



Miguel Facussé – parrot lover, conservationist, gangster, drug trafficker, death squad boss, coup supporter



Members of the 11th. Battalion harass locals at a road block in Zacate Grande. Photo: SOAW latina

The World Parrot Trust, which protects parrots, especially those which are endangered, has praised the Dinant Biological Station on the south Honduran island of Zacate Grande in the Gulf of Fonseca for its programme of returning illegally traded birds to the wild. The Dinant Biological Station was established by the Dinant Corporation which receives funds for carbon mitigation under the United Nations Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) for its reduction of methane escapes into the atmosphere at its palm oil mill in northern Honduras and the reduction in its use of fossil fuels to power the mill. The Dinant Corporation is owned by Miguel Facussé, one of Honduras's wealthiest and most influential businessmen. In the past he has donated funds to help local environmental organisations such as Fundación Prolansate on the north coast of Honduras.

Clearly, Miguel Facussé must be a man with a conscience, an environmental conscience too. He has even called himself an environmentalist. But it might be worth examining a few other sides of Facussé's character.

In Zacate Grande, Facussé has been locked in a land struggle against local campesinos. During that struggle he has awarded land titles to people for land that he does not own, he has actively fostered divisions within communities by giving special training to 'Environmental Youth Communicators' to slander those involved in the struggle for land, he has blocked access to roads through land he claims is his, his guards have constantly harassed local people and various families have been evicted from their homes by local police at his behest.

Continued....

The Aguán Valley in northern Honduras is the location of many of Dinant Corporation's palm oil plantations, from which Facussé gains much of his wealth. Again, much of the land used by the plantations is in dispute between Facussé and campesino groups. Government agrarian reform initiatives from the 1970s granted land titles to campesinos, but their associations claim that they were subsequently either fraudulently tricked or coerced into selling their parcels of land. Then, several of these groups reached agreements with the Zelaya administration to resolve the land conflicts before the 2009 coup d'état which ousted President Manuel Zelaya. After the coup, the agreements were not fulfilled and so several groups took occupation of the lands to which they claim they were titled. A further agreement was reached with the post-coup government of Pepe Lobo in April 2010 to transfer land to their communities, but this also remains to be implemented.



Miguel Facussé

Since the June 2009 coup, over 50 people associated with the campesino organisations in the Aguán Valley have been assassinated, many of them by the private security forces of Miguel Facussé. Even before the 2009 coup, Facussé is believed to have been the intellectual author of numerous assassinations, especially on the north coast of Honduras. One such assassination is that of Carlos Escaleras in 1997. Carlos was a leader of the Coordinating Body of Popular Organisations of Aguán, and was assassinated for his part in protests about the contamination caused by Facussé's palm oil extraction plant – see ENCA 44.

From 1992 onwards, through intimidation and coercion, a series of neoliberal governments promoted the transfer of lands in the Aguán Valley to wealthy elites. As one of the major beneficiaries of these policies, Facussé now claims over 22,000 acres of land just in the Aguán Valley much of which is planted with African palms.

After the 2009 coup, campesino groups began occupations of land that they claimed had been stolen from them, but these occupations were met with brutality and repression. Many of the killings have been attributed to Miguel Facussé's private security guards, the number of which (between 200 and 300) makes them more like a private army. Locally they are referred to as 'sicarios' (hitmen). In November 2010 Facussé himself publicly admitted that his guards had shot and killed five campesinos from the MUCA (United Movement of Campesinos of Aguán). Many of his victims have been members of MUCA but others have belonged to stable communities which have existed for decades and whose members believed they held legal title to their land.

A July 2011 report from the World Council of Churches and other international groups on the killing of campesinos in the Aguán Valley states that "In all cases, according to witnesses and members of the peasant movements, the security guards working for Miguel Facussé and René Morales are seen to be the primary actors."

National and international human rights groups have denounced Facussé's attacks on campesinos. Facussé's aggression, however, is not reserved for campesinos. In April 2011 he placed a full page advertisement in *La Tribuna* denouncing those who had denounced him. This group

included Bertha Oliva, Director of COFADEH (the Committee of Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared in Honduras) along with priests, environmentalists and other human rights defenders. Oliva is quoted in the advertisement as saying "The soldiers and police are commanded by Miguel Facussé, despite the fact that they are paid by the Honduran people, but they obey the orders of the de facto powers that have taken control of the nation." This reference to the de facto powers relates to the coup d'état of which Facussé is widely believed to have been a crucial supporter and of which he is certainly a major beneficiary. All of those listed in the advertisement understand their naming as a threat.

The Aguán Valley has been heavily militarised and local settlements are under a permanent state of siege. Rights Action, a Canadian human rights organisation states that "Military, police and private security forces are reported to exchange uniforms depending on the context, to mobilise jointly both in police patrol cars and automobiles that belong to private security companies employed by the African palm planters." All of this points to the security guards acting as a paramilitary force.

In July 2011, the United Nations Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) Board approved a palm oil biogas project by the Dinant Corporation. The decision was made despite representations from many NGOs worldwide, including an open letter signed by 77 organisations and networks worldwide. The Chair of the CDM Board, Martin Hession from the UK government, claimed that the Board was not equipped to investigate human rights abuses.

As if the foregoing is not enough for us to raise serious questions about the overlap between Facussé's environmentalism and gangsterism, Wikileaks has exposed that members of the US State Department stationed in Honduras have believed that since 2004 he has also been involved in the cocaine trade.

With environmentalists like Miguel Facussé, who needs gangsters?

Report compiled by Martin Mowforth:
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Nica-Tico Eco Conflict

Regular followers of Central American affairs will be aware of the dispute between Nicaragua and Costa Rica over a small area of land in the delta region of the Río San Juan near the Caribbean coastline. Costa Rica calls the disputed area Isla Calero whilst Nicaragua calls it Harbour Head. The dispute is currently under consideration at the International Court of Justice at The Hague.



Carretera 1856 - Photo: MOPT

The court case began in November 2010 after Nicaragua started dredging the river to make it more navigable. The river belongs to Nicaragua in its entirety and the border between the two countries lies on the southern bank of the river. Costa Rica claims that part of the distributary channels in the delta affected by the dredging belong to Costa Rica.

Nicaragua has now presented its written arguments to the court to counter Costa Rica's original claims, leaving Costa Rican President Laura Chinchilla to decide whether to present counter arguments in writing or orally. If she chooses the latter, it is possible that the court could issue a ruling before her term of office ends in May 2014.

In ill-advised great haste after the dispute first erupted, Costa Rica built a 160 km long, unpaved road along the southern bank of the river. The road was built without planning and without any environmental impact assessment, facts that have incurred the wrath of environmentalists on both sides of the border. Amongst the environmental criticisms of the road building fiasco are the following:

- The swath of felling that was required for the construction
- The blockage of streams that flow into the Río San Juan
- The silt and mud flows into the Río San Juan
- The access allowed for colonisers and squatters into previously inaccessible tracts of rainforest

As if these environmental considerations are not enough cause for concern, scandals have erupted this year around the funding of the road. These have led to President Chinchilla firing the Minister of Public Works and Transport, Francisco Jiménez. Specifically, the corruption has involved:

- The awarding of contracts to companies which did not have the capability to carry out such work
- The unaccountable loss of much of the US\$40 million funding for the road – as many as 40 firms involved in

the road construction are under investigation for corruption

- The use of old machinery not up to the job
- Bribes for public works officials in the tendering phase
- Kickbacks to public works and company officials from the disbursement of funding
- Unknown use of the felled timber

In July this year, the Central American Court of Justice issued a unanimous ruling finding that Costa Rica had built the road "without the studies and analysis demanded ... by regional and international law." In keeping with her kneejerk nature, President Chinchilla immediately rejected the ruling as "spurious and illegitimate" given that Costa Rica does not recognise the Court.

Whatever the rights and wrongs of the border dispute at Isla Calero / Harbour Head, President Chinchilla has certainly delivered a major blow to Costa Rica's internationally famous environmental reputation.

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Costa Rica now the world's most intensive user of pesticides

By Stephanie Williamson

The image promoted to tourists of Costa Rica as a green and eco-friendly 'paradise' was shattered yet again when the Washington-based World Resources Institute reported in 2011 that this small Central American country now ranked as the world's most intensive user of pesticides. Costa Rica's pesticide consumption figures, based on volumes applied per area of farmland, have reached 51.2 kg per hectare, followed at Latin American regional level by Colombia (16.7 kg/ha) and Ecuador (6 kg/ha). In terms of absolute volumes, Brazil tops the global chart, using over a million tons of pesticides in 2009.

The Regional Institute for Research on Toxic Substances (IRET), based at the National University, reported that Costa Rica's pesticide imports increased by 340% between 1977 and 2006, totalling 184,817 tons in those thirty years. Melon crops account for the bulk of pesticide use, followed by tomato, potato, pineapple and sugar cane. Intensive use of pesticides is causing serious water pollution, especially in large-scale monoculture systems such as pineapple. The country's environmental 'state of the nation' report in 2010 highlighted the increasing water pollution incidents in the last decade, as agriculture and urban land use and planning fail to protect drinking water sources.

Much of Costa Rica's banana production relies on heavy and frequent application of pesticides, often by air over the large plantations. Last year the NGO Ecological Development Association called on the government to publish the results from a Pan-American Health Organisation study on the health and environmental impacts of banana spraying. The study, begun over eight years ago at the behest of a former Minister for Environment, is particularly relevant for the district of Matina, where the banana plantations are right next to houses, schools and *campesinos'* food crops. The NGO has criticised the existing aerial crop spraying regulations as totally inadequate to protect human health and is demanding special measures to protect children living in the banana zones from exposure to harmful pesticides. Matina residents are currently denied their 'right to know' about precisely which pesticide products are sprayed and regularly drift over their homes and fields.

Despite new pesticide regulations in recent years, poisoning incidents continue in Costa Rican agriculture. In June 2010, at least 28 women workers suffered acute poisoning in the cotton farm Caballo Blanco in Guanacaste province on the Pacific coast, while four months later a mass pesticide intoxication of 65 cotton farm workers was reported from Las Loras farm growing GM cotton in Puntarenas province. According to figures from the National Social Security Chamber, 146 people were treated for accidental pesticide poisoning by the health services in 2010, and of these, 12 cases proved fatal.

Ignacio Arroyo, biologist and columnist, comments that behind the tripling of pesticide use in Costa Rica lies the dismantling of traditional farming and the genetic erosion of crop diversity, in favour of corporate monopoly by agribusiness. Pesticide Action Network (PAN) International and its Latin American members point the finger at continued sales in developing countries by the agrochemical multinationals of highly hazardous pesticides (HHPs), often banned in the global

North. The industry's much flaunted 'safe use' approach is impossible to achieve in most developing country conditions – due to inadequate understanding of the risks, low education levels of small farmers and farm workers, lack of affordable and effective protective equipment, compounded by government failure to implement and monitor pesticide controls.

But it doesn't have to be this way. 2011 saw the formation of a Costa Rican campaign to 'Stop Spraying', composed of young activists mobilising also against mining and oil exploration and for organic farming. The campaign is raising citizens' awareness of the dangers of pesticides and GM crops. PAN International is calling on governments and food and fibre supply chain businesses to phase out use of HHPs, in tune with recommendations from UN agencies, and to phase in agro-ecological farming methods instead. Costa Rica's neighbour, Panama, takes a much tougher stance on pesticide issues, recently passing new laws to reduce the risk of contamination of food or adverse effects on farmers or the environment. In 2011, the Agriculture and Health Ministries jointly prohibited a further 11 pesticides, increasing to 73 the number of pesticides banned or severely restricted in the country and placing Panama at the vanguard of health and environmental protection in Latin America. Panama is also leading efforts to develop Central American regional standards for organic farming and food.



Sign up to PAN's campaign to '**show the red card**' to the big 3 European pesticide companies (Bayer, BASF and Syngenta) and demand that they stop selling highly hazardous pesticides to developing countries.

Read more via:

http://www.pan-germany.org/gbr/project_work/highly_hazardous_pesticides.html

ENCA would also urge readers to visit the website of PAN-UK:

<http://www.pan-uk.org/>

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The battle for Costa Rica's environment – new legislative threats and the real value of environmental protection

By James Watson

In an article from August 2011, Óscar Núñez Olivas draws attention to a proposition currently on the legislative table in Costa Rica, Proposition 17.211, that threatens to open Costa Rica's cherished protected wild areas and National Parks to private sector interests, including electricity generation intended to export energy to the US under Plan Puebla Panama.

Presented by the ruling PLN party as an attempt to harmonise and modernise the legislation around the country's National Parks, the proposition would replace the existing National Parks law, which has been a driver of Costa Rica's internationally recognised conservation efforts, and the growth in tourism this has precipitated.

One of the major worries around the proposition is the opening of the areas to private interests engaged in 'non-essential activities' – such as shops, parking and other services – with the potential for increased human settlement within the parks and subsequent environmental damage. There has also been a worrying lack of consultation of communities adjacent to the wild areas, and the proposal includes provisions to hand over environmental management of certain areas to municipal governments and individual interests with supposed environmental agendas, without clear criteria for regulating them and avoiding corruption.

But perhaps the most alarming element, according to Olivas, is the possibility of protected wild areas being opened to increasing development of electricity projects, such as hydroelectric and geothermal plants. The country's energy demands for the next 25 to 30 years are projected to be met by the plants the country has or is already developing. However, the Costa Rican state and private interests are keen to expand its energy production further, in order to profit from exporting energy, largely to the US. This has become a possibility through the near-complete integration of energy supply networks from Panama to Mexico, created under the provisions of Plan Puebla Panama. With this pressure to expand energy production, the reduction of restrictions in Costa Rica's protected areas constitutes a very real threat.

According to Olivas, whether the new proposition will find its way into Costa Rican law is still very uncertain. However, another legal change that has already gone ahead is Costa Rica's recent approval of the expansion of Pindeco's GM pineapple production, from experimental plots to field scale plantations. (Pindeco is a subsidiary of Del Monte – see ENCA Newsletters 26, 27 and 51.) This is despite continuing worries of environmental contamination and ill health that opponents say have been ignored.

These challenges present two more examples of the conflict that seems to regularly occur between capitalist interests and the environment, especially in such ecologically rich areas as Costa Rica. In another article, Bernardo Aguilar (Director of Fundación Neotropica) attempts to dispel the imagined dichotomy between ecological conservation efforts and economically productive activities. He argues that Costa Rican



Location of Costa Rica's National Parks. (Source: Viva Costa Rica)

protected wild areas are in themselves economically productive and vital for the country's economy. As such, conservation funding is an integral part of Costa Rica's investment expenditure, and the current legislative push to open their wild areas to exploitation has a significant opportunity cost associated with it.

Aguilar highlights not only the aesthetic and sociocultural importance of Costa Rica's wild areas, and the immeasurable value this has to the nation's wellbeing and identity, but also their importance for the country's highly successful tourism trade. Tourism, according to Aguilar, contributes 7% of the country's GDP and supports (directly and indirectly) 13% of its jobs. Meanwhile, he points out that preserved wild areas contribute more tangibly to the country's economy as natural flood barriers, producers of food and materials, for carbon sequestration, and for existing hydroelectric generation. Aguilar gives as an example Fundación Neotropica's estimate that the Caribe Noreste wetland area on the border of Nicaragua generates, through these sorts of 'environmental services', between \$2,800 and \$46,000 per hectare per year.

Costa Rica it seems is increasingly a battleground between concerted efforts to recognise the common value of environmental assets, and ventures to develop these assets for the profits of big business. Hopefully analyses such as Aguilar's will help fight back against the long-term damage threatened by laws such as Proposition 17.211.

This article was based on information from: 'Environmentalists warn about proposition to privatise protected areas', (August 2011) by Óscar Núñez Olivas; 'Conflicts, the value of the environmental services and Costa Rican protected wild areas' by Bernardo Aguilar, Revista Ambientico, (November 2011); and 'Costa Rica: transgenic pineapple unwrapped', BananaLink, Banana Trade newsletter (January 2012).

Environmental farce on the Caribbean coast of Honduras: protected areas, hydroelectric dams and coastal wetlands

In July, OFRANEH, the Black Brotherhood Organisation of Honduras, sent us their assessment of developments currently under way on rivers which flow into the Caribbean Sea along the northern coast of Honduras.

On the north coast of Honduras is a chain of wetlands within which the Miskito and Garífuna peoples live. The lagoons and estuaries are an essential part of the functioning of these habitats, from which the Miskito and Garífuna people obtain their food and daily living.

During the last few years the effects of coastal erosion have taken their toll on the shoreline and have accelerated the salinisation of the wetlands with unpredictable consequences.

One of the major threats to the ecological health of these wetland systems is the construction of several hydroelectric schemes along the length of the Caribbean coast. In the department of Atlántida of Honduras, along a 60km stretch of coastline there are already ten dams either planned or completed. The channels and flow rates of the ten affected rivers are essential for maintaining the integrity and for the survival of the Sambuca, Cuero and Salado coastal wetlands.

The majority of Environmental Impact Studies commissioned by the construction companies have not taken into consideration the effects of climate change particularly in relation to the changes in rainfall and thus changes to the rates of flow of the rivers. It is thought that in the not too distant future the dry spells produced by the El Niño current will be more acute and the oscillation periods will be longer, with grave consequences for the rivers that flow into the coastal lagoons.

Hydro dams such as the Patuca III and Los Chorrros on the Sico River will have drastic effects on the Bacalar, Ibans and Brus Lakes. These lakes have already been badly affected by reduced flows of the Central American rivers experienced in recent years.

The disruption of the rivers under the guise of clean energy affects the ecology of these systems. Unfortunately, rivers are seen as a cheap source of energy whilst the potential from the tidal energy of the sea is not explored. Many environmental groups have been silent over the ecological effects of these hydro-schemes.

It should be remembered that in the 1990s the creation of the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor failed to recognise the territories of 59 indigenous communities of Central America. At present, some environmental organisations are to some extent complicit in the violation of human rights and the repression of our peoples that are brought about by these dams.

From the Maya people of Barillas in Guatemala to the Bugle de Tabasara in Panama, their human rights are being violated. In recent months many indigenous people have suffered state repression and the obliteration of their human rights. In the System of Protected Areas, which was established decades ago, the construction of dams has been permitted, as happened on the River Teribe in the La Amistad International Park in Costa Rica and Panama and on the River Patuca in

the Corazón Biosphere of Honduras. The conversion to production of these protected areas continues to date with the excuse that it is being done in the name of the 'green economy'.

There have been many entrepreneurs of the conversion of ecology into financial opportunities since the creation of the Cuero y Salado Wildlife Refuge through to the Cayos Cochinos Marine Monument and the Punta Izopo. Take for example Stephan Schmidheiny, the king of asbestos, or the palm oil baron Miguel Facussé, who turned protected areas into economic investments.

At no time did the management plans for the protected areas carry out consultations, and in some cases there have been unannounced evictions of the local people. Nearly 50 Garífuna families inhabiting wetlands were forced to move to other coastal areas by Reserve officials backed up by the army. Schmidheiny has tried to replicate this strategy in the Cayos Cochinos.

Wetlands and African Palm

According to the Minister of Natural Resources (SERNA) in Honduras for every four hectares of African palm there is one hectare of wetland. However, the proportion of African palm is expanding and that of wetlands contracting. According to the US embassy in Honduras there are currently 220,000 hectares of African palm, which could be expanded to 540,000 hectares. This ominous prediction implies that African palm production will expand in the Moskitia, accelerating the disappearance of large expanses of wetland and intensifying land monopolies.

It certainly seems that the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor is becoming the Central American African Palm Corridor. It is even possible that the palm plantations may receive funds from REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation).

As it stands indigenous peoples are suffering increased attacks from nation states, under the guise of clean energy including biofuels, which appear to be backed up by protected area legislation. This hypocrisy is allowing for a final assault on the territories, culture and lifestyles of indigenous peoples.

Obviously the developmental crisis facing the world requires responsible and ethical decisions by states. Likewise the various peoples and social movements must strengthen their resolve and mobilise effectively to guarantee a future worth living for generations to come.

La Ceiba, Atlántida, 3 de Julio del 2012

Organización Fraternal Negra Hondureña, OFRANEH

<http://ofraneh.wordpress.com/2012/07/05/farsa-ambiental-en-la-costa-caribe-de-honduras-areas-protegidas-represas-hidroelectricas-y-humedales-costeros/>

<http://www.ofraneh.org>

<http://www.ofraneh.wordpress.com>

(Translated by ENCA member Julie Gardiner)

Leatherbacks, hawksbills and other endangered species

At the beginning of July, the Tico Times (English language weekly newspaper of Costa Rica) reported on a study conducted for The Leatherback Trust that showed successful hatches of baby turtles in Playa Grande on the north-western coast of Costa Rica are likely to decline by as much as 60 per cent as temperatures rise and rainfall decreases if climate change continues as predicted by the IPCC (Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change).

Leatherback sea turtles are the largest marine turtles and Pacific leatherbacks are the most threatened of all the leatherbacks with only 2,000 nesting at the most important sites in Mexico and Costa Rica. Leatherbacks nest at Playa Grande from October to February, the hottest months, and take about 60 days to hatch. Above 32 degrees Celsius, there are few successful hatchings. Current average monthly temperatures for these months range from 24°C to 34°C in the Playa Grande area, but are predicted to increase which will reduce the number of hatchlings.

One week later, the Nicaragua News reported that hawksbill turtles are in "critical danger of extinction" in Nicaragua and El Salvador which provide the nesting grounds for 80 per cent of the estimated surviving 500 hawksbills. Their particular nesting grounds are in Jiquilisco Bay, El Salvador, and Padre Ramos estuary in Nicaragua. The latter is one of the areas covered by the Sea Turtle Rescue programme which is seeking volunteers to help in turtle conservation measures – see box.

The major threats that the hawksbills face are from fishing nets, ocean contamination, egg harvesting and use of the shells for handicraft goods. Nicaragua has had turtle protection programmes in force for many years and has also brought to prosecution several high volume egg smugglers. These programmes also include education workshops for market vendors to persuade them not to sell turtle eggs.

In Nicaragua, quite apart from turtles, 128 animal species are listed as in danger of extinction and 62 as threatened. These include all Nicaragua's species of monkeys and cats, the Great Green Macaw and the Yellow Naped Parrot, amongst others. There is a total ban on killing or capturing all those on the list.

Turtle conservation work at Los Zorros, Nicaragua – a volunteer opportunity

Arturo Rivera and Dennis Renfro have set up a Sea Turtle Rescue programme in Los Zorros, on the Pacific coast of Nicaragua. They are in need of volunteers to assist their efforts.

The kind of tasks that volunteers would undertake include the full range of activities:

- building work - they are planning to build a small rancho for volunteers to stay in, along with associated buildings such as toilets and shower;
- clearing work - some of the areas used by turtles to lay their eggs are over-run by sand weeds which make it difficult for the turtles to dig their nests. All along the beach there is always clearing work to do;
- education work - this includes involvement in the preparation of materials for use in local schools and production of information sheets and posters. If your Spanish gets up to a good level, you could also be involved in the teaching;
- IT work - for the environmental education aspects of the work, but also for searching for funds;
- measuring of the turtles and baby turtles - weight and size plus numbers of turtles laying; and
- beach patrols at night to monitor turtles and to afford them a degree of protection from poachers.

Of all the above, the last one is the most difficult task that they have. The beach is several kilometres long and they have only ever had two volunteers who were prepared to do an 8 hour shift at night and sleep during the day. Arturo was at pains to stress that he cannot cover the entire beach on his own and that he needs help in this. But he also said that most volunteers weren't prepared to do it because they enjoyed their drinking and partying at night time. Such volunteers are of very limited use to him. He really needs help during the night-time - at least during the laying season.

The main time of year for the turtle egg-laying in this area is from September to December, October and November being the busiest months. But Arturo said that there is plenty of work to be done from July onwards, in preparation for the coming season.

The programme operates from Rancho Tranquilo which has about 4 separate little ranchitos which serve as bedrooms for paying guests, and there is also a dormitory for passing backpackers plus a bar and an eating area. Tina allows volunteers who are working on the programme to stay for \$6 a night which is quite a bit cheaper than you would pay if you were just staying there as a paying guest. Tina is from the US and speaks both Spanish and English. Rancho Tranquilo and Dennis's place both back onto the beach, so the life of a volunteer is very much beach-based. There are other places to stay and to eat which are relatively close by. And if you felt the need to escape once in a while, there are several buses each day to the towns of El Viejo (1 hour plus a bit) and Chinandega (1 hour 30 minutes).

For more details and to express an interest, contact Martin Mowforth on mmowforth@plymouth.ac.uk

IPES and small farmers in El Salvador

Since ENCA's last newsletter we have heard a number of times from one of our partner organisations in Central America, namely IPES, the Permaculture Institute of El Salvador.

Hello from all of us at the Permaculture Institute of El Salvador (IPES)!

We've just launched a crowdfunding campaign at <http://www.indiegogo.com/viva-permacultura> and we'd love you to check it out, make a donation or just "like" the page via Facebook and press the "add to favourites" button. And most importantly, it would be great if you could forward this e-mail to your own network of friends and contacts.

A huge part of the campaign is about telling people what we're doing – that amidst the climate and food crisis, there are people trying to change their world. We know that Permaculture can be that positive solution that shows us how to care for the Earth whilst still providing enough food for everyone. At the same time, the economic crisis has taken its toll and made fundraising even harder than ever. Therefore we need our supporters to help us out – just until new funding opportunities manifest.

We've been teaching permaculture to subsistence farmers for 10 years this September, and we're finally receiving attention from the government, UN agencies and NGOs, both internationally and in El Salvador. It is safe to say that just a few years ago no one here at IPES could imagine that kind of recognition. But now it's happening and we couldn't be more excited!

Please help us pass on this important message! All our love and thanks,

Karen Inwood and the IPES team

The Permaculture Institute of El Salvador

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On Sale Now

The Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign now has its bi-lingual Christmas cards in stock.

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Reina is a member of IPES and recently had the chance to talk with members of the Salvadoran government about what IPES does. This is Karen Inwood's report of that meeting.

Thank you everyone. Reina told me she felt held by everyone's support, not nervous at all but just excited at the opportunity to finally talk with people in her Government who actually seemed to care. Her presentation and participation (together with one of our young women promoters) in the 2 day workshop obviously had a big impact - apart from the advisor to the Environment Ministry, they were the only women there. What excites us most is that the government officials seem to have understood what sets our work apart, saying that all the other organisations speak on behalf of the farmers, whereas IPES supports the farmers to speak for themselves. There was enthusiastic support from everyone present and a commitment from the Environment Ministry to partner with us and support us in finding funding (although it seems clear that this will not happen overnight). It looks as though there is widespread recognition of the national importance of our Education and Demonstration Centre in promoting sustainable farming and in particular in providing Permaculture Design courses for farmers' leaders and interest in replicating our Farmer-to-Farmer Permaculture model.



IPES members, Reina is second from the left

This event has confirmed our assessment that we are at the tipping point of national recognition and support for Permaculture in El Salvador.

Very shortly after this 2 day gathering, Salvadoran President Mauricio Funes launched the national farming year with a series of measures designed to aid small farmers and to "put an end to the privileges of the past". In an implicit criticism of the neoliberal economic model, Funes accused the previous ARENA government of destroying the country's food markets by opening up El Salvador to massive food imports which undermine local producers. He announced a programme for 800 peasant farmers to supply the 'basic nutritious meal' to the poorest schools in the capital and to extend the free school fresh milk using only the produce from local dairy farms. He also signed an agreement between the Ministry of Agriculture and Harinas de El Salvador for the purchase of 4,000 tons of white maize from local producers.

While the scale of these programmes is very small, the reasons given for promoting them are a welcome counter to the neoliberal neglect of small-scale producers.

COFADEH

In December 2011, along with many other organisations ENCA endorsed the following open letter to the Director of Public Prosecutions of Honduras sent by Bertha Oliva, the coordinator of COFADEH, the Committee of Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared in Honduras. There is little sign that matters have improved during 2012.

Tegucigalpa M.D.C., 9 December 2011

Open letter to Alberto Rubí, Director of Public Prosecutions
Mr Luis Alberto Rubí, Fiscal General de la República

Dear Mr Rubí,

COFADEH has repeatedly condemned the state of impunity for serious human rights violations committed in Honduras, which has intensified since the military coup of 28 June 2009. At the close of 2011, we would once again like to draw attention to the lack of transparency and inaction on the part of the *Ministerio Público* (Public Prosecution Service) in relation to these crimes.

Numerous politically-motivated human rights violations have been committed in the country before, during and after the coup, including arbitrary and summary executions, torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, kidnappings, mass illegal detentions and repression of peaceful demonstrations. The breakdown in the due functioning of state institutions is demonstrated by the systematic denial of the right to truth and justice for the victims and their relatives. Many of these violations were committed years ago. However, in cases involving agents of the state, the investigations have not been launched and those responsible continue to go unpunished.

COFADEH is aware of numerous cases of human rights violations. Several of the reports received relate to cases of murder, apparently politically motivated, or to people who have died as a direct result of the use of excessive force by state authorities. COFADEH has been in regular contact with the victims' relatives, and we can attest to the fact that the *Ministerio Público* disregards them and fails to keep them informed of progress in investigations. When it does contact them, it is to violate their right to decide who represents them legally.

The right of the families of victims of human rights violations to know the truth has been recognised by the United Nations and by the Inter-American System for the protection of human rights. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) has declared that this right belongs not only to the families but to society as a whole, as knowing the truth about what occurred can prevent it happening again in the future. In view of this, the current state of impunity within Honduras is extremely alarming.

We, the undersigned organisations, request that you conduct, as soon as possible, thorough and impartial investigations into cases of serious human rights violations and that the people responsible are brought to justice through processes which promote the involvement of the surviving victims and relatives, while ensuring their security.

We hope that in 2012, the state will undertake, as policy and in practice, to clarify the facts, thereby enabling the truth to be known and swiftly lead to justice being done.

Yours sincerely,

COFADEH

Comité de Familiares de Detenidos y
Desaparecidos en Honduras

Sitio Web: www.cofadeh.org



Events

University of Toronto, Canada

ENCA was invited to have a stand at the University of Toronto's Environmental Energy and Sustainability Fair in the spring of 2012. During the event ENCA member Doug Specht, who had been working at the University of Toronto, handed out free copies of ENCA 55, which included his damning report on the Canadian Mining industry. As suggested in the article, many of the students and faculty were unaware of the depth of these issues before talking with us, despite many of them being involved in the study of mining and resource management. ENCA handed out nearly 100 copies of the report as well as collecting more than 80 email addresses.



ENCA's stand at the University of Toronto

Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign, Liverpool

At the end of March this year ENCA member James Watson attended a small day-long discussion event in Liverpool hosted by the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign. The event aimed to bring together a small group of people and explore how to enact effective solidarity with Nicaraguan causes, especially in light of the changes in Nicaragua's political situation over the last decade. Although hampered by a disappointingly low turnout, the discussion generated some interesting information especially about the recently reconfirmed Sandinista government and their position relative to the Chavez-led ALBA.

The event was attended by Guisell Morales-Echaverry, Chargée d'Affaires at the Nicaraguan embassy in London, and gave an opportunity for the participants to hear her account of the current government's projects and direction, followed by an in-depth question and answer session. ENCA had hoped for an opportunity to lead a discussion of our own on the environmental issues that face the country, but the low turnout meant the discussion stayed in one group, led by the questions that came out of Guisell's talk. However a range of interesting issues came out of this, such as the expansion of Nicaragua's importing of Venezuelan oil - the largest part of their engagement with ALBA - as countered by the recent expansion in sustainable energy production in Nicaragua, which now generates a significant proportion of all Nicaragua's electricity.

We would like to thank the NSC for putting on this event and inviting us to speak there, and hope it represents the beginning of an increased focus on getting people together in our country to explore how we engage with and support social and environmental justice in the Central America of the 2010s.

Pacific Rim v. El Salvador Latest developments

The Pacific Rim Mining Corporation initiated a claim against the government of El Salvador in 2009 for cancelling its permit to mine for gold at the firm's El Dorado project in San Isidro in Cabañas department. Previous ENCA Newsletters (nos. 51, 52 and 53) have charted the company's claim which was registered with the World Bank's International Centre for the Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID), under provisions of the DR-CAFTA Free Trade Agreement. The company's permit had been cancelled by the government largely because of widespread public concern over environmental and social problems related to the effects of opencast gold mining on the local supply of water.

On June 1st this year, an ICSID tribunal judged that Pacific Rim, a Canadian company, could not pursue its claim under the DR-CAFTA Agreement because it did not have substantial business activities in the USA. Free trade agreements such as DR-CAFTA award exceptional rights to corporations to sue governments which curtail their ability to make profits. Pacific Rim had switched some of its head office operations from the Cayman Islands to the USA deliberately to take advantage of the agreement's clauses which would enable it to sue the Salvadoran government.

Although this sounds like a victory for El Salvador, in fact the tribunal will continue to consider the company's claim that El Salvador had violated its own Investment Law which was approved in 1999. This law prohibits expropriation without compensation and as Lisa Fuller of CISPES (Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador) explained, it "is just like CAFTA and other so-called free trade agreements, in that countries like El Salvador must forfeit their own democratic processes in the name of attracting foreign investment, which is a hallmark of neoliberal economic policy."

Lori Wallach of Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch commented: "The fact that corporate attacks on a sovereign country's domestic environmental policy before a tribunal would even be possible – much less cost a country millions when a key element of the attack is dismissed – highlights what is wrong with our 'trade' agreement model."

The National Roundtable Against Metal Mining has called on President Funes to eliminate Chapter 15 of the Investment Law which allows foreign corporations to bring suits like this one against the government at the ICSID, as well as to push forward a national ban on metal mining. The struggle continues.

Martin Mowforth.

Sources:

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ICSID (1 June 2012) 'Pac Rim Cayman LLC v. Republic of El Salvador (ICSID Case No. ARB/09/12)'.
Mining Weekly (4 June 2012) 'Canadian miner's complaint can proceed under El Salvador law', www.miningweekly.com
Institute for Policy Studies (2 June 2012) 'World Bank Tribunal Ruling in El Salvador Mining Case Undermines Democracy', www.ips-dc.org CISPES

GREEN GOLD? The Bamboo Boom

In April, a Radio 4 programme by Mike Wooldridge, BBC's World Affairs Correspondent, focussed on a new bamboo scheme in Nicaragua.

With his Environmental Management background, Camille Rebelo is pioneering a bamboo project of 1,000 hectares along the Río Cama, near the town of La Fonseca. She claims the project is a new approach to make forestry work for people and also for profit – lifting people out of poverty, alleviating global warming and providing good returns for international investors who will mainly fund the scheme by investing in 'Bamboo bonds'.

Her belief is that bamboo provides a sustainable and regenerative crop, which can grow on soil not suitable for other crops. Bamboo has a higher tensile strength than steel and is versatile, flexible and enduring. It matures in a fraction of the time it takes tropical hardwoods to grow and unlike trees – it is in fact a grass – continues to grow and replenish once harvested. Bamboo also captures more carbon than any other land plant.

Native to Nicaragua, bamboo has long been considered a 'nuisance' by small farmers on the Caribbean coast, who have traditionally burnt it to be rid of the 'invasive weed'. Now these farmers are encouraged to sell their bamboo to the project which provides a welcome income.

The bamboo plantation will provide its first harvest in 4 - 5 years, in which time a processing factory close to Rama will have been built, ready to manufacture the crop into a variety of high value end products. Local people are aware of bamboo's construction potential, though not so widely used up to now, but have been amazed and amused when local project manager John Vogel has held meetings to describe its versatility from clothing (underwear produced a big laugh!), cosmetics, green charcoal, as well as planks. Already the town of La Fonseca has seen an increase in economic activity and employment opportunities.

But these are early days, and with the Nicaraguan experience of exploitative international timber companies deforesting with scant attention to local regulations, palm oil plantations highlighting the disadvantages of a single-crop cultivation, and with local peasants often uprooted and excluded, only time will tell if this scheme can be an inclusive and beneficial scheme in a poor country. Or will it be another scheme to simply produce profits for the rich?

Summary by ENCA member Sheila Amoo-Gottfried

For more news on Central American Mining,
take a look at our interactive map:



www.enca.org.uk/mining

ENCA Newsletter 56, September 2012, p. 10

Can you travel internationally without flying?



One of ENCA's members, James, is lucky enough to be planning a year travelling to a few corners of the world, with plans to visit Egypt before heading to Latin America – volunteering with and hopefully developing further links for partners of ENCA in Central America.

With the time available to him, and aware of the carbon burden that air travel for tourism places on the global climate, James is determined to explore what it means nowadays to travel internationally without flying.

Why do this?

There are 3 reasons why James intends to do this:

1) For the environment

Nowadays there is an increasing number of people looking into tourism options that have less of an environmental impact. One of the main concerns is the huge amount of carbon released by aeroplanes, due to the vast energy required to make them fly. Furthermore the high altitude at which planes fly – especially long-haul flights – means that this carbon is dumped where it causes the most damage to our environment. As a result, there is no single activity that the average Western person undertakes that has more of an impact on global warming.

2) As a personal choice

Unfortunately, when it comes to international travel it is not as simple as choosing not to fly – for many people it seems hard to find viable alternatives. Due to the speed of air travel, and intense competition from airlines to reduce their prices – assisted by that ability to avoid fuel taxes – alternatives generally don't seem able to compete.

Furthermore, avoiding emissions is not always as simple as not flying. Any form of fossil-fuel powered transport emits carbon, and the distances involved in international travel mean that this is frequently a great deal. Cargo ships like those James intends to use to get across the Atlantic, for example, have to run their engines constantly for weeks to make the journey. However, cargo ships exist and travel regardless of whether they have passengers – by travelling by such methods you are not avoiding emissions but minimising your own contribution to them, and to a travel industry whose existence is a major source of them.

Our ENCA member has a luxury of time for his journey, and has decided to spend a bit more of this, and a bit more money, in an attempt to avoid air travel. This personal choice is in part an attempt to commit to having as little an environmental impact as possible while travelling. But it is equally driven by a desire to find out what this commitment requires of us nowadays.

Ultimately however, the painful truth is that no matter how much we love our international holidays, they come with an environmental cost. It is a personal choice we make to fly, instead of travelling shorter distances or finding less polluting methods of transport. This choice is one that our future generations, and current generations in climatically-sensitive areas like Central America, have to bear the consequences of.

3) For ENCA

One person choosing not to fly of course has very little impact on the global environment. However we hope that by promoting a little of this adventure, it may inspire other people to give it a go. ENCA will therefore continue to publish a blog from James on its website, at www.enca.org.uk/flightlesstravel accounting his experience of flightless-travel as he goes along.

ENCA and James are also asking people to donate to ENCA, in a very similar manner to sponsored hitch-hikes and bike rides. We really hope that it will inspire people to donate to ENCA using the paypal buttons on the webpage, so we can reach a target of £1000 in extra donations this year.

The plan (so far)

First of all, James is planning on going to Egypt to meet friends, via a ferry from Mersin in Southern Turkey. On the way to Mersin, James intends to hitch-hike through Belgium, Germany, Slovenia, Serbia and Bulgaria, and to use couch-surfing to find places to stay along the way.

After Egypt, James will travel by the same methods back up to Le Havre in North France, where he gets a cargo ship that will take him on a 17 day journey across the Atlantic to Guatemala in Central America.

From there, much of the rest of his travel is likely to be by local buses and coaches. So far, he is planning on going swiftly to Nicaragua where he intends to volunteer for 3 months with a partner of ENCA, Clinica Xochil.

That is the plan so far, but more is to come – please check out how things are going, and donate if possible, at www.enca.org.uk/flightlesstravel



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

enca.info@gmail.com



Donate to ENCA and show your support for ENCA member James Watson

www.enca.org.uk/flightlesstravel

Costa Rica, the Sea Shepherd and shark finning

Costa Rica seems bent of destroying its good environmental reputation. Since earlier this year, the country has been trying to extradite Paul Watson, head of the marine environmental activist group Sea Shepherd. The attempt relates to an incident in 2002 when Watson's boat tried to prevent poachers killing sharks and in so doing allegedly endangered the lives of some of the finners. The incident is on film and a previous Costa Rica prosecutor had already dropped the charges, but a new prosecutor re-opened the investigation.

Watson was arrested in Germany in May but later jumped bail to avoid extradition to Costa Rica. He will attempt to avoid re-arrest by staying at sea in international waters. Watson, quoted in The Guardian, said he had "no choice but to continue to serve my clients, the whales. I can do that far better at the helm of the Steve Irwin ... than I can defending myself from bogus charges by Japan." Watson believes that Costa Rica is colluding with Japan to have him extradited to Japan which has declared him an eco-terrorist. Japan wants to prevent him from disrupting the Japanese whale hunting season in the Antarctic.

The global trade in shark fins, driven by demand in South-East Asia, is decimating world shark populations. Fins can fetch more than US\$900 per pound in some markets and bowls of shark fin soup can sell for more than US\$100 each. The industrial fishing fleets use non-selective forms of fishing, including long lines and purse seine nets, and have reduced by up to 85 per cent marlin and sailfish populations in Costa Rican waters.

Different groups within Costa Rica's fishing industry are currently arguing over shark-finning. On the one hand, the Pacific Coast Fisherman's Union is battling against the industrial scale foreign fishing fleets which make it difficult for local, small-scale fishing businesses to compete. On the other hand, according to the Fisherman's Union, the Costa Rican Sportfishing Federation and the Marine Turtle Restoration Programme, the Costa Rican Fisheries Institute (Incopescas) always favours foreign fishing fleets.

It is against Costa Rican law to land shark fins without the bodies attached. Recently Chinese and Taiwanese boats have been testing the law by landing shark fins which have been detached from the bodies and then sewn back onto the bodies to comply with the law. Normally, to save space in the holds of the boats, the fins are cut off and the body of the shark (still alive) is thrown back into the sea.

Humans kill over 73 million sharks a year despite the fact that more than 30 per cent of all shark species are endangered. In June this year the Chinese government announced that it will ban shark fin soup at official banquets.

Sources:

Clayton R. Norman (6-12 July 2012) 'Prosecutor Probes Fisheries Institute', *Tico Times*, San José.
Hannah J. Ryan (29 June – 5 July 2012) '4 Fishermen Arrested for Shark Finning off Southern Coast', *Tico Times*, San José.
Shiv Malik (15 May 2012) 'Sea Shepherd founder arrested over 2002 shark-finning incident', *The Guardian*, London.
John Vidal (1 September 2012) 'Fugitive Sea Shepherd head vows to fight on', *The Guardian*, London.

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ENCA meeting dates 2012



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.

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

www.enca.org.uk



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