



# Honduran Human Rights Defender visits UK



Honduran police and military continue to infringe human rights across the country  
(Photo: Orlando Sierra / AFP-Getty Images)

*ENCA's meeting on Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> February was attended by Dina Meza, a Honduran journalist and human rights defender. Dina is currently (from January to May) pursuing studies at York University and during her time here she is also briefing a number of UK groups about the appalling human rights situation in Honduras and visiting Germany for the same purpose. The following article reports what Dina told us during her talk at our meeting.*

In Honduras Dina works with COFADEH (the Committee of Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared of Honduras) and directs the organisation's online press service and other press links. ([www.cofadeh.hn](http://www.cofadeh.hn))

In 2007, Dina received an Amnesty International award for journalists under threat. The current human rights situation in Honduras, however, is

very different from that of 2007. There has been a marked deterioration with human rights regressing by 30 years since the 28<sup>th</sup> June 2009 *coup d'état* which ousted President Manuel Zelaya. Dina said that all the progress made under Zelaya has been lost as most state institutions were implicated in the *coup*. For instance, hundreds of human rights denunciations are currently queued up awaiting investigation and nothing is being done about them because the government officials who are supposed to process them were involved in the *coup*.



Dina with members of ENCA

In fact the situation is much worse than that suggests. If an official denunciation is made it is likely to turn the complainant into a target for more human rights abuses. For example, two people were killed 16<sup>th</sup> February, the night before our meeting with Dina. One of these was José Trejos, the brother of Antonio Trejos, a lawyer who was representing land rights campaigners in the Bajo Aguán valley. The other was Jacobo Cartagena, a member of the Unified *Campesino* Movement of the Aguán (MUCA), who was shot and killed as he waited for a bus.

Antonio Trejos was assassinated in a targeted killing on 22<sup>nd</sup> September last year as he came out of church after officiating at a wedding. Antonio had been defending the rights of the MARCA *campesino* collective to restore their lands in the Lower Aguán valley. These lands had been seized 18 years earlier by Honduras's wealthiest man, Miguel Facussé. Facussé owns the Dinant Corporation which used the land to produce African palms as a source of agri-fuel, amongst other things. On several occasions, Antonio had publicised the threats that he had received to the media and had declared that if he were killed, Facussé would be responsible. [See ENCA 56 for more on Miguel Facussé.]

His brother José was shot and killed as he was riding his motorbike near Tocoa. José had been pursuing the case of his brother's killing in a search for justice. Amnesty International called on the Honduran government to "urgently investigate" the killing of José Trejos and noted that "the day before he was shot dead [he] had been in the Honduran capital Tegucigalpa to meet with officials

in an effort to ensure justice for his brother's murder and visiting media outlets to keep the spotlight on the case."

Associated Press notes that "no one is serving time in prison for any of the 89 assassinations of *campesinos* committed in the Aguán valley since December of 2009 when land occupations began."

Dina informed us of laws against human rights that had been introduced by the post-*coup* government, sometimes referred to as the *Coup-2* government. She also informed us of evidence that many of the paramilitaries who are responsible for much of the violence and many of the assassinations are mercenaries, especially from Colombia, Israel and the United States. They are hired as part of the growing private security forces of major landowners and businessmen.

The major targets of these groups are people who form part of the Resistance to the *coup* and the current government – that is trade unionists, women's organisations, teachers' organisations, the LGBT community, and anyone who opposes 'development' projects such as open cast mines, palm oil plantations and the like.

Dina alerted us to the fact that Honduras is being remilitarised. Since the 2009 *coup*, six new US military bases have been established and laws have been enacted that give greater power to the Honduran military and allow them to perform police functions. Military personnel can now enter houses without warrants or permission and they cannot be convicted for murders committed by the military. "The prosecution service functions to defend the military."



Antonio Trejos

Additionally, a law against terrorism has been introduced and this is being used to criminalise social movements and activists of all kinds. Other laws enacted by the post-*coup* government and which are relevant to the human rights of communities affected include a new mining law which relaxes the controls on mining and reduces the taxes that mining companies have to pay.

In February, the police fired at community members of Nueva Esperanza who were protesting against a new mining operation run by the son-in-law of Miguel



Facussé. Many hydro-electricity project concessions have also been made, affecting large swathes of Honduran territory. Additionally, a new law enabling the development of Model Cities has been enacted despite being rejected on constitutional grounds by the Supreme Court, whose judges were sacked as a direct response to the rejection.

Dina told us that Honduras is effectively controlled by ten families who for the last century have been responsible for running the country's development. Honduras is not a poor country – it has many resources. But it has been impoverished by the families which make up the oligarchy. In order to exert their control, social protest has to be repressed; protesters are put under surveillance, and death threats and assassinations are a regular tactic used against opponents of the regime. More than 200 people are currently in exile from the country.

Despite this situation, the people continue to protest, especially in defence of natural resources. The other source of hope is the electoral route. The party of resistance is called Libertad y Re-Fundación (Freedom and Re-Foundation), or the Partido Libre, or simply just Libre for short. Libre is a cause of concern for the Honduran oligarchy, and the fear of the opposition is that the party of the *coup*, the National Party, has control of the computers that will be used in the elections to be held in November this year.

In the run-up to the elections, Dina expects the repression to get worse and that there will be more specific targeting of Libre members and leaders at the local level. During the 2012 local elections, 25 members and leaders of Libre were killed.

Dina herself has been threatened with sexual abuse by text messages, and the threats have been increasing. Her son was threatened with a pistol. Since 2006 she has been the beneficiary of precautionary measures ordered by the Inter-American Court for Human Rights (IACHR), but the state of Honduras is unable to comply with the order.

The European Union is currently supporting the Ministry of Judiciary and Human Rights, but this Ministry was set up by the *coup* government. She says that it is true that EU representatives have met with human rights defenders, but they need to pressurise the Ministry about the importance of the respect for life. She recommends that there should be a permanent human rights observer mission in the country. *(If any ENCA members ever meet with their EU representatives, we recommend that they take up these issues with them.)*

*(Report by ENCA member Martin Mowforth)*

*Dina mentioned the problem of making denunciations of crimes committed in Honduras. In 2010, Berta Oliva, Coordinator of the Committee of Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared in Honduras (COFADEH), for which Dina also works, was interviewed by ENCA members Martin Mowforth and Lucy Goodman in Tegucigalpa. Amongst many other matters, Berta explained how impunity is strengthened and the vulnerability of the victims worsened by making such denunciations. A few relevant excerpts from her interview are given below.*

## Impunity through the Honduran Public Prosecutor's Office

'The international human rights institutions ask us: "Have you already made a denunciation to the Public Prosecutor?" By doing so we are strengthening a broken and criminally corrupt institute of the state. The worst thing for us to do is to make a serious denunciation and to name witnesses. We've had so many witnesses who have been assassinated.

On 30<sup>th</sup> July 2009 a teacher in a protest march was assassinated – he was called Roger Iván Murillo. There was a teacher ready to give his testimony about Roger's assassination to the Public Prosecutor. He was a witness who knew who shot Roger because he was close to his colleague. Prior to his testimony the Public Prosecutor offered to give him protected witness status and within the month he was assassinated.

In September there was a lad who filmed when they entered the barrios and shot a union president. He went to the Public Prosecutor with his film to say that he had the proof and that if they would guarantee his safety he would give it to them because on the film you can see and identify who shot him. The event was on the 22<sup>nd</sup> September, and he went to the Public Prosecutor on the 25<sup>th</sup> September. In December his wife was killed. She was driving their vehicle and it was an attempt on his life, but they killed his wife instead.

*Berta gave a number of other examples of how citizens' resort to the Public Prosecutor gave rise to attacks on those who had tried this approach.*

How on earth can people go to give testimony in a legal action to the Public Prosecutor when the first thing they do is kill them? That is an indefensible situation in a failed state; that is what little hope we have in justice.'

# CMO Improved Cookers Report

By James Watson

*In December 2012 ENCA sent one of our largest donations yet to support the CMO, the Consejo de Mujeres de Occidente or 'Council of Women of the West', with a project in the Quetzalguaque area of Nicaragua. Their US\$2,000 project involved addressing deforestation, air pollution and health problems caused by smoke, by providing 8 women who have small home food-production businesses, with efficient and safer cookers. ENCA member James Watson has been in Nicaragua working closely with the CMO during the period of the project and sent us this report.*

Throughout Nicaragua, and especially in rural areas, a great deal of food is prepared on stoves consisting of a very simple raised open fire, burning firewood on which pots are heated. In El Viejo where I've been staying, nearly all of the cookers I've seen have been this type, though there are the occasional electric and gas stoves. The smoke from these fires contains many harmful and carcinogenic substances which can cause lung cancer, respiratory problems such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and eye problems and birth defects.



Members of CMO (Photo: James Watson)

Very often these cookers are indoors or in partially enclosed areas, and the smoke from the fires is prevented from escaping from the areas where people are living. In houses using the fires the whole family is affected, including small children who are particularly sensitive to harm from the smoke. However, the health risk falls disproportionately on the women working to provide food for families, whose daily exposure is very high. Women cooking for a business might spend most of their day breathing in smoke, and the health risk is even greater.

These cookers tend to use firewood very inefficiently, losing much of the heat to their surroundings and demanding large amounts of wood to burn. This raises the health risks and air pollution, and increases the overall demand for firewood and cost to the family or business. In rural areas firewood is still generally the cheapest and most accessible fuel for cooking, however, and the resulting high demand is a major reason for deforestation in Central America. The poorer the area, the more its cooking needs are served by cheap but inefficient and harmful firewood cookers, and the more people are motivated to destroy their own environment to provide the fuel. As reported frequently by ENCA, deforestation is one of the most fundamental environmental threats to Central America, increasing the severity of water shortages, flooding, storm damage and landslides while destroying the basis of many ecosystems. (See, for instance, the short article entitled 'Firewood, tortillas and floods' on page 11 of ENCA 57.)

The CMO works in the León and Chinandega departments of the west of Nicaragua, and is a group of some 220 women, including many with their own small businesses. Acting as a cooperative they support their members with training in business development, computer and leadership skills, as well as organising to develop projects such as their improved cookers. I visited their office several times and they extended their warmest welcome, even letting me fill their office with students for computing classes.

With money donated by ENCA, the CMO have bought 8 improved firewood cookers, constructed out of metal with a simple design that encloses and concentrates the fire, reducing the amount of wood required by approximately 40%. In addition, the cookers use a chimney that means the wood smoke is ejected at roof level, out of harm's way, eliminating the health risks to the families using them.

Before their delivery of the cookers, the CMO invited me to visit the recipients and see for myself where they were to go. We drove down the main road towards Quetzalguaque town and then off into small villages in the dusty dry heat of rural Nicaragua. Each recipient was making a little extra money for their home, family and in some cases for some extra employees, cooking out of their kitchen in homes that felt very far from anywhere. Most sold their products only very locally, to people from the village passing by their house, or distributors who would take them a bit further afield. There were a variety of different kinds of business – three of the businesses I saw made and sold tortillas, two made things out of tortillas such as enchiladas and tacos. One cooked up posol, pinol and tiste, maize-based drinks common in Central America, and one had a slightly larger operation making nacatamales – packets of corn-based dough filled with pork and wrapped in banana leaves.

Talking to them, it particularly struck how small was the income they were getting from their work. One case was

*ENCA Newsletter 58, May 2013, p.4*

typical – two people working to sell 200 tortillas a day at 1 cordoba each – a total of US\$4 each a day gross, and much of this going on the ingredients and firewood – the same person spent US\$7 per week on firewood. With such a small income, the money spent on firewood is particularly crucial. The most immediate benefit for the recipients of the CMO's project is being able to almost halve this cost.

The nacatamale business I visited had a slightly larger scale to it, selling its produce to people who came from further away, allowing them to make a net income of between US\$16 and 20 per day, but I saw on the visit that this was the upper limit of incomes for recipients of the project. We visited another business, which had been chosen as the 8<sup>th</sup> recipient of the cooker, but while there the CMO members saw that the business was operating at a much higher level, with several streams of income from producing watermelon, pumpkin and maize as well as cooking. They decided it would be better to choose a different recipient for the final cooker, which seemed to me a very good decision – on the journey back they were already considering what kind of project could also support their members working at this higher level.

In all the homes we visited, the women were actively working when we arrived, and we could see the conditions they worked in. Two of them had the cookers indoors, with huge amounts of smoke billowing around all of the people working there. The rest had their cookers in sheltered areas outside the main house, but as they worked they were still inhaling the smoke, and in one case the wind was blowing the smoke directly across their yard into their house. There were thick build-ups of tar on the walls and surfaces near the cookers, which clearly demonstrated the harm that people are being exposed to over the years cooking with these fires.

Two weeks after my initial visit, the CMO delivered and set up the cookers for the businesses they had selected. A month later, they invited me back to the area to see some of the new cookers set up. All of the cookers had their chimneys set up – some with holes cut in roofs for the chimney to exit – and it was clear the difference this made to the amounts of smoke. I also saw that the cookers were designed to work with just two sticks of firewood at a time, with much more controlled and efficient burning, and the women agreed that they used a lot less firewood with the new designs. Some had had problems with smoke and heat escaping around the bases of the hotplates, but had effectively filled any gaps with the same maize dough they used for the tortillas.

The CMO members showed me that an important part of the project, as well as delivering the cookers, was providing training both on the use of the cookers, and on the wider environmental issues related to firewood use and environmental management as a whole. They showed me some of the materials they had used for this training, on issues such as deforestation, recycling and

water use. For example, the materials discussed the importance of recycling to preserve resources both globally and locally, and explained the impact deforestation has on ground-water sources that are needed for farming and drinking. On this visit I met some other members of the communities in the area, who told me that this training had impressed them a great deal, provided them with a lot of information that they had not known about before, and now considered very important.

On my return trip, I could see that there were still some problems with the CMO project. The new cookers had reduced the smoke and wood use for all the recipients to some extent; but for several of the businesses the new cookers were not big enough to cook everything on, and they were still using them side by side with their old open fires. The health benefits would be much less for these recipients, as they were still working in a smoky environment.



James Watson

The members of the CMO told me that they considered the project very much a pilot, to see what benefits the cookers brought and what problems remained. Everywhere I went in Nicaragua I could see countless families and businesses that could benefit from similar improved cookers – almost every family I encountered could be a potential beneficiary of projects like the CMO's – the need is that great. Then, as I saw,

there is the fact that some families and businesses may need two or more new cookers to meet their needs. The CMO are now considering how to expand their project, and how to seek out the additional funds to provide extra cookers to their members and their businesses.

With this in mind, the women of the CMO were starting to look into ways to reduce the cost of the new cookers. After visiting IPES in El Salvador I was fortunate enough to be able to provide the CMO with their plans for making self-made clay cookers, which the CMO were considering when I left Nicaragua. They had also started looking into finding ironsmiths that could make their own versions of the metal cookers they had delivered, which could dramatically reduce the costs per cooker.

Overall, what I saw with the CMO was a very well managed plan to address an extremely important problem. It was gratifying to see how well they thought out and executed their plans, putting the money provided by ENCA supporters to good use, to help women of very scarce resources improve their financial wellbeing, health and environment. I look forward to seeing how the CMO develops their project in the future, and hope to be able to report on it again in the ENCA newsletter.



## Geothermal developments in Nicaragua

Nicaragua's National Development Plan calls for 94 per cent of the country's electricity needs to be sourced from renewables by 2017, and an increase in electricity generation from geothermal energy is one of the means by which this may be achieved.



Volcán San Cristobal - a great potential for geothermal energy

Nicaragua and Iceland have recently completed a five year, US\$4.2 million agreement to increase Nicaragua's capacity for geothermal energy production. During the five years, Nicaragua received technical assistance, a modern geothermal laboratory, and Nicaraguan students studied in Iceland. The programme was administered by the Icelandic Agency for International Development (ICEDIA).

According to Minister of Energy and Mines, Emilio Rappaccioli, Nicaragua has the capacity to produce 1,519 megawatts of electricity from geothermal sources, three times the entire energy use of the country. Nicaragua taps only 7 per cent of its geothermal potential according to officials. Of the twelve locations appropriate for geothermal energy generation, only two have been exploited and three have had exploration concessions granted.



Volcán San Jacinto and its hot rocks

A key part of the plan is the San Jacinto Project, a geothermal power plant built on the San Jacinto-Tizate

geothermal field, widely considered to be one of the most productive volcanic reservoirs in Latin America. The plant sells power at 37 per cent below the average wholesale electricity price in Nicaragua and will generate approximately 17 per cent of Nicaragua's total electricity needs.

Rappaccioli said that by the end of the year Nicaragua will be producing half of its electricity from renewable sources. According to Informe Climascopio 2012, Nicaragua is surpassed only by Brazil in Latin America as the country most attractive for the production of renewable energy. The geothermal programme should help Nicaragua to ween itself off dependency on foreign oil.

(Sources: *La Prensa*, 20.03.13; *Radio La Primerísima*, 20.03.13; *Timon Singh*, 08.01.13.)

### GJEP Delegation to Nicaragua! Climate Change, Water, and Sustainability

June 10 - 21, 2013

Highlights of the delegation will include:

\*Visits to cities and rural areas outside Managua to see projects coping with climate change, including León, Masaya, Estelí, San Juan de Limay, El Cuá and Apanás.

\*Projects to conserve rain water, small scale hydro electric plants to provide electricity to one or two small communities, sustainable agricultural projects, and solar, geothermal and/or wind energy projects.

\*The group will visit Granada and learn about the proposed inter-oceanic canal and talk to people for and against it.

\*A cultural night and a beach day at a turtle sanctuary will also be part of the itinerary.

**Fee of \$950 includes all in-country travel, all meals, lodging, guide, translation, and materials.**

This delegation will be led by long-time Nicaragua resident Paul Baker-Hernández, former Managua Coordinator of the Nicaragua Network and well-known environmental and peace activist. Paul is also a well known musician in Latin America's New Song tradition.

**For More Information/Application:**

**Nicaragua Network/Alliance for Global Justice**

[Chuck@AFGJ.org](mailto:Chuck@AFGJ.org)

[www.nicanet.org](http://www.nicanet.org) or <http://AFGJ.org>

*We are grateful to Tim Rogers for his permission to reproduce parts of his November 2012 article entitled:*

## Are oil concessions fueling Nicaragua's border disputes?

**Oil company estimates Nicaragua has 27.6 million barrels in San Rafael del Sur, Managua**

By Tim Rogers / Nicaragua Dispatch  
November 12, 2012

After years of exploration, oil company Oklahoma Nicaragua-S.A. estimates that Nicaragua has some 27.6 million barrels of high-quality crude oil waiting to be pumped from the ground in the municipality of San Rafael del Sur, according to a company report presented to the government last week.

The report, which was obtained by La Prensa, claims Nicaragua has the conditions to become Central America's first oil-producing nation within five years, according to an article published in November last year in the Nicaraguan daily. The oil company also found the existence of natural gas at its exploration site just south of Managua, according to the report in La Prensa.

The Nicaraguan government first announced "evidence of oil" in 2008, but the quality and quantity of the country's oil reserves have never been known. The Sandinista government has been eager to find out. It granted a concession for oil exploration to US company Infinity Energy Resources in 2008, and another one to US oil company MKJ Xploration in 2009. La Prensa reports that more concessions for exploration could be awarded this year, including in the Caribbean.

Nicaraguan environmentalist Kamilo Lara suspects that Nicaragua's border dispute with Costa Rica is motivated in part by competing claims to oil reserves off the Caribbean coast. "Behind this (border) conflict is a battle for petroleum resources," Lara told The Nicaragua Dispatch in an interview in 2011.

The disputed 5 sq km island at the mouth of Nicaragua's San Juan River doesn't look like much on land, but whoever owns that island also controls an 11,000-square kilometer swath of corresponding Caribbean maritime territory — an area thought to be ripe for oil exploration.

Nicaraguan geologists think the limestone and reef conditions found in the ocean off the coast of the disputed shoreline indicate the possibility of oil reserves, even though the area has never been explored by either country. Marisol Echavery, a geologist with Nicaragua's National Institute of Territorial Studies, says the area most likely to contain petroleum reserves crosses the

border between the two countries, making it difficult for either country to conduct exploration.

According to records in the office of the Costa Rican Oil Refinery (RECOPE), the Costa Rican government nearly awarded an oil exploration concession in that area in 1999, but the concession was never granted due to an unspecified problem in the bidding process. To date, Costa Rica has never explored for oil in the contested region, designated Block 11 on RECOPE's oil concession maps. Costa Rica put a moratorium on oil exploration in 2002.

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## 10<sup>th</sup> International Election Observation Mission, El Salvador

Each time there is an election in El Salvador, the CIS (Centro de Intercambio y Solidaridad / Exchange and Solidarity Centre) serves as one of the Election Observer Organisations. Other delegations include the United Nations and the OAS (Organisation of American States). The CIS is a North American organisation which serves as an exchange centre for Sister Cities between El Salvador and the USA, a language centre for Salvadorans who want to learn English and US citizens who want to learn Spanish, and a solidarity centre for many Salvadoran communities and groups which find themselves on the receiving end of the effects of neoliberal economic development.

The next elections in El Salvador are to be held on February 2<sup>nd</sup> 2014. These are Presidential elections and the CIS is again running an observer delegation. In the past CIS observer delegations have numbered up to almost 300 people, the majority being US citizens, but the delegation has always included a few other nationalities. All members of the delegation are volunteers and pay their own way, but the CIS organises the accommodation, airport transfer, transport within the country and training of observers, and below are extracts from the CIS's advance flyer which gives details of how to apply to become a member of the CIS election observer delegation for 2014. You will see that you do not necessarily need Spanish – most US members of the CIS delegations do not speak Spanish – although it is always a great asset. The minimum time commitment required amounts to about three weeks which includes the training programme, election monitoring and election report time. There are other categories of volunteers, for which Spanish is a requirement and the time commitment much greater. For those who can afford the time and the cost, it is a fantastic learning experience.

Several members of ENCA are already keen to participate in the election observing. Leslie Schuld, the Director of the CIS, has agreed that ENCA will serve as the UK coordinating body for observer volunteers, although all applications to join the delegation will be made individually to the CIS. More details of this process are given on the CIS website, [www.cis-elsalvador.org](http://www.cis-elsalvador.org). If, however, you are interested in joining the election observer delegation, ENCA would be grateful if, as well as following the procedure outlined in the CIS website, you could also inform Martin Mowforth of ENCA. Martin will provide more details of what you can expect in terms of travel, accommodation and the election process, and if you would like to discuss the possibility with him, you can email him ([mmowforth@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:mmowforth@plymouth.ac.uk)) or ring him on 01822 617504.

### *From the CIS: 2014 Election Observation*

We are writing to let you know about our work on the upcoming presidential elections in El Salvador and to get these dates in your diaries. **In 2014 the election will take place on February 2, 2014 - this is a change from the usual March date.** There will be a possible run-off election on March 9th. We think that a run-off election is likely because there are three declared candidates: Salvador Sánchez Cerén-FMLN, Norman Quijano-ARENA, and Elias Antonio Saca-Unity (a coalition of GANA, PDC, and the PCN). It is unlikely that any one of them will get the required 50% + 1 of the electorate in the first round on February 2nd.

We are beginning to accept applications for participation in our observation mission and you can find more information below and at [www.cis-elsalvador.org](http://www.cis-elsalvador.org)

**Right now, it is important that we find longer term volunteers who can commit to being here for 3 to 6 months.** These volunteers help organise in communities and prepare to host a large delegation in late January and potentially a second group in early March. Long term volunteers must have advanced Spanish. We need help starting in November of this year and going through June of next year for the follow-up, report writing, etc. If this might be a possibility for you or someone you know please contact us: [electionmission@cis-elsalvador.org](mailto:electionmission@cis-elsalvador.org).



Previous observers working on El Salvador's elections.  
(Photo: CIS)

### **General Information for Observers and Volunteers**

Since the signing of the Peace Accords in 1992 the **CIS International Election Observer Mission** has secured a firm and respected reputation both within El Salvador and abroad through its dedicated and professional commitment to the El Salvadoran election process. The CIS election observation reports have consistently been used as a foundation for debate on electoral reform by the Legislative Assembly, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE), and other electoral institutions.



CIS International Volunteers and Observers have the opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of the political systems and processes, as well as contributing to the continued advance of free and fair democratic participation within El Salvador.

Even though the campaign officially begins October 1, 2013, it is clear the campaign is already in full swing. In these elections two important reforms will be implemented. For the first time, residential voting will be carried out in 100% of the country, meaning voting will be closer to where people live and strengthen transparency. Also for the first time, Salvadorans who live outside the country will be able to vote.

### Why International Election Observation?

Communities, electoral organisations including the TSE, and civic and grassroots organisations, have continued to ask the CIS for international observers to guarantee transparent elections for several reasons:

- ⌚ To provide witness to the electoral process and to potential violations of the electoral code before and during the elections.
- ⌚ To provide a presence in order to reduce political intimidation and violence.

- ⌚ To support the call for implementation of election reforms.
- ⌚ To monitor the implementation and impact of important reforms in the electoral process.

The CIS Mission produces a final report which is presented to the Supreme Election Tribunal, the Commission on Electoral and Constitutional Reforms of the Legislative Assembly, Political Parties, as well as other important actors, as a tool to study the electoral processes and to continue to implement electoral reforms. The presence of international observers in itself contributes to transparency, deters fraud, and builds voter confidence, especially in rural areas where the divisions and wounds of the war are still present.

Democracy depends on the transparency of the election process, which the presence of international observers can help guarantee. The CIS mission is respected across the political spectrum because of its objectivity and is recognised as one of the few missions that are not controlled by political interests. Please visit [www.cis-elsalvador.org](http://www.cis-elsalvador.org) for more information and to apply to join the observer delegation.

## CIS environmental education post, 2013 - 14

James Watson of The Environmental Network for Central America (ENCA) recently visited the Centro de Intercambio y Solidaridad (CIS) in El Salvador, and talked to director Leslie Schuld. She introduced to him recent projects in which the CIS has been involved. These projects tie together environmental, health and education themes, and have great potential to make real differences to the lives of people in El Salvador. The CIS is planning a volunteer project to bring these themes together and to create environmental educational resources for local schools, and ENCA would like to help them search for an interested volunteer.

One of the CIS's particularly successful projects provided simple household filters to clean local communities' water of disease-causing microbes, a big problem in areas affected by industrial development and over-population. James encountered other projects that ENCA has supported in the region. These have addressed health problems, air pollution and deforestation caused by inefficient open fires for cooking, by providing cheap closed fires, including ones hand-made out of earth. In addition, ENCA and the CIS have had many experiences of communities affected by poor disposal of waste water leading to diseases including malaria and dengue.

All these problems have relatively simple technical solutions but the success of such solutions requires the people using them to be well-educated in not just their use but the underlying purpose and logic; and such an education also allows communities to be more vocal in

fighting for these solutions. The problems are extremely widespread – James encountered people worried about the exact same issues in Nicaragua – and so if they could be addressed it could have a big impact.

The voluntary work for such an education programme, as Leslie imagines it, would require someone to research and develop printed resources that teachers would use for classes. ENCA would like to start off the search for someone to do this work, as well as providing advice and contacts outside of El Salvador to the volunteer, once established. The CIS regularly supports and coordinates volunteers on this kind of project, and the work would be hosted by the CIS. In this case, the work would require a minimum time commitment of ten weeks and could continue for up to a year in El Salvador. It would benefit from someone with an environmental and/or teaching background, preferably with some experience in popular education and/or facilitating workshops. Advanced Spanish would be necessary, but those with only intermediate Spanish could apply if they are prepared to improve their Spanish before they start work on the project.

So if you or anyone you know might be interested in this extremely valuable and interesting volunteer project, working in beautiful El Salvador, with the CIS, contact us at [enca.info@gmail.com](mailto:enca.info@gmail.com) for more information. If you wish to discuss the possibility informally, please feel free to call and discuss it with Martin Mowforth on 01822 617504 or at [mmowforth@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:mmowforth@plymouth.ac.uk)

# Mining News Round-Up

by Doug Specht

Gold prices have plummeted over the last few months, and although this has caused some significant damage to some mining companies, such as Barrack Gold who lost US\$6 million in the first quarter, it is still the people of Central America who are losing out the most. The beginning of 2013 has been a particularly troubling time across the region with major issues reaching a head in El Salvador, Guatemala and Costa Rica.

As has been reported on many occasions in ENCA, much of this misery is brought about by Canadian owned and operated mines, working from behind the protective laws of Ottawa that allow these crimes to continue to go unaccounted.

## Guatemala

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May the Guatemalan government declared a state of emergency as protesters, security forces and police clashed outside the, soon to be operational, Escobal silver mine, owned by Tahoe Resources (Vancouver, Canada). The mine was given the go ahead to open in April after two years of protests and legal wrangling between Tahoe Resources and the Guatemalan government. Fearful that the mine will poison and drain the water supplies of the local population, protests have become increasingly common and the levels of violence on both sides have escalated since January. Although information from the area is presently unreliable, it is believed that between six and eight protesters were injured in late April by gunfire from security forces employed by the mine, and that the Guatemalan government has now deployed troops to the area. Furthermore it is believed that these troops have been given the right to make detentions, conduct searches and question suspects outside the normal legal framework. Earlier in April four indigenous Xinca leaders were abducted while returning from a community referendum in El Volcancito concerning the mine. One of them, Exaltación Marcos Ucelo, was found dead the day after the abduction. Local and national human rights and environmental organisations have already announced their intention to challenge the legality of the mining licence. There is also an open criminal complaint against the mine for industrial contamination of the Los Esclavos River.

## El Salvador

ENCA have long been following the case of Canadian based Pacific Rim versus the government of El Salvador. Pacific Rim (Vancouver, Canada) have been pursuing the Salvadoran government since 2009 through World Bank courts, filing for loss of earnings and potential profits after the cancellation of mining permits for a gold mine in the Cabañas Department of El Salvador in 2007. Although one of Pacific Rim's two claims were rejected in June 2012, the second claim



Troops have been deployed in Guatemala to quell protests (Photo: Mining.com)

continues to be fought. Pacific Rim have upped their compensation claim to US\$315 million, approximately a third of the country's annual health spending. Local and international resistance to the claims continues, yet support from the Canadian government for this action makes the case ever more difficult.

## Costa Rica

In further legal actions Calgary-based Infinito Gold Ltd has also threatened the Costa Rican government with a US\$1 billion law suit over its Las Crucitas gold mine concession. The Crucitas mine was closed after a change in Costa Rican law that banned open pit mining. As with the El Salvador case, Infinito Gold Ltd. Are suing for what they claim would be the earnings of the mine should it have been allowed to continue operating. In the classically oppressive manner of Canadian mining companies, Infinito Gold have given the Costa Rican government six months to overturn the ban on operating Las Crucitas or else they will pursue the billion dollar claim, amounting to more than 2% of the country's GDP. Infinito Gold Ltd have previously attempted to shut down university courses in Costa Rica that have a critical view of open pit mining, as well as taking legal action against two professors who denounced Infinito Gold's operations. This attack on the freedom of education, while alarming, will no doubt remind readers of Barrack Gold's interference in the curriculum of Canadian Universities, in particular the University of Toronto, where education about mining is strictly monitored by the Canadian mining industry (see ENCA 56).

## Sources:

Jasmine, C. (2013) Guatemala declares state of emergency over anti-mining riots. Mining.com  
Hall, K. (2013) Canadian gold company threatens Costa Rica with \$1bn lawsuit. Mining.com  
CISPES (2013) Pacific Rim Ups Claim Against Salvadoran Government To \$315 Million. cispes.org  
MiningWatch Canada (2013) Groups Warn Infinito Gold re: Continued Threats Against Costa Rica Over Crucitas Gold Project. Miningwatch.ca  
MiningWatch Canada (2013) Guatemala: Tahoe's Mining Licence Approved in Wake of Violence; Investigation into Murder Pending. Miningwatch.ca  
BBC (2013) Guatemala declares emergency after mine protests. bbc.co.uk



# Coastal Erosion and Climate Change Effects Devour the Garífuna Communities.

Report from Fraternal Black Honduran Organisation (OFRANEH)

The accelerated loss of Honduran Caribbean beaches resulting from increased coastal erosion and climate change, has placed many Garífuna communities in jeopardy. Rising tides and a lack of natural protective barriers, is putting at risk those communities on shorelines and deltas.

The problems of the Garífuna have been compounded by the disappearance of coconut along much of the Caribbean coast, following a viral disease called lethal yellowing of coconut. There is at present no recovery plan to protect or restore the 6000 acres of coconut that existed in Honduras.

The coconut was introduced to the Mesoamerican Caribbean coast by the Spanish, who imported the nut from West Africa and gradually replaced the local species such as the icacos and sea grape. For centuries coconut plantations were a mainstay of the informal Garífuna economy, as well as forming the most important natural barrier to protect the coastline.

## Hurricane Mitch, the disappearance of the coconut and the beaches.

Hurricane Mitch signalled the beginning of the carnage in the Mesoamerican Caribbean. Since November 1998, a number of serious indications regarding the imbalance of coastal and marine habitats became apparent, and highlighted the ecocide that had perpetuated for decades. The vast deforestation and sedimentation of rivers in the isthmus caused thousands of deaths as well as the economic losses.

Despite the destruction caused by Hurricane Mitch, the State of Honduras has done little or nothing to remedy deforestation and recover watersheds. This means that any further meteorological phenomenon will have catastrophic results.



Without the coconut palms, beaches are more susceptible to erosion (Photo: OFRANEH)

## Adaptation strategies to climate change and mitigation of coastal erosion

The phenomenon has not been adequately studied in Honduras and the communities do not know the severity of the problems they face as sea levels rise. The 'Let's Lower the Temperature' report by the World Bank (WB) indicates that rising tropical ocean levels could be as much as 20% higher than in other regions of the world. This World Bank document contradicts the institution's policy of supporting power generation by dirty fuel.



Photo: OFRANEH

The forecast for the Mesoamerican Caribbean coast is bleak: many of the Garífuna communities are situated on the shoreline, and besides those already suffering from the onslaught of coastal erosion and rising sea levels, there is also increasing salinization of coastal wetlands due to the reduction of flow in the rivers heading towards the coast. The lagoons of Tocamacho, Bacalar, Micos and Alvarado are in great danger, with only a thin barrier separating the lagoon from the sea, with the potential for disastrous results.

In the absence of a concrete plan for the replanting of coconuts, OFRANEH has been planting icacos and sea grape varieties as a quick fix response to the loss of the beaches, with the intention of creating a natural protective barrier. The project is on a small scale, with an imperative to protect coastal habitat.

Unfortunately when talking about climate change in Honduras, the state simply defers to false solutions such as the Clean Development Mechanism (aka destruction of rivers) and REDD projects (Reduce Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation).

According to the Global Climate Risk Index, Honduras is the country most affected by climate change from 1992 to 2011. Given that it is now a failed state, the seriousness of the problem has been totally neglected. While the sea eats the beaches, the biggest concern of the ruling elite is to see how they can split the country into bits.

## ENCA stall at GMB Conference

This year the GMB will hold its annual conference at the Plymouth Pavilions in Devon from Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> to Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> June. The Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign (NSC) and Banana Link will both be exhibiting stalls at the venue and have invited ENCA to share the stalls with them.

If any ENCA, NSC or Banana Link supporters and members who live in the south-west would like to volunteer to staff the stall for any short period from 9:30 am on Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> June to lunchtime on Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> June, we would be grateful if you could contact Martin Mowforth on 01822 617504 or by email to [mmowforth@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:mmowforth@plymouth.ac.uk). He is trying to form a rota of helpers for the conference.

If you haven't got the time to staff the stalls, you're still welcome to just pop in to see our display materials – and bring your friends with you.

In 2011, the GMB launched the GMB International Solidarity Fund, and since then more than £33,000 has been raised through branch donations to support trade union partners organising in the Latin American agricultural sector and for the solidarity work of Banana Link.

*In Spring this year, the Fund donated £15,000 to COLSIBA (the Coordinating Body of Latin American Banana and Agro-Industrial Unions) whose members include unions in Nicaragua, Peru, Guatemala, Colombia, Ecuador, Honduras, Costa Rica and Panama. COLSIBA believe that this support has built the capacity of unions, as illustrated by the successful negotiations by FETRABACH (Nicaragua) of a 30 per cent increase in pay. The Costa Rican union SITRAP has used GMB ISF funding to support their participation in the creation of the new National Federation of Agro-Industrial Workers (FENTRAA), which brings together plantation and port workers to challenge anti-union forces in Costa Rica.*

### ENCA meeting dates 2013

**30<sup>th</sup> June**  
**27<sup>th</sup> October**

ENCA meetings are held at the NSC's office at the Durham Road Centre – see address on this page. 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.



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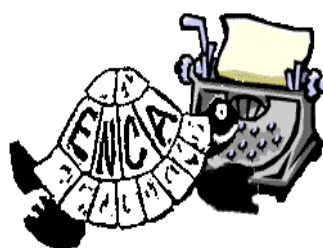
## Letter to ENCA re. ENCA Newsletter No. 57

From Isabel Macdonald

*"Thank you so much for sending [ENCA 57]. I have re-sent the newsletter to members of San José Quaker Peace Centre, who I am sure will find it very interesting. I look forward to reading this issue myself! Congratulations on excellent layout."*

Isabel Macdonald

*(Former Director of Friends Peace Centre in San José and before that Director of FECON, the Federation of Conservation Organisations in Costa Rica.)*



*If you would like to write to ENCA to tell us what you think of the newsletter, or make us aware of your organisation then you can do so using the email address below*

***enca.info@gmail.com***

## Apology

*In the last issue of ENCA (57) the ENCA email address was incorrectly printed. Measures were taken to try and capture emails sent to the wrong address, however if you contacted us using the email address listed in ENCA 57 we would urge you to contact us again using the correct address above. Sorry for the confusion.*

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