

Report from CASA Chapulin, Oaxaca
Sylvia González Castro, Co-Coordinator

“Our dignity has no price. Our ideas are clear. We will not stop until there is profound change not superficial change”¹ - words from Emeterio Marino Cruz, former teacher and father who was brutally beaten, kidnapped, and tortured on July 16, 2007 by paramilitary forces under the rule of Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz. Almost 3 years later, Emeterio and his family are still seeking justice, as the police beatings left Emeterio in a wheel chair and respirator months after his release from the hospital. His words reflect the political landscape in Oaxaca, as impunity remains at large but the spirit of resistance on the ground remains stronger than ever and on the rise.

As the context of Oaxaca is continuously changing, so does the way we do solidarity work. Over the course of six months, CASA Chapulin has experienced major changes; shifts in leadership, priorities, and long-term strategies for movement building without borders.

Along with the temporary closing of Casa de la Paz in Chiapas came the hiring of two new coordinators at CASA Chapulin, Andrea Caraballo and Sylvia González Castro. During the spring/summer of 2009, former Coordinator, Diana Denham, provided orientation to the new coordinators and formal introductions to individuals, communities, collectives, and NGOs throughout Oaxaca. The orientation provided the new coordinators a platform to continue working and launch new and exciting initiatives that directly challenge international solidarity which has been mainly white-led (from U.S. and Europe) and sustained by privileges based on race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, etc.

For the past four months, CASA has hosted strategic planning meetings with collective members and Oaxaca-based groups in an effort to redefine our work as allies in the movement for global justice. This includes identifying who we are as allies, envisioning where we want to go, and identifying steps and strategies to get there. To begin with, CASA has prioritized **community-based media** and **food sovereignty** as the two main working areas. We are currently in the process of identifying and building alliances with strategic groups that have been systemically and historically marginalized from movement building efforts, including people of color, immigrants, youth, and *comunidades en resistencia* throughout Latin America.

The economic situation for CASA has been rough the past year, with a shoe-string budget to keep us afloat for operational and staff expenses. Members, coordinators, and board members are working hard to find more sustainable ways to fund the grassroots work we do, including restructuring the board, building new accountability mechanisms, and concretizing tasks for the new Administrative Team to take on.

CASA also switched locations to a bigger space not too far away from its former location, providing more space to house collective members and organize workshops. The new house includes a small backyard area which has been used as a hands-on, experiential learning environment to host urban gardening workshops. A *compañero* from Colectivo Lucha, Siembra, y Cosecha at the Universidad de Chapingo facilitated a series of workshops for members and laid a framework to continue gardening in the green spaces around the house.

In addition to the new initiatives mentioned, CASA members have been busy working in the areas of: immigration, women and gender issues, food sovereignty, community-based media, support for political prisoners, and LGBTQ issues. Along with working with partner organizations in Oaxaca, members have facilitated privilege and solidarity workshops so as to continually check-in with ourselves as allies working with (not for) *Oaxaqueños* and towards global justice. CASA members and friends have also facilitated workshops on decolonization and allyship, humor and satire as political tools, organizing against the Olympics in Chicago, challenging activist tourism, hands-on video editing, the Merida Initiative, contemporary movements in Colombia, and mega-mining projects throughout Mexico. Earlier in the year, CASA has also provided translation and interpreting services for Norwegian students in three delegations: food security, violence against women, and fair trade.

Also, the book “Teaching Rebellion” was edited and designed into Spanish and two book reviews were written by Rumberto Robles, a playwright activist based in Mexico City, and Raul Zibechi, a journalist and researcher about social movements in Latin America based in Uruguay. CASA is currently seeking a book publisher to publish, print, and distribute the book in Spanish.

Considering the many challenges and contradictions that manifest themselves in international solidarity work, the collective is committed to continue working in solidarity with *los pueblos* in Oaxaca and building more processes to guide the paradigm shifts (as opposed to only programmatic changes) that we have proposed.

ⁱ “Oaxaca: Change possible with the reorganization of el pueblo, not with corrupt Political Alliances”, <http://www.casacollective.org/story/news/oaxaca-change-possible-reorganization-el-pueblo-not-corrupt-political-alliances>