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Public Employee Press

Union protests murder of Ecuadorean immigrant

While most New Yorkers were busy buying Christmas gifts and planning for family celebrations, Diego Sucuzhanay was preparing to ship the body of his brother José back to his native Ecuador to be buried.

A gang of thugs yelling anti-gay and anti-Latino epithets used baseball bats and a beer bottle to brutally attack Diego's brothers José and Romel Dec. 7 as they walked down the street arm-in-arm near their Bushwick home. Romel survived but José, 31, the father of two small children and owner of a real estate office, died Dec. 12 at Elmhurst Hospital.

DC 37's Lesbian and Gay Issues Committee and the Latino Heritage Committee joined more than 500 friends, family and community activists to protest José's death and demand justice in a solidarity march through the neighborhood Dec. 14.

The demonstrators — who included DC 37 Latino Heritage Committee Chair and Local 372 Vice President Santos Crespo, LAGIC Chair and Local 436 President Judith Arroyo, Local 154 President Juan Fernandez and numerous DC 37 members — marched along Myrtle Avenue and stopped at the corner of Bushwick Avenue and Kossuth Place, where the assault took place. U.S. Rep. Nydia Velázquez, who chairs the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, City Council member Diana Reyna and City Comptroller Bill Thompson also participated in the protest.

"This young man was an asset to his community," said Crespo. "We need to keep this issue in the forefront."

Sucuzhanay's violent death was the second hate crime murder of a Latino immigrant in a month. On Nov. 8, Marcelo Lucero, another Ecuadorean, was stabbed to death by a group of teenagers on Main Street in Patchogue, N.Y.

The apparent alarming increase in attacks against Latin American immigrants, particularly on Long Island, brought earlier crimes to mind. In July 2003, a group of teenagers set fire to the house of a Mexican family in Farmingville. And in 2000, two men posed as contractors, abducted two Farmingville day laborers and beat them with a crowbar.

"The people who attacked these men were out for a night of gay-bashing," said Arroyo of the Brooklyn attack. "This shows that you don't have to be gay to be attacked; you just have to be perceived as gay. We have to fight against the atmosphere that produces this kind of hate."



Local 436 President Judith Arroyo (l. with hat) and Local 154 President Juan Fernandez (second from right) represented DC 37 at march in Brooklyn.