Speaker Biographies

**Merri Ansara** traveled with other North Americans to Cuba in 1969 to cut sugar cane as part of the historic first Venceremos Brigade. She is currently director of Common Ground Education and Travel, an agency that arranges educational trips to Cuba.

**Ellen Bernstein** is Associate Director of Pastors for Peace, the organization, led by Rev. Lucius Walker, which coordinates annual Friendshipships of material aid to Cuba in defiance of the U.S. travel ban and embargo.

**Leslie Desmangles** is the Charles A. Dana Professor of Religion and International Studies at Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut. He is author of numerous articles and books on the religion and culture of his native Haiti.

**Lillian Holloway**, MD, practices medicine in Philadelphia. She was one of the first citizens of the United States to graduate from the Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM) in Cuba. ELAM has trained thousands of doctors from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, who return to their countries to provide much needed medical care. Students from the U.S. who attended ELAM pledged to dedicate their lives to working in underserved communities. Last month several North American graduates of ELAM joined the Cuban medical mission to Haiti to provide services to survivors of the earthquake.

**Nancy Kohn** represents the International Committee to Free the Cuban Five. In 1998 five Cubans living in the United States were arrested by the FBI, then charged and convicted of charges ranging from conspiracy to commit espionage to conspiracy to commit murder. Their “crime” was that they had gathered information on the activities of right-wing terrorist organizations that have perpetrated acts of violence against Cuba. Unjustly incarcerated for over eleven years, the Five have received support throughout the world demanding their freedom.

**James W. Russell** is CSU professor of sociology and coordinator of Latin American Studies at Eastern Connecticut State University. He led several student study groups to Cuba prior to the tightening of restrictions on academic exchanges instituted by the Bush administration in 2004 and has since led trips to Venezuela. He is the author of six books and has contributed to publications such as *Monthly Review, The Nation*, and *The Progressive*.

**Nalda Vigezzi** is co-chair of the National Network on Cuba. The Network coordinates the efforts of its constituent organization to express solidarity with the people of Cuba and work to end the travel ban and embargo.

**Travis Wheeler** is Cuba Policy Congressional Liaison for the Latin America Working Group (LAWG) based in Washington, D.C. He is currently working with members of Congress to promote HR 4645, a bill that would facilitate the sale of U.S. agricultural products to Cuba and lift restrictions on U.S. residents traveling there. His previously worked on an LAWG campaign to end human rights abuses in Colombia.