



Ostional - An example of the sustainable use of resources



The people of Ostional clean the beach periodically to facilitate the nesting of the turtles as part of their conservation work for these animals - Photo: Anel Kenjeeva, UCR

Over the last two years, a series of photographs showing people 'stealing' turtle eggs direct from the nests of Olive Ridley and Kemps Ridley turtles on Ostional beach on the Pacific coast of Costa Rica have been circulated around the internet with the claim that local residents participating in the theft are 'criminals'. They have been accompanied by text describing the 'illegal poaching' as an "attack against nature" and exhorting people not to buy or eat turtle eggs.

The photographs are genuine, but the descriptions and the campaign are hoaxes and amount to misinformation. Costa Rican journalist Patricia Blanco, writing specifically for the ENCA Newsletter, explains on the following pages.

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Cover Story

Ostional - An example of the sustainable use of resources

By Patricia Blanco

Sea turtles in Ostional are an essential part of life in this village. Their conservation has been possible thanks to the joint action of various social and institutional forces which for the last 25 years have developed turtle conservation as a project of sustainable resource use.

For Basilio Vega, one of the first inhabitants of Ostional to fight for change in the community, life was distinctly different before 1987. "There were no roads nor bridges, only oxen and horses. The community was adopted by the authorities who came to control the stealing of turtle eggs, and there was a great deal of poverty."

That year was memorable for these coastal villagers in Guanacaste on the Costa Rican Pacific coast because it was the start of an experience of local development which hasn't just contributed to the conservation of turtles but has also brought social and economic benefits to the population there. The project is one of management of the turtle habitat and the sustainable use of the natural resources in which the whole community is involved, adults, teenagers, women and children, as well as several governmental institutions.

The result of this joint effort has been the consolidation of a model of rational exploitation and legal sale of eggs of the Kemps Ridley turtle (also known as the Atlantic Ridley turtle and the Tortuga Lora), one of the four species of marine turtles which nest in the 19 km of Ostional National Wildlife Refuge.

The phenomenon of the mass nesting (or *arribada*) of the Kemps Ridley turtle (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) began in 1959. *Arribadas* generally last for a week when between 4,000 and 400,000 turtles nest per kilometre along the length of the beach. The biggest *arribada* takes place in October each year when around a million turtles arrive to lay their eggs. This beach is the world's principal site for the turtles' reproduction. Since 1970, the University of Costa Rica (UCR) has maintained a constant research and monitoring programme in the area and this has provided scientific data to support the decisions made regarding the protection and management of the turtles.

There have been various obstacles and ups-and-downs in the process and many lessons have been learnt. But generations of residents of Ostional have taken part in this programme and have learnt to value a natural resource which has always been a part of their lives and which therefore is worth much more than just its economic value.

Early research

US scientist Douglas Robinson was the founder of the Research and Management of Marine Turtles in Ostional Programme. He and Stephen E. Cornelius managed to determine the route which the turtles followed to get to Ostional. According to the herpetologist Gerardo Chaves, coordinator of UCR's Ostional Biological Station which is named after Douglas Robinson, they showed that they use

distinct marine corridors to search out food and they go as far as Mexico and the Galapagos Islands.

These scientists began to observe and archive data on the mass arrivals of the turtles in Ostional and the use of the beach for their reproduction. The information indicated the best ways of conserving the reptiles as being by the management of regulated collections of eggs by the people of Ostional. As Chavez explains, "egg management is part of sustainable development in the sense that the community maintains the habitat for the turtle and, in exchange, can sell a percentage of the eggs and receive an economic return."

One of the aspects which has drawn the attention of the scientific community is that there is very restricted space for the thousands of turtles which are nesting and, ecologically, this presents an obstacle for the individual turtles which get to Ostional to reproduce. The data reveal that in the areas of greatest nesting there can be more than ten nests per square meter and that the turtles destroy the nests that others made before them.

In collaboration with the Ostional Integrated Development Association (ADIO), the UCR has developed a monitoring methodology to collect data on the depredation of turtles, the number of turtles which lay eggs, the density of nests, the non-viable eggs due to fungi or bacteria, the loss of eggs with each *arribada* and the success of hatchings or births.

How the programme works

Three government institutions participate in the turtle conservation project in Ostional. The local population is in charge of collecting the eggs and of marketing them. They collect only the eggs produced during the first two days of the *arribada* because there is almost a 100 per cent probability that these eggs will be destroyed by the turtles which follow on after those two days. Those eggs exposed by the successive waves of turtles but not destroyed would be eaten by dogs or *zopilotes* (vultures) or would be destroyed by fungal or bacterial attack.

The Ostional families extract only 1 per cent of the eggs produced by each *arribada*. Additionally, each family has the right to take 200 eggs for their own consumption. These project decisions are made in a collegiate way in which all relevant sectors are represented: the UCR is responsible for monitoring the turtle population; Incopesca (the Costa Rican Institute of Fisheries and Aquaculture) regulates the sale of eggs; and MINAET (the Ministry of the Environment, Energy and Telecommunications) administers and manages the Wildlife Refuge.

Mutual benefit

There is a consensus that the project has been very positive. In the first place it has demonstrated a relationship of mutual help between the community and the turtles since they protect them but at the same time receive an economic benefit from the sale of their eggs. A percentage of the profits is dedicated to community works such as schools, social assistance, grants and environmental education.

The residents manage the habitat, cleaning the beach to facilitate the nesting, guarding against poaching and protecting the new born turtles from predators. Also, the community took the decision not to have street lighting which would deter the turtles and to exercise strict control over conventional mass tourism. There are just a few lodging places and eating houses and a group of guides accompany visitors along the beach, and that is all that tourists will find in Ostional.

This doesn't mean that there aren't any pressures on Ostional. The fact that the land in this region is very much in demand by foreign and national investors for the development of tourist

projects and real estate development is a kind of ghost that is constantly present. Also, after having spent so much time practically isolated, the residents, especially the young, have begun to enter the globalised, consumerist culture bringing about important changes in their life expectations.

In the opinions of the UCR specialists, national policies are required that determine whether the country wants to maximise the use of its natural resources rather than betting on conservation. "Depending on those decisions, Ostional will be more or less vulnerable," said Gerardo Chaves.

Success at Los Zorros Turtle Project

By Jason Searing*

Over 7,100 baby turtles have been released this year by Sea Turtle Rescue, an NGO based at Los Zorros, Chinandega (north-west Nicaragua). The success of this number of hatched Olive Ridley turtles has been the result of the hard work and commitment of Dennis Renfro (Project Director), Arturo Rivera (Hatchery Manager), Simone Nordheim (Volunteer) and Jason Searing (Volunteer).

Dennis Renfro and the Sea Turtle Rescue team have built a *vivero* (hatchery) to house approximately 100 nests. With a 76 per cent hatch rate you would think the project is achieving what it needs to, but there are still causes for concern about the survival of the Olive Ridley and Hawksbill turtles locally. According to local sources, about forty years ago up to 300 females could be seen nesting each night on the beaches between Padre Ramos Nature Reserve and Jiquilillo (where Sea Turtle Rescue is based). Nowadays you are lucky to see 25 a night during the peak of the nesting season. Such a drastic reduction in the turtle population may mean drastic protection measures are needed.

The team buy the turtle eggs from the local community members at market price (\$1 per dozen). Technically illegal, this is the only way to reduce the number of eggs being sold in local markets. Having bought over 9,000 eggs this year, costs have escalated creating a major funding issue.

Next year Sea Turtle Rescue hopes to expand with up to five *viveros*, once funds have been secured. The idea would be to employ more community members to help with the collection of eggs and prevention of poaching, as another local turtle project (SEAJJOY) has done. However unlike SEAJJOY, which is supported through a local shrimp business, Sea Turtle Rescue relies on donations. Financial support from MARENA (Nicaragua's Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources) is unavailable, although they have offered support for a community education programme. In fact, the recent turtle releases among the local community beaches have already planted the necessary idea that turtles are amazing creatures which deserve the right to survive. For some residents, it has been the first time they have seen these tiny creatures. However, the poaching of turtle nests continues on a widespread basis.



Photo: Jason Searing

Research data regarding the nesting and hatching processes of the turtles has been collected and is currently under analysis, with the help of volunteers. Sea Turtle Rescue is also looking for volunteers for the 2012 season, as their help has been invaluable.

It is hoped that a full education programme will begin in 2012 and support the protection of turtles on this part of the Nicaraguan coast. Dennis Renfro and the team remain hopeful that small NGOs such as Sea Turtle Rescue will have an impact on community involvement in the turtles' survival.

* Jason Searing is currently on a sabbatical year from his job at City College Plymouth and is working with Sea Turtle Rescue. To find out more information about the project or to donate, go to: www.seaturtlerescue.org or www.MSV-Nicaragua.de

The report above from Jason is all the more encouraging because of a December 2011 report that thousands of Olive Ridley turtles would not be born in late 2011 in the La Flor Wildlife Refuge south of San Juan Del Sur on Nicaragua's Pacific Coast because high tides in October destroyed thousands of nests. As a result, experts expect to see far fewer turtles than hatched during the previous season when 1.32 million baby turtles emerged from the sand and headed toward the Pacific.

(Nicaragua News Bulletin, 03.01.12)

Kidney Disease in Central America

Kidney Disease is now the the second biggest cause of death among men in El Salvador, and in Nicaragua it's a bigger killer of men than HIV and diabetes combined. Indeed in the western lowlands of Nicaragua, in a region of vast sugar cane fields, the tiny community of La Isla now calls its La Isla de las Viudas - 'The Island of Widows.' due to the large numbers of men killed by the disease. And it is not just a problem here, but it's prevalent along the Pacific coast of Central America - across six countries.

"Most of the men we studied have CKD from unknown causes," says Dr. Orantes. What the men in his area have in common is they all work in farming. And so he believes a major cause of their kidney damage is the toxic chemicals - pesticides and herbicides - that are routinely used here in agriculture. "These chemicals are banned in the United States, Europe and Canada, and they're used here, without any protection, and in large amounts that are very concerning," he says.

The issue has become increasingly politicised. In 2006, the World Bank gave a loan to Nicaragua's largest sugar company to build an ethanol plant. Plantation workers filed a complaint, saying the company's working conditions and use of chemicals were fuelling the epidemic. They said the loan violated the bank's own standards for worker safety and environmental practices. In response, the bank agreed to fund a study to try to identify the cause of the epidemic.

"The evidence points us most strongly to a hypothesis that heat stress might be a cause of this disease," says Daniel Brooks of Boston University, who is leading the research. Although he admits that "This has never been so far shown to cause chronic kidney disease, so we would be talking about a new mechanism that has not so far been described in the scientific literature."

The sugar cane companies say they're not convinced that farm chemicals or working conditions on their plantations are to blame for the epidemic. Still, they say, they are trying to protect their workers' health. On some plantations, workers are being supplied with additional fluids to help rehydration, and some companies check their workers for signs of CKD, but this is rare. Even more scarce is the dialysis equipment to treat those who are ill.

Everyone fears that working in the sugar cane fields is a big risk, but there are no other jobs around. "There is no alternative," says one woman, who recently lost her father. "No other way to support a family."

Adapted by Doug Specht from a story by Kate Sheehy, BBC News



Search: Environmental Network for Central America

Corporate takeover of UN Climate Conference

This short article is a summary of the Global Justice Ecology Project Press Release (13 December 2011) 'GJEP Direct Action and Climate Justice at the UN Climate Talks', GJEP, Hinesburg, USA.

Summary by ENCA member Barney Thompson

Frustrated by the lack of any significant progress at the recent UN Climate Conference in South Africa, the US based NGO Global Justice Ecology Project (GJEP) took direct action alongside hundreds of African youth activists and civil society representatives. On the final day of the conference they staged a sit-in in the convention centre halls which resulted in arrest, 'debadging' and ejection from the event. They were one of the very few organisations there to take any such direct action in protest at the corporate takeover and the dominance of empty rhetoric over binding action that has now become the norm at the UN climate talks.



GJEP is removed by UN security during sit-in occupation
Photo: Ben Powless

With a similar outlook to ENCA, GJEP highlights the intertwined root causes of social injustice, ecological destruction and economic domination. They work to build bridges between social and environmental justice groups (including those in Central America) to strengthen their collective efforts. In Durban, GJEP raised awareness of the messages of such climate justice experts and front line community representatives by connecting them with major international media outlets for interviews as well as delivering press releases and conferences. Included in the speakers was Friends of the Earth El Salvador's Ricardo Navarro, also a friend of ENCA. They also participated in a march for climate justice attended by tens of thousands of people before then deciding in frustration to take more direct action.

GJEP's Executive Director Anne Petermann was one of those arrested and she released the following statement:

"I took this action today because I believe this process is corrupt, this process is bankrupt, and this process is controlled by the One percent. If meaningful action on climate change is to happen, it will need to happen from the bottom up. The action I took today was to remind us all of the power of taking action into our own hands. With the failure of states to provide human leadership, and the corporate capture of the United Nations process, direct action by the ninety-nine percent is the only avenue we have left."

Costa Rica puts its eco-reputation at risk

This short piece is a summary of John Perry's article 'Costa Rica puts its eco-reputation at risk' from www.theopendemocracy.net, 15th December 2011. John Perry lives in Nicaragua and writes about issues in Central America. The summary is by ENCA member Tobie Roffey.

Costa Rica is renowned for its excellent environmental record, but despite being third in the world index of sustainability the current government, headed by President Laura Chinchilla, is building a 120 km road beside the San Juan River that is threatening its eco-reputation and causing great damage to the environment.

For over 150 years the San Juan River, forming part of the international boundary between Nicaragua and Costa Rica, has triggered numerous disputes between the two countries; and the most recent of these, which began a year ago, is currently being deliberated by the International Court of The Hague.

In October 2010, Nicaragua started dredging a section of the river arguing that this was necessary to maintain navigation. Costa Rica, however, complained that the dredging had caused significant environmental damage including the dumping of sediment on the Costa Rican side. After a detachment of troops was sent to the area and tempers rose from both sides, the International Court of The Hague – yet to make a final judgment on the boundary dispute – allowed the dredging to continue (only in undisputed areas of the river) and ordered both countries to desist from troop movements.

Following on from the dispute and in response to Nicaragua's reassertion that the 'San Juan River belongs to Nicaragua' in electoral campaign promotion, Costa Rican President Laura Chinchilla ordered the construction of a road along 120 km of the river bank, a road which runs as close to the river as physically possible and one that cuts through a 60,000 hectare protected area. Chinchilla claims that the road protects Costa Rican heritage and provides guaranteed communication for Costa Ricans but forgets to highlight that the road is causing significant ecological damage and destruction to the local environment.

Not only do the river and its banks harbour a fantastic range of wildlife from bull sharks to turtles, manatees, caimans, monkeys and jaguars, but major parts of the river and surrounding areas form part of nature reserves that are protected internationally under the Ramsar convention. These also form one of the largest remaining areas of tropical forest north of the Amazon. Although small groups of indigenous Rama Indians live alongside the river, neither bank has settlements of significant size, and this has allowed the river and surrounding areas to remain a highly sensitive environment and 'near paradise'. The road, however, puts all of this at a massive risk and the potential environmental damage is enormous.

The building of the road has opened up inhabited areas to settlement, ripped out large areas of forest (making it difficult for wildlife to go back and forth between the river and upland



The new road
Photo: La Prensa, Managua

habitats) and the loss of tree cover has significantly reduced the ecological value of the river corridor and the protection it offers to wildlife. More worryingly, the road will make it easier for illegal loggers and illegal hunters to penetrate the unspoilt forest on the opposite side of the bank, an area already suffering from illegal timber extraction.

Has Chinchilla's government authorised a \$14 million act of gross vandalism and violated an environmental protection (on which the ink was barely dry) out of political spite? Fortunately, it is not too late to repair the worst of the damage. Many of the trees could be replanted and if left unused, the un-surfaced road could revert back to nature.

The International Court has been asked to consider the road as part of its judgement in the pending case, but will sanity prevail? Only time will tell.



Write to us and tell us what you think of the newsletter, our work or to bring to our attention your concerns or organisation

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www.enca.org.uk

ENCA meeting dates 2012

17th June
21st October

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.



Canada's Shame



Since it was established, ENCA has been involved in reporting the environmental and human rights abuses perpetrated by mining companies operating in Central America. The levels of exploitation and abuse have increased dramatically in the last 10 years, and at the forefront of this increase are Canadian owned operations.

In order to better understand how prolific the problem is, ENCA has developed an interactive map on its website. It is updated with the latest information about each Canadian owned mine in Central America and with a ranking system to show where the biggest problems are and which companies are responsible for them.

To accompany this, Doug Specht has produced an overview, to discuss why Canadian mining companies are fast becoming one of the world's worst environmental and human rights abusers.

Canada has been in the news frequently over the last year due to a number of high profile environmental issues, firstly announcing that they will withdraw from the Kyoto Protocolⁱ, and then again at the beginning of 2012 as they lobbied European governments to allow tar sands to go unregulated.ⁱⁱ Canada has, however, long been tied up in environmental and social degradation around the world, and particularly in Latin America, where its exploration for mineral resources is hundreds of years old.ⁱⁱⁱ

The last twenty years have seen a spectacular expansion in extractive industries in Central America, and it is Canadian companies and investors that are the key force in the mining sector of many countries in the Americas.^{iv} Sixty per cent of the world's mining companies are floated on the Toronto Stock Exchange^v and more than half of their assets are located in Latin America, valued at close to C\$57 billion in 2008.^{vi} Many of these companies have begun operations by taking advantage of desperate, weak or illegitimate governments, promising foreign investment and pushing apparently lucrative deals, which are often not in the best interests of the host nation. Once mining rights have been purchased the company then uses its political and economic power to undermine a country's ability to protect its own people and environment.^{vii}

Central America is mined for a number of minerals, most prominently gold, which despite the global economic downturn has continued to rise steadily in value, leading to a proliferation of exploration, new mines, expansion of existing prospects and the use of ever more polluting techniques to extract gold from sources containing as little as 0.005 ounces of gold per tonne of rock.^{viii} This extensive mining throughout Central America (see map) has led to a wide range of conflicts, some of which have been reported in previous ENCA newsletters. These include environmental, social, economic,

political and even spiritual - in cases where land has been taken from indigenous people.^{ix}

These conflicts often turn deadly. For instance, at least four opponents of the Canadian company Pacific Rim have been assassinated in El Salvador. Critics of mining operations have been wounded and maimed in attacks while many more have been threatened.^x Canadian mining corporations deny any direct responsibility for the deaths and acts of intimidation and violence, but many of the assassinations are associated with mining company security personnel, current or former employees of the companies and local mayors who have been 'bought off' by the mining companies.^{xi}

Furthermore, the pollution of water systems and agricultural land has led to illnesses of many people living in the vicinity of Canadian-owned mines around Central America.^{xii}

Canada is not unable but is unwilling to do anything about this situation. The systematic exploration and exploitation of Central America has become a social and political norm for the Canadian mining sector. There is a severe lack of effective legal or policy frameworks to regulate overseas operations run by Canadian extractive companies, and Central Americans who are adversely affected by Canadian extraction companies are barred from accessing the Canadian legal system.^{xiii} Successive Canadian governments have continued to shy away from introducing any level of corporate social responsibility due to pressure from the mining companies themselves. Currently some voluntary regulations are in place, but no sanctions are listed, and nor could they be enforced.^{xiv}

In 2009 an attempt at regulation was made through a private members bill (C-300), but this was rejected due to "putting Canadian investors at a competitive disadvantage".^{xv} At present, Bill C-323 is being debated, and this would allow non-Canadian citizens to file claim in Canada, rather than being forced to do so in their home nation, where judicial systems are often unable to cope with taking on multinationals.^{xvi} It is hard to hold out too much hope while the mining companies themselves lobby the government against such reforms, expressing concern that an independent ombudsman able to scrutinise their operations will be bad for business.^{xvii}

Why does the Canadian population not complain about this despite Canada's fast dwindling reputation in the Americas and around the world, a poor reputation that is in fact beginning to harm other business^{xviii}? Through the media, education and politics, the Canadian population have been kept uninformed and have themselves been exploited by the mining companies. Many have unwittingly helped fund the illegal, polluting and aggressive actions through their banks and pension schemes. The Canadian Pension Plan, to which most Canadian workers are legally required to contribute, holds equity of C\$2.5 billion in Canadian mining companies operating in developing countries.^{xix} Mining companies also have a stranglehold over the media, ensuring that negative stories do not reach the Canadian press.^{xx}

In Central America Canadian embassies also attempt to control the media; in Guatemala the Canadian ambassador published an opinion piece praising the highly controversial, and widely denounced, Marlin mine^{xxi}. Even education in Canada is not free from the powerful forces of Canadian-owned mining companies. Peter Munk, CEO of Barrick Gold, 'donated' C\$35 million to the University of Toronto in 2011, to be paid out over a number of years provided the curriculum "fit with the political views and sensitivities of Peter Munk". The school's director is required to report annually to a board appointed by Mr Munk "to discuss the programmes, activities and initiatives of the School in greater detail".^{xxii} Mr Munk had previously explained away gang rape at Barrick Gold's Papua New Guinea gold mine as a 'cultural habit'.^{xxiii}

Through its regulatory liberalisation and through relationships with mining companies, Ottawa is actively supporting the degradation of Central America's environment, the poisoning of its water supplies, the demise of native populations and the murder of mining opponents and environmental and social activists. While Canada continues to hesitate in enforcing or extending legislation regulating activities of Canadian companies abroad^{xxiv}, while local opposition to Canadian-owned mining operations is increasing around the world, and while the people of Central America lose their land and livelihoods, most Canadians remain ignorant of Canada's violent and polluting role in the global mining industry^{xxv}. ■

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Marlin
Report Last Updated: 17 Feb 2012
Operating Company(ies)
GOLDCORP Goldcorp Inc.
Park Place, Suite 3400, 666 Burrard Street,
Vancouver, B.C., Canada V6C 2V8

Minerals being extracted:
Gold

Summary of mining project
The Marlin mine is in the western highlands of Guatemala, in the municipality of San Miguel Totolihuacan, approximately 300 kilometers northwest of Guatemala City. It is in an area of moderate to steep terrain. The Marlin Mine lies within a highly prospective land package of approximately 100,000 hectares that encompasses the main Marlin deposit and other important vein structures and mineralized zones.
Picture: Intercontinental Cry

Environmental and Human Rights Concerns
The Marlin Mine is subject to a wide range of environmental, human rights, and political concerns. Jose Iturza, of CODESA (Panama) Commission for Peace and Ecology) has confirmed that the waters of the Tz'ak and Quivichil Rivers that flow in the vicinity of the Marlin mine contain high concentrations of potentially lethal metals, especially cadmium, arsenic, aluminum, magnesium and nitrate. He pointed out that it had been recommended to the State that they implement precautionary measures to suspend operations at the Marlin mine but the Government did not act on the order issued by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. A study from Tufts University's Global Development and Environment Institute (GDAE) also reports that Goldcorp's Marlin mine will leave a legacy of "ecological devastation and impoverishment" risks. When the long-term environmental risks of the open-pit gold and silver mine are put in the balance with economic gains, the institute finds the benefits to be "miserable and short-lived", especially for local communities.

The Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL) and MiningWatch Canada have expressed deep concern at the political pressure being brought to bear on the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), the western hemisphere's primary organ for protecting human rights. Under substantial pressure from governments, the IACHR modified an earlier order and lifted its recommendation to suspend operations at the mine.

CIEL and MiningWatch Canada cautioned that the move should not be seen as evidence that the company is taking responsibility or that violations of human rights and threats to community well-being in Guatemala have been addressed. They warned that IACHR's decision, and the political pressure that preceded it, are a welcome call for organizations and communities concerned about the defense of human rights in the Americas.

"If Goldcorp respected human rights as it purports to, it would not be celebrating..."

B2GOLD

Our new interactive map lets you explore every Canadian owned mine in Central America.

Each mine is rated for its Environmental and Human rights using a 3 colour system.

Clicking on each mine will bring up information about the history of the mine, the operating company and current concerns about the running of the mine and its effects on the surrounding environment and people.

We hope that by mapping the issues in this way we can help bring to light just how significant this problem is throughout Central America.



Scan with a smart device to be taken straight to our map.

www.enca.org.uk/mining

It is not just First World mining corporations which have no regard for Central American environments and communities where they wish to work. First World corporations in other economic sectors are just as voracious and predatory, as the following case from Guatemala illustrates.

ENEL terminates negotiations with Guatemalan Indigenous Community regarding hydro-dam

By Adrienne Wiebe, Latin America Policy Analyst, Mennonite Central Committee

September 12th, 2011

On September 2nd, the Italian transnational corporation ENEL, refused to consider the demands of the San Juan Cotzal communities for an impact-benefit agreement (IBA) for the Palo Viejo hydroelectric dam being built on their ancestral land. The negotiations came to a standstill after ENEL rejected the negotiation of a profit-sharing mechanism with the local communities based on the earnings generated by the energy to be produced by the dam. Bishop Alvaro Ramazzini, a well-known Catholic leader and human rights defender, is currently speaking with the two parties separately to see if negotiations can be restarted.

A dialogue process between the company and the community started in May after almost two and a half years of conflict. According to the communities, ENEL and the Guatemalan government failed to properly consult the indigenous communities of Cotzal before beginning construction of the hydroelectric dam.

Guatemala is a signatory of the International Labour Organisation's Convention 169 which states that indigenous communities have the right to prior consultation regarding any exploration or exploitation of resources on their lands, the right to compensation for damages, and the right to share in the benefits of such activities.

"The government and the ENEL corporation have violated our indigenous rights since the very beginning of this grand business proposal because they neither informed us nor consulted with us. They did not wait for our consent as national and international laws require," stated Cotzal community leaders in a recent press release.

As a result of this, the communities of Cotzal began a nonviolent protest by blocking access of construction vehicles and employees to the site. In response, on March 18th the Guatemalan government sent in 500-1000 police and military personnel with tear gas and helicopters to confront and forcefully removed the blockade.

On May 2nd, during a meeting between community leaders and ENEL representatives, the Guatemalan government again sent hundreds of police and military personnel to the neighbouring municipality of Nebaj, threatening to enter Cotzal and arrest local leaders if the blockade was not taken down. ENEL and the Cotzal communities agreed to a dialogue on the condition that the communities remove the blockade and that ENEL drop the legal charges against the community leaders.

The communities of Cotzal have two demands:

- That ENEL contribute 8 million quetzals (\$1,000,000) annually from its profits as reparations for damages suffered by the communities during the construction and the eventual operation of the dam.
- That ENEL designates 20% of the profits from the energy produced by the hydroelectric dam (of a total of 84 Mw/hour) to support community development projects managed directly by the communities of Cotzal without intermediaries.

Tobias Roberts, a Mennonite Central Committee service worker in the region, is acting as an observer in the negotiations at the request of the communities. According to Roberts, "There are examples of Impact-Benefit Agreements (IBAs) between indigenous communities and hydroelectric projects in Canada that recognised the right of indigenous communities to have control over their ancestral territories and participate in the economic benefits from the mega-projects being developed on their lands. These examples set a precedent for the current negotiations between ENEL and the communities of Cotzal."

Baltazar de la Cruz Rodríguez, one of the community representatives, says that, "The government of Perú recently passed a law obligating governments and corporations to consult local indigenous populations before establishing mega-projects on their lands. This is exactly what we have been fighting for all this time. We have ancestral rights over our mountains, rivers and forests, and the right to enjoy the wealth that they create in order to create a better life for the communities of Cotzal consistent with our culture and cosmovision."

San Juan Cotzal is one of the municipalities in Guatemala that was hardest hit during the armed conflict of the 1980s. The Guatemalan military utilized a 'scorched-earth' policy against the Mayan communities thought to be the 'internal enemy', that is, supporters of the guerrilla movement. There were 16 documented massacres in San Juan Cotzal (out of over 600 in the country), torturing and killing hundreds of men, women, and children. It is estimated that 70 to 90 per cent of the villages in the Ixil region were razed by the military between 1980-83¹.

1. Guatemala: Memoria del Silencio, Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico, 1999.

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Journalists face violent intimidation in Honduras

By ENCA member Barney Thompson

It is sad to report that Honduras now holds the title of global murder capital. This also applies specifically to journalists. The murder of Luz Marina Paz Villalobos on 8 December 2011 brought the total to 17 assassinations of journalists alone since Porfirio Lobo took power illegitimately in January 2010, the highest per capita rate in the world. None of these crimes have been solved and most have not been investigated.

In this article we examine the culture of fear and violence – and impunity for its perpetrators – against which those journalists and media outlets that continue to provide an alternative message to that peddled by the mainstream corporate media must fight. Newspapers and television stations (except the lone alternative voice of Globo TV) are owned by a handful of oligarchs. Radio, despite a still highly unhealthy level of control by just three families, retains more scope for alternative perspectives. Consequently it is largely radio journalists who have been targeted. This includes community radio stations which provide a vital voice for marginalised peoples such as the Garífuna.

Regular readers will be well aware of the human rights abuses that Honduran environmental and social activists have long faced. Our previous newsletter (ENCA 54) highlighted how this has reached new heights since the 2009 coup - assassinations of opponents of the regime are now rife. In Honduras, environmentalists have long been targeted - back in January 2008 ENCA 44, for example, focused on this disturbing culture of violent repression and impunity for those who stop at nothing in search of exploitative profit. ENCA 44 also featured the importance of community radio as a way for local people to keep informed and come together in order to protect themselves, their land and their environment from this insidious tide of greed. This battle now appears to be intensifying.

Paz Villalobos, a journalist with the *Cadena Hondureña de Noticias* (CHN) in Comayagüela, was gunned down whilst driving by two men on a motorcycle. She was killed instantly, as was the young photographer with her, Delmer Canales. Paz was opposed to the coup and Lobo regime and had many years' previous experience at Radio Globo, perhaps the best known 'opposition' station.

Paz is the first female journalist slain. The following week some 50 journalists assembled outside the presidential palace to demand justice for all their murdered colleagues and to condemn the systematic harassment and censorship of the press. Their peaceful protest was met with beatings and tear gas by the police and the army, leading *Reporters Without Borders* to comment that "*The Honduran government's only response to the dire human rights and civil liberties situation is repression*" and to support the group in filing a complaint against Lobo and senior staff. Two women journalists involved, Gilda Silvestrucci and Istmana Pineda Platero have since received death threats.

Until the murder of Paz, assassinations had occurred mainly outside the capital area. One example is that of Medardo Flores of *Radio Uno* in San Pedro Sula, killed in an ambush on



A journalist protesting in December 2011 (Photo: Orlando Sierra)

8 September 2011. Flores was also regional finance manager of the *Frente Amplio de Resistencia Popular* (FARP – or Broad Front for Popular Resistance), another of whose leading members had been murdered two days earlier. Flores' murder was reported by *Comité por la Libre Expresión* (C-Libre), a Honduran coalition of journalists and members of civil society and a partner to *Reporters Without Borders*. C-Libre provides regular updates of the ongoing threats, attacks and killings, recommended to all our Spanish speaking readers.

As a supporter of ousted president Manuel Zelaya, *Radio Uno* has been targeted repeatedly. Its owner, Arnulfo Aguilar narrowly escaped an ambush by an armed group in April 2011 and has subsequently received a number of death threats. Ambush footage, including evidence of the lack of police assistance forms part of the informative *Real News Network* feature (www.youtube.com/watch?v=dvg1JcvC3KM&), on which Aguilar bemoans the lack of plurality and investigative journalism in mainstream Honduran media.

Radio Globo in Tegucigalpa is another station airing critical coverage of the actions of the police and armed forces, resulting in reprisals. Director Luis Galdamez recently received death threats whilst on air; journalist Cesar Silva was kidnapped and threatened; and two young colleagues, Walter Trochez and Renan Farjado, were killed in 2010, with police verdicts of suicide despite them being shot and strangled, respectively.

Assassinations have occurred countrywide. Just two examples in 2011 are Héctor Medina Polanco, news coordinator of *Canal 9 Omega Visión* in the northern province of Yoro, in May, and Nery Orellano, the manager of *Radio Joconguera* in the western department of Lempira bordering El Salvador in July. They both died of multiple gunshot wounds, and as with all other cases, no one has been brought to justice. Family members of journalists have been targeted too.

Silencing the voice of the community

Orellano's *Radio Joconguera* is an example of a community station frequently covering local human rights violations and environmental destruction. These local stations provide a voice for often marginalised communities battling state repression and impunity. One case is the Afro-Caribbean Garífuna, isolated and long underrepresented in the Honduran

political system. Five Garífuna stations are spread across their 46 communities on the Atlantic coast.

The most prominent is *Radio Faluma Bimetu* (Sweet Coconut) in Triunfo de la Cruz, providing opposition to the *golpista* regime and to the agro-industrial and mega-tourism plans involving privatisation and sale of Garífuna land, by publicising the violent actions of these vested interests. *Faluma Bimetu* has subsequently been the subject of arson attacks: the station was ransacked and torched in January 2010, forcing it off air; then in April 2011 the family house of studio manager Alfredo López suffered a similar fate. There has been no police investigation of these attacks.

But these communities are not giving up. With help from *Reporters Without Borders* and the *World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters* (AMARC-ALC) amongst others, *Faluma Bimetu* was quickly back up and running, indeed with a stronger signal. As López says, “when confronted with violence we respond with work and determination.” And all too aware of their lack of access to official legal and judicial recourse, the community took action by demolishing a wall built illegally by tourism investors appropriating part of their territory.



Triunfo de la Cruz community members demolishing an illegal wall. (Photo: OFRANEH)

A community voice on Honduras' other coast is *La Voz de Zacate Grande*, which brought together representatives from community radio stations across Honduras for their first anniversary celebrations in April 2011. The gathering highlighted the particular importance of the stations in terms of defending land rights. Residents of this peninsula on the Pacific Gulf of Fonseca have faced continual intimidation over the past 11 years from the infamous oligarchic businessman and key *golpista* Miguel Facussé Barjum.

Facussé is keen to develop major tourist projects and is laying claim to large areas of the peninsula, along with other oligarchic families keen to build luxury homes. With no little irony, the oligarchs – so often with no regard for environmental protection laws – are attempting to use the International Ramsar Convention on the protection of wetlands as justification to stop local people managing their own lands and small scale community projects. Many *campesino* members of the *Association for the Development of the Zacate Grande Peninsula* (ADEPZA), including the radio station's secretary Gerardo Aguilar and director Franklin Meléndez are being prosecuted for endangering the environment and land encroachment. Meléndez was also wounded in a shooting

attack. Other reporters are facing prosecution for resisting the police and sedition solely for covering the violent eviction of a local family.

Additionally, ADEPZA president Pedro Canales has been charged with illegally using a broadcast frequency. This highlights another key barrier faced by community radios across Honduras, namely that, in addition to the often deadly violence aimed directly at staff, and the threat of prosecution under environmental and property rights law, their broadcast operations and very existence are being criminalised. Prohibition as well as intimidation is taking place.

In April 2011, the National Telecommunications Commission CONATEL suspended low-power broadcast frequency licenses, blocking new stations and stopping existing ones applying for permit extensions. This will clearly penalise small stations that cannot afford higher power frequencies and appears to be a measure designed specifically to target media not toeing the party line. As well as restricting freedom of expression and information, this further strengthens the monopoly of the airwaves by three powerful pro-coup telecom groups - Rafael Ferrari's group alone owns more than fifty broadcast permits.

As *C-Libre* and others note, the CONATEL measure contravenes article 72 of the Honduran Constitution, article 13 of the American Convention on Human Rights, and Lobo's undertaking to bring Honduras' telecoms legislation in line with international human rights standards when he signed and ratified article 19 of the UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Lobo's government is clearly falling well short of its basic obligations. Despite this, the regime was further endorsed internationally by its readmission to the *Organisation of American States* (OAS) last June, begging the question, as posed by *Reporters Without Borders*:

“What is the future of journalists who show courage and concern for the right of citizens to be informed? Judicial indifference, a product of the highly polarised media climate since the coup, gives the military and police a free hand to take it out on [news organisations](#) that dare to draw attention to the abuses and misdemeanours of public authorities.”

The 2010 study by the *Committee to Protect Journalists* (CPJ) reported government claims that not one of the murdered journalists was killed because of their profession, dismissing them instead as routine street crimes. CPJ refutes this and furthermore claims that the government is “fostering a climate of lawlessness that allows criminals to kill journalists with impunity”. As a senior journalist interviewed put it,

“You get the impression that the government wants you in terror so you don't know what to report. Is this story about drugs too dangerous? What about this one about political corruption? At the end you don't report anything that will make powerful people uncomfortable.”

It is depressing that domestic and international political powers evidently place little importance on journalist safety or media plurality in Honduras, a central tenet in the battle for any significant social or environmental justice. The tacit approval by the OAS is mirrored by the supposed press freedom watchdog the *Inter American Press Association* (IAPA), which did not include Honduras when recently condemning certain Latin American countries for the persecution of journalists. (We should not be surprised, perhaps – IAPA is closely

associated with right wing parties in the Americas and was allegedly funded at one time by the CIA.)

But, vitally the people still fight to be heard. The Real News Network report details how footage of the resistance and of police brutality - blanked from mainstream stations - is broadcast with basic equipment on street corners. Radio Globo had launched TV Globo to spread the reach of its message. Circulations of oligarchic newspapers are down as many ordinary people refuse to line the pockets of the elite or swallow their propaganda. And brave journalists battle on, refusing to be intimidated.



Please write to the Honduran President and the President of the National Congress – addresses given below. Copies could be sent to the Honduran ambassador in your country and your country's ambassador in Honduras. And don't forget to cc emails to ENCA at enca.info@gmail.com. If you are able to do so, writing postal letters tends to have more impact than emails.



Paz Villalobos, a journalist with the Cadena Hondureña de Noticias (CHN) in Comayagüela, was gunned down whilst driving by two men on a motorcycle. (Photo: Radio Trinchera)

As a guideline, in your letter, please:

- Condemn the murders and attacks on journalists and the damage and sabotage of radio stations.
- Demand that authorities do everything in their power to stop these crimes occurring.
- Express deep concern at impunity for those carrying out these crimes. Demand that this culture of impunity ends, that all perpetrators are held to account, and that every crime (including all those already carried out and not properly investigated) must be thoroughly, impartially and transparently investigated.
- Express deep concern at the censorship and prohibition of opposition or alternative media and at media control by a handful of oligarchs.
- Demand the restoration of broadcast frequencies (such as those used by community stations) that have been suspended or removed and furthermore demand the wider reform of broadcast legislation in line with national and international human rights legislation.

Please send letters to:

Sr. Porfirio Lobo Sosa
Presidente de la República de Honduras
Edif. José Cecilio del Valle
Boulevard Juan Pablo II
Tegucigalpa
Honduras
Email: info@presidencia.gob.hn
daysi_2005hn@yahoo.com

Send copies of your letter to:

Sr. Juan Orlando Hernández
Presidente
Congreso Nacional
Barrio La Hoya,
Tegucigalpa
Honduras
Email: angasaor@gmail.com

Sources

Due to space constraints not all individual references have been provided. Citations can however be provided for all quotes and specific references, as required. The major sources for this article are:

Reporters Without Borders <http://en.rsf.org/honduras.html>
Comité por la Libre Expresión (C-Libre)
clibrehonduras.com/main/libertad-de-expresion/alertas
Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) www.cpj.org/americas/
Real News Network <http://therealnews.com/t2/>
Rights Action www.rightsaction.org/
Global Justice Ecology Project (GJEP)
<http://globaljusticeecology.org/>
Fraternal Black Organisation of Honduras (OFRANEH)
www.ofraneh.org
Frente Nacional de Resistencia Nacional (FNRP)
<http://resistenciahonduras.net/>

Readers are urged to keep informed of developments in this area by following the organisations listed above, and to take action on specific cases wherever possible.

Please help ENCA in reporting the injustices in Central America, to help us and others hold those responsible to account. Please consider making a donation through our website or use the form below to join us in fighting for environmental issues in Central America

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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

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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

Turtle egg poaching* still rife

Despite a generally successful programme of public awareness-raising in various Pacific coast communities about the stealing of turtle eggs for sale, it is reported that egg collectors and sellers are still at work. Javier, a resident of the Colonia Centroamérica in Managua, has reported that sellers regularly pass by his house offering them. When he asks them about their legality, he receives replies like "the season of prohibition is over now" or "the ban isn't in operation this year" or "the ban only refers to the big merchants, not to the small sellers".

He was reporting his comments to the MEL-Info Yahoo Group in January this year.

* 'Poaching' here refers to robbery rather than a means of cooking.

ENCA donates \$500 to MUFRAS-32

ENCA supporters may like to hear that since the distribution of ENCA 54 in November 2011, ENCA has donated \$500 to MUFRAS-32, the Francisco Sánchez United Movement - 32. MUFRAS-32 is a Salvadoran non-governmental organisation which defends human rights and the environment in and around San Isidro in the department of Cabanas, El Salvador. The organisation has four major programmes:

- * promotion and defence of human rights
- * conservation and defence of the environment
- * sustainable development of the communities through grassroots organisation
- * prevention of youth violence through sport and the arts

MUFRAS-32 works in the area affected by previous gold mining exploration and exploitation by Pacific Rim and is instrumental in the struggle to keep the company out of this area and out of the country altogether. It is an area where anti-mining activists have suffered assassinations and many death threats as a result of their protests. Through this donation ENCA supports their struggle.

The Ngöbe-Bugle protest in Panama

In February this year, members of the indigenous Ngöbe-Bugle people took over different parts of the Pan American Highway in Panama in order to protest against mining and HEP project proposals on their ancestral land. In doing so they clashed with police and many injuries and at least one death of a protester resulted from the clashes. They are demanding legal guarantees for their ancestral lands. The Bishop of the city of David acted as mediator to bring the violence to an end. Panama's Congress is currently considering a proposal to ban mining in Ngöbe-Bugle areas, but the indigenous group wants the bill extended to ban HEP projects as well.

Dole settles with some of banana worker chemical victims

ENCA has covered the plight of the banana workers of Central America who were affected by the health harms that exposure to the chemical DBCP (better known as nemagon) can cause. The exposures occurred in the 1970s and 1980s and affected many thousands of plantation workers in the region. In 2011 Dole Food Company agreed to compensate over 3,000 Nicaraguan banana workers. This can be seen as a major success, but still leaves around 14,000 banana workers without compensation - so the struggle continues.

For more information on this issue, go to www.nicanet.org and see numerous previous editions of the ENCA Newsletter, especially nos. 43, 44, 48, 51 and 52.

ENCA Newsletters

The last ENCA Newsletter was distributed to 92 persons and organisations beyond the UK (mostly in the region of Central America). Of these 92, only 39 were sent by email which means that the other 53 were posted by air mail. Obviously it would help us to cut costs if more of our overseas newsletter recipients could let us know if they would like to receive the newsletter by email. (But as we have noted before, if you prefer to receive a hard copy of the newsletter by post, then we are happy to continue posting where and when required.)

Want to make a donation? We have teamed up with Paypal to make it even easier.

www.enca.org.uk



Subscribe to the newsletter using the form on page 11.

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