

CIL'S MISSION

CIL provides an international forum for local grassroots groups to participate in dialogue across social, economic, religious, and ethnic boundaries. This kind of dialogue enables local groups to analyze their own situations from an international perspective and encourages new possibilities for mutual understanding and cooperation. The center was founded in 1985 by people from the Philippines, the USA and Germany.



CIL/USA dialogue
A CIL Newsletter

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CIL's International Dialogue Goes On-Line

From its inception, CIL has worked to promote opportunities for international dialogue and now, through the generosity of Hallie Cohen and her husband, CIL has introduced a new and dynamic way for international groups to enter our Communities in Dialogue. A gift from the Cohens earmarked for the development of our website has enabled CIL to expand the site and set up an internet Forum where participants can enter their reflections directly. Other participants, who might be half-way around the world, can read and reply to the comments.

Bulletin Board

Those of you who are web savvy will recognize this as a bulletin board. CIL's Forums are hosted by iEARN (International Education and Resource Network). iEARN, which has enabled students world-wide to communicate by way of the internet since 1988, provides CIL with the technological expertise that makes the Forums possible. (For more about iEARN, which CIL honored at its annual Recognition Night, see page 5.)

At present there are two different Forums on CIL's website: one for adults discussing the topic "Security: How can we all have it?" and one for youth groups in CIL's program called "Crossing Boundaries: Youth in dialogue about the Rights of the Child." Leaders for all of the groups presently involved in the dialogues have been registered in the Forums and have received directions on the techniques for reviewing the statements of the others and how to respond.

New Participants Invited to Join

Since the dialogue is just beginning in this new way we welcome other groups at this time to enter the discussions. For the adult dialogue, a group may be a pre-existing one, such as a church or civic action group or book club, or an individual may gather a group of colleagues or friends to discuss the topics on a regular basis. Group leaders will enter the thoughts, insights and questions that emerge from their discussions on the website. Currently participating youth belong to community groups around the world and are engaged in talks about common issues regarding the rights of the child.

To participate in either of the Forums contact us at:
cilusa@cil-usa.org.

Visit us at: www.cil-usa.org

Differing Without Debate: Exploring a Political Divide

Never argue about religion or politics, an old adage advises, if you want to keep the peace. However, today it seems clear that keeping the peace depends on not keeping silent, but talking openly about religion and politics while remembering our common humanity at the same time.

Before the last presidential election, CIL was challenged to devise a Living Room Dialogue format in which people with different political viewpoints could come together and express them freely. The election came to pass, but deeply felt differences remain. We offer our process for this meeting as a model that others might use in discussing sensitive topics.

As usual in our Living Room Dialogues, we wanted the process to be simple and easily adapted by other groups.

We stressed in our invitation to the meeting that the idea was to listen to one another without argument, debate, or intention to persuade. Practice in active listening was central to the process we had in mind.

To begin the meeting, we asked Barbara Barnes, an experienced peace education teacher and mediator, to model offering information about herself in a 10-15 minute talk. We told her in advance that we would like her to address three questions: 1) What values underlying your political views are most important to you? 2) Tell us a little about your political life story: What people and life experiences have contributed to the development of your point of view? 3) What, in your view, are the most important issues facing our country right now?

When Barbara had finished, we asked people in the group to say what parts particularly struck them out of the information Barbara offered. This part of active listening enables speaker and listener to insure that the listener has understood what the speaker was trying to communicate. Listeners could

Coming Up

Feb. 3: Living Room Dialogue. "Cuba: A Country of Contradictions." Laura Fernandez will talk about her recent experience. See "CIL Board Member Goes to Cuba," p. 5, for some information about her trip. 6:30 p.m. Call CIL for details, 212-426-5818.

Feb. 17: Living Room Dialogue. "Haiti Through My Eyes." Jeff Hermanski, a college student, will tell of his experiences working in Haiti in January, 2005. 6:30 p.m. Marymount Manhattan College, 221 E. 71st St. Regina Peruggi Room.

also ask Barbara to clarify anything they didn't understand. Finally, Barbara invited the listeners to ask "probing questions" that required her to go deeper into her own thinking.

Following this model of speaking and listening, Cathryn Magno facilitated a process of active listening in which everyone in the group could participate. After having the members of the group pair off, she asked them to listen actively to one another while they told their own political life stories. Each person had about five minutes to speak, while her partner listened actively. Afterwards, each person reported to the whole group some of the information shared by his or her partner.

Following our group sharing, we asked the question, "What have you learned tonight that would help you in talking about politics with people who disagree with you?" One person said she thought it was helpful that we talked

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Youth Report On Philippine Trip

By *Marta Silva**

In November, I went to a presentation at Hunter College organized by *Nispop-ugnayan*, the Filipino youth collective of Network in Solidarity with the People of the Philippines. The presenters were a group of young Filipinos, mostly women, who went to the Philippines on an immersion program.

They had spent a week with non-governmental organizations visiting rural areas, villages, and schools in order to learn how people live in the Philippines. In their presentation, called *Reclaim, Reroot, Resist*, they told us what they had found out about the Philippines and shared their personal stories

They began with some background information. The Philippines consists of an archipelago of more than seven thousand islands with more than 80 million people. The structure of the Filipino society is broken up into four different classes: peasants, workers, professionals, and ruling elites.

The peasants make up 75 percent of the population, living in mountain huts made out of bamboo. They plant rice and corn. Fifteen percent of the population work in factories. Professionals

**Marta Silva is a student at Marymount Manhattan College and a staff member at CIL*

Differing Without Debate

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about our political development and underlying values instead of trying to argue issues head on without that kind of perspective. Another said she noticed that during the time she was listening her mind tended to drift off into comparisons with her own life and that this distracted her from attentive listening. A third said knowing that she was going to have to report to the group induced her to listen more carefully than she otherwise might have.

In our evaluation afterwards, we agreed that this process had been valuable and could be recommended to others.

make up eight percent of the population and the ruling elite one percent.

The economy in the Philippines is going through a recession because there are no basic industries and very high unemployment. In addition, more than 90 million people live outside of the Philippines as migrant workers. Most of the migrant workers are domestic workers in the United States and Western Europe. They work in homes taking care of other people's children, cleaning their houses, or doing their laundry.

The students also shared their personal stories from the trip, which included what they learned about the people and how the experience changed them. In some of their presentations they got teary as they told the story of their journeys. The tears started rolling down their cheeks because they were overwhelmed by their experiences and the hospitality of the people. The Filipinos were very supportive, letting them into their homes and lives.

For me this was an excellent experience because I met great people, represented CIL, and got a great cultural lesson. Please look forward to more stories about how the people of CIL reach out to other groups and learn about the traditions of other peoples.

CIL Board Member Goes to Cuba

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although barely, and to have an opportunity to walk the same streets he did in a different lifetime. I met a family member and felt the pain of saying goodbye knowing that I may never see him again because our governments have drawn a line that cannot be crossed just because of love and family ties.

I was left wanting more, hopeful that I will have other opportunities to travel to Cuba and to keep asking questions.

I will be sharing more about this experience at a CIL Living Room Dialogue in February. See the Coming Up notice on p. 2 for details.

Connecting the Local and the Global

At this year's Recognition Night, CIL honored Ed Gragert and iEARN (International Education and Resource Network). An excerpt from Ed Gragert's acceptance speech follows.

It is our belief that the issues facing the planet are human-made and can be addressed by citizens working together. It is our hope that by having young people start at the earliest ages to communicate, to meet each other (virtually at first), to work together, and to seek collaborative solutions across boundaries of nation and cultures, they will do the same as adults.

iEARN's dream of linking students around the world to work on collaborative projects has been made possible by today's internet technology. We now link about one million students every day in 20,000 teachers' classes in 110 countries. Students from age 5 to 19 are learning from each other and learning to respect each others' cultures.

Let me share an example. One online project is Fight Against Child Labor. In this project students from 19 countries researched the legal status of children in labor in their countries, analyzed the reasons why children were pressed into labor, shared personal experiences about their countries' situations and educated each other about what was happening to provide education to children who are required to work.

As with many iEARN projects, the students published their interactive work. Here in the U.S., working internationally, students were able to grasp the reality of an issue that for most of their peers is remote and disconnected from their daily lives.

After participating in this project, students in Warren, New Jersey took their work to their mayor and township and petitioned for a proclamation. The proclamation asked the citizens of the county to support them in raising funds for a school. That proclamation was issued in Warren County by Mayor Carolann Garafola in March.

These middle school students successfully raised several thousand dollars for a school in India. Just as importantly, the experience they had interacting and working together with other students is one that will continue to impact their lives as they become older. They will no longer feel that they cannot make a difference in the world.

The CIL mission statement speaks of the importance of dialogue across these same kinds of boundaries. The work you are doing parallels and complements that of iEARN.

On behalf of the thousands of teachers and millions of students working collaboratively in iEARN, I thank you for this recognition and look forward to working closely with CIL in the future.



On Recognition Night, Ed Gragert of iEARN told a story about local students who reached out globally to help build a school in India.



Marymount School's Headmistress Concepcion Alvar and CIL's Kathleen Kanet with painting donated by Jane Haher for the event's auction.



The CIL Recognition Night Planning Committee designed a money tree for the auction.

CIL Board Member Goes to Cuba: **A Story of a Professional and Personal Journey**

By Laura Fernandez

In October, I boarded a charter plane in Miami and in one short flight traveled to Cuba, crossing a huge psychological distance. I was traveling with Professor Cathryn Magno to make a presentation in Havana about the work of Youth Practicing Democracy. This is a program using the Convention on the Rights of the Child to educate young people about human rights issues and to promote their active participation in civic life.

At the same time, I was on another, more illusive quest. As the child of a Cuban immigrant, I was seeking to understand not only my roots but also exile, identity, revolution, culture, freedom, homeland and sacrifice.

U.S. Denounced

On the simpler task, our presentation followed the announcement that the membership of the UN (except for the U.S. and a couple other countries) had voted to end the Cuban embargo. Each workshop leader read a message from the Cuban government that celebrated this victory and denounced the U.S. for its continuing actions against the Cuban people.

That announcement was followed by three Cuban educators who all talked about the greatness of the Cuban education system, its emphasis on human rights (the theme of our panel), and the horrible oppression of the U.S. "Bloqueo". One educator emphasized that democracy and voting have nothing to do with human rights.

And then our turn, two Americans talking about how we involve youth in democracy with the goal that they will become involved citizens and future voters.

The Cubans Surprise Us

As you can imagine, we had some trepidation as we began, wondering how well we would be received. We shared the challenges of the New York City educational system and told of the way our program seeks to mitigate those difficulties. We provide a place where youth can learn new skills, practice critical thinking and engage in social change activities that can have an impact on

the systems affecting their lives. We displayed a poster the youth in our program had created specifically to share with the conference attendees so their voices could be included.



Cathryn Magno and Laura Fernandez display a student-made poster.

Surprisingly to us, our fellow presenters were very excited by our ideas and how our program existed in a space between the school system and the youth's homes and families, helping to fill gaps in both settings.

Although Cathryn and I were very pleased by this exchange of ideas, I felt that the Cuban educators were very limited in what they could share in a public venue. Although we were critical of the U.S. educational system, I did not hear one unfavorable comment from a Cuban about the Cuban educational system during the week of the conference. I wished for a richer dialogue where we could all confront the problems of our respective systems and governments and share ideas and possible solutions for some of our challenges.

I am mindful that as a U.S. citizen, the greatest action I can take is to work to end the embargo and move toward policies that are more productive and benefit more of the people.

The Personal Quest

On my more illusive quest, I was lucky to find my father's childhood house still standing,

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Report from Ethiopia

At a CIL Living Room Dialogue in December, Negash Aburahman gave an update on the work of Sr. Tibebe Maco and her program addressing HIV/AIDS in Addis Ababa. Sr. Tibebe was honored at last year's Recognition night. Serving the entire community of a poor region of the city, the program is built on traditional values of neighborhood support. Read more about this report in the Recent Events section of our website:

www.cil-usa.org



Negash Aburahman and Marta Silva set up a video in preparation for Negash's Living Room Dialogue presentation.

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