

Weaving for Justice & Sophia's Circle Annual Newsletter, 2025

Email us at weavingforjustice@gmail.com

Visit our website and on-line store at www.weaving-for-justice.org

What a tapestry we weave!

15 February 2025

Dear Friends,

When it seems that all is in destruction around us, we are turning to our brothers and sisters in the resistance movement in Chiapas to find courage to keep creating and resisting, with compassion and commitment. While our threads may be frayed, we are pulling them together, across borders, languages and cultures, to make a human tapestry of dignity that can never be destroyed. We are in solidarity with Maya students and weaving collectives because we believe this fervently.

Our organization's goals are twofold: to sell textiles for Maya collectives in Chiapas in order to help women and their families remain on their ancestral lands doing dignified work; and to raise funds for scholarships for Maya youth to prepare for careers that will enable them to stay in their home communities and countries and give back to their people.

Over the past year, we have often wished we could do more to respond to the escalating violence in Chiapas. Many communities find themselves caught between criminal organizations warring for control over municipalities. In an article by the journalist Luis Hernández Navarro, originally published in *La Jornada* on November 5th, 2024, Hernández Navarro describes the current situation in Chiapas as a state of "narco-colonization."

The effects of this narco-colonization include displacements of large numbers of people from their ancestral lands; assassinations and disappearances of community leaders; the forced recruitment of young people into criminal gangs; and a tenor of terror which tears at the social, economic, and cultural fabric of communities. In this context individual human lives have little value. Under these conditions, more and more people have no choice but to leave their communities and migrate to the U.S. or other parts of Mexico.

A tragic consequence of this violence was the assassination on October 20, 2024 of Padre Marcelo Pérez, a beloved priest in Chiapas. Padre Marcelo had just given mass in a barrio of San Cristóbal de Las Casas when some men on motorcycles shot him in his truck as he was leaving. Padre Marcelo was the first indigenous priest in Chiapas and dedicated his life to the defense of the original peoples of his state and to all people seeking peace with justice. He stood up against the drug cartels and spoke out alongside his brothers and sisters against the ill-fated rural cities project of the Jaime Sabines government.

When Padre Marcelo was priest in Chenalhó he became like a brother to the women and their families in three weaving collectives with which Weaving for Justice works – **Tsobol Antsetik** (Women United), **Luchom Jolom Antsetik** (Women Embroiderers and Weavers), and **Jolom Luch Maya** (Maya Weavers and Embroiderers), a group of women from the Catholic organization Las Abejas (The Bees). After the massacre of 45 members of Las Abejas on December 22, 1997 in Acteal, Chenalhó, Padre Marcelo worked tirelessly to bring justice to the fallen brethren and their families.



¡Presente!

Padre Marcelo Pérez Pérez, 1974-2024

For information about organizations defending human rights in Chiapas, please go to the web pages of **Las Abejas** (www.acteal.org); the **EZLN** (www.ezln.org.mx; www.enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx); the **Center for Human Rights Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas** (<https://frayba.org.mx>) and **Schools for Chiapas** (<https://schoolsforchiapas.org/>)

Our partners in Chiapas, the weaving groups



L to R: María del Carmen Ruíz Pérez, Verónica Arias Pérez, Floriberta Arias Pérez, Herlinda Pérez Arias, and Pancha Pérez Pérez

The weavers in the photo above are the representatives of **Tsobol Antsetik (Women United)**, a **collective in Chixiltón, Chenalho'** that formed in the late 1980s. Weaving for Justice has its roots in work that began at this time when the women were organizing weavers in their communities and asked Christine Eber's help to sell their weavings in the U.S. Christine had been conducting research in their communities at the time and was honored to be able to keep working with the women from her home in the U.S. Over the years, students who Christine met in her teaching as well as members

of the communities where she lived joined her in helping the weavers sell their work. Weaving for Justice was the result of these efforts which continue with the weavers of Tsobol Antsetik, as well as with eleven other collectives in the following municipalities: **Aguacatenango; San Juan Chamula; San Pedro Chenalho'; Oxchuc; Santa Catarina Pantelhó; San Andrés Sakamch'en de los Pobres, San Cristóbal de Las Casas and San Bartolomé de Los Llanos Venustiano Carranza.**

The members of the weaving groups we assist are in the resistance, that is they do not participate in state and federal economic development projects that fail to take their needs into account. Instead, they focus on developing local economies of solidarity in collaboration with civil society organizations in Mexico and nations, and in the U.S organizations such as Weaving for Justice.

OUR EXPANDED ON-LINE STORE WHERE YOU CAN PURCHASE TEXTILES FROM CHIAPAS COLLECTIVES

Our on-line store has many new items! The most recent are ten brocaded and embroidered woven squares to string into **Prayer Flags**. A little background is in order about these flags:

In 2016, Weaving for Justice gave **Tsobol Antsetik** (Women United) a gift for their new meeting house in Chixiltón, Chenalho', Chiapas of several strings of prayer flags made by **Guerilla Prayer Flags** in Anapra, Juárez. The women in the Juárez collective tie-dyed cloth to make wonderful flags featuring spiritual and cultural themes. For a few years Weaving for Justice helped the collective sell their prayer flags at La Frontera, a community-based fair trade store in Las Cruces. Guerilla Prayer Flags disbanded a few years ago as the women found other employment to support their families. We're delighted that the weavers of Tsobol Antsetik are carrying on the legacy of their Mexican sisters in Juárez.



Above is a prayer flag with the seven of ten designs from which you can choose to make prayer flags. Designs depict (left to right): corn, bee, universe, sun, holy toad, Kulkukan, and a woman. For ordering information visit our on-line store: <https://weaving-for-justice.org/household-linens/>

Wherever you hang these prayer flags, we hope they will remind you of the millions of people in our nation, Mexico, and the world who are working for peace and justice.

FROM CHENALHO', CHIAPAS TO LONDON, ENGLAND

Textiles we receive from Maya weaving collectives in Chiapas, Mexico find their way around the world into the diverse hands and hearts of children and adults who appreciate and want to learn about Maya weaving and the history and struggles of Maya people. Below is a photo of children from the Edmund Waller Primary School in London. The two children in the center of the photo are holding up a napkin brocaded with a design depicting Kulkukan, the plumed serpent. Their class had just been presented with the napkin after learning about the ancient Maya from members of **Mexicolore**, now believed to be the longest-running peripatetic teaching team in the UK.



We asked Ian Mursell, co-founder of Mexicolore, to write about their workshops for this newsletter:

"Mexicolore has worked with around 250,000 children since being established in 1980 by Mexican Graciela Sánchez and her British partner Ian Mursell. Their interactive workshops are heavily artefact-based, with youngsters learning through drama and role-play, music/dance/chant, costume and object-handling, backed up with audio-visual material. In the session, the team dress a group of girls in traditional huipiles, and explain the history and meaning of their woven designs. In a new initiative the team have begun partnering with Weaving For Justice, gifting to each school a small, hand-woven textile embroidered with a sacred symbol, with the aim of drawing the school's attention to the modern plight of traditional weaving groups in Mexico and Central America, with their deep roots in ancient Maya culture." <https://www.mexicolore.co.uk/>

BORDER IMMERSION GROUP VISITS WITH WEAIVING FOR JUSTICE

For the past few years Weaving for Justice has been presenting to groups of students from around the country who visit our border region to learn about immigration and the border. Our presentations are part of a Border Immersion Program sponsored by the Border Servant Corps in Las Cruces – <https://www.borderservantcorps.org/border-education>

The photo below was taken when students from Gettysburg College in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania came to visit us in January 2025. After our presentation, the students had a chance to shop. Wilder (on the right) was very happy with his purchase, a donation for scholarships from Carlota Duarte!



ANNUAL DONATED TEXTILE SALE TO FUND SCHOLARSHIPS FOR MAYA YOUTH



Emma Álvarez de la Rosa (L) is wearing a huipil from Xela, Quetzaltenango, Guatemala donated by Carol Hendrickson; Karla Robles Guzmán (R) is wearing a huipil donated by Armando Alfonzo Utrilla. Photo by Bryan Robles.

For over twelve years, Weaving for Justice has been partnering with the Maya Educational Foundation (www.mayaedufound.org) to turn donated textiles into scholarships for Maya youth in Belize, Chiapas and Guatemala by selling textiles and other items from Latin America that have been donated to us. Through the generosity of our textile donors, each year more and more children and youth in Belize, Chiapas, and Guatemala, are pursuing their dreams of an education.

We held our annual scholarship fundraiser in 2024 on November 1st and 2nd at First Christian Church in Las Cruces. We owe a big debt of gratitude to the many kind people, here in our community and around the country, for coming together to make the fundraiser a success. As part of our two-day event, we held a fashion show with models from the Las Cruces and New Mexico State University

communities. Some of the clothes they modeled were woven and embroidered in the mid 1900s. It was moving to remember that most of the women who made the clothing at that time had no formal schooling. Unbeknownst to them, through the generosity of our many textile donors, they have given to the future generations in their communities the opportunity to pursue an education.

It was difficult to choose among the many beautiful photos taken at the fashion show. Below are a few for your enjoyment, the first three taken by Bryan Robles Guzmán and the last by Gail Forrest.



Autum McAllister modeling a huipil from Chajul, Guatemala donated by Pat Young & a skirt from Zunil, Guatemala donated by Laura Martin.



Karyme Arteaga modeling a huipil from San Andrés Itzapa, Chimaltenango, Guatemala, donated by Brenda Rosenbaum.



Maya Sol Frank & Charlotte Rose Rizzuti-Moore holding dolls donated by Pamela Brown & Miriam Laughlin.



Left to right: Maya & Emma Álvarez de La Rosa in front; Norma Chairez-Hartell, Bryan Robles Guzmán, & Patricia Gonzales in back.

As we prepared for our fundraiser, the many Maya students who benefit from our efforts were often in our thoughts. We know that they face many obstacles to obtain an education in their home countries of Belize, Chiapas, Mexico, and Guatemala. The words of Sergio, one of the students in the Chenalho' program who is studying nursing and public health, reflect the gratitude expressed by hundreds of students supported by MEF's programs.

"Besides contributing to my academic achievements, this scholarship has inspired me to work even harder and value the importance of education and community support. I hope one day that I'll be able to repay this generosity helping other students achieve their goals, as you have done for me."



Photo by Christine Eber, February 2024

We welcome donations of textiles and other items from Latin America, including books, jewelry, and tourist items. Please email us at weavingforjustice@gmail.com for guidance on donating. Thanks to our donors, over the past ten years we have been able to pass on to MEF almost \$60,000 for scholarships.

WAYS YOU CAN HELP

*** BECOME A MEMBER** - All proceeds from weaving sales go back to the weavers. As an all-volunteer organization, we depend upon memberships and donations to cover the costs of holding sales and events. Memberships in Weaving for Justice come with our gift of a woven bookmark and a 10% discount on purchases at our face-to-face and on-line sales.

Donating on our webpage automatically enrolls you as a member. To donate please go to the **DONATE** page on our website homepage. There you will have the option to make your donation **recurring**. If you'd prefer to become a member by check, please fill out the form at the end of this newsletter or on the membership page of our website - www.weaving-for-justice.org

*** VOLUNTEER WITH US** – We're happy to explore with you how you might become involved in our work. We need help in many ways! Please contact us at weavingforjustice@gmail.com.

* **VISIT THE WEAVERS IN CHENALHO', CHIAPAS** - The weavers of Tsobol Antsetik welcome you to visit their meeting house in Chixiltón, Chenalhó, Chiapas. Directions to the house are on our webpage – <http://weaving-for-justice.org/weaving-cooperatives/>

***PATRONIZE THE FOLLOWING STORES & VENUES:**

- * **Las Cruces, New Mexico - 3RD Saturday of the month sale** – Our monthly sales are on the 3rd Saturday of each month, 10 am – 3 pm in the Atrium of First Christian Church, 1809 El Paseo Road in Las Cruces. For appointments at other times, email us at weavingforjustice@gmail.com
- * **Las Cruces - Toucan Market**, 1701 #1 E. University Ave. Pan Am Plaza (tote bags with corn design)
- * **Mesilla, New Mexico - Bowlin's Mesilla Book Center**, 2360 Calle Principal, Mesilla, NM (scarves, cloth books)
- * **Friends of the Taylor-Mesilla Gift Shop** 2350 Calle Principal, Mesilla (little felted turtles)
- * **Denver, Colorado - Hijos del Sol**, 2715 W. 8th Avenue, Denver. The Latino Cultural Arts Center's retail store, Hijos del Sol, is open Monday-Sunday, 11-4 pm or by appointment. 720-353-2233 www.lcac-denver.org
- * **Phoenix, Arizona - Palabras Bilingual Bookstore**, 906 W. Roosevelt St. Unit 2. (bookmarks, felted animals)

HELP US STAY IN TOUCH WITH YOU

Once a month we send an email newsletter to our supporters and anyone interested in learning about our work. If you haven't been receiving our newsletters, please email us at weavingforjustice@gmail.com so we can add you to the email list.

THANK YOU TO OUR MANY MEMBERS, DONORS, & VOLUNTEERS!

We can't thank you enough for supporting us in our work. As an all-volunteer organization, at times we feel stretched, but then someone offers to help, or a donation arrives in the mail, and we feel renewed and strengthened. We are also forever grateful to our 228 members/donors and to the weavers in cooperatives in Chiapas who have been teaching us about the meaning of solidarity through drawing us into their struggles to create alternative economies that uplift everyone.

In solidarity,
The Weaving for Justice Steering Committee

MEMBERSHIP FORM

YES! I want to support Weaving for Justice. Enclosed is my check payable to Weaving for Justice or Sophia's Circle in the amount of US \$_____. Sophia's Circle is a 501c3 organization so your membership/donation may have tax benefits. Please mail your form to: Weaving for Justice, 1825 Myrtle Ave., Las Cruces, NM 88001.

Note: You may also pay with a credit card or through paypal on the membership page on our website – <http://weaving-for-justice.org/become-a-member/> **Please consider a recurring membership!**

Membership: Budget _____ (**\$15**); Basic _____ (**\$35**); Gold _____ (**\$50**); additional donation _____. (Please indicate if you'd like this donation to go to the following: _____ projects for which the weaving collectives request our assistance; _____ health emergencies of members of the collectives; _____ the Weaving for Justice general fund to cover our operating expenses.)

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

email: _____

Please tell us anything you'd like us to know: