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VOICE OF REVOLUTION

Publication of the U.S. Marxist-Leninist Organization

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Summit of the Americas : 1-8



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SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS

Peoples of the Americas Demand No U.S. Sanctions, End the Blockade of Cuba, Free Puerto Rico Now!

The Seventh Summit of the Americas is being held in Panama City, Panama April 10-11. The Summit, organized by the Organization of American States (OAS)

brings together the heads of state of the Americas, 35 countries in all. As a result of the firm stand taken by many of the member states, includ-

Summit of the Americas • 3

Hands Off Venezuela! No to Sanctions and U.S. Terrorism

President Obama recently declared Venezuela “an extraordinary threat to U.S. national security.” Obama also increased the unjust and illegal sanctions against the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, all in an effort to overthrow her democratically-elected

government — first of Hugo Chavez and now of President Nicolás Maduro.

Using an executive order, Obama claims he is targeting — in Venezuela, not the U.S. — “actions or policies that undermine democratic processes

Hands Off Venezuela • 9

SUPPORT WOMEN HUNGER STRIKERS

End Family Detention Now!

Dozens of women held at the Karnes County, Texas detention center went on a hunger and work strike the first week of April. Many, together with their young children, have been held for more than a year in prison-like conditions. The women have been subjected to abuse by the guards, the children are not given the

needed food and recreation and are suffering from malnutrition and anxiety, and all are forced to drink contaminated, fracked water or pay for bottled water.

The large majority of the women and children are refugees, fearing for their lives and attempting to escape violence

Support Women Strikers • 14

April edition of **Voice of Revolution**

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I • Summit of Americas

ing Bolivia, Venezuela, Ecuador and others, Cuba for the first time attended this year's Summit.

For decades the U.S. blocked Cuba's participation. But faced with the strength of the Cuban revolution, a boycott by many member states, and its own isolation in a region the U.S. still considers belongs solely to it, it is the U.S. that was defeated and the peoples of the region that achieved success. Indeed, the situation was such that the U.S. had to admit that its stand toward Cuba was a failure and has begun restoring normal relations.

At the same time, President Obama attempted to assert U.S. dictate by issuing an executive order claiming Venezuela was a "threat" to U.S. national security. But again, it was Venezuela and the peoples of the Americas that have succeeded. Venezuela has mobilized and united her own people in defense of her revolution and received the support of the peoples and governments of the region. Collective organizations like UNISUR and ALBA, which both exclude the U.S., have issued statements demanding that the U.S. end the sanctions against Venezuela and rescind the order. The Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), the G-77+China, all have stood firmly with Venezuela. Their collective strength has been such that Obama was forced to say Venezuela was not a threat — though he did not withdraw the

executive order. But the most he could do at the Summit was refuse to support the final declaration, which included support for further collective actions and integration favoring the peoples. As a result no declaration was issued.

Alongside the OAS Summit, a People's Summit was organized, to further strengthen and unite the various organizations and people's movements of the Americas. It included many fighting forces, such as youth, women, workers, environmentalists, and organizations from the U.S. It took up key questions facing the peoples and expressed their firm demands: *End U.S. Sanctions! End the Blockade Against Cuba! Free Puerto Rico Now!* While the OAS Summit refuses to recognize Puerto Rico, the People's Summit called for her independence and condemned the continued U.S. occupation and colonization of this sister nation. Many participants also called for the removal of all U.S. bases as part of efforts to secure peace and stability in the region. More than 80 organizations issued a statement rejecting a U.S. plan for more militarization of Central America and called instead for the U.S. to respect the rights of immigrants and refugees (see p. 16). And the peoples put ending the blockade of Cuba as a key step in the normalization of U.S.-Cuba relations, There was broad rejection of U.S. efforts to undermine independent developments in the region and support for defending the rights of all.

People's Summit Kicks Off in Panama

Unions, women's and student organizations, environmentalists and other social movements are participating in this week's People's Summit in Panama. The event seeks to express the people's alternatives, based on support for sovereignty, rights and integration that favors the peoples. Close to 2,000 representatives from across the hemisphere began meeting April 9 to discuss issues such as opposing U.S. sanctions on Venezuela, lifting the blockade against Cuba and Puerto Rican independence.

The four-day People's Summit is taking place at the University of Panama, under the slogan, "Latin America — a homeland for all, with peace, solidarity and social justice." Some additional topics include the role of the U.S. in Latin America and reparations for civilian victims of the 1989 U.S. invasion of Panama. Bolivian President Evo Morales will address the summit and Ecuador's President Rafael Correa has also confirmed plans to attend.

In a statement, organizers said the summit is a forum for "the voice of our peoples," and their demands for change. The summit's organizer, union leader Olmedo Beluche, says participants will submit a joint declaration of demands and proposals to regional leaders.

Voices from the People's Summit

The Summit of the Americas, where heads of state from the Americas are gathering, begins April 10 in Panama City. It incorporated



parallel meetings, such as the Youth forum, the Academic forum, the Business forum and the Civil Society and Social Actors forum. Many of those participating in the People's Summit were excluded from these parallel meetings, as are some of the topics and demands they are raising.

Ecuadorean delegate Juan Francisco Torres and Panamanian organizer Dr. Fernando Cebamanos of the People's Summit and President of the Broad Front for Democracy party in Panama were interviewed by TeleSUR and commented on the aims of the People's Summit. Portions of the interview are below.

What Is the Aim of the People's Summit?

The social movements that will participate in the parallel

summit include small farmers, indigenous groups, human rights activists, political movements, workers' unions and environmental organizations. With such a diverse array of different issues the organizations agreed on an extensive agenda to discuss the most important problems, which they believe will not be present in the official presidential event.

"We are not an anti-(Americas) Summit. We are a summit that aims at giving voice to the popular movements that are not part of the Summit of the Americas. Our objective is to raise the issue of fighting poverty, for social equality and the sovereignty and right to self-determination of the peoples," explained Dr. Cebamanos. Organizer Juan Francisco Torres said "Taking into account the regional context — specially regarding foreign intervention — we will reject the attitude displayed by the U.S. against Venezuela, which is also against all of the region."

Dr. Cebamanos explained, "Our final demands and conclusions will be sent through (Bolivian) President Evo Morales to the rest of the presidents before the official event ends,"

Why Are These Movements Not Participating in the OAS Civil Society and Social Actors Forum?

"From the social movements that are participating in the People's Summit, many organizations and leaders sent their formal requests to participate (in the OAS Civil Society and Social Actors Forum). Organizations such as the National Front for Eco-

nomic and Social Rights — which is made up of 53 Panamanian organizations — was rejected. The Construction Workers' Union of Panama, one of the largest worker unions in Central America, was also rejected. And several teachers and student leaders were also denied participation," explained Cebamanos.

According to Juan Francisco Torres, the delegations that will travel to the People's Summit have been warned about the presence of far-right Cuban organizations, which could generate incidents and provocations.

"We know there are going to be people infiltrated from agencies, financed by the U.S. government. Organizations that have been supporting the ousting of the Cuban government ... will try and create disturbances and, as much as possible, delegitimize the Cuban government," explained Torres.

The selection process and the representative value of the OAS-organized civil society forum have come under scrutiny. As Cebamanos explains, it does not reflect the people of the region.

"It is an event that, instead, brings so-called "dissidents" from Venezuela and Cuba to provoke and divert attention from the real problems that are affecting our people," he added.

The People's Summit is taking its stand against these various forms of U.S. intervention and for modern democracy and relations of mutual respect and benefit. (*TeleSur*)

Peoples' Summit: Broadening Participation and Building Solidarity

Karla Díaz Martínez, April 7, 2015

Nearly 2,000 representatives of Latin American social movements are attending an alternative summit in Panama this week where North, Central and South American nations are meeting. The background to this week's Seventh Americas Summit is well known, but there are two particular aspects that must be mentioned.

The third summit, in 2001 in Quebec, was the occasion when the hemisphere's governments spoke in unison about democracy, but not just any democracy. They meant liberal representative democracy, understood as an indispensable condition for the region's economic and social development as part of neoliberalism, which was entering a crisis in those early years of the 21st century. [Broad demonstrations uniting resistance, especially of the peoples of the U.S., Canada, and Mexico, and rejecting the militarization and criminalization of dissent, took place throughout the summit. The peoples led in rejecting the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) then being pushed by the U.S., and the militarization, criminalization of dissent and attack on democracy and sovereignty it represented — VOR Ed. Note.]

It was there that the voice of Venezuela, Hugo Chavez, was heard. His was the voice of Latin American social and popular movements, which had no formal voice in those spaces. His government was questioning that notion of democracy and introduced into the debate the idea of participatory and protagonistic democracy, as expressed in the then-new constitution of the Bolivarian Republic

of Venezuela.

The Inter-American Democratic Charter does not incorporate these notions presented by Venezuela. Rather, it has served to consolidate a liberal democracy, which ultimately seeks to exclude any form of political organization that does not correspond with the dominant Western paradigm.

But with Chavez came talk of "popular sovereignty," of "national self-determination," of "social participation," and of "social justice," as criterion of the distribution of the economy's products.

Four years later in 2005, the Fourth Americas Summit took place in Mar del Plata, Argentina, and that one really was historical.

Suddenly Venezuela's voice was not alone, but surrounded by many voices. Argentina and Brazil spoke out and we can still remember Bush's face, who believed he had misheard when his free trade proposal was thrown out.

But it was not only governments. The voice of the people was also heard thanks to one of the most important gatherings of the region's social and popular movements. Participatory democracy was not only spoken of: it was being put in practice. Anti-imperialism was not just talk, the FTAA was defeated: the Empire was defeated.

2015 Summit

The main background issue to this Seventh Summit of the Ameri-

cas is the recent Obama executive order that declares Venezuela an “extraordinary threat” to U.S. national security. Apart from being simply ridiculous, it represents not only a threat of direct aggression toward Venezuela, but has had repercussions throughout the whole region.

What we will see at this summit, in an institutional space, is the force of the region’s response. So far there have been various expressions of solidarity with Venezuela and of rejection of the nefarious executive order. Within the social movements the expectations are broad. The organizers expect the participation of 1,800 people from all over the region.

The Venezuelan social movements will participate in the Peoples’ Summit. Youth, women, workers, peasant and indigenous peoples’ movements on different fronts of the struggle are seeking:

1) To deepen the web of networks of popular organizing, which in national spaces have the responsibility to take apart and unmask the local bourgeoisies.

Ecuador’s President Correa has denounced an ongoing attempt at conservative restoration in Latin America. Mass demonstrations organized by the right in Brazil, Argentina and Ecuador in recent days, all have common elements, indicating that they are part of a regional plan: they are not isolated initiatives. Undoubtedly



these have shown their most violent face in Venezuela with violent street protests and killings, and the detained criminals, wrongly called “political prisoners,” to create media scandals and even justify sanctions from the U.S.

2) Give visibility to the forces of Latin American revolutionary organizations and be a counterweight to the right-wing, organized as “civil society,” which traditionally occupies the OAS’s institutional spaces and is well covered by the media, especially the so-called human rights defenders. Here the alternative media and

social networks play a key role in communicating and socializing the actions and declarations of the Peoples’ Summit.

3) Occupy a space in the Americas Summit and incorporate an alternative space, where excluded subjects can be discussed and demands can be made that governments pay attention to these social demands.

4) Demonstrate through action the solidarity of the social bases with Venezuela, which is in solidarity with all of Our Americas, against imperial attempts; solidarity that is also a way of confronting the empire, and the path to obtain a historical anti-imperialist triumph of the peoples.

(Karla Díaz Martínez a Venezuelan lawyer, and Professor and Researcher of the Bolivarian University of Venezuela.)

BOLIVIA’S EVO MORALES

Obama Is Disrespectful for Not Agreeing on Final Summit of the Americas Declaration

April 10, 2015

Bolivian President Evo Morales, in an interview April 10, said that the United States and Canada are being disrespectful towards Latin America for not approving a final declaration for the Summit of the Americas because of their disagreement with some of the proposed declaration’s points.

According to Morales, it is because of these kinds of decisions that greater unity is being forged in organizations like CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean states, which excludes the U.S. and Canada) and not the Organization of American States (OAS, sponsor of the Summit).

“It would be good if Obama, who represents such an important country in the Americas and the world were to make proposals that would allow us to unite and to convert ourselves into an Americas of peace, with social justice, and solidarity ... because we cannot advance with a mentality that is patronizing, colonial, imperial, and with the policies of neoliberalism,” said Morales.

Obama’s greatest mistake was to declare Venezuela an “extraordinary threat to national security,” which Morales said

represents a form of aggression against Latin America. “Obama will remember that the worst error he made was the decree against Venezuela,” said Morales.

For a peaceful Latin America, it is necessary for the presidents to be united, which is why there will be a special meeting of presidents of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our Americas (ALBA), to discuss their reaction to the U.S. government’s decree, explained Morales.

ALBA is the alliance of Antigua and Barbuda, Bolivia, Cuba, Dominica, Ecuador, Grenada, Nicaragua, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Venezuela, which was founded in 2004 by Presidents Hugo Chavez of Venezuela and Cuba’s Fidel Castro.

According to Morales, the ALBA meeting is to agree on “how to engage in this great battle, ideological battle, a problematic battle, for our sovereignty at this Summit of the Americas.”

Morales emphasized that the coordination between Venezuela and Bolivia has always been very strong, both during the presidency of Hugo Chavez and now with President Nicolas

Maduro.

Morales went on to explain that the reason he participated in a demonstration in Venezuela on Thursday was to show his rejection of U.S. sanctions against Venezuela and that he was surprised to see that more than 10 million Venezuelans had signed signatures calling for the repeal of Obama's executive decree declaring Venezuela to be a threat.

"I came to join with my signature ... we are one family, we are the patria grande (greater homeland)," said Morales, referring to all of Latin America. "The best would be if Obama arrives (at

the summit) with the decree repealed."

The reason that Obama has recently tried to back-pedal from the decree by saying that the U.S. does not consider Venezuela a threat is probably to avoid being questioned about the decree at the Summit of the Americas, argued Morales.

Morales highlighted that Venezuela is being supported by "everyone," the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), the G-77+China, and the non-aligned movement, among others.

Obama's Legacy Set to Fail in Latin America

Eva Golinger, April 6, 2015, venezuelanalysis.com

As Latin America prepares for the upcoming Summit of the Americas in Panama City on May 9-10, the big elephant in the room is not going to be the long awaited reunion of Cuba with the organization, from which it was excluded over fifty years ago under U.S. pressure, but rather President Obama's latest act of aggression against Venezuela.

The entire region has unanimously rejected Obama's Executive Order issued March 9, 2015, declaring Venezuela "an unusual and extraordinary threat to U.S. national security and foreign policy" and has called on the U.S. president to rescind his decree.

In an unprecedented statement on March 26, 2015, all 33 members of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), which represents the entire region, expressed opposition to U.S. government sanctions against Venezuelan officials, referring to them as "the application of unilateral coercive measures contrary to International Law".

The statement went on to manifest CELAC's "rejection of the Executive Order issued by the Government of the United States of America on March 9, 2015", and its consideration "that this Executive Order should be reversed".

Even staunch U.S. allies such as Colombia and Mexico signed onto the CELAC statement, along with U.S.-economically dependent Caribbean states Barbados and Trinidad, amongst others. This may be the first time in contemporary history that all Latin American and Caribbean nations have rejected a U.S. policy in the region, since the unilateral U.S. blockade against Cuba.

Ironically, President Obama's justification to thaw relations with Cuba, announced in a simultaneous broadcast with President Raul Castro on December 17, 2014, was primarily based on what he called Washington's "failed policy" towards the Caribbean island.

More than fifty years of unilateral sanctions and political hostility had only served to isolate the U.S. internationally, while Cuba strengthened its own relations with most countries around the world and gained international recognition for its humanitarian assistance and solidarity with sister nations.

Almost without pause, Obama opened the door to Cuba, admitting Washington's failure, and then shut it on Venezuela, implementing an almost identical policy of unilateral sanctions, political hostility and false accusations of threats to U.S. national security.

Before the region even had time to celebrate the loosening of the noose around Cuba's neck, it was tightened on Venezuela's.

Why, the region wondered, would President Obama impose a proven failed policy against another nation in the hemisphere, especially during a period of renewed relations?

Considering the ongoing U.S. war on terrorism that qualifies any alleged threat to U.S. security, by anyone or anywhere, to be a viable target of its vast military power, Venezuela was not about to sit quiet in the face of imminent attack. The South American nation immediately launched an international campaign to denounce Obama's Executive Order as an act of aggression against a country that poses it no real threat.

President Nicolas Maduro published an Open Letter to the People of the United States in the March 17, 2015 edition of the *New York Times* alerting readers to the dangerous steps the Obama administration was taking against a peaceful, non-threatening neighboring state (see p.10). The letter urged U.S. citizens to join calls for Obama to retract his Executive Order and lift the sanctions against Venezuelan officials.

The region reacted quickly. Just 48 hours before Obama's Executive Order was issued, a delegation of Foreign Ministers from the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), representing all twelve South American countries, had traveled to Venezuela to meet with government officials, opposition representatives and members of civil society. UNASUR had been mediating dialogue between the government and opposition since anti-government protests erupted last year and caused over 40 deaths in the country and widespread instability. The fact that Obama's decree came right after UNASUR had reignited mediation efforts in Venezuela was perceived as an offensive disregard of Latin America's capacity to resolve its own problems. Now the U.S. had stepped in to impose its will. UNASUR responded with a scathing rejection of Obama's Executive Order and demanded its immediate abolition.

Additionally, countries issued individual statements rejecting Washington's sanctions against Venezuela and its designation of the South American country as an "unusual and extraordinary threat" to its national security. Argentina considered it "implausible to any moderately informed person that Venezuela or any country in South America or Latin America could possibly be considered a threat to the national security of the United States", and President Cristina

Fernandez made clear that any attempt to destabilize Venezuela would be viewed as an attack on Argentina as well. Bolivian President Evo Morales expressed full support for President Maduro and his government and lashed out at Washington, “These undemocratic actions of President Barack Obama threaten the peace and security of all countries in Latin America and the Caribbean”.

Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa tweeted that the Obama Decree must be a “bad joke”, recalling how such an outrageous action, “reminds us of the darkest hours of our Latin America, when we received invasions and dictatorships imposed by imperialism... Will they understand that Latin America has changed?”

Nicaragua called the Obama Executive Order “criminal”, while wildly popular ex Uruguayan president José Pepe Mujica called anyone who considers Venezuela a threat “crazy”.

Beyond Latin America, 100 British parliamentarians signed a statement rejecting U.S. sanctions against Venezuela and called on President Obama to rescind his Executive Order labeling the country a threat.

More than 13 million people have signed petitions in Venezuela and online demanding the Executive Order be retracted.

Furthermore, the United Nations G77+China group, which represents 134 countries, also issued a firm statement opposing President Obama’s Executive Order against Venezuela. “The



Group of 77+China deplores these measures and reiterates its firm commitment to the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela... The G77+China calls on the Government of the United States to evaluate and put into practice alternatives of dialogue with the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, under principles of respect for sovereignty and self-determination. As such, we urge that the Executive Order be abolished”.

And then there’s the CELAC statement. The entirety of Latin America has rejected Obama’s latest regional policy, just when

he thought he had made groundbreaking inroads south of the border. Unsurprisingly, the White House has miscalculated regional priorities once again, underestimating the importance sovereignty, independence and solidarity hold for the people of Latin America.

While Latin America celebrates the easing of tensions between the U.S. and Cuba, the region will not stand by and let Venezuela come under attack.

If the Obama administration truly wants to be a regional partner, then it will have to accept and respect what Latin America has become: strong, united and bonded by a collective political vision of independence and integration. Any other means of engagement with the region, beyond respectful, equal relations based on principles of non-interventionism, will only have one outcome: failure.

Obama Visits the Caribbean to Undermine Alternative Models

Kevin Edmonds, 9 April 2015

Projects such as Venezuela’s PetroCaribe [which provides low cost oil/fuel to countries] are popular in the Caribbean, leading to the first visit of a U.S President to Jamaica since the Cold War.

On April 8, President Barack Obama visited Jamaica with the heads of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), before heading over to Summit of the Americas, held in Panama from April 9 – 10.

While Obama will try and cast himself as a “progressive” President that is charting a new path in the region, particularly in regards to the ongoing diplomatic thawing with Cuba, without a doubt it will be his March 9 Executive Order, in which he declared Venezuela “an unusual and extraordinary threat to U.S. national security and foreign policy” that will overshadow much of the Summit.

The timing of Obama’s visit to Jamaica also coincides with the release of a crushing report by the Center for Economic and Policy Research, which revealed how the International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) austerity program is literally suffocating the Jamaican economy. Not surprisingly, the Obama administration is a strong supporter of the IMF’s deal with Jamaica – and it was likely discussed in the bi-lateral meeting with Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller, which was scheduled to take place before the official CARICOM meeting.

The report outlines in sharp detail that Jamaica has been pushed into adopting the harshest austerity budget in the entire world – resulting in cuts which overwhelmingly compound the impact on the island’s shrinking middle class, the poor and the vulnerable. The report even pointed out that “Without the Venezuelan and Chinese investments staving off recession, it’s

likely the IMF program would fail due to serious public opposition. In this way, the IMF program is largely being subsidized by both Venezuelan foreign aid and Chinese investment.”

Heading into the Obama-CARICOM meeting, the major themes for discussion were centered on youth and crime, trade and investment, in addition to regional energy security. While the meeting may superficially appear to be about kick starting a green energy revolution in the region – building on Vice President Joe Biden’s Caribbean Energy Summit held in January, it was also realistic to perceive this meeting as a strategic geo-political maneuver by the United States to try and drive a wedge between the Caribbean and Venezuela.

Staying true to this, Obama remarked in his official statement that:

“A particular focus today is going to be one of the greatest barriers to development in the Caribbean, and that is expensive, often unreliable and carbon-intensive energy.

“This region has some of the highest energy costs in the world. Caribbean countries are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, and we have to act now. This is an example of how large countries and small countries have to work together, because without collective action, we’re not going to be able to address these challenges.

“The Vice President hosted a summit on this in January. Our Caribbean Energy Security Initiative aims to help move the region toward cleaner more affordable energy. Today, we’re announcing new partnerships, including a new fund to mobilize private investment in clean energy projects in the Caribbean and in Central America. And I’m confident that given the commitment of the CARICOM countries and the U.S. commitment, that this is an issue in which we can make great strides over the short term and even greater strides over the long term.”

As an article in the *Jamaica Gleaner* mentioned right after January’s Caribbean Energy Summit, “Jamaica has not been singing from the same hymn sheet as the U.S. To solve our energy crisis, we have turned — not to the U.S. private sector, or any other — but to entities wholly owned by the governments of Venezuela and China. This has weakened the influence of the U.S. in Central America and the Caribbean. The Caribbean Energy Security Initiative of the U.S. government is an effort to turn back the clock, to re-establish U.S. hegemony in the region.”

It is even more obvious that the geopolitical stakes are high given the fact that the last and only time a President of the United States visited Jamaica was during the height of the Cold War in 1982, when Ronald Reagan visited Edward Seaga to congratulate him on putting an end to Michael Manley’s experiment of democratic socialism and calls for a New International Economic Order which held the promise of altering the terms of trade to be fairer to commodities exported from the Global South.

If one wants a key sign that the geopolitical landscape of the



Caribbean is not what it was in years past, looking at the membership of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of our America (ALBA), the islands of the Caribbean are well represented. Member countries include Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines – with Haiti holding observer status. ALBA, the 11 country alliance is also set to present a joint declaration to Obama at the Summit of the Americas, to denounce the policy of increased aggression towards Venezuela.

If Obama truly wants to avoid repeating the mistakes of his predecessors he can start by shedding the hostile rhetoric and engage in constructive dialogue with Venezuela – and stop treating the Caribbean as trinkets that can be treated as geopolitical pawns to be abandoned at will.

The reality is that Washington has not paid attention to the Caribbean since the end of the Cold War, and in that space Venezuela has stepped up big time providing development assistance and oil at concessionary prices through PetroCaribe. Experts throughout the region, such as Sir Ronald Sanders, the late Norman Girvan and David Jessop have made it very clear that without the lifeline of PetroCaribe many economies would have simply collapsed.

As David Jessop rightly points out “Despite criticism from those outside the Caribbean who do not like the implied political leverage the program gives to Caracas, no other nation at this time has the political will to provide this level of support to Caribbean states.”

While Obama’s likely pitch to the Caribbean leaders is that Venezuela’s PetroCaribe program is unsustainable and they should jump ship now, they cannot offer any viable alternative but a wink and a handshake. Given the history of repeated U.S. intervention, broken promises and the fact that the only real connection between the Caribbean and the United States has been the ongoing “Made in Washington” austerity budgets dominating the region, it is hard to imagine that the Caribbean leaders will be swayed so easily – or that Washington will be willing to make a comparable effort to Venezuela’s investment.

I • Hands Off Venezuela

or institutions; significant acts of violence or conduct that constitute a serious abuse or violation of human rights; actions that prohibit, limit, or penalize the exercise of freedom of expression or peaceful assembly.”

The genocide of mass incarceration of African Americans and torture of solitary confinement in U.S. prisons; police killings and brutality; the broad spying by the Pentagon down to local police and infiltration and disruption of anti-war and pro-rights groups; the continuing drone warfare massacring civilians and Guantánamo indefinite detention without charges, all done with impunity, show it is the U.S. that is the biggest abuser of human rights at home and abroad. It is the U.S. that terrorizes and massacres civilians and interferes wherever and whenever it decides, all in the name of “security.”

Every day, at home and all over the world, the U.S. imposes insecurity as it acts as judge, jury and executioner. It brands people, groups and whole countries as threats, subject to assassinations, kidnappings, torture, drones, special forces and invasions. It has no right to do so. On the contrary, its obligation is to take responsibility for its crimes and stop its illegal and unjust interference and aggression.

Venezuela has invaded nobody and poses no danger to the United States. It is the U.S. that has a long history of crimes against humanity, including its use of nuclear weapons, carpet-bombing and use of Agent Orange and depleted uranium from Korea and Vietnam to Iraq and Palestine. It acts with brutal impunity, at home and abroad, but it accuses the Venezuelan government of “human rights abuses.”

Despite the most vicious interference by the U.S., including



funding criminal forces inside Venezuela that hoard food and incite violence against the people, the Venezuelan government has consistently upheld rule of law. All those arrested for criminal offences linked to violent destabilization efforts will have fair trials.

In the face of the vicious and repeated U.S. interference in their affairs the Venezuelan people have stood firm. They are organizing to build and develop their own democracy based on defending their sovereignty and rights. Time and again they have defended the Bolivarian Revolution and blocked every attempt by the U.S. and its agents to reverse the great achievements of the people since 1998.

Voice of Revolution salutes the firm and determined stand of the Venezuelan people and government and calls on the U.S. to end all sanctions and stop all interference now! We are confident that, as in the past, the Venezuelan people will

continue, undaunted, in their nation-building project, a project to defend their dignity and rights as a people.

We urge all to stand against sanctions and join in defending Venezuela and her people. More sanctions and aggression are crimes. As people in the U.S., it is our responsibility to oppose U.S. aggression and build the anti-war movement with the aim of bringing about an anti-war government. Such a government would renounce the use of force, bring all U.S. troops home and stand with the peoples in their fight for rights.

*End the Sanctions Now!
No to U.S. Interference and Terrorism!
Victory to the Bolivarian Revolution
of the Venezuelan People!*

More Than 13 million People Sign Petition to Repeal Obama’s Decree Against Venezuela

More than 13,447,650 Venezuelans and Cubans have signed the letter demanding that U.S. President Barack Obama repeal his executive order declaring Venezuela a “threat” to U.S. national security rejecting U.S. interference in Venezuela. The order has been denounced as interference and a serious threat that U.S. military intervention could occur. The signatures have been collected since March 18 and are being taken by Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro to the 7th Summit of the Americas in Panama. Additional signatures from Panamanians, peoples across the Americas and worldwide were secured through an on-line petition.

People in Panama and the region well remember that similar presidential threats preceded the U.S. invasion of Panama in 1989 under Bush Sr. and the long history of such invasions by the U.S. Both at the Summit, and the parallel People’s Summit, they are taking a firm stand against U.S. intervention and interference in Venezuela and the region as a whole.

Following is the full text of the letter:

On March 9, 2015, our country was the subject of the largest aggression by a foreign empire: an executive order issued by the White House that has stigmatized our nation with an unusual and extraordinary threat.

This absurd statement has aroused the patriotic unity and desire to be free.

President of the United States, Barack Hussein Obama, this is the reason why the people and the vast majority of governments around the world have demanded repeal of this unbelievable decree against our unyielding homeland.

Venezuela in its 205 years of history, in its 205 years as a Republic, has never hurt any nation nor has she committed the misfortune to sully the right and the political destiny of other peoples, on the contrary, those humble beings who gave their lives to free the continent from the colonial tyranny are remembered around the world as liberators. This is thus a small but immensely proud nation, made up of men and women who have loved and have always defended it as the most appreciated and inherited property.

Our nature is peaceful, our ideals are libertarian ones. The form of government the people have chosen to embody, idealize them, is a global example of the fight against poverty, social exclusion and inequality. No wonder we are the country that since 1999 has increased 60 times public investment aimed at social development and participation.

With the same libertarian impetus for over 200 years, our men and women are armed with intelligence to gain complete independence. President Obama, your government has nothing to

fear from Venezuelans. Our only enemies are and will be poverty and inequality, which we learned to fight following the example of our beloved leader Hugo Chavez.

For all this, millions of souls, millions of wills of this peaceful country stand up in one voice to say: a finger pointing strongly to the heart of the world, millions of hearts are one heartbeat, millions of hearts are one fist. Thirty million human beings that choose to live, 30 million voices will sing the hurricane of love.

We, the undersigned, being born free and determined to live in freedom, created equal and committed to live together in equality, raised for independence, democratic by choice, born human and meant to grow in humanity; we, citizens of the nation where one in three compatriots pursues education; we, patriots of the country with less inequality in Latin America, we know about equality; we, citizens of one of the five happiest countries in the world, we affirm that happiness does not threaten.

President of the North, nobody has chosen you as executioner. President Obama, repeal destruction. President of the North, repeal the decree.

*Long live the people of Bolivar and Chavez! Long live peace!
Long live Bolivar! Long live the Venezuelan people! Long live Chavez!*

In Caracas, April 9, 2015

We Shall Overcome.

President Maduro's Letter to the People of the United States: Venezuela Is Not a Threat

On March 17, the New York Times published the following letter from Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro to the people of the U.S.

We are the people of Simon Bolívar, our people believe in peace and respect for all nations.

Freedom and Independence

More than two centuries ago, our fathers founded a Republic on the basis that all persons are free and equal under the law.

Our nation made the greatest sacrifices to guarantee South American people their right to choose their rulers and to enforce their own laws today. The historical legacy of our father, Simón Bolívar, is always remembered. Bolívar was a man who gave his life so we would inherit a nation of justice and equality.

We Believe in Peace, National Sovereignty and International Law

We are a peaceful people. In two centuries of independence, we have never attacked another nation. Our people live in a region of peace, free of weapons of mass destruction, and in freedom to practice all religions. We uphold respect for international law and the sovereignty of all people of the world.

We Are an Open Society

We are a working people, we care for our families, and we have

freedom of religion. Immigrants from around the world, live among us, whose diversity is respected. We have freedom of the press and we are enthusiastic users of social media.

We Are Friends of the American People

The histories of our people have been connected since the beginning of our struggles for freedom. Francisco de Miranda, a Venezuelan hero, fought with the American people during their independence fight. We share the idea that freedom and independence are fundamental elements for the development of our nations.

The relations between our peoples have always been peaceful and respectful. Historically, we have shared business relations in strategic areas. Venezuela has always been a responsible and trustful energy provider for the American people. Since 2005, Venezuela has provided "heating oil" through subsidies for low-income communities in the United States, thanks to our company CITGO. This contribution has helped tens of thousands of American citizens survive in harsh conditions, giving them relief, and necessary support in times of need, evidencing how solidarity can create powerful alliances across borders.

Incredibly, the U.S government has declared our country a threat to its national security and foreign policy

In a disproportionate action, the government of Obama has issued a "National Emergency" declaring Venezuela as a threat to its national security (Executive Order, 03-09-2015). This

unilateral and aggressive measure taken by the United States Government against our country is not only unfounded and in violation of basic principles of sovereignty and self-determination under international law, but also has been unanimously rejected by all 33 nations of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) and the twelve member states of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR). In a statement made on March 14, 2015, UNASUR reiterated its firm rejection of these coercive measures that do not contribute to the peace, stability and democracy in our region and called on President Obama to revoke his Executive Order against Venezuela.



We Reject Unilateralism and Interventionism

President Obama, without any authority to interfere in our internal affairs, unilaterally issued a set of sanctions against Venezuelan officials with potentially far-reaching implications, interfering in our constitutional order and our justice system.

We Advocate for a Multipolar World

We believe that our world must be based on the rules of international law, without interference in the internal affairs of other countries. We are convinced that the relationship of respect between all the nations is the only path for strengthening peace and coexistence, as well as for ensuring a more just world.

We Honor Our Freedoms and Uphold Our Rights

Never before in the history of our nations, has a president of the United States attempted to govern Venezuelans by decree. It is a tyrannical and imperial order and it pushes us back into

the darkest days of the relationship between the United States and Latin America and the Caribbean.

In the name of our long-term friendship we alert our American brothers and sisters, lovers of justice and freedom, of the illegal aggression committed by your government on your behalf. We will not allow our friendship with the people of the United States to be affected by this senseless and groundless decision by President Obama.

We demand:

1. The U.S. government immediately ceases hostile actions against the Venezuelan people and

democracy.

2. President Obama abolish the Executive Order that declares Venezuela a threat to U.S. national security, as has been requested by the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR).

3. The U.S. Government retracts its libelous and defamatory statements and actions against the honorable Venezuelan officials who have just obeyed our laws and our constitution.

Our Sovereignty Is Sacred

The principles of the founding fathers of the United States of America are followed today with the same dignity by the people of Simón Bolívar. In the name of our mutual love for national independence we want the government of President Obama to think about and rectify this dangerous precedent.

We are convinced that the defense of our freedom is a right we shall never give up because the future of the humanity lies also in our country. As Simon Bolivar said, "The freedom of the New World is the hope of the universe."

"Venezuela is not a threat, but a hope ... Independence or nothing" —Simon Bolivar

OPPOSITION TO U.S. AGGRESSION

Worldwide Support for Bolivarian Venezuela

Actions continue around the world to express support for the people of Venezuela and their Bolivarian Revolution, in opposition to the increasing threats of the U.S. imperialists. Most recently this included demonstrations at the People's Summit in Panama City as well as statements by various forces participating in the Summit of the Americas.

The U.S. declaration that Venezuela constitutes a threat to U.S. national security is utterly baseless. And the broad rejection of the claim throughout the Americas and the world has forced President Obama, participating in the Summit of the Americas, to admit that Venezuela is not a threat. However, he has refused to rescind his executive order.

Venezuela, unlike the U.S., has never invaded or engaged in aggression against another country. Far from it, since the empowerment of the broad masses of Venezuelans since the election of Hugo Chávez in 1998, Venezuela has been a force for peace in the region. She has not only ensured the well-being of her own people, but the peoples of the region through various relations of mutual benefit. This includes development of PetroCaribe, which provides oil and fuel at discounted rates. Low-cost heating fuel is also being provided to people in the U.S., in Detroit and Massachusetts, for example, as part of Venezuela's efforts to develop relations of mutual respect and benefit. Her democracy includes broad participation and mobilization of the people in decision making,

with government putting issues like education and elimination of poverty at the forefront.

The U.S. imperialists think they are the center of the universe and that their monopoly interests and imperialist values are universal. U.S.-style democracy is to be accepted by all, regardless of the fact that it has shown itself incapable of meeting the rights of the peoples at home or abroad. Its human rights record is among the worst worldwide, with racist police killings continuing and mass incarceration worsening just two examples. Yet the U.S. is targeting Venezuela in the name of human rights.

The actual complaint the U.S. has is that Venezuela is setting

its own course and encouraging others to do the same. She is facilitating the development of organizations, like ALBA (Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America) that are independent of the U.S. and organized to defend the interests of the peoples. All of these efforts are a threat to the U.S. aim of hegemony and world domination. It is this U.S. striving for world empire that threatens all and is being rejected, in the U.S. and around the world. President Obama would do well at the Summit and during the rest of his administration to take a stand for peace and security by supporting the demands of the peoples to lift sanctions against Venezuela, end the blockade of Cuba and *Bring All U.S. Troops Home Now!*

Venezuelan People's Unity at Mass Anti-Imperialist Rally

Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, addressing a mass anti-imperialist rally in Caracas on March 15 said that the unity of the Venezuelan people is a major victory against the aggression of U.S. imperialism.

“The great unity of the people is the first victory; the support of the governments and peoples of the world is a great victory for the defense of our peace, our sovereignty,” said Maduro at Miraflores Palace, where he received a massive march in support of the *Anti-Imperialist Enabling Act* passed that day in the National Assembly.

Maduro noted that six days after the U.S. issued its latest assault on Venezuela with President Barack Obama signing an executive decree declaring the South American country an “unusual and extraordinary threat,” Venezuela has built a national and global movement of popular support.

“We are going to reap moral, political and diplomatic victories; this mass mobilization of the people is the first,” he said, adding that while the U.S. has the power of its monopoly media, its dollar and military, it will never have the kind of power that the Venezuelan people have.

Referring to the broad support from the peoples of the region, Maduro pointed out that at a time when Venezuela is experiencing a new onslaught of U.S. imperialist interference, the fraternal peoples of Latin America have raised their voices in support of the homeland of Bolivar.

During his speech, Maduro emphasized the importance and significance of the March 14 statement of Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) that calls on Barack Obama to immediately repeal his executive order designating Venezuela as “threat” to U.S. national security. The statement expressed UNASUR’s willingness to assist “the broader political dialogue with all Venezuelan democratic forces, with full respect for the constitutional order, human rights and the rule of law.” Maduro added that the government has been repeatedly issuing the call for dialogue to opposition forces.

Despite the aggression from the U.S. against the region,



President Maduro reiterated that he is willing to meet with his U.S. counterpart Barack Obama, “[w]herever, and whenever you are ready to talk [...] with respect, equality, without arrogance.” He said that the chargé d’affaires of Venezuela in the U.S., Maximilian Arvelaez, would be traveling on March 16 to Washington, DC to meet with all levels of the State Department and to reject the decree.

Likewise, Maduro called on the peoples, social movements and political world to step up demonstrations to demand Obama repeal his interventionist decree.

“I am calling to all popular movements, all movements of solidarity, all the fraternal peoples of the world, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean, patriots, democratic, progressive and revolutionary leaders, on behalf of the people of Venezuela, to keep the demonstrations going, to bring out the truth and the demand to the world that President Barack Obama repeal the decree threatening Venezuela. [...]” he said. He acknowledged the many places where mass demonstrations were recently held, noting in particular Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Uruguay, United States, Germany, Spain, Russia, China and India.

Maduro also launched the campaign to get 10 million Venezuelans, one third of the population, so sign a petition to President Obama against his anti-Venezuela executive decree (this goal was accomplished, see article above).

Extraordinary UNASUR Summit in Quito

On March 14, the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) held an extraordinary meeting in Quito, Ecuador, to discuss U.S. sanctions against Venezuela and its claim that Venezuela is a threat to U.S. national security. UNASUR's Secretary General Ernesto Samper began the meeting by explaining that the group's aim is to preserve peace and democracy in Latin America.

UNASUR issued a statement denouncing U.S. aggression against Venezuela. "We call upon the United States to evaluate and implement dialogue as an alternative," it said. UNASUR pointed out that it is Obama's executive order that poses a threat to Venezuela's sovereignty. UNASUR also said the actions by the U.S. amount to an interventionist threat to the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. UNASUR reiterated its call to the U.S. government to evaluate its unacceptable stand and put in practice alternatives for dialogue with the government of Venezuela.

Sao Paulo Forum Calls for Anti-Imperialist Summit

On March 16 the Sao Paulo Forum, which gathers Latin American political parties, joined the broad condemnation of the executive order issued by President Obama calling Venezuela an unusual and extraordinary threat against U.S. national security and foreign policy.

"We state that if there is a threat against the national security and the sovereignty of Latin America, the Caribbean and all the countries in the world, it is the imperialist aggression carried out by the United States seeking desperately to maintain its declining hegemony and the control over strategic resources in the planet," said the Working Group of the Sao Paulo Forum, following a meeting in Mexico City.

The group called for an anti-imperialist summit of Latin American

popular organizations and movements in Managua, Nicaragua, on March 20 and 21, 2015.

It also called for a "Worldwide Day of Solidarity with Venezuela and condemnation to U.S. intervention" on April 19 with the slogan "Peoples of the World United for Venezuela."

The Working Group called an extraordinary and extended meeting on April 13 in Caracas to express their support for President Nicolas Maduro and the Venezuelan people.

The Group also told parliamentarians at the Sao Paulo Forum to denounce the U.S. aggression against Venezuela, not only at national parliaments but also at the Latin American Parliament, the Central American Parliament, the MERCOSUR Parliament, the Andean Parliament and the Euro-Latin American Parliament.

Support at St. Lucia Forum

Friends and supporters of Venezuela gathered in Castries, St. Lucia to show support for Venezuela and urge the U.S. to adhere to international law for a landmark solidarity event on March 15.

Brazil's representative at the gathering said other countries are paying close attention to developments in U.S.-Venezuela relations. "We know that Venezuela is a very prestigious country for St. Lucia and of course, what happens in Venezuela interests St. Lucia and if it interests St. Lucia it also interests the embassies of other countries here," said Ambassador Sergio Couri adding there should be "respect for principles that help us live together in peace and mutual respect."

The event included students, scholars and Latin American nationals resident in St. Lucia. The Venezuelan representatives thanked those in attendance for supporting the government of Nicolas Maduro and for firmly denouncing the U.S. sanctions.

Cuba Holds Solidarity Concert

Thousands of Cubans gathered at the University of Havana's Grand Stairway on March 15 to express their unconditional solidarity with Venezuela and opposition to U.S. aggression. The evening concert began with the two countries' national anthems, the Venezuelan one heard in the voice of Commandante Hugo Chávez, via a recording made during the final days of his 2012 election campaign.

In the name of Cuba's youth, Yosvany Montano, President of the Federation of University Students (FEU) welcomed the crowd to the event saying that Cuba's youth sing for peace and self-determination for the peoples of Our America; that at a time when the Bolivarian Revolution is being attacked, Cuba's youth reaffirm their unconditional support for the Venezuelan people and government.

Speaking for the Cuban Five, all in attendance, René González Schwerert recalled that this past December 17, when the anti-terrorists imprisoned in the United States for over 16 years were freed, the world awoke to a more just world with the U.S. empire recognizing that it could not defeat a people such as Cuba's. Despite the celebrations that followed the announcement of talks to reestablish diplomatic relations, he emphasized that, as Che said, imperialism can never, never be trusted, not even a bit.

Nicaragua Bestows Highest Honor on Venezuela's President

The government of Nicaragua bestowed its highest honor on Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro on March 13. This was an act of profound solidarity from the government of Daniel Ortega and the FSLN, which itself through great hardship prevailed over U.S. imperialism and its dirty wars in Latin America and the Caribbean.

First Lady Rosario Murillo read out Presidential Decree 49-2015, signed by President Ortega, giving President Maduro the Augusto C. Sandino Gold Medal of the highest order. Decree 49-2015 acknowledges the indisputable merits of the brave people of Venezuela, embodied in their President Nicolás Maduro, she added.

"We are one in battle, we are one in the fight for more victories, we are one because we want to move forward, as we say here in Nicaragua, in Faith, Family and Community to achieve, as Chávez said, a full, good and beautiful life, the life that all of Our America wants and deserves," said Murillo.

"We proclaim Presidential Decree No. 49-2015 as proud Sandinista people. This is a proud and joyous occasion, especially the ratification of our brotherhood," said Murillo.

Extraordinary Summit of Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America Takes Unequivocal Stand

The 11-country Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) met on March 17 in Caracas, Venezuela to discuss U.S. aggression toward Venezuela. Presidents and foreign ministers of the ALBA countries analyzed U.S. President Barack Obama's latest executive order against Venezuela and issued a joint statement in the face of Obama's determination to declare Venezuela a threat to U.S. national security. ALBA's declaration will be presented at the Summit of the Americas, April 10-11 in Panama.

The ALBA summit's final statement rejected "the Executive Order issued on March 9, 2015 by the Government of the United States of America," describing it as "unfair" and "unjustifiable" and "threatening interference" in violation of "the principle of sovereignty and the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of States."

It states that Venezuela "does not pose a threat to any country" and calls on the "United States to immediately stop the harassment and aggression against the Venezuelan government and people" believing this "encourages destabilization and the use of violence by sectors of the Venezuelan opposition."

The statement calls for the "peaceful resolution of conflicts" and calls on the U.S. "to act within the framework of universal principles and the Charter of the United Nations," and to especially "refrain from the use of unilateral coercive resources that violate international law."

It also calls on the "U.S. government to establish dialogue with the government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela as an alternative to conflict and confrontation, based on continued respect for sovereignty and self-determination." To facilitate this, the statement calls for regional bodies representing South America, Latin America and the Caribbean "to facilitate diplomatic engagement between the governments of the U.S. and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to alleviate tensions and ensure an amicable resolution."

Speaking during the opening ceremony of the summit, Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro warned that the United States was trying to "twist the arm" of Venezuela, and would continue to do the same against other sovereign nations in the region. Maduro also quoted the late Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez as a reminder of the progress that has been made in Latin America: "The 21st century will be our century, the century of emancipation," he said.

Former Cuban leader Fidel Castro wrote a letter to Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, published March 17, highlighting the importance of ALBA's extraordinary high-level summit. The letter was read by Maduro as he opened the event.

Bolivian President Evo Morales explained that the U.S. government is trying to divide the region: "Now that they cannot defeat us politically, nor economically nor military through coups, what do they do? They try to divide us." Morales urged the U.S. government to change its ways: "The U.S. government must understand we are not living in imperial times of the past ... [President Obama] has to know he is wrong." The Bolivian President criticized the double standard applied by the U.S., condemning Venezuela over alleged



human rights abuses: "In Latin America and the Caribbean we have no death penalty, the worst violation possible of human rights, but it does exist in the U.S."

Cuban President Raúl Castro said, "The facts show that history cannot be ignored," as over decades the U.S. "has backed bloody military dictatorships, covert operations and has supported terrorism" in the region. Furthermore, the Cuban leader warned about the history of U.S. policy towards the region in general: "The objectives are consistent, they've just changed their methods." He explained that the region wants peace, but with dignity: "[We want] to have peace, but standing tall, not on our knees."

Saint Vincent and Grenadines' President Ralph Gonsalves said, "The U.S. executive order is a threat to all of us."

Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega referred to the "coups in Honduras and Paraguay" and "coup attempts in Bolivia and Ecuador" that have occurred with President Obama in power, saying that the U.S. "is a threat to global security, this is not rhetoric, it is reality." He warned that the executive order "can be used for anything." He said that the ALBA leaders want "respectful relationships between the U.S. and the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean."

Ecuador's Foreign Minister Ricardo Patiño criticized the U.S. during his intervention: "What can the U.S. teach us about human rights... [it] imposes lifetime jail sentences against children and teenagers; the country that has made torture legal and ...developed the most powerful mass surveillance system." He asked, "If Venezuela is a threat, any of our countries could be a threat. What makes Venezuela different from the rest of our countries?" He also urged "the international community to respect Latin America and the Caribbean as a zone of peace."

"We know these acts of declaring a country or a group of people a threat to the United States is a prelude to an invasion, it has happened many times before. We cannot risk tolerating this in any way ... Latin America is advancing very well, economically, but also in terms of social justice and political stability. We have to maintain this," explained the Ecuadorean Foreign Minister upon his arrival in Caracas.

I • Support Women Strikers

and persecution imposed on their countries by the U.S. “war on drugs,” and its backing of reactionary governments, such as that installed by the U.S. in Honduras. Rather than treating the children as refugees and having them dealt with by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) — one of the only departments still without a major police force — President Obama is having Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), one of the largest policing agencies, and the Border Patrol deal with the families. ICE in turn has contracted private prison companies, in this case GEO, to run the detention camps.

HHS, unlike ICE, has social workers, churches and other non-police forces interview and care for the children. ICE and Border Patrol have armed agents detain and interview them, often with no interpreters. The government stand is one of criminalizing the women and children and “welcoming” them into the militarized U.S. culture that now pervades the border and its policing agencies.

Contrary to U.S. and international law, the children are being held in prison-style detention camps. International law says that children “should in principle not be detained at all,” according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Detention, if used, should only be a “measure of last resort” for the “shortest appropriate period of time,” with an overall “ethic of care.”

U.S. law also calls for detention to be a “last resort.” Instead



it is the first action being taken. And even when the women meet the government’s requirement of establishing a “credible fear” that they face persecution if they return to their home countries, they are still being held in detention. Most do not have access to lawyers and many of the children are being interrogated by armed guards without a parent present. These are the actual crimes, while it is the women and children who are being criminalized!

The women organized their hunger strike in the face of threats, demanding respect for their rights and their release. Three were immediately placed in isolation along with their children. The strike continued for days until these families were released from isolation. The women have ended their strike for now, awaiting changes by the government to meet their rights. Otherwise, another strike is planned.

Voice of Revolution salutes these courageous women and their children and demands their immediate release. It is criminal to hold families in detention, deny them legal representation and then keep them detained even when they have met requirements for their release.

Protection of those most vulnerable, such as these families, reflects what standard of human rights the U.S. upholds. And as is the case with the on-going killings of unarmed African Americans by police, the detention of refugee families shows the U.S. is the worst offender of human rights with no ability to solve these problems. As the women themselves are making clear, it is the people standing up to defend rights that provide a way forward.

Mothers Are on Hunger Strike at Karnes Family Detention Center

Aura Bogado, March 31 2015, Colorlines

Seventy-eight mothers being held at Karnes County Residential Center have signed a letter demanding their release. The Spanish-language letter suggests that the immigration detainees are staging a hunger and work strike. Located in Karnes County, Texas, and run by the private GEO Group, Karnes has been the site of repeated allegations of sexual abuse.

Most of these mothers are asylum-seeking Central Americans picked up along the U.S.-Mexico border. Most have brought their children from Guatemala and El Salvador — countries with some of the highest femicide rates on the planet.

The mothers who have signed the letter have all been interviewed by immigration officials and have established a credible fear of persecution or torture if they were to be deported. But

they either have not been given an opportunity to post bond for release, or the bond amount has been set too high. Their letter, in part, reads:

“[D]uring this [time], no mother will work in the detention center, nor will we send our children to school, not will we use any services here, until we are heard and approved: we want our FREEDOM.”

[The 78 women began the hunger and work strike, demanding their release. After threats and removal of three women and their children to isolation, about 40 persisted in the strike. “We deserve to be treated with some dignity and that our rights, to the immigration process, are respected,” their letter said.]

The women say their children aren’t eating well in confinement

and that “their health is deteriorating.” Some of the women and children have been in the detention camp nearly a year. [...]

“A prison for children”

Polyane Soares de Oliveira has been in Karnes with her 11-year-old daughter for eight months. Both are from Brazil and although they have established credible fear, a major step in the asylum process, they remain locked up. I spoke with Polyane’s husband, who lives in Boston, late Monday, who described Karnes as a “prison for children.” He says his 11-year-old stepdaughter has been questioned by immigration authorities without her mother or an attorney present. “They asked her questions like, ‘Are you a member of any gang?’ and pressured her to explain if she had ever killed anyone.” His stepdaughter was only 10 when authorities questioned her.

Although undocumented people are not authorized to work in the United States, undocumented detainees at Karnes help run the facility for just \$3 a day. They clean and run the laundry facility — a big task for the 532-bed detention center.

Dirty fracked water

[The detention center is purposely located in a small, rural area, making it difficult for lawyers and for protests.] Karnes City, Texas, is tiny: The population is roughly 3,500. It is also home to major fracking operations. Residents have complained

of contaminated drinking water. That is why many detainees only drink bottled water. The cost per bottle, however, is \$3 — the exact amount of a day’s pay.

Kicking paralegals out

In February, a paralegal named Victoria Rossi published a detailed account of what happens at Karnes for the *Texas Observer*. She’s subsequently been barred from visiting Karnes as a result. Other legal aid workers have reported similar consequences at Karnes.

Sexual abuse allegations

Most of the guards at Karnes are men and they have access to women and children’s rooms at any hour. Since August 2014, when it reopened as a center to hold immigrant families, detainees have accused guards of sexually abusing them, including assaults in front of children. A federal investigation that ended last month found that there was no such abuse. But that conclusion is based only on interviews with guards and current detainees, including those who fear deportation if they report abuse to authorities.

[Having won the release of those held in isolation, the women have now ended their hunger strike, but plan to resume if their demands for respect and upholding their rights are not met.]

Human Rights, Labor and Women’s Organizations Call for Respect for Rights of Refugees and to De-Militarize Central America

More than 80 human rights, labor, women’s and environmental organizations have issued a joint statement condemning a proposed U.S. plan to further militarize Central America and target immigrants and refugees from the region for more repression and state violence. The groups called on the U.S. and Central American countries to reject their controversial plan for the further militarization of borders and the region as a whole. The plan, called the “Alliance for Prosperity,” has been under development by the U.S., El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and the Inter-American Development Bank since late 2014. It is part of the U.S.-led repression of refugees from these countries, especially women and children.

This repression is also evident in the U.S. re-opening family detention camps in Texas and elsewhere. Conditions are so horrendous that the women have conducted hunger strikes, demanding their release and that the U.S. respect humanitarian law concerning the housing and care of refugees, especially children.

“The plan perpetuates the same militarized security policies that have become synonymous with the horrors of the drug war,” the organizations said in the letter. “Many of our organizations are witness to and have suffered from the systematic human rights abuses carried out by police and military. It is essential that any proposed solution to the violence in our region center on ending corruption

and impunity, especially when it occurs at the highest levels, and on the de-militarization of security forces,” they stated. They called for investigations and prosecutions of crimes and abuses committed against migrants and that any plan should focus on defending the rights of migrants.

The organizations also called on the presidents of the U.S., El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and, Mexico to immediately carry out a democratic process to involve the peoples of the region. According to the organizers, the plan has been developed behind closed doors, with projects and militarization that will have wide-ranging impacts. The letter was released April 10, at the Summit of the Americas, where all the presidents were in attendance along with those of all of the Americas.

According to Kelsey Alford-Jones, Executive Director of the Guatemala Human Rights Commission in Washington, DC, the plan basically replicates state policies that produced Central America’s emigration crisis in the first place. U.S. domination and dictate of the economies of these countries, as well as fomenting violence and chaos, remains. Alford-Jones says, “One of our deepest concerns about the “Alliance for Prosperity Plan” is that it perpetuates the same economic policies that have already resulted in skyrocketing inequality.” He adds, “We are especially alarmed by the proposed

construction of large-scale infrastructure projects and the expansion of extractive industries, which have caused a lot of forced displacement throughout the region and are often associated with violence against communities that organize to defend their lands and livelihoods,” she said.

It also sanctions the U.S. militarization of the borders and life more broadly, as already evidenced inside the U.S., with broad impunity for border and policing agencies to unjustly detain, deport,

brutalize and kill immigrants and refugees.

“One of the greatest dangers posed by the current Plan is the proposal to militarize the borders within Central America,” said Laura Embree-Lowry, Program Director at the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES). “Not only does this risk violating human rights, it is likely to lead to even more rampant abuses against refugees and migrants traveling throughout Central America and Mexico,” she added.

Letter Demanding De-Militarization and Respect for Rights of Immigrants and Refugees

(More than 80 rights, labor, women’s and environmental organizations signed the letter below, addressed to the presidents of the U.S., El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico, opposing plans to further militarize the region and deny rights of refugees and immigrants. Those signing includes many organizations from these five countries as well as Argentina, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Panama and Spain.)

* * *

We, the undersigned civil society organizations and groups, wish to address you as your meetings begin at the Summit of the Americas in Panama to express our urgent concerns about the Plan of the Alliance for Prosperity of the Northern Triangle.

For years, civil society organizations in our countries and other allied nations have been sounding the alarm regarding the dire human rights crisis in Central America and Mexico. The militarization of citizen security has contributed to systematic human rights abuses while harmful, private- and foreign-investor-led “development” policies continue to dispossess communities of their lands and livelihoods. The result of these policies, among others, is forced migration, the impact of which differs based on social conditions, including gender, ethnicity and ability. Migrants continue to be criminalized, which heightens the grave risk to their lives, physical safety and human dignity. Migration that occurs under these conditions continues to divide families and increase human suffering in the region.

While we welcome the commitments from the governments of countries known as the Northern Triangle to jointly address this regional crisis, we fear the Alliance for Prosperity will only exacerbate the very conditions of poverty and violence they claim to address.

Our deepest concern is that the Plan reinforces the same economic policies that have resulted in skyrocketing inequality, widespread abuse of workers’ rights and increased violence against labor leaders, and forced displacement throughout Mesoamerica. We are especially alarmed by the proposed construction of large-scale extractive, hydroelectric or infrastructure projects in marginalized communities, particularly because of the notable absence of any democratic processes to ensure free, prior and informed consent of the affected populations.

Furthermore, the Plan perpetuates the same militarized security policies that have become synonymous with the horrors of

the Drug War. Many of our organizations are witness to and have suffered from the systematic human rights abuses carried out by police and military. It is essential that any proposed solution to the violence in our region center on ending corruption and impunity, especially when it occurs at the highest levels, and on the de-militarization our security forces.

Finally, the Plan’s proposal to militarize our regional borders not only risks violating the human right to free transit and the rights of refugees fleeing violence, but also is likely to lead to increases in many forms of abuse towards migrants in Central America, Mexico and the United States. Therefore, we call on the governments of the region to end, and on the international community to remain alert to, the criminalization and deportation of migrants, to initiate a thorough process of revising migration policy that’s currently based on a security framework to one based on human rights, to investigate and prosecute crimes and abuses this population that are committed in various countries during the different periods of migration, when forced to leave, during transit and upon return, and to improve and expedite refugee services in all of our countries, most especially in the United States.

We believe it is critical that it be made known at the Summit of the Americas that there was no process of democratic consultation during the development of the Plan of the Alliance for Prosperity and that our organizations - which represent a diverse cross-section of the human rights, migrant justice, labor, indigenous, faith-based, women’s, agricultural, and environmental movements in our countries - were not consulted either. The Plan was developed behind closed doors by the governments of El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and international financial institutions like the Inter-American Development Bank, with support from the United States. We understand that limited civil society consultation is underway now, though we are not aware with whom, though several agreements have already been signed.

Therefore, we call for robust, participatory and democratic processes of consultation with the population to be carried out before moving forward. This is the only way to ensure that regional co-operation among our governments will serve to redress, rather than exacerbate, the urgent needs of the citizens of Central America.

JOIN THE FIGHT

Refuse the Tests! Refuse State Takeovers! Our Schools, We Decide!

There is a broad and growing movement in Buffalo and statewide for public control of public schools. The public — through numerous rallies, forums, petitions, letters, interventions at school board meetings, refusing state tests and more — is putting forward its right to decide. Such decision-making is necessary to improve the quality of public education and defend the equal right to education for all. As a whole, this public is emerging and acting to unite all: teachers, parents, students, staff, superintendents; urban and suburban; and increasingly organizing under the banner, *Our Schools, We Decide!* This democratic stand, broadening of support and growing unity are important accomplishments of the movement and the basis for further advances.

It is this pro-public, pro-education movement that state executives, like New York's Governor Cuomo, are seeking to block and divide. This includes using state takeovers, school closings and the Common Core testing regime as weapons. This makes strengthening and building the movement, under the banner *Our Schools, We Decide!* all the more important.

Concretely this means joining the various actions taking place in cities and states across the country. A main front of work at present is refusing the state tests being given. Informing and encouraging all to join the efforts to Refuse the Tests! is a vital means to build the resistance and work for our own alternative, where we decide curriculum and student and teacher evaluations. Students especially can strengthen this resistance by organizing to refuse and encouraging fellow students to do the same — using wrist-bands, armbands, refusal labels, and walk outs or sit-ins.

In various areas, parents and students are being threatened. The Ken-Ton School Board, in New York for example, was threatened with losing \$50 million in state funds and removal of the school board by the state for considering refusal to administer the tests. It is not an accident that New York State executives, like executives in other states, are taking the undemocratic action to withhold public funds. This is consistent with the anti-democratic character of the entire Common Core testing and evaluation regime. Its was decided by private monopolies and appointed bodies that excluded



students, parents and teachers.

Such executive action to hold public funds hostage is not a modern arrangement suitable to the needs of today. They are backward arrangements, with federal and state executives acting Kings. The public treasury is to be completely taken from the public and its need to serve the public good. It is all to be handed over to the rich and serve their narrow interests. This includes narrowing education to solely serve “commercialization opportunities,” as Governor Cuomo puts it, paying private monopolies hundreds of millions for harmful standardized testing and paying private charter schools run by hedge fund billionaires.

The modern innovation of public control and decision making is needed to raise the quality of public education and redesign education to serve the public interest to advance society. Collective action, by students, teachers, parents, and the public as a whole is vital for a modern democracy to flourish. This is the direction needed and all should join in making a contribution to the pro-education movement that declares, *Our Schools, We Decide!*

BLOOMINGTON, ILLINOIS

Normal Community High School Students Walk Out to Protest PARCC Tests

Derek Beigh, Pantagraph

Normal Community High School (NCHS) students showed what they think of standardized testing in dramatic fashion March 6, 2015. More than 100 students “walked out” by refusing to go to first-hour classes; marching from the NCHS entrance to the opposite front of the building and back; and holding an

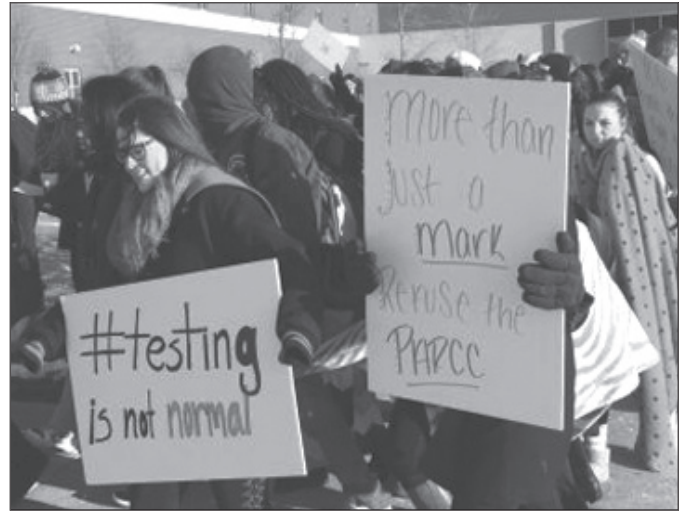
impromptu rally in front of the school doors. Students chanted as they marched, including “1, 2, 3, 4, we are not a test score” and “the students united will never be defeated.” They held up signs with slogans including “We have a say in our education,” “No PARCCing - School zone” and “#testing is not normal.”

Students assembled to protest the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) exam that started this week at Bloomington's District 87 and is set to start Monday at schools in Normal-based McLean County Unit 5.

PARCC has become a rallying point for students, parents and educators dissatisfied with standardized tests and the Common Core standards. It has replaced the elementary-level Illinois Standard Achievement Test and will replace the high-school level Prairie State Achievement Examination in an attempt to reflect students' mastery of Common Core.

Tanvi Singh, a NCHS junior and representative of the Bloomington-Normal Student Union, encouraged students to refuse to take PARCC although the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and local educators, including District 87 Superintendent Barry Reilly, have said that is not an option. She cited ISBE by-laws that state students can refuse to take standardized tests.

"Now they know that next week, when schools across Bloomington-Normal boycott the PARCC test, if any student is treated unfairly for refusing, we will be there fighting for them," she said. "To fix this, it's going to take students ... being defiant and disobeying and being disruptive and demanding that they be heard, and that's what we're doing today." Singh said students must protest because they "have nothing to lose



but our chains."

"The policies like PARCC testing and the Common Core that are making the education system the way that it is are coming from the federal level, and our states and our districts and our schools and our teachers are all forced to comply," she said. "It all comes down to the students to not comply."

INDIANA AND OHIO

In Protest of Common Core, Parents and Students Refusing State Testing

Emily Scheie, World Magazine

Upon learning that Indiana's ISTEP standardized tests had increased from five hours and nine minutes to over 11 hours, Indiana Governor Mike Pence signed an executive order the second week of February to shorten the test. "Doubling the length of the 2015 ISTEP test is unacceptable and requires an immediate solution," Pence said in a statement.

About one week before the start of the testing window, the Indiana Department of Education issued a release including guidance to reduce the test by three hours and five minutes.

Some advocates and teachers are encouraging parents to boycott the standardized tests by refusing to allow their children to take them. And vocal "opt-out" movements are growing in many states.

NYS Allies For Public Education (NYSAPE) and other sources report parents of as many as 60,000 New York state students boycotted testing in 2014. NYSAPE advocates parents refuse testing in grades 3-8. Its Indiegogo page to raise money for "Refuse the Tests" billboards, started on January 25 [and within a month] received \$10,690.

Marie Blistan, the vice president of the New Jersey Education Association testified before the state Assembly's education committee in support of parents' right to exempt their children from standardized tests. "Parents should not have to worry that their children will face negative consequences ... if they refuse

the test," Blistan said in her prepared testimony.

Heidi Huber, the financial administrator for a K-12 Christian academy in Ohio, founded Ohioans Against Common Core two years ago and is also encouraging parents to exempt their children from the new standardized tests being implemented this spring. She sees opting out of the tests as a way for parents to protect their children, but also as a form of civil disobedience, sending a message to the state.

The Ohio Department of Education issued "Information on Student Participation in State Tests" which warns, "If a parent withdraws his or her child's participation in certain state tests, there may be consequences for the child, the child's teacher, and the school and district."

But the Ohioans Against Common Core website assures, "Ohio parents can exempt their child from Spring 2015 PARCC tests without affecting their grades, promotion or graduation."

"The upside of all of this is it's been so rewarding to watch parents re-engage with their child's education," said Huber. She acknowledged parents should be prepared for a long path of engagement. But she said if fighting Common Core was the price they had to pay to get parents involved in education, "then, to me, it has actually been a positive thing because, ultimately, I don't think you solve the problems we have within our society and culture until you get parents re-engaged."

Poughkeepsie Teachers Protest New York State Budget and Testing

Refusing New York State (NYS) testing was one of the main issues that brought hundreds of members of the nearly 900-strong Wappingers teachers union to the intersection of Route 9 and Vassar Road in Poughkeepsie on April 10. They, along with other local teachers and parents, protested New York's recently passed \$142 billion budget, which included vicious attacks on public education, including increasing the role of state testing, insufficient funding and state takeovers of schools, using a single appointed receiver.

Many teachers, student and parents participated in the action, similar to others across the state. "This particular budget, it's almost like the last straw," said Wappingers Congress of Teachers President Pasquale Delli Carpini. "It represents a real threat to education." To Cuomo and other elected officials, "our kids are just a number, a test score."

At the busy Route 9 and Vassar Road intersection Friday, teachers chanted and held signs that read, "Stand up 4 students" and "Defend public education," as drivers honked their car horns.

"I want to get back to teaching my students things that they need to be successful in life," said Karen Ferrara, a Wappingers special education teacher. "Not what the state feels that they need to learn to be college and career ready."

Allyson Rubin, a Wappingers Spanish teacher, said she went

to the rally to protect students' and teachers' rights. "Students should be learning... not sitting and taking tests that are inappropriate for them," said Rubin, who added that she should be evaluated on what she teaches. Right now, she is evaluated on students' math and English Language Arts test scores.

Refusing the test

Kelly Sheahan, a Wappingers sixth-grade teacher, said her own children will refuse the tests this year, as they did last year. "I can't support a flawed system," Sheahan said. "We're teaching material that I feel is not educationally appropriate for the children and I feel like I don't have a say in what I'm teaching."

One of the things angering parents and students is that each district handles the situation differently and sometimes different schools within the district do as well.

A letter from parents saying their child refuses the test is supposed to be sufficient. But some superintendents say that is not acceptable. In Beacon, New York, for example, the Superintendent said in a letter to district parents that only "a student can refuse a test. That does not come from a parent letter or note."

The approach made Beacon mom Marisa Brink "furious... the purpose is to bully and intimidate," parents she said. At the same time, efforts are being made to fully inform students that they can refuse the tests.

NY TEACHER

I Am Standing Up for My Students and Refusing to Administer the Common Core Tests

Teachers are increasingly taking the stand to refuse to administer New York State tests. They are doing so as part of defending the right to education and protecting their students from child abuse and unjust testing. New York and a number of other states, like Illinois and Massachusetts, are part of a consortium known as the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC) which is imposing its newly designed Common Core tests this school year.

New York however, did not even wait for the consortium to finish its work but paid additional millions of dollars to private monopoly Pearson to design Core-aligned tests. These were first given in 2013. The developmentally inappropriate content, the arbitrary scoring of the tests — where the state admitted it would ensure 70 percent would fail — and their unjust use against students, teachers and schools, brought parents across the state out to organize to refuse the tests. Last year more than 60,000 did and this year at least double that will. And even though teachers are repeatedly threatened and told they cannot speak out against the testing, many more are doing so at school board meetings, rallies and other forums.

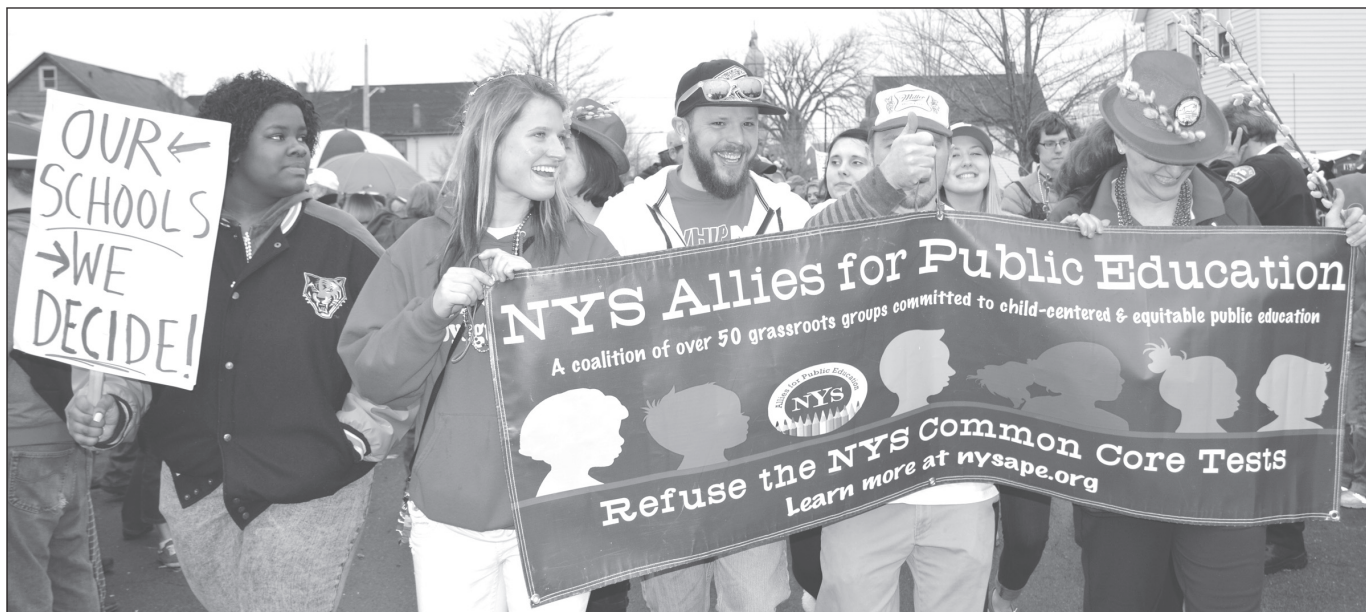
Below we reprint the statement given by 22-year teacher Jennifer Rickert to her school board, in a district in an area south of Albany. She said she was standing up for her students and refusing to administer the tests. Another Long Island teacher is also refusing, as is one in Orchard Park, whose statement on refusing at his school board went viral on facebook.

* * *

I have the greatest job on earth. I'm a teacher. This year, I began my 22nd year at the Ichabod Crane Central School District, where I have taught Grades 2, 5, and 6. I love my students and I am very passionate about teaching. I also stay involved with educational shifts and new strategies. I try to exemplify this in the leadership roles I assume as Grade Level Chair, English/Language Arts Liaison, and Middle School Student Mentoring Coordinator. I have always thought of myself as somewhat "old-school" because I respect the chain of command, respect my elders, and consider myself patriotic. I am a rule follower.

For these reasons, I have complied enthusiastically with the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards and all of the instructional shifts, professional development, and student

REFUSE THE STATE TESTS



testing required due to the adoption of the CCLS. Instrumental in our school district's adoption of a CCLS aligned English/Language Arts program, I have stayed the course, attempting to reach the lofty goals set forth for our students. I have facilitated professional development and department meetings, reassuring my department that "it will all work out if we keep moving forward." I have told parent upon parent that "the testing is only one measure of your child's success," and "we are seeing some gaps, but let's keep trying."

Over the last few years, I have seen many parents cry about their child's New York State test scores, and I have seen students cry because they can't complete the tests. I began to question the validity of the assessments as they became more and more daunting for my students, but I believed that if I continued to incorporate the Common Core Learning Standards and provide the highest quality instruction, my students would be evaluated fairly. During this period, I kept the faith in our great state of New York and our educational leaders, hoping that there would be a fair resolution for the children.

Optimistically, I thought that if I remained professional, continuing to comply with the mandates, eventually things would change. So, I remained quiet.

Today, I am a broken woman.

I read the "New York State Testing Program's Educator Guide to the 2015 Grade 6 Common Core English Language Arts Test," and I sobbed. I am so disturbed by the descriptions of the test in this guide that I find myself in deep moral conflict regarding the administration of the 2015 Common Core English Language Arts Test to my students.

My students are 11- and 12-years-old. They are at the cognitive level that Jean Piaget, revered cognitive theorist, characterized as "concrete-operational," meaning they can think logically about concrete events but have difficulty understanding abstract or hypothetical situations. Yet in the guide, it states that students will "evaluate intricate arguments."

In addition, "students will need to make hard choices

between fully correct and plausible, but incorrect answers that are designed specifically to determine whether students have comprehended the entire passage." This is not developmentally appropriate for my students, and I find it cruel and harmful to suggest that it is. I do not believe in knowingly setting my students up for failure. I cannot remain silent for one more day without speaking up for my students.

The reading passages on the 2015 Common Core test will be "authentic passages." Well, that sounds great until you consider 11-year-old reading passages from texts like "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn" and "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer," which include "controversial ideas and language some may find provocative." This is not okay with me. The students I work with every day are still children. It is not my business to subject them to "provocative language" in sixth grade. In addition, 11-year-old children do not have the capacity to understand these themes. They do not have a context for these time periods in history until they have had more exposure to New York State and United States history. The majority of students do not receive this exposure until they are in Grades 7 and 8.

The guide also indicates that students will be reading difficulty levels, or Lexiles, as high as 1185, which is the level eleventh-grade students are required to understand. When children read, if the difficulty level significantly exceeds their instructional level, the lack of fluency causes a dramatic breakdown in comprehension.

Clearly, this is a set-up for the kids to fail. As students learn, they make sense out of new information through schema. Schemata are cognitive frameworks to which they can add to, or modify, as they learn new information. One could compare the requirement for children to understand these passages to expecting them to master algebra before establishing number sense; there is no foundation to build knowledge upon.

If a student has no context, they are not likely to comprehend the text at the deep level required to distinguish fully correct answers from plausible, but incorrect answers. In addition to these

inappropriate, unfamiliar concepts and time periods, students will be expected to sift through authors' use of "intentionally incorrect grammar and/or spelling" and "passages drawn from works commonly taught in higher grades." Finally, in the guide it states that "Students will be required to negotiate plausible, text-based distractors. A distractor is an incorrect response that may appear plausible."

In summary, we are going to ask 11-year-olds to read and comprehend passages that are taken from higher grades, some at 5 years above their level, with controversial and provocative language, based on abstract literature and historical documents that the students have not learned about yet, and choose an answer from several plausible choices? We are going to have our students spend nine hours of seat time, allowing extra time

for our Special Education students, on these inappropriate tests? (Add another nine hours for math.)

And after all is said and done, we will reduce each child to a number: 4, 3, 2, or 1, based on their performance, providing the teachers and parents with little to no information about what they can and cannot do.

No. No, I cannot.

With all due respect to my students, their parents, my administration, and Board of Education, I must go on record as strongly objecting to this test. I respectfully request reassignment on the dates of the 2015 Common Core English Language Assessment.

As I said, I have the greatest job. I am a teacher. I, today, am standing up for my students. Finally.

RESPONDING TO THREATS BY THEIR SUPERINTENDENT

Letter from New Jersey Parents Defending Their Right to Refuse Testing


We have read your [the superintendent's] response letter, numerous times in fact, and we are a little taken aback by it. We are in no way asking for your permission to REFUSE these standardized tests, assessments, questionnaires and surveys for our children. The Constitution and Supreme Court rulings supersede any authority you think you may have over our decision as tax-paying parents within this district. It is our right as parents to refuse to allow our children to take the state standardized tests because our parental rights are broadly protected by United States Supreme Court decisions (Meyer and Pierce), especially in the area of education.

The Supreme Court has repeatedly held that parents possess the "fundamental right" to "direct the upbringing and education of their children" and the Court declared that "the child is not the mere creature of the State: those who nurture him and direct his destiny have the right coupled with the high duty to recognize and prepare him for additional obligations." (*Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, 268 U.S. 510, 534-35) The Supreme Court criticized a state legislature for trying to interfere "with the power of parents to control the education of their own." (*Meyer*

YOU CAN...

- **Refuse the PARCC**
- **Take Control of Your Education**
- **Make a Stand**

Parent? Student? Teacher?
Whoever you are, you can REFUSE our new
standardized test being administered
in our school: PARCC.



Overtesting strips us of *our* love of learning.
High stakes testing limits *our* exploration of
our world, *our* teacher's creativity, and *our* school's
ability to improve education.
You are more than a score.

v. Nebraska, 262 U.S. 390, 402.) In *Meyer*, the Supreme Court held that the right of parents to raise their children free from unreasonable state interferences is one of the unwritten "liberties" protected by the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. (262 U.S. 399).

Please see additional rulings:

"It is cardinal with us that the custody, care and nurturing of the child reside first in the parents, whose primary function and freedom include preparation for obligations the state can neither supply nor hinder. . . . It is in recognition of this that these decisions have respected the private realm of family life which the state cannot enter."
— *Prince v. Commonwealth of Massachusetts*, 321 U.S. 158 (1944)

"This Court has long recognized that freedom of personal choice in matters of marriage and family life is one of the liberties protected by the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment." — *Cleveland Board of Education v. LaFleur*, 414 U.S. 632 (1974)

"In a long line of cases, we have held that, in addition to the specific freedoms protected by the Bill of Rights, the "liberty"

REFUSE THE STATE TESTS

specially protected by the Due Process Clause includes the rights . . . to direct the education and upbringing of one's children.

"The Fourteenth Amendment "forbids the government to infringe ... 'fundamental' liberty interests of all, no matter what process is provided, unless the infringement is narrowly tailored to serve a compelling state interest." —*Washington v. Glucksburg*, 521 U.S. 702 (1997)

"The liberty interest at issue in this case — the interest of parents in the care, custody, and control of their children — is perhaps the oldest of the fundamental liberty interests recognized by this Court.

"In light of this extensive precedent, it cannot now be doubted that the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment protects the fundamental right of parents to make decisions concerning the care, custody, and control of their children.

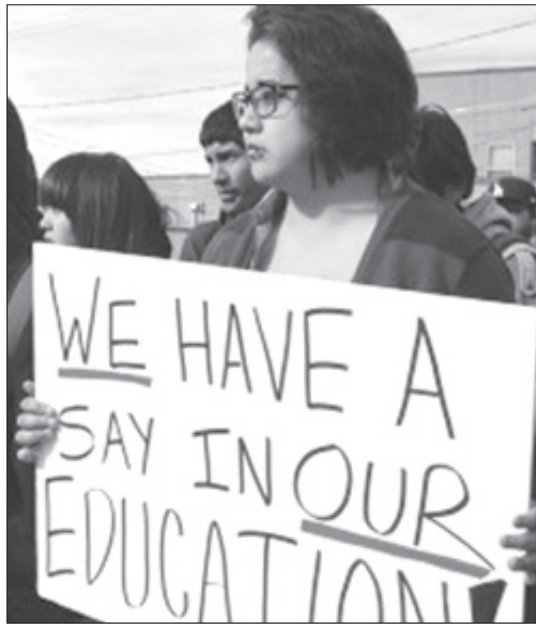
The problem here is not that the Washington Superior Court intervened, but that when it did so, it gave no special weight at all to Granville's determination of her daughters' best interests. More importantly, it appears that the Superior Court applied exactly the opposite presumption.

"The Due Process Clause does not permit a State to infringe on the fundamental right of parents to make childrearing decisions simply because a state judge believes a 'better' decision could be made. — *Troxel v. Granville*, 530 U.S. 57 (2000)

Furthermore, there is no "federal law" that requires the state or district to "implement" anything you referred to, or you would have included that paperwork as well. The state implemented common core standards and standardized tests voluntarily, to obtain Race to the Top federal funds. Period. It is bad enough that the Federal Government has resorted to blackmailing the states to receive their own money. We will not allow the District to visit the States' burden of obligation on our children.

Your own paperwork on Title 6A:8-4.1 states that the District "SHALL" administer the tests; it does not say that our children have to TAKE these tests. We understand that neither of our children are of the age to be subjected to the PARCC test yet, but we REFUSE any and all state assessments that are common core aligned, up to and including it and the MAP tests.

You did not have to make this adversarial; you could have just accepted our refusal as many reasonable districts around the state



and country have done. As we have stated in our original letter, we have the utmost confidence in the teaching skills of our son's teachers and their ability to determine and calculate their grades from daily class participation, class work, home work, quizzes and tests. We believe these standardized tests to be developmentally inappropriate and contain questionable and often inaccurate material, and will not subject [our children] to the inevitable anxiety and stress that children all over the country are feeling.

We are prepared to go to the media, the ACLU and to obtain legal counsel if you do not comply, and our parental rights or the rights of our children are violated. That includes carrying out the "sit and stare" policy that some

districts are enforcing, as this is psychological child abuse and will not be tolerated. We do not expect our children to be retaliated against or treated any differently due to our position on this subject. It is by no fault of their own that they are in this situation. Nor do we expect to have to repeat this every time a standardized test is administered. This refusal should go into both of our children's files.

To reiterate: Deptford School District does not have our permission to compel our children to take any state / district standardized test or assessment. Under our guardianship, our minor children will refuse same.

In addition, various tests / assessments will be properly scored as a "refusal," will be considered "invalid," and will not be included in the participation rate. Any attempt by your school district to otherwise code, score, or deviate from these instructions would constitute a due process violation of governmental procedure.

Furthermore, during the administration of any and all make-up tests, my child will continue to receive a free and appropriate public education in his regular classroom environment, alongside the rest of his classmates. You are hereby on notice that any state agent who ignores my parental instruction, and/or who compels, harasses, intimidates, or otherwise forces my minor child, or attempts same, in any way, to participate in any standardized test or assessment, and/or who takes any action that causes my child emotional, psychological, and/or physical harm against these express instructions, will be in violation of federal and state constitutional law, statutory law, and common law.

I trust there will be no further need for clarification.

Visit our website: usmlo.org

As South Carolina Adds New Testing, Parents Urge Refusal

Nathaniel Cary, Greenville News, South Carolina

Like never before, South Carolina public school students are being asked to perform on a battery of new high-stakes standardized tests. Many students will spend more than a month this spring either taking tests or preparing to take tests, say educators. Teachers and principals are evaluated on how well their students perform and, eventually, schools will be assessed on their effectiveness based on student performance on standardized tests.

Some parents now say they have had enough.

One group, led by Sheri Few, who ran unsuccessfully for superintendent of education, said it will ask parents to defy the new state law requiring students to take the tests.

The bold move comes as South Carolina, for the first time, rolls out the Common Core ACT Aspire test for students in grades three through eight and makes all 11th graders take the ACT and a new ACT Workkeys test to evaluate job readiness.

“We are going to encourage parents to refuse the tests,” said Few, president of South Carolina Parents Involved in Education. “Students are being tested far too much. It’s gotten absurd.”

After seeing opt-out forms circulating among parents in the state, South Carolina’s Department of Education released a memo to school district superintendents in September that said state and federal laws require all students to take part in testing. There is no opt-out provision, the memo said.

It refers to two state laws: the 1998 *Education Accountability Act* and 2014’s *Act 200*, both of which say tests will be given to “all” public school students.

Many parents have protested Common Core and new state English and math standards. Now Few said her group has reached a breaking point with a state system that is not listening to parents. “We believe that parents have been driven to civil disobedience because we no longer have any say in our children’s education,” Few said. One family in a Lexington County district is prepared to go to court if needed, Few said.

In 2014, lawmakers in South Carolina, through *Act 200*, required a state assessment for English Language Arts (ELA) and math be given to all students in grades three through eight beginning this year. If funds are available, the test also will be given to grades nine and 10 in coming years.

It also required state-developed tests in science and social studies for all students in grades four through eight, as well as a college-and career-readiness test and a Workkeys test for all students in 11th grade to measure job skills. [...]

The state did not select the tests it will use this spring until mid-December when it awarded a five-year, \$58 million contract to ACT Inc. Last week, the state’s Procurement Review Panel ruled the contract invalid beyond this year. Testing companies will have to bid again for the contract for next school year.

The timeline-crunch to inform principals and teachers of the new tests is making it difficult on students and teachers, in terms

of trying to prepare students for what to expect.

For instance, teachers instruct third graders on the complete writing process: brainstorm, outline, write a draft, edit and rewrite, said Jason McCreary, the director of accountability and quality assurance for Greenville County schools.

But the ACT Aspire test is timed, which requires third graders to write a reflective narrative in 30 minutes. “That requires a completely different type of mindset,” he said. “It’s called attack writing and if a student comes in there unprepared, then they’re not going to do as well.”

It is not just third graders. This is the first time every grade level is being timed for all test sections, not just writing. Non-answers count against the student’s score.



Impact On Students

Depending on a student’s grade level, he or she could be in test mode from the second week of April all the way through May, according to Jason McCreary, the director of accountability and quality assurance for Greenville County schools

Beyond the state tests, students have end-of-course exams in key subjects that count 20 percent of their grade. Some have Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate tests. Then there are final exams.

In 2011, Sharon Johnson opted her third-grader out of testing in Charleston County Schools for the first time for medical reasons. “I had a doctor’s note and everything,” she said. She received such pushback from the principal and teachers that she filed a complaint with the U.S. Office of Civil Rights and the school backed down. “Ever since then I’ve refused testing for both of my children,” she said.

Johnson formed South Carolina’s first Parents Across America chapter and has led a charge for parental rights to opt out of testing in South Carolina.

Johnson opposes having test scores used to rate schools and teachers. Before this year, only 10 to 15 students each year have opted out, Johnson estimated. But the national opt-out movement and blowback in South Carolina to Common Core has drawn more interest this year than ever before, she said.