

The Future Is Peace

By Cynthia Roberts, member of the Cuba, Women, and the Bolivarian Alliance Issues Committee, WILPF US

“The future is Peace”—Jose Marti. Let’s realize this future.

I had the good fortune to attend the Fifth International Seminar for Peace and the Abolition of Foreign Military Bases in the town of Guantanamo (in the province of the same name) in May 2017. There are grave misconceptions about Guantanamo throughout the United States as a result of the news coverage that largely addresses only Guantanamo Bay. The town itself is a thriving, attractive community with a population of over 200,000.

Participation in the event was international in scope, with multiple groups that traversed Cuba to converge at Hotel Guantanamo. These included Code Pink, Witness for Peace, the Canadian Ernesto Guevara brigade, and the ICAP*-led group of which I was a part. Other participants in my group included members of the WILPF Ojai Branch Nuri Ronaghy and Alan Shorb, Veterans for Peace, the Socialist Workers Party, a couple of activists from Hawaii, as well as a number of the speakers. The speakers hailed from Okinawa, Japan; Brazil; Nicaragua; Colombia; and Puerto Rico—all countries negatively impacted by US military overreach. The event was held at the Guantanamo Medical College, where a number of representatives from African countries who are enrolled there were also able to attend the seminar.

In the opening session, Silvio Platero Yrola highlighted the participation of delegates from a total of 32 countries. He is the current president of the Cuban Movement for Peace and Sovereignty of the Peoples (MOVPAZ), which organizes the biennial seminar, with support this year from ICAP. Maria do Socorro Gomes, president of the World Peace Council, offered the first official presentation to an audience of close to 250. Silvio and Maria were both award winners at the Friday night Concert for Peace held in downtown Guantanamo, where we were all treated to a lovely evening of entertainment. The site was 24 de Febrero Square, the date of the leasing agreement between the United States and Cuba in 1903, which was more an act of coercion.

The World Peace Council has NGO status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations and came into existence in Poland in 1950. It supports “efforts to construct a world where justice, peace and solidarity reign, according to the wishes of the people.” MOVPAZ was conceived in 1949 in the Amadeo Roldan Theatre, Havana, but was repressed during Batista’s regime, given it’s pacific intent, and went underground in the later 1950s. MOVPAZ resurfaced once the revolutionary forces were victorious and received endorsement from leader Fidel Castro, who, in 1960 at the United Nations General Assembly, stated: “Make the philosophy of plundering disappear and the philosophy of war will have disappeared.” (Both the quotes above are from the publication “Cuban Movement for Peace and Sovereignty of the Peoples,” Havana, Cuba, distributed to seminar participants.)

A high point for many, judging by the applause, was hearing Ann Wright, a retired US colonel and a Veterans for Peace member. She railed against the US administration and apologized for the longest historical occupation by the US, maintained at the naval base in Guantanamo. She stated her heartfelt rejection of US wars of choice. The evening culminated with an inspiring visit to a group of CDRs (Committees for Defense of the Revolution, loosely equivalent to a neighborhood association) in Villa Toa Quarter. There, the youth demonstrated the traditional dance and music of Guantanamo, the *changüi*. We were then invited to join them and the whole community in dance and to view more of the neighborhood.

Friday began with the opportunity to view the poster exhibition, *A world of peace is possible*, allegorical posters for peace and against war. Exhibited posters were winners of a competition held in collaboration with the Cuban Association of Social Communicators, which will go on to tour the provinces.

Daniel Ortega Reyes, deputy to the Parlamento Centroamericano and Partido Unido Cristiana de Nicaragua member opened Friday's session with *Guantanamo: The Thorn in Latin American Dignity*. Argentine journalist Carlos Aznárez pointed out that the push for military bases is justified with a number of pretexts, among them the need to support "humanitarian aid interventions". He spoke out against President Macri's interest in purchasing weapons of mass destruction and urged people to mobilize in support of the mandates of ALBA, Unasur, and CELAC, which have declared the region a Zone of Peace. Myriam Parada of the Colombian Escuela Fundación de Paz addressed sexual imperialism on military bases and stated that the bases are strategic instruments to control resources. She encouraged a pedagogy of peace, a concept later praised in the morning's audience comment period.

Ian Hansen of Psychologists for Social Responsibility and the Okinawa fighters were among the other speakers during Friday's session. A dual interpretation from the Japanese conveyed the reality of living in occupied territory and the disregard for environmental concerns, as new helipads are built, essentially to replace the former base in Okinawa.

To get a greater understanding of the history of the US occupation of Guantanamo Bay, I encourage you to view the documentary *All Guantanamo Is Ours*, which was screened during Friday's session. The filmmaker and several of the film's participants were present. The documentary was filmed in Caimanera, a small community adjacent to the Bay, which is negatively affected by the US's overextended agreement, which designated the bay as a coaling station for US ships. We visited this village on Saturday and received a warm welcome from community members. The final declaration of the seminar was read in the presence of the many community members gathered, and all participating delegations had ample opportunity to display their banners calling for removal of the US base from Cuban soil. Shut down Guantanamo Bay Naval Base!

In the final statement that the seminars conveners issued, the call was made for pacifists and antiwar activists to continue demanding that the United States return to the Cuban people the territory illegally occupied by the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, and to end the economic, commercial, and financial blockade of the country. Closure of foreign bases and military enclaves around the world, and immediate withdrawal of foreign occupation troops from

countries where they have been deployed, was another demand of the document. It also denounces economic, political, and military aggression and intervention by the United States and its NATO allies in numerous countries, and alerts peoples to the danger of a nuclear world war. Recognition and denunciation of antiterrorist warfare that merely benefits the purpose of imperialism and negatively impacts the environment and health of populations where military bases are located is imperative.

The document likewise calls for expanding efforts to disseminate the Proclamation of Latin America and the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace. Continued condemnation of interventionist actions by imperialist powers and the local oligarchy in Venezuela directed toward destroying the Bolivarian Revolution must be recognized as an offensive that is threatening peace in the entire region.

As our bus set out on the return journey on Sunday, faced with a full 12 hours on the road to Santa Clara, we made a stop at Cemetery Ifigenio to pay respects to Comandante Fidel Castro Ruz, Jose Marti, and Mariana Grajales (Mother of the Revolution), all of whom are buried there in Santiago de Cuba. It was a fitting end to the previous days' testimonies to the need to act in solidarity for an end to imperialism and for the closure of foreign military bases.

* Instituto Cubano de Amistad con los pueblos. Cuban Institute for Friendship with the People.

For additional reading:

- Nalda Vigezze, "Support expressed for Cuba's demand to return territory occupied by the Guantánamo Naval Base," National Network on Cuba, May 12, 2017, <http://www.nnoc.info/support-expressed-for-cubas-demand-to-return-territory-occupied-by-the-guantanamo-naval-base/>.
- Julio César Cuba Labaut, "Inolvidable Noche Guantanamera," *Venceremos*, May 7, 2017, <http://www.venceremos.cu/guantanamo-base-naval/9228-inolvidable-noche-guantanamera> (in Spanish).
- "Return the Illegally Occupied Guantanamo Naval Base to the Cuban People!" Witness for Peace, May 12, 2017, <http://witnessforpeace.org/>.