

# Village Updates May/June 2010



## Not Right - Nor Civil

This month we are following up on our last newsletter with regard to the bus company that is thwarting our center adolescents' basic human right to an education. By means of threats and actively impeding the students' ability to board any public or private bus, our teens have had no means to get safely to and from high school (an hour bus ride away for some).

For those who missed the last newsletter a brief recap is in order, and for the full story go to our website at [www.wrgnews.com](http://www.wrgnews.com) or email me [wnsmith@bellsouth.net](mailto:wnsmith@bellsouth.net) for a PDF version.

In April our center teens' parents voiced extreme concern about the abusive conduct of a bus driver they had contracted to take our adolescents to and from high school. The transportation cost of \$25 per child per month was paid by our organization as a scholarship, in exchange for the teens' volunteer service at the center. Pleas by the parents for help with this situation were ignored by the bus company and transportation officials in Danli. This left us no choice but to contract a new bus.

Something that sounded so simple...

*The urgency with which we obtain the legal access to hire our own bus has hit an all new level now that five students have been attacked on their way home from school.*

Attempting to hire a new bus service brought everyone concerned threats to life and limb. Knowing that people are killed in Honduras for something as insignificant as a cell phone, we took the threat seriously and contacted the American Embassy and friends in the current Honduran Administration for help. Face to face discussions with Minister of Security and the Minister of Transportation resulted in those offices contacting the bus company with orders to cease and desist in their mistreatment of our students.

However, the warnings apparently served to incite the bus company to step up its maltreatment. The employees dug their heels in deeper, convincing all private and public bus drivers not to pick up any child that attends our center!

While we did not take the threats lightly, we met with American Ambassador Hugo Llorens to discuss the situation because of a deeper issue that was emerging. Impeding the free movement of our children to get to school was a flagrant violation of their basic human rights.

Ambassador Llorens was sufficiently alarmed by this state of affairs and immediately called the Mayor of Danli, Dr. José Antonio Urrutia. The next day our team spent two and a half hours with the Mayor trying to bring resolution to this issue.

After hearing our complaint, the Mayor at once called the D.A.'s office and the Chief of Police in Danli. Representatives from both offices were dispatched within minutes to meet with us and the Mayor. Both officials took our complaints quite seriously.

The D.A.'s office made a special appointment to see us the following day and take a deposition regarding the human rights violations of our students by the bus company.

A few days later our team, the parents, and the students being abused sat down with the legal representative of the bus company to air their complaints. Initially the representatives were full of bravado, ready to sue us for infringing on their bus route. However, that was before they learned that they were being brought up on the very serious charges of human rights violations.

For over a month now our students have been ostracized by all bus companies serving Linaca. They have to make their way to high school on bicycles, hitchhiking, or walking. As we stated before, this is a very long and very dangerous trip - especially for our teen girls.

The weather in Linaca now is extremely hot - in the 90's with a heat index far higher. The exhaustion factor alone is causing the teen's great distress and affecting their studies. Add to this the fear of being attacked and you can see that a great toll is being exacted on these responsible young people - whose only desire is to get an education, better themselves, and give back to their community.

The urgency with which we obtain the legal access to hire our own bus has hit an all new level now that five students have been attacked on their way home from school. Our girls feared for their lives and believe they narrowly escaped sexual assault or worse.

This type of incident has all of our teens quite anxious and their parents even more so. As we discussed before, it is very difficult for a poverty-stricken villager to agree to keep a teen in school - especially when that teen is worth income by working the fields.

While we understand there is a legal process involved in addressing this issue, our main concern is how can we protect our students and get them to school.



*Not Right Nor Civil continued*

We are desperately seeking some sort of immediate and legal measure allowing us to contract a new bus company and safely transport our children to school.

We must do everything in our power to keep these children from harm. It is important to note that our concern extends beyond the human rights abuses that the children we know and love are suffering. Villagers in areas near those we serve also have reported this type of treatment of students. How many other regions might be suffering a similar fate?

That very day, after hearing our complaints, the Mayor's office began a media campaign asking people in the region who were experiencing abusive treatment by any transportation company to come and report their grievances. The media exposure was encouraging to us. This type of treatment, the intimidation of the powerless for personal gain, is a systemic problem in Honduras.

The problems of our region and beyond are worth carefully investigating - the difficulty being the custom of the marginalized villager not to speak up for fear of retribution.

Several good things have emerged from this fiasco. One is that the parents and teens are truly owning their own problems and are feeling empowered by not allowing this intimidation to continue. Few of the parents of our teens graduated from the 6th grade. Until we came along they had no hope that their children would achieve a higher education giving them the prospect of better lives. This glimpse of hope is what taught them the value of standing up and defending their rights.

It also knit the entire community of parents and teens tighter together and more disposed to help us in other ways moving forward.

After two more attacks on our kids in the last several days the parents have had enough. Tomorrow they are organizing a formal protest

in Linaca and inviting the media to hear their complaints against the bus companies. Their aim is not to start a war. Their only hope is that reason will prevail and their children will be safe and free to continue their studies without harassment. We pray the example of our courageous villagers will extend throughout the region.

It is not an easy task to end these types of human rights violations and the abuse of children. But it is a challenge our team takes very seriously, so that Honduras might actually begin to rise above the misery it faces should thugs continue to rob, steal, and destroy the future of those they consider to be least of these.

If we could find 140 people to donate a mere \$100 each we could purchase a bus and transport 52 teens safely to school! Please continue to pray for a bus of our own and a peaceful resolution to this dangerous and difficult situation facing our teens.

**\$25,000 MATCHING GRANT PROGRESS**

So far over \$22,000 has come in on our matching grant for the children's center! All designated donations - 100% - go to the children's work. Administrative costs are raised separately.

As you know from this newsletter we are in desperate need of our own transportation and are starting a fund to purchase our own bus. We also need \$5,000 to cover what we have spent so far for school supplies. February of each year is a time our budget is hit hardest because of these start up expenses. This year we helped almost twice the number of children as last year to stay in school! In some cases for the lack of a pair of shoes, or even something as small as notebooks and pencils, can cause a parent to keep a child home. It never ceases to amaze us how for the lack of some small thing, a child's life is doomed.

In addition to this we have another good problem of a growing teen population who also want to remain in school. It costs on average \$50 a month to support a student in high school. Their needs are comprised of bus fare uniforms, books, and miscellaneous charges that come up during the school year for internships and special events.

We have scholarshiped more than 70 High School students. Volunteering with our team, they tutor the younger children and are the hands on help for needs arising in the community. They are the capable, future

leaders of the nation. Not all teens will come to work with us in the future, but they will have received an education enabling them to get a better job. And they will be trained in a multitude of skills to help them advance personally and thus help their nation.

is to help more and more children but provide less and less financial aid to each family in the years ahead. As the families see the fruit of our labor they become believers that education and our services are actually their children's best hope for escaping poverty.

If you wish to donate to the matching grant fund – please write Teen Scholarship or Children's Center on the memo line of your check. All undesignated giving will go where our board deems the need is greatest.

