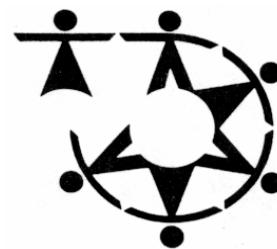


THE

# MUSTARD SEED



Denver Justice & Peace Committee

Celebrating 28 years of peace and justice!

901 W. 14th Avenue, Suite 7, Denver, CO 80204 • 303-623-1463 • www.denjustpeace.org  
May 2007 • Volume 28 • Number 1

## 10 Days in Guatemala: *En Busca de Justicia y Paz*

By Hayden Gore, CAMINOS/Guatemala Human Rights Intern

Under the quiet cloak of darkness, the CAMINOS delegation arrived at the Guatemala City airport. We packed ourselves into two taxis for a midnight ride into the dense city center. At this late hour, the streets were deceptively calm; the chaotic city lay completely dormant. When it erupted with activity a few short hours later, so did our delegation. And though we did stop for reflections, we kept a tireless pace.

The Myrna Mack Foundation, the Guatemalan Foundation of Forensic Anthropologists (FAFG), Center for Human Rights Legal Action (CALDH), Sector de Mujeres (Women’s Sector), Communities of Populations in Resistance . . . the agenda read like a *Who’s Who* of the most prominent human rights organizations in the country.

On any day we could expect to open the newspaper and read now familiar names in the headlines. Indeed, on February 6<sup>th</sup> the *Prensa Libre* reported that a CALDH lawyer, Angélica González, who is working on the genocide cases against ex-dictator General Efraín Ríos Montt and his high command, received a death threat taped to the windshield of her car. It read, ominously, “One of these days we’ll do lunch together, as always it’s on us . . .” We had visited CALDH just four days before; on that Friday afternoon, we arrived minutes after one of their associates had been carjacked and kidnapped. We were given an immediate, visceral introduction to the current human rights situation in Guatemala.

With death threats, kidnappings, intolerable levels of violent crime, a pervasive culture of impunity, and little progress in the implementation of the Peace Accords, where is the hope for Guatemala? It resides in those activists, lawyers, victims and survivors with whom we met, those that resist fatalism and despair and, at great personal risk to themselves and their families, work courageously to construct a better, more just Guatemala. Omar Bertoni, a forensic anthropologist with FAFG, moved us with his impassioned commitment to the victims of genocide, whose remains he examines with zealous precision as if every individual’s case would have its day in court.



Omar Bertoni speaks to delegates about the exhumation process. Photo Credit: Catherine Raveczky

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## MISSION STATEMENT

The Denver Justice and Peace Committee is a volunteer organization dedicated to promoting human rights, economic justice and lasting peace in Latin America through education, solidarity projects and nonviolent activism.

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Doug Stephens.

**Printed by P & L Printing**

**Thanks to everyone who continues to help work on program development, fundraising, newsletter publication, mailings, the website, etc.**

**We couldn't do it without you!**

## Message From the Board

Saludos dear friends,

In formulating this letter, I pondered what should be the most important message to bring to our membership. The result is twofold. First, I had an experience in Guatemala that is worth sharing and relates to DJPC's work. Second, I would like to impart a general sense of optimism around DJPC's current and future work.

I was recently in Guatemala and had the opportunity to meet and spend an hour with a lovely Guatemalan family in their modest home. What struck me about this family is their paradoxical reality—hope for the future combined with a lingering sadness wrought in the past. On one hand, they have much to celebrate. Their joy and excitement was evident as they talked proudly about their son who is just beginning medical school in the city of Antigua. However, they must work hard to make ends meet caring for their three grandchildren. Their oldest granddaughter lost her father in the civil war. Her mother lives and works in Guatemala City and sends home whatever money she can to help pay for her daughter's high school education. Theirs is a story that seems all too common in Latin America.

This visit was an undeniable reminder that recovery from a 36-year blood bath takes generations to heal, as well as a reminder of the importance and value of DJPC's work. For example, participants in the Salons are addressing the concept of transitional justice to understand what is required for genuine healing in traumatized societies. Recently, the CAMINOS program took a delegation to evaluate progress toward a more just Guatemala. I salute both of these activities, and challenge all of us to foster the knowledge and human connections necessary to motivate and guide us in our work. With them, we can become exceptional activists, not just ordinary ones.

The success of the delegation to Guatemala is one of many reasons why the second message I bring to you is one of optimism for DJPC's future. The delegates returned better informed and with new insights into Guatemala's reality. Their experiences generated an enthusiasm that will undoubtedly result in concrete actions taken in support of the Guatemalan people.

Let me share a few more good reasons for optimism:

- Kara Martinez, our highly talented Program Services Director, has grown into her own over the last two years. She is leading with ever more clarity and confidence and as a result, many great successes lie ahead.
- Our bright, new interns and committee volunteers bring fresh energy and ideas.
- Our Salon events are providing a new connection to our membership and the Denver peace and justice community as a whole.

Hopefully, these activities will stimulate your support and involvement—sources of our future advancement and momentum. In closing, I would like to borrow the charge from a recent e-mail sent by one of our valuable committee members...

¡Adelante!  
Jeremy Lee

The Denver Justice & Peace Committee Presents:

# David Barsamian to speak on “Latin America’s New Political Landscape: Is Real Change Possible?”

**Friday, March 23**

**7:00-8:30 PM**

**Book signing to  
follow**

Arrive early,  
seating is limited!

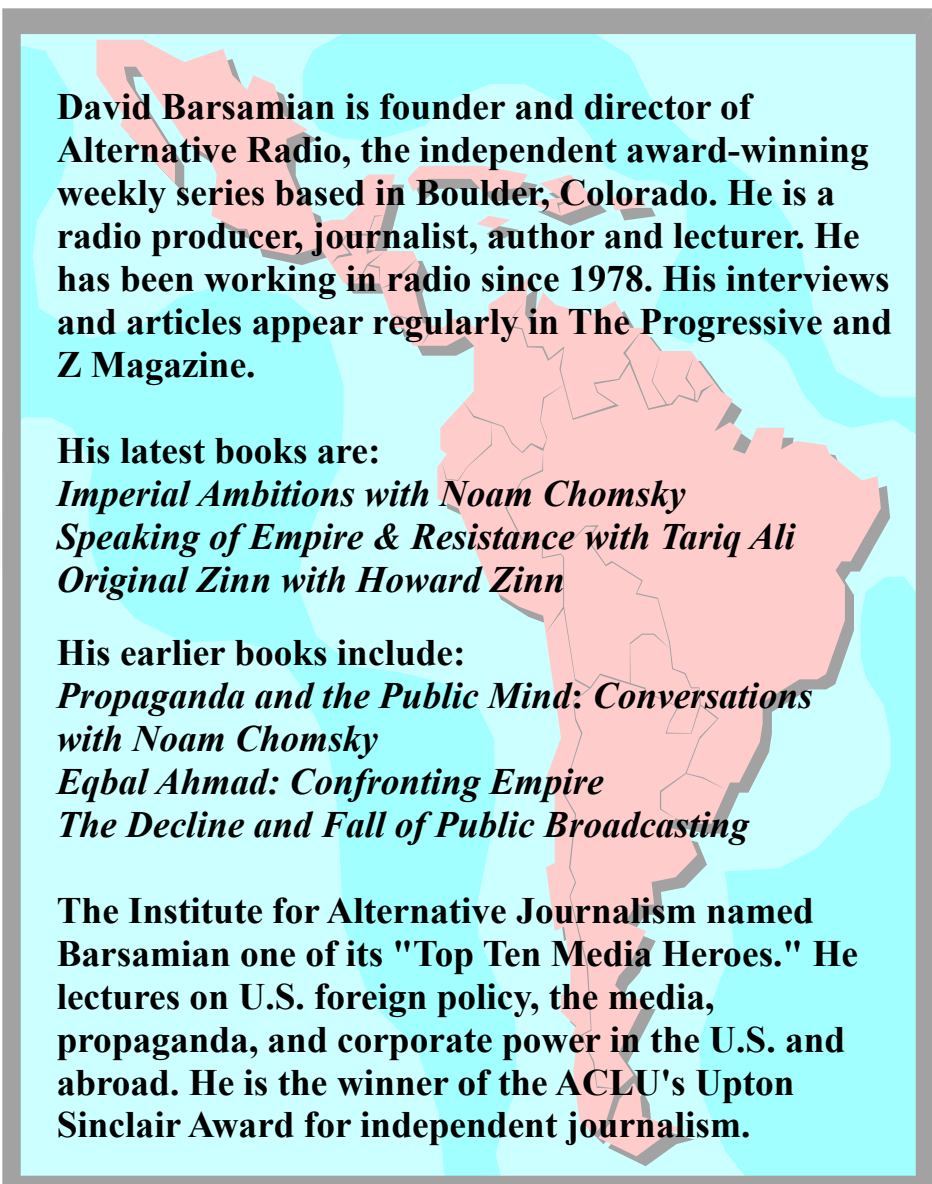
**The Mercury Café**

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**Denver**

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\$5 Students (with ID)  
\$10 DJPC members  
\$15 Non-members

All proceeds go to the Denver  
Justice & Peace Committee and  
their work towards human rights,  
social justice and lasting peace in  
Latin America



**David Barsamian is founder and director of Alternative Radio, the independent award-winning weekly series based in Boulder, Colorado. He is a radio producer, journalist, author and lecturer. He has been working in radio since 1978. His interviews and articles appear regularly in The Progressive and Z Magazine.**

**His latest books are:**

*Imperial Ambitions with Noam Chomsky*

*Speaking of Empire & Resistance with Tariq Ali*

*Original Zinn with Howard Zinn*

**His earlier books include:**

*Propaganda and the Public Mind: Conversations with Noam Chomsky*

*Eqbal Ahmad: Confronting Empire*

*The Decline and Fall of Public Broadcasting*

**The Institute for Alternative Journalism named Barsamian one of its "Top Ten Media Heroes." He lectures on U.S. foreign policy, the media, propaganda, and corporate power in the U.S. and abroad. He is the winner of the ACLU's Upton Sinclair Award for independent journalism.**

For more information, contact the Denver Justice & Peace Committee  
303.623.1463      [www.denjustpeace.org](http://www.denjustpeace.org)      [djpc@denjustpeace.org](mailto:djpc@denjustpeace.org)

## Venezuela: A Firsthand Report

By Tom Moore

I recently returned from a two week trip with *Witness for Peace* to Washington, D.C. and Venezuela. Venezuela regularly makes the “news” with quotes from President Chávez deriding President Bush. The Bush Administration resents many aspects of the Chávez government, calling it undemocratic and making moves to subvert it and undermine its credibility. Chávez rebuts with fiery vocalizations; at the UN last year he made metaphorical remarks about Bush being the incarnation of the devil.

But these reports ignore the serious content in Chávez’ remarks and overlook important innovations taking place in Venezuela. Remarkably, the poor are optimistic about the future and about democracy. The Chávez government has been plowing oil revenues into projects that elevate poor people at home and abroad. These programs range from subsidized food, access to health care, cooperative businesses, upgrades in public schools, and programs allowing working people to become literate, complete high school and attend college.

Folks in Venezuela witness democracy every day. Articles from the Constitution are printed on subsidized basic food packages! For example, Article 88 found on canisters of powdered milk, guarantees equality between men and women in work and says that work in the home has economic value and creates social benefits. On packages of lentils you will find Article 72, describing the process for how officials, even the President, can be removed half way through their terms. (A presidential recall, which Chávez easily won, was mounted in 2004. He was re-elected with a strong majority in the general election in December 2006.) Having Constitutional guarantees printed on food packages does not implement democracy, but I left with the impression that people are determined to make the Constitution and the government work for them.

This is not to say that heaven has set up a branch office in Caracas. There are plenty of problems. Corruption and police brutality are standard grievances. The moneyed classes grumble about the re-nationalization of PDVSA, the main oil producer in Venezuela. A few years ago, Chávez pushed through laws to make petroleum a national asset to which all Venezuelans should have access. The elites felt that they were being cheated out of what they believe is rightfully theirs. There are complaints that Chávez suppresses free speech, however, I did not see any sign of that. There is an active opposition press, including television stations, which abuses him every day. The Chávez government has, however, chosen not to renew the license of Radio Caracas Televisión (RCTV) for its active participation in the 2002 presidential coup and other offenses that would merit similar treatment here.

How does the United States fit into all this? I will offer a few observations. The U.S. does not like Chávez because: 1) His government represents a threat to the neo-liberal economic model promoted by the U.S. 2) Chávez has a close relationship with Fidel Castro, and is perceived as leading other Latin American nations astray. 3) Chávez might withhold oil shipments to the U.S., although this is unlikely given the co-dependency in that matter. In order to push its agenda, the U.S. injects money into Venezuela through the National Endowment for

Democracy (NED, started by the Reagan administration when Congress was withholding direct support for the wars in Central America) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). While it is not always clear how these monies might undermine the Venezuelan government, there are strong signs that this is at least partially the intent.

For more info, please see [www.venezuelanalysis.com](http://www.venezuelanalysis.com).



Venezuelans take to the streets.  
Photo credit: Global Exchange ([www.globalexchange.org](http://www.globalexchange.org))

**Tom Moore has offered to discuss his insights on Venezuela with DJPC members. Please call the office if you would be interested in this opportunity.**



## In Community in El Tesorito

By Harriet Mullaney

The highpoint of the CAMINOS 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary delegation to Guatemala were the two days spent in El Tesorito—the community that DJPC accompanied during its war-time displacement in the mountains through its hurricane-induced displacement in the lowlands to this home in the coastal region.

Delegation members who have known the community over the years experienced a new found feeling of “hope” among the residents. In spite of the government having disempowered the Maya by splitting up the various Communities of Populations in Resistance and removing them from their ancestral homes, the people were strong and resilient. To those of us meeting them for the first time, the people exhibited pride in their accomplishments, strength, determination and purpose.

Their graciousness was abundant. We were not there as observers, we were there as friends. We were welcomed into their homes where we ate together, shared stories, laughed and tried to sleep—amid a nocturnal animal chorus! We were delighted by the *constant* presence of the children—their interest, their aliveness, their happiness, their fresh promise of hope.

All were struck by the level of accomplishment within the community. In seven years, houses, schools, a health clinic, a dental clinic, and a community center have been built. There is electricity (and 23 TV’s!) and “running” water by hose hookup. There are *tenditas* (small shops with snacks and the basics) and a church and a bus to the main highway. The recent addition of a *basico*, a middle school, is a major achievement that will increase opportunities for the youth and the community as a whole.



Children in El Tesorito.  
Photo credit: Harriet Mullaney

For the last two years, DJPC/CAMINOS has helped to sponsor the *Promesa Partnership*, supporting the work and training of community health promoters. We were impressed at seeing how medical needs are being met due to community initiative. El Tesorito is divided into sectors with one health promoter for every 30 families. The clinics are stocked with medicines and basic instruments.

This is not to say that El Tesorito is without its challenges. There is no running water in either of the clinics. The government has not taken responsibility for the schools, so the community must secure its own funding sources. The water is not potable. While no one shows signs of desperate hunger, food security is a concern. Many children have chronic coughs. Small plots of land have been given to community members but they are not large enough to sustain a living. The men, the wage-earners, have no choice but to go to haciendas or the city for work, resulting in long separations from their families.



Community health clinic constructed in El Tesorito.  
Photo Credit: Vince Orlando

El Tesorito’s “progress” invariably raises questions. What does it mean for the continuation of Mayan culture? For now, the language has been preserved but what will happen with the next generation? For sure, the kids will embrace new conveniences, but how will these changes affect the social fabric of the community? We came away conflicted, although knowing that as outsiders, it is not for us to judge but to celebrate with the community of El Tesorito all that they are.

*Thanks to Marge Burgess, Susan Cotton, Sheila and John Malcolm, Julie Nutter, Denise Peine and Kathryn Rodriguez for sharing their impressions.*

See [www.denjustpeace.org](http://www.denjustpeace.org) for the entire article.

## **ADVOCACY & NONVIOLENT ACTIVISM UPDATE**

*By Doug Stephens, Advocacy and Nonviolent Activism Intern*

### **Femicides**

Since 2000, Guatemalan women have been targeted in gender-based killings. According to Guatemalan officials, the women range in age from 18 to 30 and most have been abducted in broad daylight in well-populated areas. Though some NGOs are hesitant to use the term 'Femicide' as they see the killings in a broader context of a rising murder rate for the population as a whole, these killings are an extreme form of violence against women, often including sexual assault, mutilation, and torture.

More than 3,000 women have been murdered in Guatemala since 2000 and, according to police statistics, the number of murders has steadily risen from 213 deaths in 2000 to an estimated 589 murders in 2006. While the number and brutality of the killings is distressing, most worrisome is the lack of political will to resolve the murders and prosecute the perpetrators. Few arrests and fewer convictions have taken place and on ten separate occasions police officers have been implicated in the murders. The government's inaction sets a public policy of tolerance for gender-based violence.

However, there is movement in Congress to push Guatemala into taking action against the femicides. House Resolution 100, introduced on January 24<sup>th</sup> by Rep Hilda Solis (Ca – D), condemns the abductions and murders and expresses condolences to families of the victims. It also recommends specific actions to President Bush, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and the U.S. Ambassador to Guatemala to help stop the femicides. As of this writing Diana DeGette has been the only member of the Colorado delegation to co-sponsor the resolution.

### **Plan Colombia & Colombian Free Trade Agreement**

Civil war has been raging in Colombia for 59 years. Second only to the Sudan, Colombia has the highest number of internally displaced persons. Approximately 3 million people have been forced from their land since 1985. Despite a recent pardoning of some paramilitary groups, 30,000 people still die every year due to military violence. Plan Colombia was an initiative presented by former Colombian President Andres Pastrana to promote peace and stability in Colombia. While adopted as a peace plan in 2000 by the out-going Clinton administration, U.S. policymakers encouraged the Colombians to shift the majority of aid toward military and police training to fight drugs. This realignment of aid has not proven successful in combating an increasing drug trade.

In Plan Colombia, only 22% of the \$735 million in aid goes towards projects such as sustainable development, displaced persons, and judicial reform. The other 78% of the aid goes directly to the military. Of this, 75% is unconditional and 25% (18.75% of the total aid package) is distributed only if Colombia passes human rights standards. Colombia, notorious for human rights violations, has continually failed to receive this portion of the aid. In addition, millions of dollars every year are spent on aerial fumigation of coca fields, which has failed to reduce coca cultivation but has succeeded in destroying subsistence crops and damaging Colombia's biodiversity and natural environment. Colombian President Álvaro Uribe recently released "Plan Colombia II" which calls for 86% of the money to be economic (i.e. non-military) aid and only 14% to be slotted for the military and police.

The Colombian Free Trade Agreement (FTA) is currently being debated in subcommittees in the House and the Senate. The proposed FTA will have the undesired effects of increasing poverty and the income gap, increasing human rights violations, and increasing the production of narcotics. Workers' rights in the proposed FTA are a huge step backwards, with standards and enforcement mechanisms inferior to U.S. law and the International Labor Organization standards. Almost a quarter of the Colombian population is employed in agriculture and will be severely and negatively affected if Colombian trade barriers are removed. According to agricultural experts and farmers, damage to the agriculture sector will force workers, who lack other economic opportunities, to turn to coca production as an alternative form of income. In addition to agricultural concerns, the FTA has been rejected by the indigenous population due to property rights favoring U.S. companies over indigenous claims to land and traditional knowledge.

Currently, there is a nation-wide movement lead by the Latin American Working Group in Washington, D.C. to educate Congressional Representatives on Plan Colombia's failings, promote a revised version of the policy similar to Plan Colombia II, and warn against the dangers of the Colombian Free Trade Agreement. Recently, a DJPC delegation had a successful meeting with Representative Udall's office and plans on holding similar meetings with Representative Perlmutter and Senator Salazar in the near future.

### **DJPC ACTIONS Taken Since December 2006**

- ◆ Signed on to an American Friends Service Committee letter that called for an end to Immigration Control and Enforcement (ICE) raids against immigrants in the work place and called for investigations into ICE violations of civil liberties.
- ◆ Urged Senators to reject the nomination of John Negroponte as Deputy Secretary of State. During his service as U.S. Ambassador to Honduras from 1981-1985 and as Deputy National Security Advisor from 1987-1989, Negroponte was heavily involved in the Dirty Wars in Central America as well as the Iran-Contra scandal. Despite these efforts, Negroponte was confirmed February 13, 2007.
- ◆ Urged Colorado Representatives to become signatories on House Resolution 100 condemning the femicides in Guatemala, which have been occurring since 2000 (see update above).
- ◆ Contacted Colorado Representatives requesting that they co-sponsor HR 654, allowing freedom of travel between the U.S. and Cuba.
- ◆ Held a meeting with Representative Udall's office and sent letters informing the Colorado delegation of the flaws with Plan Colombia II and urging reform (see update above). Plan Colombia II is part of the Foreign Aid appropriations bill and is currently being debated in the Foreign Operations Sub-Committee.

**We encourage all DJPC members to sign up for our e-mail listserve and take part in Urgent Actions to amplify our voice in Washington!**

**YOU ARE INVITED TO A SPECIAL EVENT!  
A Salon Discussion of the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
Delegation to Guatemala**

Wednesday, March 28<sup>th</sup>  
6:00 to 9:00 pm  
Denver Justice and Peace Committee  
901 West 14<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Denver

Light refreshments will be served.  
A donation of \$7 (\$5 for members) is suggested to cover expenses.

Call DJPC at 303.623.1463 to RSVP by Wednesday, March 21st.  
All information available at: [www.denjustpeace.org/events.html](http://www.denjustpeace.org/events.html)

Please participate in our third Salon discussion with members of the CAMINOS 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary delegation to Guatemala. Recently returned delegates will share what they learned about efforts to heal Guatemalan society in the wake of genocide. Together we will identify what local, national and international actions we can take personally and collectively to support the Guatemalan people in their process of transitional justice.

Delegates will discuss the standing of the genocide cases in Guatemala and Spain and their meetings with human rights, forensic, women's and labor organizations who risk their lives to bring peace and justice to Guatemala. Delegates will also report on meetings with representatives of the Guatemalan and U.S. governments.

The delegation highlight was visiting the Maya community of El Tesorito whose members put a human face on our experience. Delegates had the opportunity to share briefly in the lives of community families as they were welcomed into their homes and experienced firsthand their progress in building new lives. We joyfully celebrated 10 years of accompaniment and friendship.

*Discussion and Action! What Can We Do?*

At this Salon, we will apply our learning about *transitional justice* to specific action planning.  
Based on the delegation experience, what can be our role in supporting the path of transitional justice in Guatemala?  
As in the previous two Salons, we are fortunate to have Fran Sterling from **Facing History and Ourselves** to facilitate our learning and planning.





The inspiring and determined Felisa Chaclán and Isabel Cruz speak to delegates at Sector de Mujeres. Photo © Jonathan Moller

Rodrigo Carrillo at the National Commission for Reparations spoke emotionally about the difficult task of providing restitution for the victims of a war in which conceivably everyone was a victim. “We are all sick,” he said, revealing a part of his humanity that we had not expected from a government employee. Felisa Chaclán and Isabel Cruz at Sector de Mujeres charmed us with their ebullient good humor and enduring optimism just as we had begun to feel discouraged by what seemed like an unrelenting stream of bad news.

When we reflect on the delegation, these people stand out most prominently. They are the human face of the struggle for peace and justice in Guatemala. Quite literally, without them there would be no fight against impunity, no effort to redress the crimes of the past, and

no credible movement to establish a more democratic country. And although they often face incredible odds, we can at least take heart that they are there, they are determined, and they are *en la lucha*. Thankfully, through our association with DJPC, we can stand in solidarity with these courageous individuals and accompany them as they pursue their goal of constructing a better future for Guatemala.

***Please visit the DJPC website for more photos and writings on the delegation!***



Group photo of delegates as they are welcomed in the community of El Tesorito. Photo Credit: Vince Orlando

# Welcome to DJPC!

For those of you receiving this newsletter for the first time, we welcome your help in working for justice and peace! If you would like to keep receiving *The Mustard Seed* and/or support our work, please return the slip below.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to continue to receive *The Mustard Seed* and renew my DJPC membership for \$30 per year.

I would like to contribute \$\_\_\_\_\_ to help with the work of DJPC and its programs.

I would like to receive Events Announcements & Action Alerts via e-mail.

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

For tax deductible contributions, please make checks out to "DJPC Education Fund."

DJPC is a small grassroots organization and depends on your membership donations for the survival of our programs and advocacy efforts. Please give generously!

## Denver Justice and Peace Committee

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