

Seventh International Delegation to Peru



Members of the 7th Delegation: Padma Ratna Tuladhar (Nepal), Jaime Bonilla (Colombia), Peter Erlinder (United States), Heriberto Ocasio (United States), Jose Enrique Gonzalez Ruiz (Mexico), Juan Jose Landinez (Colombia). The seventh delegate, Haluk Gerger (Turkey), is not in this picture.

The International Emergency Committee to Defend the Life of Dr Abimael Guzman (Chairman Gonzalo of the Communist Party of Peru) sent its seventh delegation to Lima, Peru for a week in late March and early April 2001. The delegation faced new conditions and problems unlike those experienced by any of the previous delegations. This time, amidst the political turmoil that has been roiling Peru since the collapse of the Fujimori regime, the delegation was able to get much further than ever before in helping to create conditions in which the Peruvian government would be forced to allow the public presentation of Chairman Gonzalo – so that he can present his views freely – and permit contact with attorneys, family and friends, etc. The seven delegation members (four lawyers and three other activists) were able to robustly raise the issue through: a press conference, a string of successful media appearances, private conversations with high government officials and others, and some contact with the masses on the street and elsewhere.

For a few days this delegation was led to believe that it was on the verge of actually being able to visit Chairman Gonzalo, but these hopes were

cruelly disappointed. They met several times with representatives of the Ministry of Justice, the general in charge of the Supreme Council of Military Justice, which still has jurisdiction over the case despite the recent change in government, and the Ombudsman's office. In all of these meetings – which in and of themselves represent a breakthrough in contrast to the stonewalling previous delegations received – these officials had to acknowledge that there are no legal grounds to deny Chairman Gonzalo access to his lawyers (one of the delegates is one of Chairman Gonzalo's international lawyers of record). Yet while this delegation was received cordially, and not simply arrested and expelled (as happened once under the Fujimori regime), and while the interim government took pains to try and present itself as fundamentally different from the dictatorial Fujimori regime, it still did not comply with the legal standards it paid lip service to.

The seven delegates fought on both the legal front and the front of public opinion. They issued a "Message to the Peruvian People" at a press conference held on 29 March 2001 in Lima, attended by broadcast crews from nine television channels and ra-

dio stations widely listened to in remote areas of the countryside, and a horde of reporters from the national and international press. Their release stated, in part, "...we have gone to the civilian and military authorities demanding to meet with Dr Abimael Guzman and verify his state of health and well-being, and we have hopes of being able to achieve this.

"The concerns about Dr Guzman's health, which come from all corners of the world, are so much more important because the Fujimori-Montesinos dictatorship used his isolation to claim to speak in his name. It is unacceptable to attribute declarations to Dr Guzman as long as he does not make them in a direct form before the mass media and without any kind of pressure. No government has the authority to speak on behalf of its political prisoners. And, of course, the only way to verify the changes that the government has indicated regarding his treatment is that Dr Guzman be able to express himself in person."

Chairman Gonzalo was last seen in public on 24 September 1992, in a government-organised "photo opportunity" before a howling pack of jackals from the police and reactionary press, when he stunned the regime, and de-

lighted the world, with a call for the People's War to continue. Following a swift, secret military trial before masked judges, Chairman Gonzalo was placed in a specially-constructed underground hole, where, it was announced, he would remain in total isolation until he died, and his lawyer was later sentenced to life imprisonment. The Fujimori government had declared that Chairman Gonzalo, above all, and everyone suspected of supporting or even sympathising with the People's War under his leadership, are "terrorists" with no rights whatsoever and thus subject to the most inhuman, barbaric and arbitrary treatment. The very presence of such an unprecedentedly broadly representative group from five countries, including, for the first time, a delegate from Nepal (the first prospective South Asian delegate to successfully oblige the Peruvian government to grant a visa), dealt a blow to the interim government's attempts to essentially continue this policy with only minor changes.

All seven delegates spoke to the press and answered questions from the reporters who crowded around them. Haluk Gerger, a journalist from Turkey and supporter of the struggle being waged there by revolutionary political prisoners against the F-type isolation cells, was able to take a hostile question, about where he had received the money to travel to Peru, and turn it around to bring out strong support in Turkey and elsewhere for the delegation's mission. Padma Ratna Tuladhar, a former Nepalese Minister of Health and Labour, took a clear stand, "Well, I am from Nepal, a country far from Peru. Our country is the country of the Himalayas as we have the tallest mountains. In our part of the world, that is, South Asia, and especially India and Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, Comrade Guzman is highly respected as one of the great revolutionary leaders of the world. So when he was arrested, and the people knew that he was ill-treated in prison, especially that he was imprisoned in a cage-like prison, the people worried about his life."

Peter Erlinder, one of two lawyers that represented Chairman Gonzalo before the International Human Rights Court in San José, Costa Rica, also responded directly to press attempts to discount his client as a "terrorist": "your definition or mine about who is

a terrorist, or who isn't a terrorist, is not recognised as relevant with respect to international law and the treatment of individuals accused of a crime, and any attempt to characterise a prisoner with a political label is completely contrary to international law." Heriberto Ocasio, medical doctor and activist with the US Committee to Support the Revolution in Peru, also spoke to this: "With respect to the things that you say about the war that has been led by Dr Guzman, on this we should say that while we (the delegation) have different points of view, different political views, ideologies and methods of struggle, on one thing we are in agreement, and it is that the way the government of Fujimori and Montesinos, and also the United States, through the CIA and their other agencies, try to label movements, to call them terrorist and this type of thing, is something we don't accept, because it is something used to deny the people their fundamental rights." The following day, the lawyer Enrique Gonzalez, the International Emergency Committee (IEC) delegate from Mexico, debated on television with a former top general in DINCOTE, Peru's notorious "anti-terrorist" police.

When the delegation had a chance to walk through the streets of central Lima after the press conference, anonymous people and others expressed strong support, as did messages sent to their hotel rooms. Many of the delegates had already participated in one or more delegations, and this time they found a highly charged, volatile political climate. Crowds engaged in informal debate and even openly (though cautiously) voiced support for the Peo-

ple's War in a main city centre plaza. This contrasted sharply with the far more repressed atmosphere and heavy-handed police measures delegates had encountered on previous trips. But this was only one aspect of the situation, and the delegates themselves noted that they had to fight a tendency to let themselves be lulled by the government's misleading change in tone.

With Fujimori driven from office and his right-hand man, Montesinos, brought back to spill yet more dirt in public as part of the infighting amongst Peru's ruling classes, there are new possibilities for developing the people's struggle in different forms. Yet both the interim government, which dealt with the delegation, and the newly-elected Alejandro Toledo government, set to take office on 28 July, are just as backed by, and beholden to, US imperialism as the Fujimori regime - that is, 100 per cent, with no reservations.

After high-ranking authorities at three major offices, especially the Ministry of Justice, had given the impression for several days that a visit with Comrade Gonzalo was not only a legal right but an immediate possibility, on 2 April the delegation was informed by that Ministry that it would not happen after all. The delegates replied through a press release pointing out the contradiction between the acknowledgement given by the Ombudsman, the Supreme Council of Military Justice and the Ministry of Justice that the isolation of Chairman Gonzalo was illegal, and their attempt to distance themselves from the blatant brutality and open terrorism of





IEC delegate Dr. Enrique Gonzales Ruiz faces off with General Juan Gonzales Sandoval, a former head of the notorious DINCOTE police agency. Photos taken from a video.

Below: IEC delegate Professor Halu.. Jerger addressing this year's May Day rally in Berlin.



the Fujimori regime on the one hand, and their failure to act accordingly on the other.

At the press conference, Dr. Juan José Landínez, one of the delegates from Colombia, pointed out emphatically that the delegation was being forced to repeat the very same request that had been made to Fujimori by previous delegations years previously, and that the refusal of the new government to end the isolation of Dr. Guzman was "a clear violation of Peruvian and international standards [of human rights]".

The case of Lori Berenson speaks volumes about the superficial differences and basic similarity between the old and new regimes. Berenson, an American, has been held in harsh conditions for five years, since she was

convicted by one of Fujimori's faceless military courts of collaborating in a planned action by the MRTA group (an action that never took place, and to which she was never directly linked). That trial was widely criticised and ridiculed internationally as a travesty of justice. Finally, Fujimori himself

was forced to allow his minions to grant her a new trial. But her retrial before a civilian court turned out to be pretty much like the first, and on 20 June, once again, she was sentenced to 20 years in prison for "terrorism". The interim government's Minister of Justice, Diego Garcia Sayan, a man known as an ex-1970s "radical" whom some people would like to put their faith in as the best hope for justice under the Toledo government, was quoted in the press as expressing satisfaction with that outcome.

In this political context, it would be madness to expect the wheels of imperialist justice to stop trying to grind up the masses and especially their revolutionary leaders. As Mao said, sometimes the enemy shoots with real bullets, and sometimes they

try to combine this with shooting sugar-coated bullets, which in this particular case includes promises and vague assurances and changes in style, but not substance. Both the interim government and its successor clearly represent the Peruvian ruling classes as a whole (perhaps even more so than Fujimori did), and are second to none in their determination (as already shown in their military actions, the hunting of suspected PCP leaders, arrests, etc.) to use both kinds of bullets to crush the People's War – the Peruvian people's only hope. By relentlessly exposing the government's hypocrisy, the delegation and the IEC, and the international campaign they are part of, are exposing the government's own lies and contradictions, so as to help force it to meet the central demand: the public presentation of Chairman Gonzalo. This also gives concrete aid and support to the people's struggles there in all its forms.

There have been unconfirmed reports about several short-term hunger strikes by Chairman Gonzalo to protest his conditions of confinement. Such unverified reports from the Peruvian government and reactionary press cannot be accepted at face value, but this further increases concern for Chairman Gonzalo's life and well-being.

Further, Peru's prisons are still teeming with thousands of other political prisoners and prisoners of war subjected to atrocious conditions on a daily basis and even murder. The most outstanding of them is Comrade Feliciano – Oscar Ramirez Durand – who assumed leadership responsibilities after Chairman Gonzalo's arrest until he himself was finally captured and brought to the same underground prison complex. He, too, must be defended and his isolation broken. ■

For more information, to contribute or to support the campaign, please write to:

BCM IEC
London
WCIN 3XX
UK