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Easter Sunday report from Colombia Delegation

Posted March 26th, 2008 by [FOR \(/user/admin\)](#)

By Andrew Gorby

Yuri Neira has spent the last one-thousand and fifty-eight days bringing his son's dreams to life--dreams that the riot police of Bogotá ended with the savage swinging of their batons on May 1, 2005 during city-wide protests. With their faces cowardly hidden by ski masks, and their bodies and minds protected by thick black armor, they brutally beat 15 year-old Nicolas Neira as he gasped for air. The tear gas which was thick in the air had induced Nicolas' asthma. He died days later, his head not full of dreams, but full of blood and fluid from severe cerebral hemorrhaging.

Casa Salmon, a refuge of art and resistance against Colombia's repressive, U.S backed, security "democracy", is the dream Nicolas was unable to dream during his last days. It is his dream in action. With the guidance and financial support of Yuri Neira, youth from around Colombia and the world gather to imagine, create, and artistically express visions of a new, just, and free world. Graffiti art rises over the walls of Casa Salmon and images remembering the victims of police brutality and violence soar to the high ceilings of this expansive sanctuary. Under the atmospheric lights and colorful walls of Casa Salmon youth unite for art shows, workshops, gatherings and screenings to learn and discuss ways to combat militarism and violence with the power of creativity.

It was an incredibly powerful evening. To many in the group the experience was emotionally exhausting. But for me, hearing and feeling one father's passion, compassion, and love of his son, was encouraging. Seeing Nicolas' dream taking life three years after his death in this haven reminded me of work needed back in the States. We have a desperate need to create an alternative sanctuary for those most affected by war and violence: a sanctuary for soldiers. A place in the country where they can come to relax, a place where they can come to fish and create art, learn about their rights and options of resisting, a place to read about the struggle for peace and justice, and most of all a place to recover.

Andrew Gorby is one of eight participants in the youth arts delegation to Bogota and Medellin. Andrew was discharged from the military as a conscientious objector and is currently on staff

with the Center on Conscience & War in Washington DC. At CCW he lobbies for the Military Conscientious Objector Act and counsels conscientious objectors in the military. He also works as a GI Rights Hotline Counselor and has recently been focusing on CCW's "Alternatives to Enlistment, Alternatives to Killing" campaign.

The delegation is spending the last ten days of March learning from and with ACOOC and Red Juvinel about youth resistance to militarism. The delegation participants will help to support FOR's fall 2008 campus tour.

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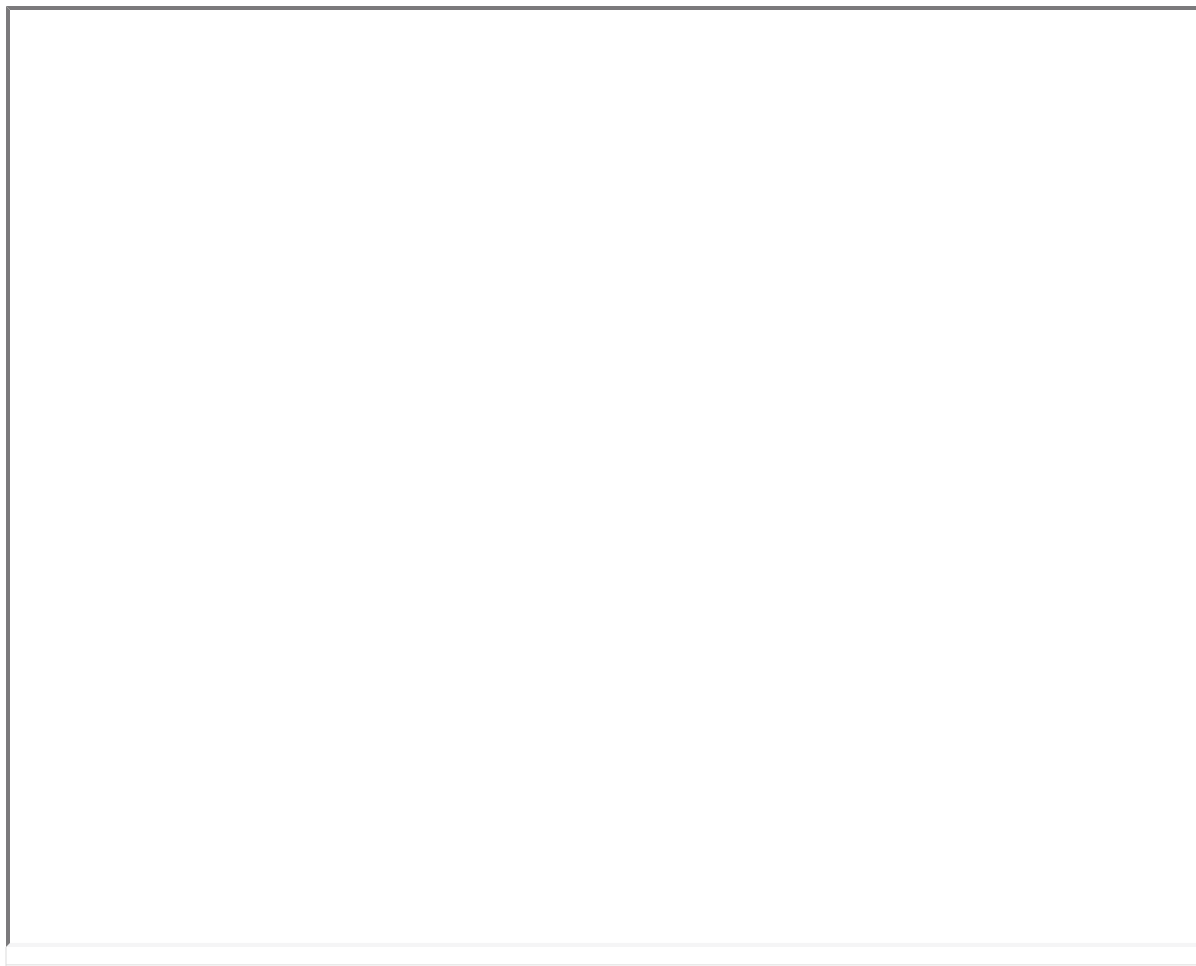
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