

Resisting Walls

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CPT-Lesvos is now Aegean Migrant Solidarity p.4



The three community leaders embrace their family members as they emerge from the Barrancabermeja court. Caldwell Manners/CPT

Letter from the Editor

Dear CPT Community,

I spent 2019 on sabbatical, after eight years on the Colombia team. Returning to the work of liberating love, in this new role as communications coordinator, fills me with great joy. I'm excited to be working on a new team, with colleagues I've known for years. But what excites me most, is to contribute to this work of peacemaking through the curation and creation of content to amplify the voices of our partners.

I remember that sweaty, warm afternoon at the local court house in Barrancabermeja. We were anxious. A few of us had gathered on the balcony awaiting a verdict on three community leaders from El Guayabo and Bella Union who had who turned themselves in after avoiding arrest —under false and unjust charges— for six months. As I stood there, I remember convincing and questioning myself, “Whatever the verdict we can’t give up. This struggle for justice won’t end here, even if Erik, Santos, and Jhon end up going to prison.” “Is this what being present looks like?” “Does accompaniment work?”

That morning I had spent some time with Erik. He was nervous. He had not seen his family in months and was concerned about his farm, and how he was going to sustain his family if he had to go to jail. The next moment, I heard him shout, “Somos libre!” “We’re free!” As I turned around I saw them embracing their family. That slice of time is permanently etched in my mind. I didn’t need an answer anymore. Justice wins! Love Liberates! And accompaniment matters!

I want to thank you for your letters of encouragement, your contributions and your participation

Cover Image: US/Mexico border wall, Nogales, Arizona. Ignatian Solidarity Network/Flickr. CC BY-NC 2.0

in this work of liberating love. We're grateful to end this year, and we look forward to another year of collaborative, participatory solidarity action towards transforming oppression, with you and our partners.

"There is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in." — Leonard Cohen.

Write to us at peacemakers@cpt.org.

IN KINDNESS,
CALDWELL MANNERS

Announcement: New Coordinators

Outreach Coordinator

Julie Brown trained with CPT in 2015 and has served with the Iraqi Kurdistan Program since that time. She also served as a Corps Rep on the Steering Committee. Prior to CPT, she served in Palestine with Meta Peace Teams (MPT) and the International Solidarity Movement (ISM). When she is not in Kurdistan, Julie lives in a Catholic Worker house in Waterloo, Iowa, where she works with un-housed and under-served community residents. Julie is married to CPTer Mohammed Salah and has three sons. In her free time, she enjoys making art, camping, and spending time with friends envisioning ways to promote peace and justice. Julie began her role as Outreach Coordinator in November 2019.



Julie Brown, Outreach Coordinator.

Communications Coordinator

Caldwell Manners trained with CPT in 2009 and began serving full-time with the Colombia Program in 2011. He is from the Khasi Indigenous tribe in northeast India, a community that centers oral traditions and storytelling. He has a passion for stories, particularly in visual form. During 2019, Caldwell has been on sabbatical working on building his skills as a non-fiction photographer and filmmaker. Over the course of the year, he began working to retrace the foot travels of his grandfather throughout the Khasi and Jaintia hills, and is also currently working with an award-winning filmmaker exploring gender and inter-ethnic relationships in the matrilineal Khasi society. Caldwell began as Communications Coordinator in October 2019.



Caldwell Manners, Communications Coordinator.



Martha and Rodney Yoder Maust.

Donor Portrait

Martha and Rodney Yoder Maust have been supporters of CPT for over twenty years. Shaped by their Christian faith, as part of the Mennonite church they reflect on how their understanding of peacemaking has broadened over the years. “To say Peace! Peace! in open conflict is insufficient. We also need to think about justice and injustice, and who’s telling who to be peaceful.”

They are peacemakers in their own city of Indianapolis, where Martha initiated a multifaith women’s group

to foster understanding toward reconciliation between Jewish, Muslim and Christian communities. In the same spirit of making space for understanding, earlier this year they hosted a high school exchange student from Nablus, Palestine.

“It makes sense for us to support the work of CPT because we share a common calling, reconciliation.”

CPT-Lesvos is now Aegean Migrant Solidarity

Christian Peacemaker Teams - Lesvos is now Aegean Migrant Solidarity. The new name reflects the geographical location of our working area. Our work is not limited only to Lesvos Island but also includes other locations such as Chios Island, Athens, and the west coast of Turkey. Aegean Migrant Solidarity demonstrates a reference to the geographical scope of our work.

Our inclusion of ‘Aegean’ makes reference to the history of the Aegean Sea as a migration point for different populations. This predates what is now known as the ‘refugee crisis.’ Many of the locals of the island are also the descendants of Aegean migrants from more than one hundred years ago. In the 1920’s, a forced population exchange made refugees of ethnic Greeks living on the Western coast of Turkey; they faced a lot of difficulty when they had to resettle on the island. Aegean Migrant Solidarity is more inclusive name, embracing and underlining the common ground between the old and new migrants of the island.

The team prefers to use the word ‘migrant’ rather than ‘refugee,’ because on a daily basis we see people seeking shelter are divided into ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ claimants. European policies and rhetoric is focused on accepting those who are considered genuine (refugees) and driving out those who it claims, came simply for better opportunities (economic migrants). We reject this categorization and do not make such distinctions when working with communities.

We chose the word ‘Solidarity’ because it easily leads into a conversation about the nature of our work, and provides a better opportunity to discuss CPT’s core values – ‘amplifying voices’, ‘accompaniment’, ‘undoing oppressions’ etc.

The members of the team will present themselves as workers of Aegean Migrant Solidarity, while on social media: Facebook and Twitter, the team will use CPT- Aegean Migrant Solidarity.



Vigil for Jose Antonio Elena Rodriguez as seen from the north side of the border. Painted on the wall is a likeness of Jose Antonio at the spot where he was shot 10 times in the back and head by Lonnie Swartz, Border Patrol agent, from the north side. Peg Hunter/ Flickr. CC BY-NC 2.0

Resisting Walls

By Peggy Gish

Walls take many forms. They may be words, glances, or actions that distance us from others, or physical structures that protect us from the weather or the vulnerable from further harm. But the walls we saw at the Arizona/Mexico border, on the Christian Peacemaker Teams borderlands delegation, were made of concrete, metal, or stone, or even from threats, meant to deprive people of their rights or shut out the tired, the poor, the “huddled masses yearning to breathe free”—as the message on the Statue of Liberty says at a port of entry in the Eastern United States.

There were walls made of steel slats decked with concertina wire. In some places it ran parallel to a second wall of layered metal mesh. In areas where water floods through arroyos during monsoon rains, large iron gates let the water flow through. Farther from towns were the original barbed wire fences constructed in 1880, with added razor wire, that sometimes crossed over with old railroad rails, called the “Normandy fences.” All are fortified by heavy technological surveillance.

Ostensibly a means of security, these barriers are actually monuments to fear and racism, and an extension of U.S. colonial history, a reminder that the U.S. claimed half of Mexico’s territory after the 1846-48 war. They have been tools of control, keeping people of color in an inferior place and maintaining white supremacy. They cut through the lands of indigenous nations—violating their sovereignty and disrupting communities and ecosystems. Billions of tax dollars go to wealthy, private companies that build walls and run detention centers. Maria Padilla, member of the Mayo indigenous nation, and emergency room worker, reminded us that the nation-state operates as a police force on behalf of the rich—who have no border—while patriotism is expected of poor and working class, who are led to believe it’s for their benefit.

The border wall isn't intended to keep migrants out, only slow them down, to catch and detain them. With the increased militarization of the border area, migrants who feel desperate, but can't cross legally, need to travel farther, into more dangerous areas to bypass detention. So they die in larger numbers, suffer more trauma, and are locked up in larger numbers for the crime of escaping desperate circumstances. Lupe Castillo, retired history professor with indigenous Hispanic heritage, termed this criminalization system "the invisible wall."

These are walls to tear down.

In contrast are the many creative organizations and dedicated people along both sides of the border protesting and resisting the effects of the wall that sometimes risk their own safety by caring for and assisting migrants on their journey. Several cooperative businesses are creating alternatives to the economic deprivation and oppression that cause many to flee their homes.

Also resisting the wall are brightly painted murals on it near ports of entry. They tell the truth about the wall, or "erase" it, minimizing its power, refusing to let its ugliness define what role the border should take. So butterflies depict the freedom of flight migrants should have, wall slats evolve into piano keys, and a painted open door symbolizes the alternative we must work toward.

Members of our delegation left the border feeling an urgency to tell the truth and find creative alternatives as we work toward a more just, welcoming, and less brutal society that builds—not more militarized walls—but more doors.

Join a Delegation to the US/Mexico Borderlands, February 19-20. Apply at cpt.org.

Clampdown in Lesbos

By CPT-Aegean Migrant Solidarity

Over the years, the island of Lesbos has been transformed into a procedural greyzone for the thousands of migrants who cross the Northern Aegean sea from Turkey to Europe.

The establishment of the hotspot islands in 2015 (Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Leros and Kos), in conjunction with the 2016 EU-Turkey deal focused on 'returning' failed asylum seekers to a 'safe third country', turned the islands into vast open-air prisons. Migrants were 'geographically restricted' in a region that also hosts an array of European institutions in order to speed up asylum claims. This stream lining gave tacit approval to the abuse of due process by European asylum agencies.

The summer of 2017 saw a series of protests, hunger strikes, and occupations demanding the government end the administrative abuse embedded in the asylum process, and address the miserable and over-crowded conditions in the island's main refugee camp, Moria. They also called for an end to the implementation of 'geographic restriction,' a protocol that leaves people in limbo awaiting asylum decisions, transfers, detention and deportation. In most cases, peaceful protest has been met with backlash. Police and prosecutors were repeatedly seen conducting arbitrary arrests and using collective punishment techniques, including bribing and threatening informants to testify against each other in the community, in order to lower evidentiary standards to secure a prosecution.

The priorities of the criminal justice system are clear. Lesbos has become a lab in detention and punishment, a testing ground for the state, police and prosecutors to see what they can get away with, and against whom. Migrants often wait years in pre-trial detention, while the far-right vigilantes



Demonstration in Mytilene, Lesvos, to stop mass deportation of refugees to Turkey. Phil Mike Jones/ Flickr. CC BY-NC 2.0

who attacked Afghan protesters on April 22, 2018 remain free. This two-tier justice system is one example of institutional racism.

In October 2019, CPT Aegean Migrant Solidarity hosted five of thirteen defendants who were on trial for participating in peaceful protests in November 2017. The defense was undertaken by the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, CPT Aegean Migrant Solidarity's partner, which argued that the protesters had occupied public spaces because of a condition of necessity following violent incidents in the overcrowded Moria camp. In his closing statement, the state prosecutor asked "what were these people expecting to find, a paradise?" The case was one of a number of trials against peaceful protesters who were eventually declared innocent by the courts.

These prosecutions have quelled the motivation of migrants to resist their inhumane containment on the Aegean islands.

Conditions have further deteriorated. Over 15,000 people now live in the Moria camp and the surrounding Olive Grove overspill area, a space designed to host a maximum of 3,000 people. In July 2019, when the centre-right New Democracy government was elected — on an anti-migrant and law-and-order platform— rather than decongest the island and provide migrants with dignified accommodation, the newly elected government abolished the Ministry of Migration and handed jurisdiction for migrant issues to the Ministry for Citizen Protection, the state institution responsible for policing and prisons.

The Greek state now unashamedly treats migration as a public order issue. Populations are warehoused out of sight and mind, in camps miles away from basic services, and when they try to make themselves seen and heard, the police deals them with.

In September 2019, when fatal fires spread through the Moria camp, the police chief accused migrants on local media, for starting the fire and attacking fire services personnel. In response to



these reports, locals testified that they were afraid to leave their homes. As it later turned out, the fire was not started by migrants but was the result of faulty electronics, and police had shot tear-gas at migrants who were attempting to extinguish the flames.

The government’s response makes their priorities clear: to clamp down on migrants, and leaving the responsibility to rehouse the now-displaced migrants to international NGO’s and humanitarian volunteers.

In the days after the fires, migrants and their advocates participated in tandem protests. Those in the solidarity movement, predominantly Europeans, marched freely through the streets of Mytilene, while migrant-organised protest were not tolerated. CPT Aegean Migrant Solidarity witnessed militarized riot police and armored vehicles blockading Moria camp’s exits, preventing a migrant demonstration from disturbing business as usual in the city.

The arrival of the New Democracy government has brought repressive policies that will make CPT’s work more challenging. Yet the severity of the situation has produced a renewed determination from migrants to organize and fight together, across communities, for a better life.



Why CPT? Reflections About Our Work in Colombia

By Marcos Knoblauch

In a world where violence and conflict are constant, nonviolence and peacemaking has become a true alternative. Christian Peacemaker Teams and other international civil society movements offer real alternatives to violence in volatile situations in spaces where there is still a quota for dialogue and interlocation through accompaniment. This alternative enlarges the capacity of civil society to act politically in its defense. Accompaniment, monitoring, witnessing, and amplifying the voices of partners exerts political pressure, which gives them support to defend their territories and human rights. Throughout the 18 years of presence in the middle-Magdalena region, the team has engaged in building meaningful partnerships with thousands of farmers, artisanal miners and social leaders.

The real cost of a violent action committed by criminal organizations or legal and illegal armed actors is extremely low. These victimizing actions often go unpunished and are intertwined with a multipolarity of elements that include: stigmatization, inefficient bureaucracy, institutions permeated by violence and flagrant corruption with influence from powerful political and

economic interests. It is in this context of impunity that the team operates, accompanying partners through protective physical accompaniment, psychosocial care, political advocacy and strategic communications.

The cost is high for Human rights defenders. Many human rights defenders and community leaders choose to work despite adverse and risky conditions, exposing their personal integrity and security, and often putting their loved ones at great risk. CPT's physical accompaniment represents a dissuasive, efficient and effective alternative in volatile situations, which increases the political cost of violent acts against our partners or volunteers. Physical presence with a solid base in nonviolence and pacifism, and rooted in faith and spirituality, has proven to be a powerful tool to dissuade illegal or legal armed actors.

Frequently, from within our own spirituality, CPTers build ties with, and support our partners through active listening, accompanying them in moments of celebration and mourning through the course of life of popular resistance movements. This approach has been crucial in Colombia, where

the Christian faith, in its various expressions, is central to many partners, and is also a refuge where many find guidance, peace and hope. On many instances, the team is invited to offer Biblical reflections. Recently, we led a reflection in commemoration of a massacre that took place 36 years ago in the township of Altos de Manila, where the community planted trees to remember each of the victims of the massacre. Organizations and human rights defenders who do not include spirituality in their exercise of resistance, have often expressed their appreciation for this dimension of our work.

The exercise of political advocacy seeks to increase the political cost of human rights violations, and exert political pressure on institutions to act justly and fairly. It also highlights, the disregard for protective measures and blatant violations of human rights by institutions, making sure these issues are on the agendas of decision makers. This exercise requires a vast support network that includes CPT's constituency, sister organizations, and national and international actors like the United Nations, embassies, and international civil society organizations.

Last year, the team launched an international political advocacy campaign in order to amplify the request of our partner, CAHUCOPANA, who demanded the state officially recognize three humanitarian safe havens installed in the northeast region of the Department of Antioquia. These safe havens were designed by the local community and CAHUCOPANA as a measure of collective protection in an area where the State is absent, and violence exerted by the ELN guerrilla and paramilitaries. This joint advocacy campaign resulted in the government recognizing the need for collective protection measures, formally recognizing the havens and offering technical and economic support in their implementation. CPT constituents, followers and peacemakers from all over the world signed on to the campaign and shared it widely. This amplified the work and voices of our partners.



A tree planted in commemoration of the victims of the Altos de Manila massacre.

CPT's work is funded by contributors like you. Your contribution represents over 60% of our income. To work in 6 countries, supporting thousands of social leaders, farmers, activists, human rights defenders, with a majority of financial support from individual contributors - allows us to hold high ethical standards. CPT is a community of people that is continuously learning the exercise of creative nonviolence and undoing structural oppressions. For me, CPT's active solidarity represents a political and spiritual alternative in times of polarization, individualism and hopelessness. It encourages me to observe the many movements of peacemakers in the world, and it gives me hope to see it is possible to build networks and alliances that strengthen the work of resistance against violence and oppression.

We are thankful for your support, and your willingness to become a peacemaker by joining our delegations, contributing and spreading the word.

Join a Delegation to Colombia, June 24 - July 4. Apply at cpt.org.

“Are the soldiers coming again tonight?”

By CPT Palestine

Repeated Israeli raids on three Palestinian homes, complete with police dogs, brutal arrests, confiscations, terrified children, demolition orders ... and nearly eight weeks of silence from the Israeli authorities: This is the experience of Beit Kahil village's extended Assafrah family and their Zahur in-laws.

That all happen after the 8th of August, when the Israeli corporal and yeshiva student, Dvir Yehuda Sorek was found dead by the road leading to his yeshiva on the edge of Migdal Oz, an illegal Israeli settlement south of Jerusalem.

During those weeks of official silence, the Palestinian family (Assafrah/Zahur) in Beit Kahil near Hebron city suffered wave after wave of arrests, overnight raids, deprivation of work permits, and categorical condemnations in Israeli mass media, without one word of official explanation or contacts with their arrested family members.

Two days after Dvir Sorek's body was found, the resulting Israeli manhunt claimed its first arrests, leading to warm public congratulations to Israeli forces from PM Netanyahu: "You arrested Dvir's murderer within 48 hours... We've mapped the houses of the terrorists and will soon demolish them."

Until military court indictments were issued on October 3, the only information the anxious Palestinian family received came via mass media (in a superheated political campaign environment) and the human rights organization HaMoked. Newspapers originally identified the suspects as 24-year-old Nazir Assafrah and 30-year-old Qasem Assafrah. HaMoked provided the locations where those arrested were being held, and confirmed the issue of demolition orders for two apartments and a single-family dwelling. Neither family nor lawyers have been allowed contact with detainees, nor have they been permitted to attend the secret detention hearings.

The members of this extended Palestinian family live within a few hundred meters of each other in Beit Kahil, some in the threatened apartment building and others in the nearby home also slated for demolition. Their extended nightmare began at 2 a.m. on August 10, the eve of Eid al-Adha holiday, when they were awakened by Israeli forces breaking down their front door, invading



This single-family dwelling was measured and photographed by Israeli soldiers on the night of 12 August.

women's quarters, setting police dogs on the brothers sleeping on the multifamily roof, and dragging everyone into one room of each house. Terrified children screamed for their parents. The forces turned the houses' contents upside down until 6 a.m., and arrested three men and one woman – the two men identified by the press as suspects, Nazir Assafrah and Qasem Assafrah, along with Nazir's brother Ekrema, and Qasem's wife Enas. They also confiscated Qasem's car.

On August 12, 2 a.m., the second wave began. Israeli forces raided both houses, conducting searches and taking internal and external photos and measurements of the houses. Later that day, the Assafrah family learned of PM Netanyahu's politically-timed public commitment to demolish their homes. They felt they had no choice but to evacuate Qasem's and Nazir's homes. When human rights observers visited, a child gave a guided tour: "This was my bedroom. This was the kitchen where I helped my mother cook." When asked where his relatives were, he answered matter-of-factly, "They're in prison."

Adults in the family described other effects on the children. Aside from sudden displacement to relatives' homes and the absence of loved ones, the children have frequent nightmares, and one has trauma-induced incontinence. They ask fearfully, "Are the soldiers coming again tonight?"

Third wave: August 15. When Israeli forces entered the town, the Palestinians thought that this was a demolition raid and resisted the soldiers' entry. The Israelis succeeded in getting to Qasem's house, stayed for a couple of hours and then left.

The next blow came soon after, and had devastating financial consequences: the suspension and possible cancellation of work permits to cross into Israel. At first, the order affected three extended family members, but the number impacted has since grown to sixty as of this writing, including not just family members but also others in their Beit Kahil neighborhood. With pervasive unemployment in the region, this extended Palestinian family now depends on odd jobs, primarily construction day labor, and the income (on a reduced schedule) of one teacher.

Fourth wave of arrests: On the morning of August 20, the Israeli forces raided the village again,



arresting six more brothers and cousins of the extended family.

Fifth and sixth waves: On September 4, the Israeli military arrested yet another family member. A day later, the mother of detainee Qasem's wife Enas, already deeply affected by grief and anxiety, was hospitalized with stroke symptoms, resulting in partial paralysis and loss of memory. A week later, on September 11, while the mother was still in hospital, three more members of the extended family were taken away by Israeli forces.

On September 13, the Palestinian family learned through HaMoked that demolition orders had been issued for the two apartments and single-family home that had been surveyed by Israeli forces. (Another house has since been added to the list.) Home demolition appeals go through a two-stage process; the first appeal is routinely denied, and the final appeal sometimes results in a decision to reduce the number of units to be demolished. **This process seems unrelated to any legal findings of guilt or innocence through open court.**

On September 16, the four new arrests included deputy mayor Bassam of Beit Kahil, and his son. The pattern of arrests, demolition orders, denial of family and legal contacts with detainees, and work permit suspensions and cancellations, all without due process in law, fit the classic descriptions of collective punishment — which is explicitly prohibited by international law (Third Geneva Convention article 87; Additional Protocol I, art. 75.2.d and 75.4.b; Additional Protocol II, art. 4.2.b).

Starting October 3, the Israeli military court finally announced indictments, revealing that three more Palestinians have been charged — Ahmad Assafrah, Yusef Zahur, and Mahmoud Atuna. Two more Beit Kahil homes have been placed under demolition orders, and families anticipate yet another order in the near future. Appeals are pending for the original orders (see September 13, above) but the families anticipate their homes will be destroyed after an October 31 court hearing.

Home demolitions violate universal human rights and attack the most basic necessity of any family – the need to have shelter and a place to call one's own. Israeli Occupying Forces have a practice of not only demolishing family dwellings, but also the surrounding infrastructure, such as schools, water cisterns, and community centers.

Learn more about Home Demolitions: icahd.org

Incident Report: January - June, 2019

Download and read CPT Palestine's latest report at cpt.org



If you are faithful to your people...!

By Runak Hassani

The time is 4 p.m.

After driving for 7 hours, we arrived at an Assyrian Christian village, Chame Rabatke of the Nahla Valley in the Duhok Governorate. We were hosted at the home of a local teacher, Ashur.



During the Bombardments, children cry and even animals are scared.

Chame Rabatke village, Duhok Governorate.

CPT has visited the village of Chame Rabatke and the ones that are around it before. For about 6 years these villages have lived under the bombardments of the Turkish government, causing constant fear.

One of the members of Kak Ashur’s family said, “In the past, the Turkish government bombarded the mountains outside of the village, but now they are bombing near the village, causing great fear, and traumatizing the people who live here. During the bombardments children cry, and even the animals are scared.”

These continuing attacks have forced the people of the village to leave their houses, fields, orchards, and livestock, and to flee to the cities. For generations their ancestors have lived in this place. Now, the evacuation is threatening the continuation of a religious minority that has made this region its home.

“We are not ready to let our children live here and suffer anymore.” Another member of the family, Kak Ninos, shared their grief over evacuating the village. He told CPT that living in this situation is simply not safe anymore. “We are not ready to let our children live here and suffer anymore. This is our red line. Try to put yourselves in our place, what would you do as a father?”

The state of the road to and from the village is another safety concern and reason to flee. With deep potholes and jutting rocks, it is a dangerous and slow evacuation route when fleeing bombings. Even on more normal days it is a difficult journey for the children attempting to get to school.

“I am a teacher but I could not go to work.” There is only one school in Chame Rabatke village. But it was closed in 2014, during the ISIS war, and has remained closed. That same year, it became a shelter for people who were displaced by that war.

Kak Ashur, who was a teacher in their elementary school, now must teach in another village and the roads make it too difficult to return home each day. "I am a teacher," said Kak Ashur, "but I cannot go to my work ... I have to teach somewhere else and cannot live in my village anymore".

The villagers of Chame Rabatke are distressed about the weak attitude of the Iraqi Government and the silence of the Kurdistan Regional Government. They say that the Kurdistan Regional Government has no power to stop the bombardments by Turkey and Iran. All the Iraqi Government has done is publish a statement opposing the bombardments.

The international community is silent. Kak Sandi, another member of Kak Ashur's family, told us, "Bombardments caused the displacement of people from the villages to the cities. What surprises me is that Turkey is a member of NATO, and they kill innocent people with U.S. weapons. But the international community is silent."

The villagers do not address only the governments, but also the Christian communities. They welcome any organizations that will come to serve the people of Nahla Valley, including the Muslim village of Dupre. They say that as a Christian community, their possibility of being destroyed is much higher than the other communities in this region.

If you are faithful to your own people, help us. Sargon speaks about the role of the global Christian community toward the villagers here. He said, "Some international churches gave 10,000 dollars to us, but this sum was not enough to pave the roads completely. We managed to fix part of the road, but after six months it was in disrepair again." He added, "If you are faithful to your own people, it is time to come and help us. We ask you to protect us and to try to stop the bombardments."

Join a Delegation to the Iraqi Kurdistan, May 31- June 13. Apply at cpt.org.

Toxic Tour: Seeking Environmental Justice for Residents of Chemical Valley

By Emily Green

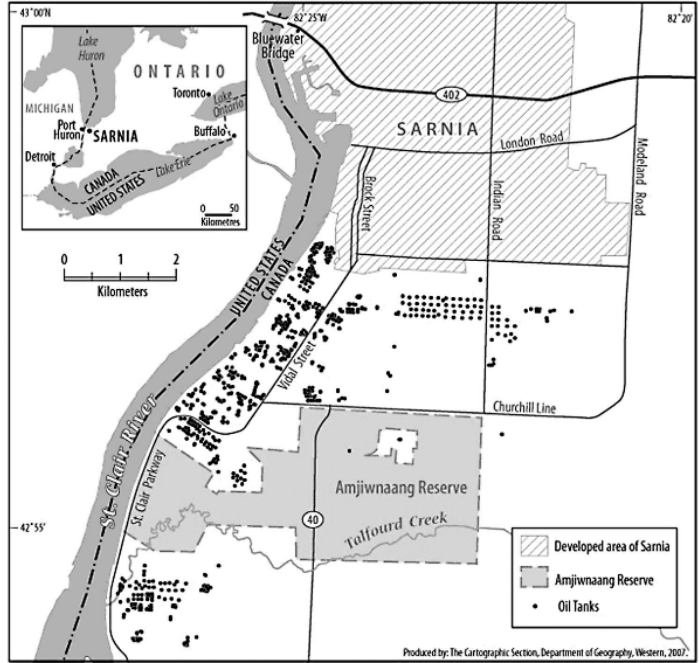
For several years, youth from Aamjiwnaang First Nations reserve have invited allies to visit their community for what they have coined the Toxic Tour. They have created this tour to give participants a glimpse into the realities that they live with every day: their home is surrounded by petroleum and chemical refineries, their air smells like a laboratory experiment, and their health and safety are constantly being put at risk by corporate powers and limited government regulations.

The tour group of about 150 people was greeted with a large feast at the Aamjiwnaang community center that included traditional foods like wild rice and venison stew. We were welcomed by an elder who thanked us for coming to witness their reality; he shared that folks from Aamjiwnaang used to join the tour, but that fewer come these days, because they know the sites of the tour so intimately that it feels redundant.

Members of the Aamjiwnaang community spoke about the constant risk of spills, leaks, and eroded health. The condition of living in relationship with land that is surrounded by 40% of Canada's oil refineries holds many layers of emotion: fear, anger, lack of control, frustration, and sadness. This tour is one way for the community to be witnessed in their struggles, and for them to gain support. One of the main requests from the tour leaders is for participants to share their story,

and to take action when the community calls for action.

One of the most visceral lessons that I took away from my Toxic Tour experience is the connection between pollution and colonialism. As we stood at the site of the Aamjiwnaang band office, which until recently also housed the community's daycare, I took in the flairs and smokestacks of the chemical refinery across the street. No one should live, work, or watch children to play in proximity to these industries. The racism inherent in the choice to position these refineries on all three sides of an Indigenous reserve does not feel accidental; the lack of governmental systems of accountability to regulate and minimize the harms of these industrial sites feels aligned with other historical and present incidents of environmental racism.



Map retrieved from: Luginaah, Isaac, Kevin Smith, and Ada Lockridge. “Surrounded by Chemical Valley and ‘living in a Bubble’: The Case of the Aamjiwnaang First Nation, Ontario.” *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management* 53.3 (2010): 353-70. Web. 20 Nov. 2019

At his year's Toxic Tour, the community launched an app called “Pollution Reporter” that will help those living in Chemical Valley (the area of Sarnia and Aamjiwnaang) to track incidents of leaks and spills, and the impacts that the industry has on residents' health. This data collection is one way that Aamjiwnaang residents can hold industry accountable to government regulations, while also showing patterns of illness relative to location.

Take action for peace.

**Become a peacemaker sustainer in 2020.
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Cracks inside one of the homes in Chame Rebatke, affected by Turkish bombing in October.

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BORDERLANDS	19 – 29 February

Learn more at cpt.org/delegations or email delegations@cpt.org.



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USA: P.O. Box 6508
Chicago, Illinois 60680
Tel: +1-773-376-0550
Fax: +1-773-376-0549
peacemakers@cpt.org

CANADA:
103 Bellevue Ave
Toronto, ON M5T 2N8
Tel: +1-647-339-0991
canada@cpt.org

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Cracks inside one of the homes in Chame Rebatke, affected by Turkish bombing in October.

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Learn more at cpt.org/delegations or email delegations@cpt.org.



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**BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS
TO TRANSFORM VIOLENCE
AND OPPRESSION**

USA: P.O. Box 6508
Chicago, Illinois 60680
Tel: +1-773-376-0550
Fax: +1-773-376-0549
peacemakers@cpt.org

CANADA:
103 Bellevue Ave
Toronto, ON M5T 2N8
Tel: +1-647-339-0991
canada@cpt.org

christian peacemaker teams - canada
équipes chrétiennes d'action pour la paix canada
103 Bellevue Ave
Toronto, ON M5T 2N8
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