

New group works to improve human rights

Shin Furuya said the U.S. is contributing to the political violence in Colombia

By Ben Garvey
Freelance Reporter

In response to human rights violations in Colombia, a sister city program called the Columbia Support Network was officially established this winter in Eugene.

The Columbia Support Network is a national organization on campus that deals with human rights violations in Colombia, as well as establishing a sister city program between Eugene and Cantagallo, Colombia. The Eugene program is the newest chapter to work toward improving human rights and building solidarity between the United States and Colombia.

"Currently, Colombia's human rights violations are the worst in Latin America," said Shin Furuya, regional organizer of the Columbia Support Network. "An estimated 24 people die each day from the political violence in Colombia."

Although the common perception is that the majority of deaths in Colombia are drug related, the reality is that political killings far outnumber the amount of drug-related deaths, he said. Over 70 percent of the identified political killings are carried out by soldiers, police and paramilitary death squads in Colombia.

The United States is actually aiding the violence by arming, training and financing the forces of oppression in Colombia, Furuya said. Multinational corporations, such as gasoline giant British Petroleum, have supported death squad activity through funding, he added.

Furuya said the major cause of human rights violations in Colombia is class segregation. The top 3 percent of the elite in Colombia own over 70 percent of the farmland, while 57 percent of the poorest farmers own less than 3 percent of the land, he said. Forty percent of the Colombian population lives in poverty, and 4.5 million children who are under the age of 14 go hungry.

The purpose of the network is to inform the public and put pressure on the U.S. government to reduce the military and financial support to Colombia, Furuya said. The network also helps by holding conferences to gain national awareness and creating a place to exchange new developments in the situation between different human rights organizations, he said.

The reason why he became involved with the network is to "help address the human rights situation in Colombia nationally and to take part in the first step towards equality of human rights in Colombia," he said.

Furuya explained that the recent establishment of the sister city program will be effective in raising awareness and in helping to end the problem.

"As we can see in the Central American movements in the '80s, building sister city relations can personalize, cultivate a sense of responsibility as U.S. citizens and help to develop long-term relations," he said.

Amita Malakar, co-director of the International Students Association, said it is important to raise awareness. "Colombia is pretty exclusive, so not that many people here know about what is going on," she said. "The Columbia Support Network should use the same method of how world-wide interests were raised about the situation in Tibet."

The Columbia Support Network has been effective in raising awareness of human rights violations in Colombia by joining forces with other organizations such as Peace Brigades International and Amnesty International, Furuya said.

"The situation in Colombia is very difficult because it is the U.S. government who supports what is happening, and even though we may not want to face the reality of what is happening, we must because there is something that we can do about it," he said.

For more information about the Columbia Support Network, visit their Web site at www.igc.apc.org/csn/csn.html.

CAMPUS BRIEF

Civil rights activist to close symposium

Only one more event remains for the week-long "envisioning equality" InterSEXions symposium.

Civil rights activist Suzanne Pharr close the symposium Monday, March 9 at 4 p.m. in the Alumni Lounge of Gerlinger Hall. She will discuss coalition building as an effective means to achieving equality.

"People should know that this won't be your basic lecture, but much more of an action-oriented workshop with one of the nation's experts on this topic," said Stephanie Carnahan, director of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Educational Support Services.

Carnahan is a member of the standing committee on gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender issues, which coordinated InterSEXions.

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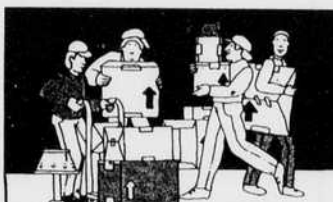
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