization when she met Veronica while working at a professional internship. She works at Las Libres as a psychologist and serves in many ways including developing a model of psychiatric services to best serve the women, with who the organization works, conducting workshops in rural communities, and meeting on an individual basis with women. Regina strongly believes that the work of Las Libres is vital because they are able to give women a different perspective on their lives, one that helps the women see that they are valuable and strong. For her, seeing one woman recover from her past and become a strong person with the help of Las Libres is worth all of her time and effort.

Lucero Circe López Riofrio

Psychologist

When Circe first heard about Vero's idea for Las Libres, she thought that it sounded extraordinary, especially when groups charged with sexism, misogyny and violence towards women advance every day in the center of Mexico. Circe works in diverse areas of Las Libres including working with the Observatory of Social Violence and Gender and the Interstate Alliance for Our Right to Decide (two projects of Las Libres), as well as two tutorials for women. She sees the leadership of Vero as vital to the progress of the organization. Circe is glad knowing that Las Libres is



still continuing to fight and that they will never give in under any circumstances.

Magui Mora Cantoral

Psychologist

Magui, who has been a friend of Veronica's since before she started Las Libres, has been working with the organization since its beginning. Currently, Magui conducts workshops in different communities in schools and with mothers, usually focusing on subjects such as sexuality, violence, gender, sexual rights and adolescence. Also, she meets with women who decide to interrupt their pregnancies or need information on contraceptives, and aids the women in prison in their emotional process during the revision of their cases. Magui greatly enjoys working with the women in the communities because she gets to experience life alongside the women. Visiting with the women in the jail and seeing their sadness, pain, worry for their sons and daughters, and even their laughter and hope, has been one of the best experiences of her life.

María del Carmen Rosas Rendón

Coordinator of Project Evaluation

Karmen found out about Las Libres while searching for organizations that provided sexual health information to young people. She works primarily building a social climate of respect and gender equality for women and children in urban and rural communities in the state of Guanajuato. The most significant moment for Karmen was when she realized that education directly influences social cohesion within a community.

Rebeca Estefanía Mendoza Ríos

Program Coordinator for Children

Beki was introduced to Las Libres while obtaining her bachelor's degree. Veronica taught an optional class at her university, through which Beki heard wonderful things about her work. Together, she and her friends decided to begin volunteering for the organization, and she still remembers the warm welcome she was given upon her arrival. Currently, Beki develops and executes programs for children in several urban and rural communities. She knows that she has learned a lot from Las Libres, but looks forward to learning even more and continuing to make a difference.

Lupita Rodriguez

Program Coordinator for Children

Lupita began working with Centro Las Libres after hearing about the organization through a class given by Veronica at her university. Lupita works with children in rural and urban communities in Guanajuato, focusing the programs on topics of rights and value, giving the children a healthy perspective on gender. Most of all, she loves seeing the children apply to their lives what they learn in the workshops. To Lupita, it demonstrates that Las Libres is having a positive impact on the community and makes her work worthwhile.

Wendy Salazaar

Volunteer, Winter 2010

Wendy first heard about Las Libres when she was a university student in Chicago, IL. When Veronica visited her university to hold conferences on the work of Las Libres and the condition of women's rights in Mexico, Wendy thought highly of the organization. After volunteering with Las Libres Wendy says that the members do not work out of obligation, but out of the passion they feel about the unfairness of an unequal society.



Catia Perez

Volunteer, Winter 2010

Catia, who lives in Switzerland, heard about Las Libres through a journalist of a friend. During her time with the organization, Catia organized newspaper articles pertaining to subjects that affect women, and visited with the women in the prison, where she participated in a psychological workshop with the women and they cooked Swiss-Mexican meals together. Catia believes that women's rights in Guanajuato need to be respected and expanded. Las Libres has risen to the challenge, says Catia, and she hopes that one day women in Guanajuato and in all of Mexico can freely live self-determined lives.

Jecca Steinberg

Volunteer, Winter 2010-Summer 2010

After finding Centro Las Libres through a study abroad program Jecca knew that she wanted to participate in their work. Their organization, dedication and passion inspire her to continue towards her goals regarding human rights. Upon working with the organization and witnessing the lack of women's rights in Mexico, Jecca has been moved to continue working for their cause even from the United States. She now knows that the work of Las Libres for unjustly incarcerated women is invaluable and incredibly important for the progress of women's rights in Mexico.

Blair Bacon

Volunteer, Summer 2010

Blair started at Las Libres expecting to help a group of people, but did not know the specific details. She met the women in the prison and instantly understood that they, and the truly unjust legal world that surrounds them, are real. Coming from the U.S., whose laws affecting women she generally does not hesitate to critique, Blair could hardly fathom a legal system in which women do not have the right, and in which many do not have the education, to choose what happens to their bodies. After visiting with the women in the prison, she knows that she must try her best to work with them for justice because they are her friends, and they are women that could easily be her sisters, mothers, aunts, and friends.

Samantha Tyburski

Volunteer, Summer 2010

Sam first heard about Las Libres while searching for an opportunity to study abroad and volunteer. It is encouraging to her that there is an organization struggling towards equal human rights for women not only from a legal standpoint but also from a social standpoint by educating the people of Guanajuato about the injustices in their society and how they can have a positive impact. After her experiences with Las Libres, including teaching an English class to women in a rural community, Sam can say with confidence that the organization is doing good and important work for the women in Guanajuato.

Projects and Accomplishments 2010

∴ National and International Educational Conferences ∴

Through lecture series, expert panels and educational workshops Centro Las Libres brings together human rights leaders, advocates and students from around Mexico to teach and discuss themes like women's rights, domestic violence, abortion etc. Through these workshops, leaders around Mexico collaborate and support each other in their efforts and receive national and international feedback.

∴ Workshops with Women ∴

In the communities of Guanajuato, Centro Las Libres works with women and children to provide a safe opportunity to discuss and learn about socially taboo subjects such as sexuality, the right to decide over one's body and mind, domestic violence and other meaningful topics such as the value of education and money management. In the workshops the women can discuss their lives and adversities without repercussions, and find support through difficult decisions. These workshops have led to a network of educated women who become human rights leaders in their communities.

Along with working with the women throughout Guanajuato, Centro Las Libres runs a series of workshops with children in the communities, enforcing values such as honesty, cooperation, and nonviolence, as well as teaching on subjects like sexual education, access to education, and recycling. Through working with the women and the youth in these communities Centro Las Libres contributes to the progress of human rights in the present and for the future of these communities.

∴ Proposals to Government ∴

Along with changes on the grassroots levels, the team of lawyers and activists at Las Libres compiles evidence and testimonies for formal proposals to the government for top-down changes. This year Las Libres submitted a formal proposal to implement laws that provide specific protections and resources for victims of domestic violence, victims of sexism and the families of



Image used to advertise a 4-week series on women's rights in Mexico in Irapuato.



victims of femicide. Guanajuato is the only state of 32 in Mexico that has yet to pass such laws despite the fact that 60% of women above the age of 15 in Guanajuato state have experienced a form of physical violence and that Guanajuato has the 10th highest femicide rate in the country.

.: Funds and Representation for the defense of unjustly incarcerated women .:

In Guanajuato state prison, Centro Las Libres, their team of lawyers and international volunteers are working to raise funds to appeal the cases of six women imprisoned in Guanajuato after being accused by physicians of alleged abortions upon having miscarriages in their homes and going to the hospital to be examined. Despite the laws mandating 1-3 years for abortions in the state Guanajuato, these women are imprisoned for homicide and are each serving sentences between 25 and 35 years. Centro Las Libres is currently organizing legal representation to appeal their cases to a federal court and raising funds to pay for this enormous project. In addition to working directly towards the release of the women, Las Libres is educating the general population of Guanajuato about the lack of human rights for women in their state in hopes of instilling a sense of indignation among the people toward the way women, who furthermore are poor, are treated. Please look to page 14 for more information on this project and ways to contribute.

.: Work with women in Guanajuato .:

Centro Las Libres provides free psychological help, medical assistance and legal representation to all victims of sexual assault, violence and gender-related violence (includes domestic violence). Through their work, rape victims find access to safe, legal abortions outside of the state (approximately 500 since 2005), and resources to lead their lives in a safe, supportive environment free of violence.

A Word from Volunteers

∴ Working with Women around Guanajuato ∴

by Daniel Bowersox and Jessica Steinberg

On March 9, Veronica Cruz Sanchez led the first of a series of four workshops on the topic of the female body and the need for protecting it. In the five communities where Centro Las Libres conducts these workshops women usually work as maids or street vendors in larger cities and almost none complete more than a high school education, if that. In the workshop in the community of San Jose de La Luz 15 women attended the event. Sitting in a circle on plastic chairs in a former restaurant, the women listened intently as Veronica started the discussion by instructing the women to close their eyes and direct their thoughts to their bodies. She asked them to focus on any scars that might be present, and to think of the circumstances surrounding the scars. The women then took turns sharing stories about their scars: how they were injured, who they were with at the time, how they felt, and whether they still feel any particular emotions about the incident. All of the women shared their stories openly and candidly, at points speaking more seriously and at points cracking jokes and laughing at their childhood injuries. The conversation led into a discussion of cesarean scars and scars resulting from pregnancy. Although this topic usually is not breached among women in this culture, Veronica casually spoke on the sacrifices of pregnancy and the women eagerly responded.



A young woman and her baby sharing a laugh at one of the workshops in the community of Maravillas.



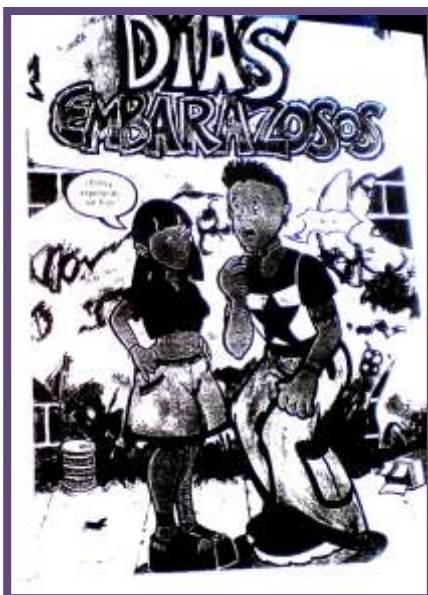
Two women and Verónica (on the right) listening as another woman shares her story about a scar.

property of their spouses and the decisions surrounding their body frequently are made without their input. Through these workshops, Veronica raises the women's knowledge about their bodies physically and emotionally, and leads the women to a discussion about the decisions they can and should make about their lives and their bodies. Subsequent discussions will breach more difficult subject matter, such as options for women who are faced with unplanned pregnancies, or whether the women have experienced any other person or institution trying to take control over some aspect of their bodies. This incremental approach frames the issues of women's rights, domestic violence, and abortion in a way that makes women realize that they and only they should make decisions about what happens with their bodies.

These discussions are part of a larger effort to change the norms in a country and region where machismo reigns. By raising women's awareness of their bodies and empowering them to value and protect their bodies, Las Libres can slowly revolutionize the thought that women have had forever that they are a form of property and that they exist only for the benefit of others, and encourage the evolution of a new culture of liberation and respect for women. When these women have **agency** over their bodies, they might elect to use birth control or contraception despite the disapproval of their partner, or they might decide against having another child despite the influence of their husband or boyfriend. Women will take pride in their bodies and will feel ownership over their sexual health.

.: Promoting Healthy Sexual and Romantic Relationships among Youth .:

by Jessica Steinberg



One of the workshops sponsored and funded by Las Libres covered sexual education in public schools for boys and girls between the ages of ten and fifteen at a public school in San Jose de La Luz, the same community in which they conduct several workshops with women. Three university students from Queretaro put together full lesson plans for the boys and girls of this school covering everything from sexual anatomy, to contraception, to the emotional and spiritual elements in love, sex and relationships. In schools in Guanajuato there is no sexual education of any form and when teachers tried to introduce basic anatomy and technical reproductive health information into their biology text books a few years ago, priests and Catholic leaders around the state burned the books in huge public bonfires. Most parents don't talk to their children about puberty or sex because of their own lack of education and because of embarrassment surrounding the subject

matter. Guanajuato has the 3rd highest teenage pregnancy rate in the country, a fact that can be seen in the remarkable number of young girls in Guanajuato city carrying babies under their arms as they shop with their friends and go out for coffee dates. The workshops sponsored by Centro Las Libres will probably be the students' only exposure to sexual education and their only opportunity to ask an adult figure about their doubts and misunderstandings.

Entering the classroom, I felt a smile stretch across my face and wondered if my maturity and Spanish level would allow me to talk about sexual health with a group of boys between the ages of 11 and 15. I swallowed my smile and took a deep breath when the boys joined us, and a student from Queretaro, Alejandro began the days lesson with sexual anatomy and questions from the past weeks workshop. Opening the first anonymous question, the extent of the misinformation became apparent:



Blair and Alejandro teaching a group of boys in a public school in San Jose de la Luz. From these public grade schools 40% of students usually attend high school and another 8% attend a university. Drop out rates are due to economic and familial needs.



“Si se quema el condón después de tener relaciones sexuales, se previene el embarazo?”

“If you burn the condom after sex, will it prevent pregnancy?”

As the questions continued my Spanish was put to the test. Technical sexual terms and methods of contraception were definitely not topics I ever thought I would breach, nonetheless explain to a group of *hispanohablantes*. Despite my reservations and nervousness, the students listened to their peers and us attentively, absorbing the new information and sharing their doubts and knowledge.

Throughout the remainder of the 45 minutes we covered the reasons why we weren't ready and wouldn't want to become pregnant, the responsibilities of pregnancy, and what love is and what love is not. The students actively participated, and surprised me with their kindness, consideration and seriousness. To reinforce our points we made posters and handed out a comic called “Días Embarazosos” (Pregnant Days), which discusses pregnancy and contraception in a palatable form for pre-teens. By the time we finished with our two groups (15 people in each), I left with a great feeling of accomplishment as well as gratitude for the experience, for the challenge, and for the positive response of the students. As their parents came to pick them up after classes, I noticed several of the women who attend our workshops in the same community were mothers. Realizing that Las Libres' work percolates through all levels of the community, I couldn't help but smile and feel reaffirmed in the value of Centro Las Libres. Little by little, grass roots efforts like theirs will change the social dynamics of the culture and bring about the change needed for progress.

Funds and Representation for unjustly incarcerated women

In the state of Guanajuato, all forms of abortion are illegal except in the case of rape. Despite this exception, no woman has ever received a legal abortion in the state. Women who seek abortions illegally are penalized with one to three years in prison (even rape victims) and since 2000, 150 women have been reported and some have served time for this “crime.” Along with these women, 7 women who had miscarriages have been accused by authorities and physicians of having intentional abortions, tried and imprisoned for the crime of homicide. Because these women are poor, with little education and no knowledge of the legal system in Mexico, they had no means of defending themselves against these accusations and are now imprisoned because of crimes they did not commit. Instead of being tried under abortion laws, these women were penalized for homicide and will spend between 25-35 years in prison instead of the normal abortion sentence of 1-3. On top of the injustice of their incarceration and excessive punishments, some of these women were rape victims. These women, in the eyes of the *machista* culture here and in the eyes of the politicians in Guanajuato, have no rights and no voices. The violation of the human rights is of no concern because their social status, gender and education level render them undeserving of the inherent freedoms guaranteed to all individuals by international law.

133

*rape victims
imprisoned*

25

*years for alleged
abortions*

Centro Las Libres has visited these women biweekly for about one year, after finding the women during a two year search, studying the facts of their cases, learning their stories, and developing relationships with both the women and their families. After much work, we are finally ready to appeal their cases to a state court. After collaborating with the Clinic of Public Interest of the Legal Science division of CIDE, a university in Mexico City,

Centro Las Libres recently appealed the case of one woman. Upon receiving the fifty-page appeal, the state court immediately mandated her release and her unjust 27-year and 6 month sentence ended after only 3 years. The lawyer collaborated with Las Libres to free this woman pro bono, but unfortunately the other cases will cost up to 500,000 pesos (around \$39,000 US) for each case. In addition to the immeasurable amount of work Las Libres has done researching, preparing information, providing moral and emotional support for the women and collaborating with the lawyer from Mexico City, this year Las Libres has taken on the raising of these funds on as its largest project. The women at Las Libres, the collaborators and the volunteers work day and night to ensure that these women have a voice and that their rights are realized.



A billboard put up by Las Libres during the last gubernatorial race in Guanajuato state. It reads "130 rape victims jailed from 2000-2009. 231 registered rapes in the last two years. Most of the rapists remain free. Zero legal abortions for rape since 1978. Don't Vote for PAN, which is against the dignity of life and freedom because they too violate our rights."

However, Las Libres is not stopping at achieving freedom for the women that are currently imprisoned unjustly; the organization is educating the general population of Guanajuato about the lives and cases of these women with the intention of progressing social thought about the rights that women deserve. By approaching this issue from many sides, Las Libres is working towards ensuring that women have the full power of decision over their bodies and that no woman is ever imprisoned unjustly again.

In the following pages you will find the stories of each of these women in their voices compiled and translated from interviews (pseudonyms are used to protect the identities of the women), a personal story from a volunteer about visiting the women in prison and how to donate money to their freedom:

In their Voices

∴ Alejandra ∴

When she was 18 years old Alejandra was accused of aborting her pregnancy of 9 months and sentenced to 25 years of prison.

"I hadn't told anyone I was pregnant, because I had already been threatened that if I had another child, my family would be upset. Suddenly, I started to feel sick one day I went to the bathroom and felt like something was coming loose from inside my body. Then I realized that I was bleeding and that the umbilical cord had started to emerge.

My mom took me to the doctor and he refused to treat me because he thought I had aborted the child. He sent me to the hospital. The doctor there yelled at me "Do you know what you have done *niña*? How could you do this?" He put me to sleep and when I woke up he made me sign something, I couldn't tell what. He told me they couldn't save the baby and that I had to go to prison for what I had done."

∴ Gabriela ∴

When she was 34 years old Gabriela was accused of aborting her pregnancy of 6 months and sentenced to 25 years of prison.

"I have no idea what day I was born. I never went to school, and from a young age helped my father around our farm. One night in the community a man offered to walk me home, but I told him no, and my niece and I left.

My family's house was poorly made. The doors were thin wood. The man came by at night and forced me to be with him. He would leave before sunrise. I never told anyone I was pregnant. One day I felt sick...the neighbor found me and called the police..."

∴ Patricia ∴

When she was 26, Patricia was accused of aborting her 7½-month pregnancy and sentenced to 29 years in prison.

“One morning I woke up feeling sick and like I had to go to the bathroom. I went to the latrine near our house and fainted. My parents found me there, unconscious with a dead fetus between my legs. My father removed the fetus and put it on our patio to bury later in a funeral service. They brought me to the hospital.

When we returned the fetus was gone; a neighbor had seen the bundle and called the police and the Public Prosecution Office. Public officials came to my house and forced me to sign several documents. Then they took me to their office and said they had to detain me. My assigned defense lawyer explained to me that I had abandoned and murdered my child, that I would have to go to prison for my crime.”

∴ Ana ∴

When she was 19, Ana was accused of murdering a 9-month-old baby and sentenced to 30 years of prison.

“I didn’t realize I was pregnant. So when I noticed I was bleeding I thought it was my cycle. After eight days of heavy bleeding, I started vomiting and my mother took me to the hospital.

“Don’t tell me you don’t know what you did,” the nurse scolded me. “We know you threw your baby in the trash.” A 9-month-old baby had recently been found in a trash near the hospital. A nurse told me they did a blood test (There is no medical or legal record of this blood test or proof that it existed).

They wouldn’t let me see my family or call them. I told a doctor my stomach hurt. “Your stomach doesn’t hurt. You are feeling the results of what you did,” he told me. They said police and fireman found evidence at my house, that I would be punished. I was interrogated and imprisoned. I never met my defense lawyer. They used false documents with forged signatures as my confession.”

∴ Sofía ∴

At the age of 19 Sofía was accused of the homicide her fetus of 6½ months and sentenced to 25 years.

“I was in my house and my stomach began to hurt. I went to the bathroom and the product came out in the bathtub. I felt hits nose and chest, but it wasn’t breathing. I was scared. I didn’t know what to do. I wrapped it in a bag and left it on the side of a river.

I was sick for several days and finally I had to go to the hospital. The doctor said I almost died. They had found the product and told me I would be punished. I was taken to a holding cell. They said I taped my baby’s mouth shut to suffocate her, but that was a lie. When I went to the bathroom they accused me of trying to escape. One of the officials from the Public Prosecution Office put a cross in my cell so that I could repent for my sins. “

All of these stories were translated by Jessica Steinberg from parts of interviews conducted by Gabriela Ortiz.

Visiting the Prison

By Jessica Steinberg

Entering the prison involved an elaborate process of pat-downs, electrically controlled gates, ID checks and hallways. When we finally reached the holding area for women, I shouldn't have been surprised that it matched the coloring of the lifeless hallways. A coat of tan or khaki green covered the walls, the ground, and the women's clothes. The only visual breaks from the monochromatic scheme were the barney-purple basketball hoops and the colorful, patterned curtains each woman hung in the entrance of her respective cell.

I don't remember what I expected of my first meeting with the women I have read so much about. In some ways I felt I knew them already, their stories, the facts of their court cases, the details of their families and loved ones, but none of the documents I studied began to touch on their incredible warmth. My co-worker at Las Libres and I walked towards a patio of khaki, concrete benches and tables where we were greeted by huge smiles, bigger hugs and affectionate kisses. Before we sat down, Fatima* began gushing about her new *novio* and their salsa dancing date in the prison. She beamed while she described her companion from the male area of the prison, saying it was the happiest she'd ever been in a relationship; he respected her, he didn't try to control her, it was safe. As the conversation flowed, her thoughts and experiences brought me to tears. Despite having spent six years in prison, she explained that she never feels incarcerated because in her heart and mind she is with her loved ones, with her other daughter and in the happy moments she shared with her. As long as no one can control her mind, God has given her the strength to feel free. She continued, describing the horrors of her past. "I was imprisoned by the hatred I felt for my husband, he abused me. He abused my children. He was unfaithful. I hated him. Through this experience god has forgiven me and allowed me to free myself of the negativity that held me captive. I am not a prisoner of these walls or of my thoughts. I have love and hope, and I will never be a prisoner."

As she finished my chest tightened and I knew she was the reason I do this work. Her circumstances convoluted her beautiful story and muffled powerful voice, but with Las Libres, her story has become an international scandal.

When we left the prison, Sofía burst into tears. "I need to leave here. I need my life back. Your work is our only hope." We hugged for several moments and I pledged to her that I would work to raise as much money as possible; that her freedom means the world to me. With the success of one case, these women gained a new sense of hope and purpose. They know now, case by case, we will work for their liberty and the life unjustly stolen from them.



Centro Las Libres in the News

∴ Letter to the Governor of Guanajuato by Human Rights Watch ∴

<http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/03/05/letter-governor-guanajuato-mexico>

∴ Interview with Verónica Cruz by Human Rights Watch ∴

<http://www.hrw.org/en/audio/2009/03/04/entervista-con-ver-nica-cruz>

∴ Audio Interview with a woman punished for an abortion in Guanajuato ∴

<http://www.hrw.org/en/audio/2009/02/26/punished-abortion-mexico>

∴ 2006 Human Rights Watch Report on Mexico: Obstructing Access to Legal Abortion after Rape in Mexico ∴

<http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2006/03/06/mexico-second-assault-0>

∴ 2010 More Magazine Article by Teresa Wiltz- Verónica Cruz is on page 8 ∴

<http://www.more.com/2050/22144-the-most-dangerous-women-in>



How to Donate

To donate to the efforts of Las Libres from or in the United States:

Personal checks can be made out to *Planned Parenthood of the Columbia/Willamette*. PPCW is acting as our fiscal sponsor in the U.S., which guarantees that your contribution will be tax deductible. On the bottom left-hand corner of the check, please write *Centro Las Libres' Fund*. Checks can be sent to the following address:

Centro Las Libres
PO Box 25311
Portland, Oregon
97298-0311

Please direct questions related to donations in US dollars to our US Outreach Coordinator:
hollysil@comcast.net

To donate to the efforts of Las Libres from or in the United States or Mexico:

Cash deposits can be made by directly depositing into our account in Mexico (Deposits in USD will be converted into Mexican pesos). The required information is as follows:

Bank: BBVA/Bancomer

Branch office number: 0306

Account name: Centro Las Libres de Información en Salud Sexual Región Centro, AC

Account number: 0152261553

International Transfer Code: BCMRMXMMPYM

Interbank Code/CLABE: 012210001522615530



Contact Information

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