



# Anti-Mining Activists Threatened, Kidnapped and Murdered in El Salvador



Photo: Martin Mowforth

Since 2009, Salvadoran anti-mining activists have been threatened, robbed, kidnapped and murdered while attempting to halt Pacific Rim, a Canadian mining company, from excavating gold in the northern department of Cabañas.

This week, US-El Salvador Sister Cities, an international solidarity organisation, reported that a disturbing wave of new death threats has hit activists opposed to Pacific Rim's gold mine. The organisation is calling on the Salvadoran government to investigate the threats and the various violent crimes that have

been perpetrated against the movement opposed to Pacific Rim's proposed mine.

The struggle began in 2004, when Pacific Rim conducted its first gold explorations in Cabañas. Residents who had previously noticed the effects of other mines - dry wells, skin irritations and dead animals - were skeptical of a new, massive gold project. Local Salvadoran organisations responded by researching the environmental, social and economic impacts of mining.

*Continued inside...*

What they found was shocking: Pacific Rim's proposed mine would use almost 900 million litres of water a day (more than a Salvadoran family uses in 20 years). The mine would also require around 2 tons of cyanide each day, yet even brief exposure to cyanide can cause serious brain damage or death. Other heavy metals released during mining could easily poison the water supply, a critical resource for families in the region.

Local residents began to organise against the project, successfully convincing residents of Cabañas and other municipalities and eventually bringing national attention to the mining industry. By the 2009 presidential elections, both candidates took public stances against mining. And when historic left-wing candidate Mauricio Funes was elected president, he promised to prevent mining operations in the country.

Pacific Rim was not pleased. The company filed a \$100 million lawsuit against the Salvadoran government under the Central American Free Trade Agreement (DR-CAFTA) for lost investments and potential profits.

Outside the courtroom, however, the heat was turned up on the highly organised anti-mining movement. In June 2009, anti-mining activist Marcelo Rivera disappeared. His body was found in a well days later with clear signs of brutal torture.

Later that month, journalists at Radio Victoria who reported on the murder began receiving death threats, along with other prominent anti-mining activists. Soon after, a local priest who had publicly denounced the murder narrowly escaped kidnapping by four masked men after he leapt from his car into a nearby ravine.

In August, anti-mining activist Ramiro Rivera was shot eight times in the back and miraculously survived, only to be murdered four months later in Cabañas.

Less than a week afterwards, Dora Santos Sorto, the wife of another Cabañas anti-mining leader, was gunned down as she walked with her two year-old son.

by Antonio Ramirez · February 07, 2011  
(Antonio Ramirez directs outreach and leadership development at a transnational workers' rights law center in Mexico.)



Photo: Upside Down World

This month, US-EI Salvador Sister Cities reported on the following recent death threats against the Cabañas anti-mining movement, a scary omen of renewed violence against activists:

- **On January 11, the community radio station Radio Victoria received a written death threat.** The authors claim to be an "extermination group" and offer large sums of money to the radio if they "stop making trouble," including to stop reporting on mining. If they don't, the group says they will murder the radio's three "loudest mouths," Elvis Zavala, Pablo Ayala, and Manuel Navarrete.
- **On January 23, Roundtable Against Metal Mining member, Hector Berríos received threatening phone calls from an unidentified person** who claimed to have been hired to kill Hector or a member of his family. (See the following article 'The reality of a death threat'.)
- **This month, employees of CEICOM, a part of the anti-mining movement, have been victims of two robberies** in which a vehicle and important organisational documents were stolen. In 2010, while traveling to regional anti-mining conferences, CEICOM employees were kidnapped, robbed and left tied up in Guatemala.
- **Two young people in Cabañas who were connected to the June 2009 Marcelo Rivera murder trial were killed.** Darwin Serrano, who participated in the murder but was released from prison because he was a minor, was attacked and killed on December 20. Gerardo Abrego León, who testified in the trial that convicted and sentenced to prison the material authors of Marcelo Rivera's murder, was killed on January 2.

Donate now  
with  
**PayPal**

We have teamed up with PayPal™ making subscribing and donating to ENCA even easier.

Log on to **www.enca.org.uk** & click donate

\* Make a one off donation

\* Set up a direct debit for regular donations

\* Set up a direct debit to pay for your annual subscription



*One of the death threat phone calls received by Hector Berríos (as mentioned above) is given below in order to give readers an idea of the chilling nature of such threats for the victims concerned.*

## The reality of a death threat.

From Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2011 we began to receive telephone calls at the house from 10 pm, calls made to both the fixed line at the house and to my cell phone. As soon as I answered, they hung up. And that was the same on Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> January until 20 minutes past noon, when the number of the house fixed line rang again. On answering, the caller asked for Hector, and when I replied by asking who was calling him, he replied "Ricardo, a friend of his." On asking where he was calling from, he said Mejicanos [a large suburb of San Salvador]. On asking what he wanted to talk about, he said to me, "You are Hector." I told him no, and he asked where Hector is. I told him that he wasn't living here any longer, but if he wanted he could leave a message which I could give to him. Then he told me to give him his cell phone number, but I replied that he had said he was a friend of Hector's and so he must have his cell phone number and can call him. Less than a minute had passed before my cell phone rang. When I replied, this was the conversation:

**Hector Berríos:** Hello.

**Caller:** Hello Hector, Ricardo here.

**HB:** How can I help you?

**Caller:** I'm talking about something that is happening.

**HB:** OK, I'm listening.

**Caller:** I've been paid a lot of money to kill you.

**HB:** Tell me who has paid you to assassinate me.

**Caller:** It's a man and a woman who asked us to assassinate you – that's you or one of your family – and we've been observing you in San Isidro and Mejicanos. We're close to you. Look, we know you work for the people and we get bad vibes about killing you, so I want to talk with you so that we can reach some agreement.

**HB:** OK, we can talk. Just give me a name and we'll carry on talking.

**Caller:** We need to get some arrangement; we'll give you the name and you look out for your family, and withdraw [from your activities].

**HB:** Tell me a name or we stop talking this shit.

**Caller:** They've already paid us for you. We don't give a shit.

**HB:** Because you're not telling me, I'm not going to make an arrangement with people I don't know.

Then the telephone line went dead.

*Hector Berríos*



## Help stop this violence now

**Such continued violence against communities that are simply fighting for continued access to clean water is appalling.**

**PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY** in Spanish or your own language:

- Urging that the authorities take immediate steps to fully comply with the IACHR order of 7 October 2009. The form of protection provided to Hector Berríos must be agreed with him and reflect his own wishes
- Calling for an independent, thorough and impartial investigation into the threats against Hector Berríos, with the results made public and those responsible brought to justice
- Calling for a full investigation of all these threats and human rights abuses.

To:

Human Rights Director, Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
David Morales  
Director General de Derechos Humanos  
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de El Salvador  
Calle El Pedregal,  
Bld. Cancillería.  
Ciudad Merliot,  
Antiguo Cuscatlán  
Fax: +503 2231 1152

Salutation: Estimado Director/ Dear Director

Attorney General  
Romeo Benjamín Barahona Meléndez  
Fiscal General de la República  
Fiscalía General de la República  
Final 4<sup>a</sup> Calle Oriente y 19<sup>a</sup> Avenida Sur, Residencial Primavera,  
Santa Tecla,  
La Libertad,  
San Salvador,  
El Salvador  
Fax: +503 2523 7409

Salutation: Estimado Sr. Fiscal/Dear Attorney General

ENCA is trying to keep a count of how many letters of support are sent to the Salvadoran authorities, so it would be helpful if anybody who sends a letter could just send a one-liner email to [mmowforth@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:mmowforth@plymouth.ac.uk) to let us know.

**Thank you**

## Assassinations

Through Dr Juan Almeyda, Padre Fausto Milla reports that on February 9<sup>th</sup> Francis Soriano Mejia was murdered and Mauro Días was injured in the Municipality of Dulce Nombre de Copán. In the same region on 20<sup>th</sup> November last year, Modesto Melgar, a religious man and member of the National People's Resistance Front – more commonly simply called the Resistance – was also assassinated.

Padre Milla and his team carry out valuable work in improving conditions in the communities and in the defence of human rights in the department of Copán where there is a climate of persecution and crime. The violence is committed in order to weaken the ability and resolve of members of the Resistance to continue their fight for social justice and their work in support of the material and spiritual needs of the communities.

## Obituary

### Carlos Arguedas Mora

Carlos Arguedas Mora died on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2010.



Carlos had been a great union leader on the Costa Rican banana plantations for more than 30 years. He was a particularly strong defender of health and environmental rights of workers. He was a member of the Executive Committee of SITRAP (Union of Agricultural Plantation Workers), on which he held the post of Secretary of Occupational

Health and the Environment, also a founder member of the Environmentalist Association of Siquirres, he represented civil society on the Caribbean Regional Environmental Council of the La Amistad Conservation Area, a Vice-President of FECON (the Costa Rican Federation for the Conservation of the Environment), a member of the Costa Rican Consultative Commission of FANCA (the Central American Network for Action on Water) and a representative of the 'Juanito Mora Porras' Social Centre.

He had been detained by the police on 22 occasions but without any crime ever having been proven – as he said “the only motive [for the detentions] had been my union activity, my work for justice ...” He married together his religious convictions with his political militancy, having been a leader of the Costa Rican Communist Party and more recently of the Broad Front Party.

His obituary in *The Guardian* quoted his response to the question about the benefits brought to Costa Rica by the

multinational fruit trade: “All the pineapple production has done is generate money for the multinational companies' foreign bank accounts. It pays wages too low for people to live on and destroys our environment. This is not development. If anything, it is going backwards.”

Carlos was one of the workers affected by the criminal Nemagon chemical which was sprayed on the Central American banana plantations after it had been banned in the United States and other countries. Below we reproduce his story of the tragedy of Nemagon in Costa Rica.

## The Great Tragedy of Nemagon in Costa Rica

By Carlos Arguedas Mora\*

Being a young person of 21, back in the sixties I moved from the Central Plateau to the Banana plantation regions of the Atlantic. Many young people were filled with the illusion of seeing others that were coming back from the region with good clothes and we wanted to do the same. That's how I joined, and together with my older brother, we went in search of new horizons.

I began to work towards the end of 1969. After a few months, one day the foreman told us and all the workers that a new agricultural chemical had arrived that we should use in the plantation. They also told us that we would gain greatly from this job and to at once prepare to unpack the tools that had arrived. The tools consisted of pump sprayers and the agricultural chemical; none of us were supplied with any material for protection. First we applied it with spray or with pipes. The workers had to walk through the applied area, changing and cleaning the nozzles. Others had to go back through the area where everything was impregnated with the chemical; which had an unbearable smell.

That was how the tragedy began that today affects some 25,000 workers in several Central American countries and many more indirectly with its effects, but they are not listed in the lawsuits presented in the courts of the USA because they were not the applicators of the poison; despite having been affected by it.

In this period there were many poisonings, however we couldn't confirm that the deaths occurring were a direct result of contact with the chemical, but many more workers began to feel effects that weren't common. The workers and the neighbours informed us of the massive deaths of fish in the streams where the chemical drained.

From this we suspect that the substance is very bad. An environmental group carried out an action in The Hague, Netherlands, and achieved a court order against the

*ENCA Newsletter 52, March 2011, p.4*

Standard Fruit Company (Dole) for the pollution and death of fish in the River Estrella.

At the time, a publication was produced in the media about a lawsuit which workers in the US had taken out against a company which made the agrochemical called Dibromo chloropropane (DBCP), known in our country as Nemagon. It was then that we began to suspect that some damage could have been done to those that had contact with the chemical and that some damage had been caused to those industrial workers in Dallas, Texas.

We began investigations and found that the chemical is carcinogenic; causing sterility and that smell or contact with the skin is sufficient to contaminate. Furthermore, it had been banned in the USA for several years and despite this they were sending it to us in Costa Rica. From there we initiated actions both legal and political and managed to ban the application of the substance in the Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica. However, against our laws, they continued to apply it for two more years. For another two years the use was suspended but the surplus stock was transported to other Central American countries like Nicaragua, Honduras and others.

Great unknowns. The questions that they have never answered are: Why did the health authorities permit the import of the chemical? Is it because companies brought it in a secretive manner? Why did the authorities maintain a great secrecy around the subject? Why did the press refuse to publish any information about it? How did they transport the surplus chemical to other Central American countries, making a mockery of our controls?

All of these questions are unanswered. The argument used many times by those in government is that, if we follow these complaints, the companies could withdraw from the country. Thousands of us workers are hoping that we can receive compensation based on a policy from the Institute of Securities; however, none have been compensated after a fight of 17 years.

The conditions that affect us cover a wide scale: from headaches, rhinitis, loss of vision, upset stomachs, muscle pains, and of course, sterility and impotence besides numerous cases of children born with congenital problems... And there are many that don't suffer the pain because they have died waiting for justice in each case.

I personally sent a letter to the President of the Republic and I have not received any response.

The threat continues. Currently DBCP isn't applied, it was used to eliminate nematodes in the roots of banana plants, but now they apply 'Counter', that has the same effects and because of its application it produces many toxins and slaughters large amounts of fish in rivers and canals in the banana plantation zones. And again the courts, the health authorities and the Environmental Minister don't react, despite the multiple reports that

have been carried out by trade unions and environmental agencies. Recently a report was published on the slaughter of fish in the River Tortuguero, but that is where it ended, because it has not resulted in anything from the courts, despite severe damage to the water, wildlife and environment in general.

I want to express that the only positive in all of this is the level of consciousness that has been obtained in the fight for the defence of our natural resources, to that I dedicate a great part of my time, because I am convinced that if the people do not fight to conserve our natural resources, our government will not.

Despite this we continue in pressuring our government so that they are consistent with the discourse that they put forward to the world. We believe that we cannot continue proclaiming the protection of natural resources whilst internally we are destroying them.

\*A victim of 'Nemagón'  
Secretary of Occupational Health and Environment for the  
syndicate SITRAP

Source: 'Diario Extra', Suplemento Página Abierta

## Join the network

If you would like to ensure you always receive a copy of the ENCA newsletter containing news about environmental issues in Central America and opportunities for action then please return this form:

Affiliations: Individual £8, Unwaged £4, Local groups £10, National Organisations £30

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

Tel \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

I enclose £\_\_\_\_\_ affiliation fee  
I would like a complimentary copy of a recent ENCA newsletter.

I enclose a donation of £\_\_\_\_\_ for the work of ENCA.

**Return to: ENCA, c/o NSC, Durham Road Centre,  
86 Durham Road, London N7 7DT**

As well as the sad news about Carlos, Didier Leitón Valverde also sent us the following news in January.

## Banana companies in Costa Rica continue the wave of lay-offs of workers who affiliate to the union

At the behest of a group of 10 workers of the 'Bananera Venecia S.A', on Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> January, 2011, Mireya Rodríguez, Gilbert Bermúdez and Juan Hernández, all members of the Board of the Union of Agricultural Plantation Workers (SITRAP) went to a meeting in Venecia with a group of workers from Finca Venecia at approximately 6pm. Eight of them joined the union in the meeting with the aim of improving their social and working conditions.

On 13<sup>th</sup> January, 2011, Juan Hernández, Secretary of SITRAP, appeared before the Minister of Work and Social Security in Limón and delivered photocopies of documents, the communication of the 8 workers who decided to make use of their right to organise themselves in the union SITRAP and a copy of the agenda dated 13<sup>th</sup> January, 2011 directed to the company. He requested a meeting with the Minister to discuss the issues that affect the workers.

The same day, 13<sup>th</sup> January, 2011 at 2pm, Juan Hernández Fonseca, SITRAP secretary, appeared at the security gate of the finca to apply for an entry permit to the office to deliver the original documents of the copies that had been delivered to the Minister of Work and Social Security (the union membership and agenda) and also to request the respective permit to meet with the members of SITRAP since they had completed their workday. The security official who protect the gate refused to acknowledge his identity, communicated by radio to the office, then said to Juan that he could enter but he had to go to the other security gate which is approximately a kilometre from the first gate and also that the office had told him that they couldn't receive the documents. The security official at the other gate, who still wanted Juan to identify himself, indicated to him that he had instructions from the administration not to let him in nor receive documentation from the union. So Juan could not deliver the documents.

While Juan Hernández Fonseca was prevented from entering, the 8 members of the union were gathered in the offices of the company where they were handed a letter of dismissal with employer's liability. Curiously all this happened only within two hours of Juan Hernández delivering the copies of the afore-mentioned documents to the Minister of Work and Social Security.

Affected Workers:

EDDY SAMUEL RODRIGUEZ LUNA  
PEDRO PABLO EUGARRIO CASTILLO  
JOSE ABRAHAN CALERO CORTEZ  
DANIS MARTIN LOPEZ RAMOS  
LEONARDO EUGARDO EUGARDO  
ANACLETO COREA RIVERA  
DONALD ACEVEDO MORALES  
DENIS EDUERDO VILLARREINA HERNANDEZ

The Bananera Venecia Corporation is provider to CHIQUITA and is located in the district of Carrandi Caserío Venecia, Cantón de Matina, Limón, 1 Kilometre to the north

Reported by  
**Didier Alexander Leitón Valverde**  
Sub General Secretary  
**Juan Hernández Fonseca**  
Secretary of the Organisation



## Mail bag

Following the last edition of our newsletter which focussed especially on the issue of fair trade produce from Costa Rica, one of our readers, Francis Oeser, wrote to us the following short observation:

A great newsletter, if devastating.  
I thought I should tell you I sent part of it about Fair Trade to Abel & Cole, from whom I get weekly fruit and veg and who are committed to Fair Trade and should think your piece through.

Best Wishes,  
Francis Oeser

If you have something to say, then send us an email to

[enca2011@gmail.com](mailto:enca2011@gmail.com)

Log on our website:

[www.enca.org.uk](http://www.enca.org.uk)

Or join us on

**facebook**

Search for  
Environmental Network for Central America

We also came across another example of unfair fair trade, this one in Belize and relating to cacao producers. We reproduce it here.

## Unfair Trade in Belize - How Kraft Shaft's Cocoa Farmers

By Clay Gordon

(All emphases are the author's.)

**Do Fair Trade certified cacao farmers reliably earn more money than cacao farmers who are not Fair Trade Certified and reliably benefit from increased world market prices?**

**Answer:** *Probably not.*

What? How can this be? A hint at the true nature of how 'fair' Fair Trade is can be found in the [FAQ](#) on the TransFair USA web site. Many people believe that Fair Trade benefits farmers directly. However, you have to go to the Advanced FAQs page to learn that **individual farmers don't benefit directly, though this is not how Fair Trade is understood by the general public**. Fair Trade premiums are paid to farmer co-ops who deduct a variety of operating expenses (including certification costs - which are not directly mentioned and are bundled into 'administrative costs') from the premium paid. Thus it is quite likely - almost certain - that the *average individual cocoa farmer receives little to no actual direct benefit from Fair Trade certification*.

Let's do some math. Say that the Toledo Cacao Growers Association (TCGA) sold 40 tonnes of cocoa to Green and Black's (previously bought by Cadbury which was just purchased by Kraft) in 2009. Now Green and Black's tries to do the right thing and pays the entire Fair Trade premium (\$150/tonne) irrespective of world market price, even though they are allowed to *reduce the premium they pay* as the world market price goes up.

This means that the maximum Fair Trade premium on 40 tonnes in 2009 would have been US\$6000 (or Bz\$12,000). From this amount it's prudent to account for and deduct all of the costs associated with attaining and maintaining Fair Trade certification. I was unable to discover what those are at the TCGA, but for argument's sake let's say they run to 8% to make the math easy, or just under Bz\$1000 (they are likely far higher).

At the moment, there are nearly 900 active farmers in the TCGA. If the remaining premium (Bz\$11,000) got distributed evenly it would mean that each farmer would receive about Bz\$12 (or US\$6) extra *annually* for their work. *Fifty cents a month*. More likely, the premium distribution is pro-rated according to how much cocoa gets contributed so some farmers will get more - while most get less - and the actual percentage of the premium available to be paid out is lower because overhead costs are much higher than 8%.



Cacao

And this US\$6 average per farmer figure is only because Green and Black's pays the maximum Fair Trade premium irrespective of market price.

### **How is this Fair?**

One of the underlying fallacies of the whole Fair Trade pricing and premium structure is the assumption that, as the world price for an agricultural commodity (e.g., cocoa) increases, farmers automatically get paid more. In fact, this is not often the case because farmers are insulated from market prices through a variety of layers and mechanisms. In Belize, the price paid to the TCGA (and therefore the price the TCGA pays to its farmer members) is based on a 5-year rolling average of the world market price. This rolling average protects Green and Black's from price volatility - at the expense of the farmer.

To be fair, Green and Black's does bring value to the TCGA and to its member farmers by providing a guaranteed market. Guaranteed markets are hard to find in the world and its presence in and around Punta Gorda has benefited farmers in the area immensely because they know they have a buyer for what they produce. However, the guaranteed market is a benefit Green and Black's offers and is not an intrinsic benefit of Fair Trade. In fact, a portion of this guaranteed market is about to go away as the new owners (Kraft) are shifting production from Italy to Canada requiring different organic certification and the TCGA will no longer be purchasing transitional cacao (cacao from farms in the process - which takes up to three years - of being certified organic).

The point to make here is not that Fair Trade is bad, but to acknowledge that while its aims are noble it is *part of a solution, and not the solution*. It is important to remember that Fair Trade is a business. And while that business

*ENCA Newsletter 52, March 2011, p.7*

demands transparency and accountability from its member organisations all the way down to the farmer co-ops it certifies, as a business *it does not demand the same accountability and transparency of itself.*

In other words, is Fair Trade as a business run well? As of the 2008-2009 Annual Report there were 746 producer organisations across all commodities in 59 countries with over 2,700 companies making over 6,000

## Mokoron Hill, Nicaragua

*Our sister organisation, the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign (NSC) is initiating an environmental campaign in the coming months which will include supporting Nicaraguan environmentalists to protect Mokoron Hill. The NSC worker in Managua, Julián Guevara, and Helen Yuill in London explain the struggle to protect Mokoron which of course ENCA is supporting.*

'The Rio San Juan belongs to Nicaraguans, Mokoron belongs to Managuans.' This is the slogan used by protestors in a march on 11 November 2010. The reference to Rio San Juan relates to the border dispute between Costa Rica and Nicaragua.

The 82 acre Mokoron Hill is the closest forested area to Managua. For decades it has been under the control of the Nicaraguan Army. During the Somoza dictatorship dozens of young combatants and civilians were killed there by Somoza's National Guard: evidence of their graves remains.

According to presidential advisor on the environment Jaime Incer Barquero, Nicaragua has lost 50% of its forest cover in the last 50 years. This has had devastating repercussions causing the drying up of rivers and flooding. In the last part of the 2010 rainy season the level of Lake Managua rose above the levels reached in Hurricane Mitch in 1998 forcing thousands of people living near the lake to flee to refuges. Remaining areas of forest such as Mokoron Hill are key to the environmental balance of the area, essential to ensuring a safe water supply to the capital as well as acting as a sponge to provide flood protection.

Managua is the only Central American capital with no forested area where people can go walking. Mokoron could also play an important role in providing such a facility within the city boundaries.

Two years ago, the Nicaraguan Community Movement (MCN) found out that the Military Pension Institute was planning to build luxury houses on Mokoron to be sold to rich people and top rank retired officers, a move that would have been a major blow to the already

licensed products worldwide. Is it cost-effective at delivering on its goals? Does the rhetoric of Fair Trade match the reality? Is Fair Trade effective? The total amount of Fair Trade cocoa produced in 2008 was 10,299 tonnes from a total harvest of over 3,000,000 - or about one-third of one percent.

### **If Fair Trade works so well, how come more cacao farmers aren't certified?**

The simple answer is - they can't afford it.



Public demonstrations in support of the defence of Mokoron Hill

deteriorated ecological balance of the area. The MCN mobilised thousands of its members to stop the venture. Media coverage and MCN actions drew the attention of the authorities at different levels and construction plans were stopped. The MCN has continued to organise different activities to keep the issue on the public agenda. In 2010 they presented a proposed bill to the National Assembly to declare the area a National Park, an historical place managed and protected by the Army, but open to the public for recreation. The municipal authorities could then build in the site trails for trekking, camping areas, reforestation projects, tree nurseries, and educational facilities.

The MCN has included the defence and protection of Mokoron in their national strategic plan. They plan to continue working to ensure the approval of the bill in the National Assembly and to expand their work to include the municipalities of El Crucero, San Marcos, Masatepe, Masaya, Ticuantepe, La Concepción, and Nindirí in recognition of its importance in ensuring water provision to Managua and preventing environmental disasters.

The MCN is the leading organisation in a Committee for the Defence of Mokoron that also includes the Centro Humboldt, the students union UNEN and primary and secondary schools in the area. On 11 November they formed a human chain of 2,000 people demanding that the National Assembly approve the bill to declare Mokoron a national park.

This is a complex struggle since the Army in Nicaragua is very well respected and powerful. However, it is a struggle that is strategic for the future of Managua.



# New Panamanian Mining Law Approved but Condemned

## Panamanian groups grow angry over mining

February 2011 was a fractious month in Panama. Protests grew throughout the course of the month over a new mining law which received approval in the National Assembly. The new law allows the expansion of the mining sector in Panama and would mean that the Ministry of Commerce and Industry will consider granting licenses to more than 180 currently pending applications which would cover more than 40 per cent of Panamanian territory. The law also allows foreign companies or persons to carry out mining operations in the country. On the positive side, it doubles the royalty that mining companies have to pay to the government to 4 cents in every dollar – which will surely help the Panamanian government to raise itself up from nothing to a state of extreme poverty. *[Thanks to Groucho Marx for that.]*

Various demonstrations have been held throughout the country in protest at the new mining law. On 7<sup>th</sup> February, members of the Ngabe-Bugle<sup>i</sup> indigenous people in Chiriqui protested against the new mining code and the proposed exploitation of the Cerro Colorado copper mine which is located in Ngabe-Bugle territory. President Ricardo Martinelli's government is looking for partners to develop the Cerro Colorado copper project which would make Panama one of the top producers of copper in the western hemisphere. Martinelli and his supporters argued that mining could be Panama's second largest source of income after fees from the Panama Canal.

About 2,500 Ngabe people blocked the Trans-Panama highway in San Felix and Viguier where they were met by police using tear gas and buckshot. 13 people were injured and taken to hospital and 19 were arrested. The detainees were released later in the day after indigenous leaders agreed to withdraw from the road. Protests grew during the week and on 8<sup>th</sup> February at least eight people were injured when riot police clashed with students who also opposed the new law. After the vote on 10<sup>th</sup> February, clashes broke out between indigenous people and police near the National Assembly.

Despite the location of some of the mining sites being undisputedly within indigenous territory, the BBC News website reported that President Martinelli had said that “no mining concession or exploitation will be made in a district in any area” of indigenous lands.<sup>ii</sup> On 11<sup>th</sup> February, ENCA received reports of the disturbances from Bernardino Morales, a Panamanian

advocate for indigenous rights, who claimed that the government of Panama could not be trusted because they “violated our rights within the indigenous territories giving out a concession of 6,215 hectares to the AES company for the construction of hydroelectric projects without any consultation.”<sup>iii</sup> Bernardino also claimed that two people had been killed in the disturbances earlier in the week – as yet, we have no confirmation of this, but evidence from the June and July 2010 protests by bananeros who included many Ngabe workers in Changüinola suggests that the police have become accustomed to showing disregard for the lives of indigenous people at such clashes.

The following week, the BBC News service reported that police had again clashed with indigenous protesters: “Members of the Ngabe-Bugle group occupied a bridge on a major highway on the outskirts of Panama City. Clashes erupted when police tried to move the protesters to clear the way for traffic.”<sup>iv</sup>

On 3<sup>rd</sup> March, The Panama News (a fortnightly English language newspaper in Panama) reported that President Martinelli had backed down and had promised to repeal the new law:

*As president, my main responsibility is to ensure the preservation of public order and to maintain a climate of peace and peaceful coexistence among all Panamanians. Therefore I decided to present a project that repeals all parts of Law 8 of 2011. We cannot let the confusion caused by radical groups who take advantage of the nobility and courage of the brothers of the comarcas destroy the peace in which Panama lives.<sup>v</sup>*

i. Please note that the Ngabe-Bugle indigenous group is the same group that we in ENCA – and we believe everybody else – have always called the Ngöbe-Bugle indigenous group. We are unsure why the change has occurred in all our source articles relating to this present round of protests.

ii. **BBC News, Latin America & Caribbean:** [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-12513084](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-12513084)

iii. **Bernadino Morales** (11 February 2011) personal communication.

iv. **BBC News, Latin America & Caribbean:** [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-12513084](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-12513084)

v. Ricardo Martinelli as cited by Eric Jackson (3 March 2011) ‘Mining law changes will be repealed’, The Panama News, Panama City.

## Funding

### The Campamento Environmental Movement

At our February 27<sup>th</sup> meeting, ENCA members agreed to grant £500 to the Campamento Environmental Movement (CAM) towards the costs of a programme of environmental workshops for schoolchildren and also for future leaders of such workshops.

The CAM is one of the 15 very local and very small environmental groups which have taken over the work of the MAO, the Olancho Environmental Movement. The MAO was previously led by Padre Andres Tamayo and René Gradis. Padre Andres Tamayo was expelled from Honduras back to his native El Salvador in September 2010, almost four months after the coup in Honduras which ousted President Mel Zelaya. Padre Andres had become one of the main leaders of the Honduran Resistance to the coup. René Gradis was left as the only worker of the MAO and became the Number 1 on the hit list of the death squads which have operated with impunity since the coup. As a result of that he has withdrawn from public view and activity as far as it is possible to do so.

The CAM and a number of other rural village organisations are trying to continue the work of the MAO as far as is possible. They are up against a rather hopeless task, however, as the ban on logging in a large part of Olancho was lifted after the coup – not too surprising, as the logging companies were major backers of the coup and the coup government.

---

### The Permaculture Institute of El Salvador (IPES)

IPES has run into a funding crisis, but the email informing us of that fact arrived after ENCA's meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> February, and so we shall be unable to consider the appeal that the organisation sent until our next meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> June. That may also give us a little time to raise a few more funds for this purpose.

IPES has set itself a target of raising \$10,000 by 1<sup>st</sup> July 2011, and they are seeking donations from individuals as well as organisations. So, if anyone would like to donate to their cause, you can visit their website at [www.permacultura.com.sv](http://www.permacultura.com.sv) in order to do so. (Recent ENCA Newsletters have covered various aspects of the work of IPES for those who want to find out more.)

[enca.org.uk](http://enca.org.uk)

### COPINH's ENCA-Supported Herb Garden Project - Report Back

Honduras: As reported in newsletter 50, last year ENCA facilitated a grant application from COPINH – the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organisations of Honduras – to the Unicorn Grocery in Manchester. COPINH received a grant for the establishment of medicinal herb gardens in two of their local communities, Montaña Verde and Plan de Barrios, plus a larger garden at their training centre, "Utopia".



ENCA recently received an excellent report back from COPINH describing the success they've had with this project. COPINH have been fighting for the rights of the local Lenca indigenous people for almost 2 decades, and are now one of the voices calling for an end to the coup in Honduras.

COPINH started their project by bringing together herb seeds from the local peoples' collections, and setting up special germinating beds and *herbalario* herb gardens to grow them together. At The Utopia centre, they've developed this herb garden into a well-stocked health food shop for the community at large.

An important element of the project has been developing the community's technical knowledge of how best to grow plants in a *herbalario* garden, and the Utopia centre features comprehensive displays on the processes COPINH have used. The project was carried out with full involvement of the Montaña Verde and Plan de Barrios communities, and COPINH report that neighbouring communities are now also expressing interest in setting up their own *herbalarios*.

Meanwhile, the project is providing an excellent way to increase interest in the herbal knowledge of the Lenca's own elders. In Montaña Verde the local school children are being taught the medicinal skills and being involved in the care of their *herbalario*. COPINH and the volunteers involved have also created 50 booklets and 10 large information sheets on the medicines they're

*ENCA Newsletter 52, March 2011, p.10*

growing, which will hopefully be long-lasting resources to develop the educational side of the project.

The project has not been without problems, especially due to adverse weather. At one point the Montaña Verde herb garden was destroyed by torrential rains, and the weather has also been a barrier to the transport of supplies, delaying the project's progress. But despite these problems all the *herbolarios* are now functioning again, and COPINH are considering how to increase their protection further in the future.

Despite the horrors of the coup in Honduras, and the increasingly clear brutality of the new regime, ENCA is gratified to hear that the hard work of COPINH is paying off for the Lenca. The successful establishment of their *herbolarios* promises to improve the lives of their communities with cheap medicines and an additional source of income. They have also enabled them to utilise and protect a part of their ancestral knowledge before it slipped away with the invasion of modern agriculture.

You can read their complete report in English, along with all the pictures of the new project, on our website at [www.enca.org.uk](http://www.enca.org.uk). COPINH's own website (in Spanish) is at [www.copin.org](http://www.copin.org).



**Want to help us support more projects like this?**  
You can now make a donation through our website: [www.enca.org.uk](http://www.enca.org.uk)

## **Revised ENCA meeting dates** **for 2011**



**19<sup>th</sup> Jun**  
**30<sup>th</sup> Oct**

ENCA meetings are held at the NSC's office at the Durham Road Centre – see address on page 12. The nearest tube station is Finsbury Park on the Victoria and Piccadilly lines. Meetings are held on Sundays from 12:30 pm to 5 pm and we start with lunch which is made up of whatever people attending choose to bring with them to share.

## **Statement by FUDECO**

### **– United Front for the Defence of Ecosystems**

On the 9<sup>th</sup> January 2011, in the City of Santiago in the province of Veraguas, Panama, members of environmental groups, indigenous peoples and other peoples from the provinces of Bocas del Toro, Veraguas, Chiriqui and Ngöbe Bugle came together to honour the memory of those who have lost their lives fighting for human and social rights as well as to promote the protection of mother earth.

The opportunity was taken to analyse the social and environmental impacts of the Government's development policies regarding natural resources, including hydro power, mining, tourism, real estate, monoculture, carbon market speculation and a number of other areas.

FUDECO put forward the following statement as a result of this meeting:

### **We at FUDECO would like to once again put forward our concerns;**

- The installation of hydro-power projects and mining are causing significant negative impacts to the environment, especially in rural and indigenous areas
- These projects designed to stimulate 'development' have all lacked citizen participation and have by-passed the democratic process
- Decisions have been taken about vital resources such as water or soils, without carrying out studies to ascertain the capacity of these resources, or the current demands on these resources

### **Demands of FUDECO:**

- Stop the granting of concessions for more hydroelectric plants, mining projects and other projects that threaten the social stability of our people
- Declare a moratorium on the construction of hydroelectric projects, pending individual studies into the capacity and cumulative impacts in each basin, giving local communities the opportunity to participate.
- Sustainable and productive alternatives should be identified by the local population and authorities to ensure the welfare of communities.

## Colombia's 'alternative Panama Canal' – repercussions for Panama and Nicaragua?

Colombia is negotiating with China to build an alternative to the Panama Canal. The alternative will be a 'dry canal' linking the Pacific port of Buenaventura with the Atlantic coast by rail. The Colombian president, Juan Manuel Santos, said that the project was "a real proposal ... and it is quite advanced." China has been increasing its involvement with Latin America in order to feed its growing demand for raw materials and commodities.

The Panama Canal is currently being widened and deepened, and so will probably be in a sound condition to withstand any new competition from such a Colombian and Chinese undertaking, if the latter materialises. But Nicaragua's plans for a similar dry canal across its territory may suffer as a result.

Watch this space – over the next few years.

## EU Association Agreement with Central America

Argentine journalist Raúl Llarul and the Salvadoran Ecological Unit (UNES by its Spanish initials) presented the results of an investigation they have conducted into the Association Agreement between the EU and Central America. The Agreement was signed last year but is pending ratification by the national assemblies. At a press conference in February, Llarul and Angel Ibarra of UNES warned that the Agreement would pose various risks to the Central American nations, especially those aspects which are a repeat of issues covered in the DR-CAFTA agreement made earlier with the USA.

They suggested that the Agreement does not benefit Central America at all and should be re-negotiated. One example of such an issue, cited by Llarul and UNES, is that water is considered by the Agreement to be a merchandise rather than a fundamental human right.

## AFFILIATION RENEWAL REMINDER

Happy New Year to you all. A big thank you everyone who has supported our work through 2010. We hope that you will join us for another year of solidarity with Central American Environmental Movements.

You can renew your membership using the form on page 5 or if you wish to give regularly by standing order, please complete our standing order form. By doing this it will enable us to plan our work more effectively.

### ENCA STANDING ORDER FORM

*(Please print in block capitals)*

Name .....

Address .....

Postcode .....

Please pay the account of the Environmental Network for Central America, at the Yorkshire Bank, 35 Regent Street, London SW1Y 4ND (to the credit of: Account no. 29849897; Sort code 05-02-00)

£\_\_\_\_\_ each month / quarter / year and debit my/our account number \_\_\_\_\_

Sort code \_\_\_\_\_

Starting on (date) \_\_\_\_\_

Your bank details:

To the manager of \_\_\_\_\_

Bank / Building Society

Address .....

Your signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Please return this form to Mrs Janet Bye,  
5 St Edmunds Place, Ipswich, Suffolk IP1 3RA)**

### ENCA CONTACTS

*Chair* Nick Rau 0208 809 4451  
hnrnu@yahoo.co.uk

*Secretary*  
Sheila Amoo-gottfried 0208 769 0492

sheila.amoo-gottfried@virgin.net

*Treasurer* Janet Bye 01473 254695

janet.bye@btopenworld.com

*Postal Address* ENCA, c/o NSC, Durham Road Centre, 86 Durham Road, London, N7 7DT

*ENCA Newsletter 52, March 2011, p.12*

Some of you may have noticed that this edition of the ENCA newsletter has arrived at your door in a smaller envelope. By folding your newsletter we are reducing our postage costs and the amount of paper required for envelopes.

Please let us know what you think about this or anything else we do by sending an email to

[enca2011@gmail.com](mailto:enca2011@gmail.com)



NEWSLETTER PRINTED ON  
RECYCLED PAPER BY NEWARK  
DESIGNER PRINT