

Transcript of a telephone conversation between hunger striker Olga Flores and Rev. Jill McAllister June 11, 2009.

Jill: I have just spoken with Olga who spent this past weekend in the hospital. The women agreed to end the strike on the suggestion of the attending physician. They won recognition by the government which passed a resolution that military archives would be opened to them and that the military would have to meet with them to answer their questions. Olga says this has been a huge stride forward for this issue which exists across Latin America and that because of the international pressure, Latin American activists will no longer feel isolated and alone in their work for justice and human rights.

Read below for details of conversation with Olga...

Olga has just returned from the hospital where she recuperated this weekend with her compatriots. She was sitting down to write us when I called and so I promised to send off to you and to her the transcript of our call:

Olga: The action we performed has given us more influence than we thought possible. We do not have to be in passivity any longer. We could do much more than we are doing now. Charlie Clements of the UUSC wrote to her and she was most appreciative. They did file a complaint three years ago with the Organization of American States, Human Rights Commission. It is a lengthy, formal process which ruled in their favor but it has no specific date or teeth to mandate compliance by the Bolivian government--no sanctions are imposed. They now have new elements that have been added to the complaint and the OAS has promised to take action on these additional elements of the case.

Each day Evo Morales, who offered so much promise at the outset of his administration, becomes entrenched in government and institutional demagoguery. He gives nice speeches...but in practice they are hurting the poorer people. Morales is just a figurehead and they use his image to do colonialism, relying upon the ignorance of indigenous people, especially the police for human rights. It is very difficult to have clear understanding with double talk.

Jill: Though she is finished with her hunger strike they will continue the work—this is a promise they made before finishing the strike. They will work at three levels:

Their personal demands. For example the military have opened the archives on her brother. She remains skeptical, but she will go and continue to ask for the release

of materials. And this is true for all three compatriots. Marta will go to exhume her father's remains at Teoponte. The woman whose husband disappeared in Paraguay will go to that government to ask for information.

They will generate a movement against impunity and for justice. She has realized that it is a national problem. The hunger strike increased her awareness of how much they need access to prosecute crimes by the authorities. They will have meetings in the next week. They are generating a movement that goes forward.

Thirdly, they will move at the international level because this most directly impacted the Evo Morales Administration. All of the international letters they received had a very large impact. Many people said that Morales would lose international standing where his administration has received a great deal of support.

OAS Human Rights Commission case will continue and Olga will present a new demand to them pertaining to Bolivia and what happens when a state does not follow its own laws. OAS will punish the state by imposing economic sanctions through the Inter-American court. This approach, where the OAS has imposed economic sanctions, has worked previously in Guatemala and in Bolivia.

Also, it is a very sensitive area but they are negotiating for monetary damages. This is politically very sensitive but the only avenue available to them and the only one which imposes consequences upon those who perpetrated these crimes. It is the only thing that has an impact.

Are there any other demands?

Olga: People say to us that time has passed, this is not important any longer—we should move on, forget it, live in the future. But this is important to know what happened in the past. There is no limit on the time until these cases are resolved. Many women have to raise their children alone. The government says, "We are a young nation, we don't have money to pay for them." But we reply that they have to use the money for the right things, and must not be contemptuous of the people and their plight.

At the moment this is a problem all over Latin America. In Brazil they are asking for declassifications of the archives as well. In Chile there are problems, the military is not in the government or seemingly answerable to the government, even when it is a democracy. The judges of Pinochet in Chile say they have to punish the terrorists—Mapuches Indians of Chile, are branded terrorists. And so now these repressive measures of the Bush Administration are suddenly legitimatised and

used against indigenous citizens who are standing up for their rights.

We got lots of publicity and so for us it was successful and the government was not expecting this. There were radio broadcasts, news articles here. The government said, "They are poor women who just want to get on TV." But after this campaign they were afraid to say anything against us. They stopped branding us as protagonists!

How are you physically? She joked that she has many reserves, physically. The doctor told them that they could not go on. Their kidneys were at risk. Many people who were supporting, begged her to stop. They heard these pleas and were engaged to continue fighting, but after the doctor's advice and our please, they decided the best way to fight is to live particularly as the dictatorship were not changing.

The international support from our community saved her life. If she had not had it, they would have been absolutely insulated. In their locale—many young people came to support them. Now she knows their history and she is organizing them. This is very important for her particularly for the future of the movement.

The other is the government could not isolate her. They were able to break the negative circle of the government, which knew it had to do something. The government passed a resolution for declassification. It's not enough according to their legal advisors because it's not law but only a resolution. However, they are doing something...And the military has to answer to the hunger strikers—they have to meet with them and answer something to them...the hunger strikers are calling themselves Activists for Justice Against Impunity

Olga: To have all our community work on this shows sisterhood is in our hearts and that we are not just a faith of proclamation, but a faith of action. Even though we did not have a structure immediately at hand, we all came forward. Bolivia is very isolated from the world, but through this action you have given us perspectives we did not have before.

We did not before trust in our own actions, but now we can do many things in common with Brazil and Chile and this is why it's important to have this movement active!

I send you all my blessings,
Olga