

ENCA

Environmental Network *for* Central America

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www.enca.org.uk

Drought and Floods

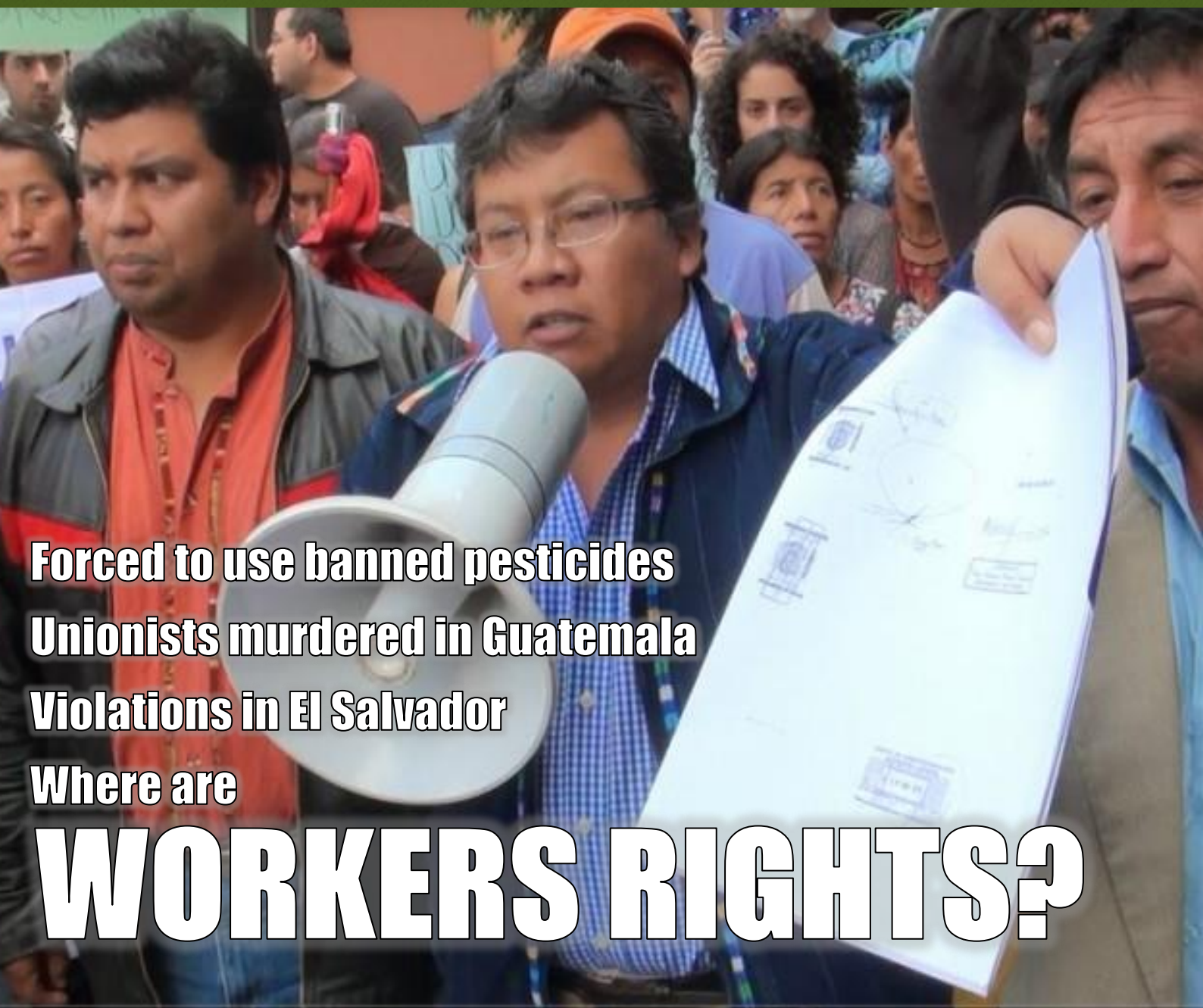
From one extreme to the other

El Gran Canal

A further update on Nicaragua's controversial mega-project

From Little Acorns....

How an ENCA project grew into a global enterprise.



Forced to use banned pesticides

Unionists murdered in Guatemala

Violations in El Salvador

Where are

WORKERS RIGHTS?



ENCA aims to work directly with people in communities who are seeking to arrest environmental degradation and who are often struggling against the repression and violence of armies and police forces acting under the command of wealthy individuals, transnational corporations and corrupt politicians. We campaign with them to place environmental rights within national constitutions and to ensure that all natural resources are made to benefit the many and not the few.

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Guatemalan farmers protest
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US takes Guatemala to arbitration for anti-union violence

Unprecedented decision could be a game-changer for Guatemalan workers

It took over six years of a tortuous and hard fought legal battle, but Guatemalan workers have finally reasons to celebrate. Today the United States has agreed to take Guatemala to international arbitration for violating workers' rights under the DR-CAFTA (Dominican Republic-Central American Free Trade Agreement). It is the very first time in history that one country has sought international arbitration against another for a violation of labour standards.

The dispute started back in April 2008, when six Guatemalan unions and the AFL-CIO filed a complaint with the US Office of Trade raising a number of serious concerns, including trade union violence. The petition argued that Guatemala failed to enforce its own labour laws and its commitments to respect, promote and realise core worker's rights.

Since then, the situation has only deteriorated. From 2008 to 2013, there have been 30 documented assassinations of union members, according to the UN Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG). Furthermore, there have been numerous acts of attempted murder, torture, kidnappings, break-ins and death threats. This culture of intimidation and impunity has prompted the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) to name it the most dangerous country in the world for trade unionists.

Even so, a compromise was reached in April 2013, when the US and Guatemala agreed on an 18-point enforcement plan to strengthen labour inspections, increase compliance by exporting companies, improve enforcement of court orders, among other measures. The plan was supposed to be completely implemented by April 2014. Guatemala has been granted several extensions up until now to give it "one last chance". By taking Guatemala to arbitration, the US Office of

Trade has acknowledged that very little was done to comply with Guatemala's obligation to simply enforce its own laws.

"Today the US government took the correct decision to make it clear that without workers' rights, Guatemala cannot be inserted into the global economy", said Sharan Burrow, secretary general of the ITUC. "The business community pressed very hard for CAFTA, despite the well-known and serious violations. This move should give the employer community pause and hopefully provoke deep reforms in their supply chains".



The CAFTA-DR arbitration panel will issue an initial report with findings and recommendations. If the government fails to implement those recommendations, Guatemala could face fines and potentially trade sanctions if the fines are not paid.

A similar process is also taking place at the International Labour Organisation (ILO), where a request for a Commission of Inquiry – the strongest investigative measure available under the ILO system – was filed by workers' delegates. The decision should be taken in November 2014.

As well as the US, Guatemala also has an association agreement with the European Union.

Sources: [ITUC](http://www.ituc-csi.org); [Banana Link](http://www.bananalink.com).

Murder of Guatemalan banana trade unionists

News from *Banana Link* informs us that although Guatemala's neighbour Honduras is currently in general terms the most dangerous country in the world, for trade unionists Guatemala happens to be the most dangerous place in the world.

Since 2007 a total of 68 unionists have been murdered and none of the perpetrators of these crimes have been brought to justice. Banana trade unions have been on the front line of this surge in violence. The local banana workers' union SITRABI have had some successes in the north of the country but the large-scale anti-union plantations of the Pacific South – now responsible for over 80% of exports – are still somewhere that workers dare not organise.

The only attempt to organise a union in this region was put down with violence in 2008; the General Secretary of the new union was killed and the daughter of another leader was raped. The north isn't much safer: between 2007 and 2012, twelve SITRABI organisers were also murdered there.

This is an international issue too, with implications for workers in many other countries. Guatemala is growing very quickly as a producer of bananas, as companies seek to find cheaper labour for their crop. The exploitation of Guatemalan workers makes them the cheapest and threatens jobs with better conditions and respect across Latin America. The violence feeds the race to the bottom for the whole region and this manifests itself in the ridiculously cheap bananas that we in the northern countries can buy in supermarkets.

It's a key moment for the issue. A new Attorney General, Thelma Aldana, was appointed and sworn in by President Otto Pérez Molina on 17 May this year. It is widely believed that the change was politically motivated and it is feared that she will allow these crimes to be swept under the carpet to spare the government international embarrassment.

The investigations into the murders are going very slowly. In March this year we heard that possible culprits had been identified but still nobody had been

brought to trial. And then the Attorney General, Claudia Pay y Paz, was suddenly dismissed, jeopardising the work she had started on the investigation. In her role of Attorney General, Claudia Paz y Paz had courageously enabled the Rios Montt case² and other cases to move forward. Her work led to increased prosecutions thereby reducing Guatemala's remarkably high level of impunity³.

Since the overturning of the Rios Montt verdict, other key judicial figures (as well as Paz y Paz) have been replaced or sanctioned, and resolutions passed that further erode the chances of victims seeing justice. An Amnesty International press release of 20 May 2014 declared that "Guatemala [is] slipping back into a state of impunity on the anniversary of the overturned genocide conviction". Such a level of impunity serves to underline the threats to life for trade unionists.

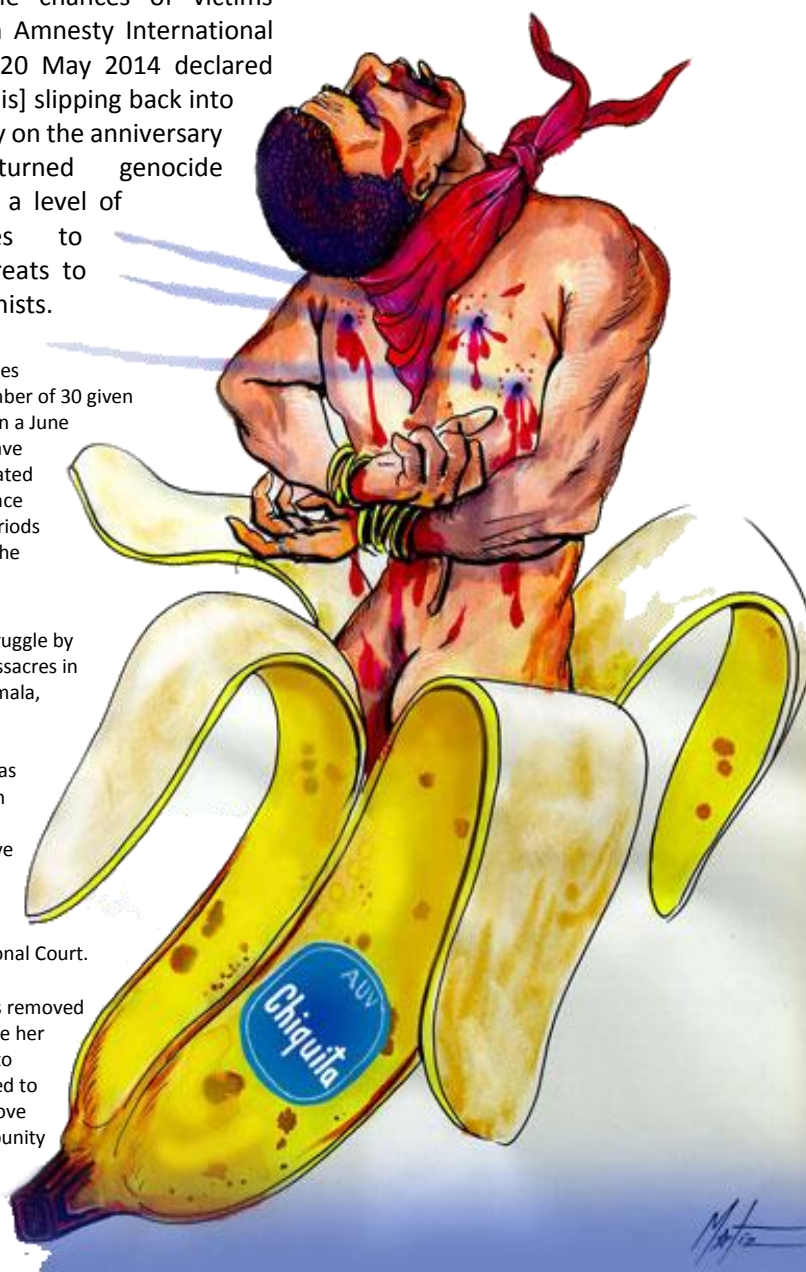
1. This number of 68 does not conform to the number of 30 given in the previous article. In a June 2013 report the ITUC gave the number of assassinated trade unionists as 53 since 2007. Different time periods might explain some of the discrepancies.

2. Thanks to years of struggle by survivors of various massacres in the Ixil region of Guatemala, School of the Americas graduate and former President Rios Montt was convicted of genocide in 2013 in a precedent-setting case, only to have the verdict overturned on a technicality a week later by Guatemala's Constitutional Court.

3. Claudia Paz y Paz was removed from office a year before her term of office was due to expire in what is believed to have been a political move designed to restore impunity and protect former and present human rights.

Letters urging investigation into the cases of murders of banana trade unionists can be made to:

Fiscal General de la República
Ministerio Público
15 Av. 15-16 Zona 1
Barrio Gerona
Ciudad de Guatemala
Guatemala 01001



Pesticides in Costa Rica's banana zones seriously affect pregnant women

Article by *Pablo Rojas* in www.crhoy.com and sent to ENCA by *Didier Leitón Valverde*, General Secretary of SITRAP, the Union of Plantation Agriculture Workers in Costa Rica.

A study published in the international journal 'Environmental Health Perspectives' warns of the risk to pregnant Costa Rican women who live near plantations where certain pesticides are frequently used.

The pesticide *mancozeb* is used to treat banana plantations. According to the report, the pregnant women who were examined in the analysis record a significant amount of etilentiourea (ETU) in their urine. This is a component of the *mancozeb* pesticide.

"From March 2010 to June 2011, the study included 451 women, of whom 445 gave urine samples which were analysed for ETU. The analysis showed that the amount of ETU found was higher than the quantities found in countries like the USA, Italy and England, at an average rate of five times more ETU in their urine," explained Berna van Wendel de Joode of the Regional Institute of Toxic Substances of the National University (IRET-UNA) which took part in the research.

Along with IRET-UNA, the Lund University, the Swedish Karolinska Institute, the University of Quebec in Canada and the University of Berkeley California took part in the study. This is the first study which has detected the presence of herbicides in the urine of pregnant women who live in areas around plantations. A small part of the sample were agricultural labourers during their pregnancy and a half of their partners worked on banana plantations.

"Current regulations covering fumigation areas appear to be insufficient to prevent the contact of women with this pesticide, but according to the study's results it would be possible to take measures to reduce the contact – measures such as: reducing the frequency of fumigations; replacing aerial fumigation with techniques with lower dispersal; and



implementing additional measures to diminish the drift generated by aerial applications. These measures would probably reduce the environmental and worker contact with the pesticide," explained the researcher.

A quarter of the women lived within 50 metres of the plantations. According to the data, some women had higher levels than others because they were living within the banana plantations, and were working there during their pregnancy or were washing clothes for their families.

"Using the data on the amounts of ETU found in the urine, researchers estimated the quantity of the substance which was entering the body each day. For three quarters of the women, their estimated dose was greater than the Integrated Risk Information System's reference indicator of the US Environmental Protection Agency. For a quarter of them it was double the level of the reference indicator, and for a tenth it was three times higher," said the official statement provided by the UNA.

The major concern is that herbicides directly affect thyroid illnesses. Other cases of this have occurred in Mexico and the Philippines and it is held from these cases that the regulations for aerial fumigation continue to be weak.

"The researchers show the importance of increasing the distance between the bananas and the houses, planting natural barriers and implementing an automatic system for washing work clothes so that they aren't washed alongside other items in the workers' houses," stated the document.

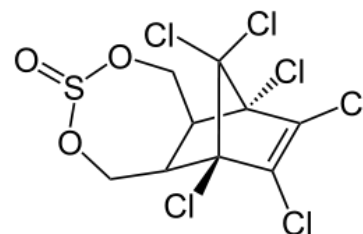
Thyroid hormones are essential for the healthy development of the foetus and for a healthy pregnancy in general.

The original report on which the article is based can be found at:

<http://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/wp-content/uploads/advpub/2014/9/ehp.1307679.pdf>
(Translated by Martin Mowforth)

Growing Coffee without Endosulfan

ENCA member *Stephanie Williamson*, who works for Pesticide Action Network (PAN) UK reports on farmers' successful experiences from Central America



Endosulfan is a highly hazardous and persistent insecticide responsible for many poisoning incidents, including fatalities, in developing countries and for harm to wildlife. The PAN network has campaigned for over a decade for it to be banned. A massive step forward was achieved in 2011 when international policy makers added endosulfan to the list of pesticides on the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), for global phase out. While over 50 countries have now banned it, farmers in the coffee and cotton sectors continue to use it in some parts of the world, including several Latin American countries.

To find out how these farmers can shift to safer alternatives, PAN UK worked with the coffee sector to interview farmers certified under standards such as Fairtrade, organic, and Rainforest Alliance. These standards have

prohibited farmers from using endosulfan for 3 or more years, so certified farmers have developed good experience in managing the key pest, Coffee Berry Borer beetle (CBB), by other methods. We interviewed 22 farmers in Colombia, Nicaragua and El Salvador, from small and medium family farms and large estates, to learn what methods they use and how they had made these changes.

In El Salvador, several estates are now using traps baited with a mix of methanol and ethanol to attract the female adult borers when they start to emerge from fallen berries at the start of the rainy season. This method has been developed by the national coffee research institute PROCAFE and promoted to farmers by COEX export company. By trapping large numbers of female beetles and preventing them from breeding, pest levels in the

developing coffee berries can be much reduced.

Don Abelino, farm manager for Belmont estate in Santa Tecla (El Salvador), a zone where CBB levels can often be high, recounted how he formerly applied endosulfan twice a year in plots which needed control. While endosulfan could be very effective, if it rained shortly after application, he would need to spray again, at further cost. At other times, an application would simply fail to control the pest and levels would rise, requiring yet more spraying. Since COEX agronomists introduced him to trapping as an alternative, he has been delighted with the results, stopped all endosulfan use and succeeded in gaining Rainforest certification for the estate. Furthermore, he no longer risks his workers suffering ill health from pesticide poisoning and is not contaminating the environment with



Don Abelino Escobar, Farm Manager, Belmont estate, Santa Tecla, El Salvador with one of his home-made traps, showing the methanol:ethanol dispenser. Credit: P Lievens, PAN UK

powerful chemicals. Don Abelino's experience is that trapping is very easy, very cheap and very effective. Approximate costs per hectare for trapping are US\$12, compared with US\$70 for two endosulfan spraying rounds.

In Nicaragua, Fairtrade co-operatives have introduced the traps too, with very good results for their members. They are also promoting use of biological pesticides based on a strain of the naturally occurring fungus *Beauveria bassiana*, which infects and kills CBB without affecting other insects. Organic farmers have found using the fungus extremely useful in their situation. The Mirafior Union of Cooperatives in Estelí has a small *Beauveria* production unit and sells the product to its members, along with training farmers in how to handle and use it effectively, given that it is a living organism and not a chemical.

All farmers we met are also doing field hygiene as the backbone of good CBB management. These include sanitary picking of bored berries or early maturing berries and collecting fallen berries and dried berries left on trees after the main picking season. These practices are essential to reduce the amount of pest breeding sites and reduce CBB levels in the following season. Farmers explained that the labour cost of these sanitary collections should be seen as an investment in achieving good quality coffee.

Our findings show that it is perfectly possible to achieve good CBB control without using endosulfan, across a range of farm sizes, climate zones and altitudes, pest pressure levels, and coffee production systems. We've also shown that methods which avoid

pesticide use can be similar in cost, or sometimes cheaper. More governments need to take action to ban endosulfan in their countries, so that safer alternatives can be given a fairer chance.

You can watch four YouTube videos (in English and Spanish) of farmers telling their experiences via www.pan-uk.org/projects/growing-coffee-without-endosulfan

An accompanying note from Stephanie explained a little about the coffee rust problem currently causing so much damage in Central America:

"It seems it's at crisis stage, especially in El Salvador, with thousands of poor rural families affected because yields are so low this season that farmers are only hiring half their usual number of pickers, pushing many families into food insecurity. Whether this will be used as a pretext to justify more reliance on fungicides, I don't know. One of the main causes is that so many coffee groves have not been maintained or renewed for years and the disease runs riot through these. Changing weather patterns make things worse."

In Central America, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica have still not banned endosulfan.

This work was kindly funded by the Food & Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the Sustainable Coffee Programme powered by IDH and the ISEAL Alliance of sustainability standards.

Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Honduras sign development accord for Gulf of Fonseca

After a long session of negotiations in Managua, Presidents Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua, Salvador Sánchez Cerén of El Salvador, and Juan Orlando Hernández of Honduras on Aug. 25 agreed to a series of cooperative proposals, read by Ortega, for the Gulf of Fonseca, a body of water shared by the three countries. Sánchez Cerén said, "We are now moving to work on development projects that will impact the fight against poverty, generate more opportunities for the population, and guarantee security." The projects include tourism, infrastructure, agroindustry, renewable energy, and transportation. A ferry is planned that would visit the ports of the three countries in or near the Gulf and the three presidents said that they would contact international financial institutions to obtain financing for the various development projects and also include the private sector. Hernández said that, "From today on, with this declaration, instead of the Gulf being a focus of conflict, it is a place of union."

The Nicaraguan daily newspaper, La Prensa, which is generally antagonistic to the Nicaraguan government, headlined that it was just another meeting to plan "more castles in the air," and accused President Ortega for his "Pharaonic" projects. Environmentalist Jaime Incer Barquero, on the other hand, said that it could bring further development of tourism, transportation and trade. Incer said that the Gulf of Fonseca is an area that is very rich in biodiversity, including migratory song birds which visit in the northern winter, and other resources, including fisheries, which need to be managed to benefit the population of the zone.

Sources: *El Nuevo Diario*, Aug.26;
La Prensa, Aug. 26.

NICARAGUA CANAL - AN UPDATE

ENCA member *Amy Haworth Johns* provides a summary update of progress on what may become one of the region's biggest ever mega-projects, the Nicaraguan Canal.

With the power to either lift a country out of poverty or to create an environmental disaster on an unprecedented scale, the trans-oceanic canal has entered the second phase. Up and down the (now finalised) route, censuses are being conducted to record land use and population as canal financiers, HKND, get to grips with the environmentally and socially diverse terrain. Reports from the ground show they're being met with either grim acceptance or increasingly with protests. A recent protest in Rivas saw hundreds take to the streets with banners reading: "We Demand Respect for Private Property! No to the Canal!" This unrest is spanning the country and seems to stem from the growing concerns for the rights of the indigenous population. Already facing threats from expanding populations and deforestation, the canal will slice through ancient Rama and Kriol territories and worries are growing that land rights will be ignored.

While HKND-run censuses are continuing along the route, Nicaragua and the

international community continue to wait for the final independent assessment reports. In a recent interview, a spokesman for the commission of the Grand Canal of Nicaragua, Telemachus Talavera, revealed that the "studies of the financial, commercial, social and environmental impact of the Canal will be ready by the end of October. ENCA will bring you said results in our next issue and via our website.

Conflicting Views: Economy vs Environment

In July 2014, ENCA attended a public meeting with Guisell Morales, chargée d'affaires for Nicaragua in London to discuss the project. Within the Nicaraguan government, the canal represents the single lifeline with which to pull Nicaragua out of poverty and rectify years of under-development. In regards to environmental impact, Morales repeated that the economic growth from the canal would be the only possibility to fund a mass



reforestation project in a country which has suffered ongoing deforestation since the 1980s.

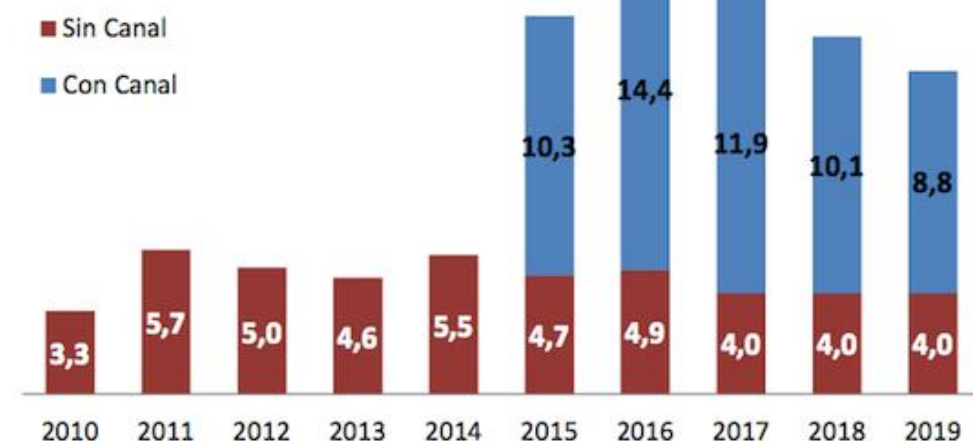
Research from Centro Humboldt and the Cocibolca Group, however, reported that approximately 109,000 people will be displaced by the canal which will also affect 193,000 hectares of forest, more than 40 species of animals, as well as nature preserves that include protected wetlands. There are also growing concerns regarding the amount of water needed to supply the canal (7.5 million cubic metres in the dry season; 8.4 million in the wet season). In a future of increasing droughts, dry-spells and climate change, water will soon become a scarce resource. When paired with Ortega's signing over of all rights regarding Nicaragua's water resources and the route passing through Lake Nicaragua which provides drinking water for a huge percentage of the population, this makes for a chilling future.

As it stands now, the canal is in a state of limbo. According to HKND, the \$50 billion project is full-steam ahead; this should be dependent on the outcomes of the forthcoming social, environmental and economic assessments. The law, however, has been passed and the environmental aspect is absent from that law. So the general feeling is that regardless of their outcomes, there is nothing to stop Nicaragua being cut in two.

Sources:

<https://walesnicaragua.wordpress.com>
<http://lainfo.es/en/2014/10/15/nicaragua-canal-commission-studies-have-ready-in-late-october/>
<http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2014/sep/30/nicaragua-canal-forest-displace-people>
<https://1voz.org/report/103>

Crecimiento Económico de Nicaragua con y sin Canal



Fuente: PEF, FMI & Estimaciones Propias

Nicaragua's economic growth with (Con) and without (Sin) the Canal.



Drought hits Central America

As we prepare this edition of the ENCA Newsletter, floods are hitting various parts of Central America and it appears that the unexpected and prolonged drought which hit the region may be over, but its effects are likely to continue to make life difficult for many families for some time to come. *John Perry* who lives near Masaya, Nicaragua, wrote about the drought in his blog and with his permission we reproduce one of his blog articles here.

The government is blaming it on the warming of the Pacific Ocean known as El Niño, while scientists are disputing how much warming has actually occurred. But whatever the cause the drought that has hit Central America and extends south into Colombia is very real. The rainy season should have begun in May, but three months later there has been only a fraction of the normal rainfall. Crops have failed, cattle have little to eat or drink and subsidised grains are being made available to poor communities – even while government budgets are cut back because nearly one-fifth of the economy is based in farming.

This week I saw some of the effects at first hand. A group from the US is on a visit to Nicaragua looking at the effects of climate change and the government's success in switching to renewable energy for electricity generation – last year they passed the 50% mark for the first time. We took the group to El Timal

where the crops have already started to shrivel and will certainly not produce any corn. The irony is that the field is alongside the community's well – one of the US visitors is looking into it in the larger photo – but the only way to draw water at present is with a small bucket.

We hope that this will all change in the next few months. We have a grant of £9,000 from the British embassy to install solar panels, an electric pump, a water storage tank and the pipes to irrigate the surrounding fields – the eight families each own just over three hectares, allocated through the country's land reform programmes. The well has an ample supply of water, which can be drawn up by the solar-driven pump and held in the tank for use both for irrigation and by the families themselves. The irrigation will use a drip system to minimise wastage. The families are already talking about growing vegetables and fruit, and the project will include training from one of

ADIC's² farming experts in how to make best use of the improved water supply.

This is a very small project, but an exciting one. It brings together

the 'alternative technology' aspect of ADIC's work, which we've been developing over the last eight years, with the longer-established sustainable farming work with which ADIC began as an organisation more than 20 years ago. There are several challenges. It's a lot of money to invest in one small community and we have to decide how best to recover some of the investment so as to pay maintenance costs. We have to train

people both to use the equipment and in farming methods they may not have used before. The community is isolated and very poor – and distance itself is a problem as it's more than an hour's drive from Masaya because of its location well away from main roads. Above all, we're going to be reliant on their ability to work together and share a communal resource.

John Perry's 'Two Worlds' blog can be found at: <http://twoworlds.me/>

1. <http://twoworlds.me/latin-america/a-community-with-origins-in-the-contra-war/>
2. ADIC: Association for Community Integration and Development. This is a Nicaraguan partner organisation with the Leicester Masaya Link Group.



This is a very small project, but an exciting one. It brings together the 'alternative technology' aspect of ADIC's work, which we've been developing over the last eight years

to see the latest phase of the solar energy project, and while there we also visited Cuadrante 84¹ where we have not only installed electricity but plan to carry out a solar-driven irrigation project.

There will be eight families taking part in the new project, and the main photo shows several of those involved. They are standing, sadly, in a maize field

Nicaragua hit by severe earthquakes and flooding

The following is a report dated 20th October 2014 from the NSC. It briefs on the recent floods mentioned in the header to John Perry's report on the drought which preceded the floods.

Twenty-two people have been killed over the past few days as a result of constant heavy rains and severe flooding. An estimated 33,000 people have been affected, particularly in the northern region of the Caribbean Coast and Managua. Thousands of families living in low lying areas have been evacuated by the emergency services.

The country was already on yellow alert after an earthquake on 13 October registering 7.3 on the Richter scale that was followed by constant aftershocks. The emergency authorities have also warned that volcanoes in the León region are showing signs of increased activity.

2014 has been a year of extreme weather in Nicaragua. The first part of what should have been the rainy season saw the worse drought in three decades across the Central American region. As Fátima Ismael, general manager of the agricultural co-operative SOPPEXCCA, explained in an interview for Nicaragua Now in early September '...the big problem this year has been drought, 40% less rain than usual. Crops have failed all over the country. Some farmers have lost 90% of the first harvest which raises concerns about food security.' The major concern of the past few weeks is the loss of life and destruction of crops due to flooding.



Honduras and Nicaragua rank second and fourth respectively on a 2014 Global Climate Risk Index of countries suffering the most as a consequence of extreme weather.

As Vice President Moises Halleslevens stated at the UN Climate Summit in New York on 23 September, 'It is developing countries who are at the mercy of the consequences of climate change, particularly the most vulnerable sectors, such as indigenous peoples, children, women and the elderly.'

ENCA Presents a **Free Public Lecture**

THE VIOLENCE OF DEVELOPMENT

Why has 'development' failed people in Central America?

Why do so many still live with violence and poverty?

How might digital media help us better understand these patterns of violence?

Speakers: Martin Mowforth, University of Plymouth

Doug Specht, VOZ & University of Westminster

Monday 9th February - 7:30pm

Fyvie Hall, University of Westminster

309 Regent Street, London

Hydropower Electric Plants in tropical rainforest regions: Clean energy for Costa Rica?

This opinion piece was written for the ENCA Newsletter by members of the *Watershed Protection Movement* in southern Costa Rica, an area threatened by the development of hydro-electricity projects.

A day by day more western (un-)economic system bears strange shoots and fruits wherever it takes root. Under shiny labels such as 'green' or 'clean' energy, we find EU subsidies for 'clean' and 'renewable' agro-fuel produced in countries such as Indonesia accelerating the substitution of the last virgin rainforests with endless oil-palm monocultures, a phenomenon which has not by-passed Central America. We also discover lavish financial streams from the World Bank and from governments in all continents except around the southern pole for thousands of hydro-electric power (HEP) projects, in eco-news-speak meaning 'clean' and 'green' hydropower energy.

The Central American forest and mountain rivers are particularly endangered by hundreds of HEP projects. A year ago ENCA informed on the negative ecological, social and economic impacts of HEP on local communities and exuberant tropical biodiversity in the Southern Zone of Costa Rica.

A good number of environmentally and socially damaging mega-projects in the ecologically fragile region stretching from Mexico to Colombia are elements of the Mesoamerican Project, formerly the PPP (Plan Puebla Panama). The PPP was first presented to the public in 2001. Its main purpose is to open up for corporate exploitation the rich natural resources, strategic location and cheap workforce of the land bridge between the Caribbean and the Pacific, the 'US backyard'. How? By building the necessary mega-infrastructures for energy production and increased exports: ports, airports, highways, trains, communication, HEP projects, and international high voltage power lines.

Rapidly growing resistance against these new dangers for the environment, local self-sufficiency and historically grown relationships and balances between people, communities and the environment forced the bosses of the PPP to bestow a new name on their baby: Mesoamerican Project – old wine in a new bottle. The official script says that these projects are Mexican initiatives, allowing the pervasive US interests to keep a

low profile. There is an old proverb in this part of the world: "Poor Central America, so far from God and so close to the USA."

The anti-HEP struggle since Oct. 2013

While in 2013 the grassroots movements for the defence of local watersheds against HEP projects felt like David vs. Goliath, the panorama now looks quite a bit brighter. There are various reasons for this change to the better, such as:

- * The ability of the watershed protection movements to unite locally, regionally and now also nationally.
- * The use of a mix information strategies from the distribution of information leaflets from farmhouse to farmhouse to the presentation of their concerns in the big media, internet and social media, nationally and internationally.
- * The intelligent and creative use of the options for opposition offered by some government institutions of Costa Rica. For example by disproving the generally superficial and often fake 'studies' presented by the promoters of HEP to government institutions and by putting pressure on municipalities to decree 'moratoria', i.e. to refuse the issue of construction permits for HEP projects. Nevertheless, when necessary the citizens' movements also use appropriate forms of popular direct democracy such as demonstrations, marches, blockades, street theatre, colourful processions.
- * The inspiring help of Kioscos Socioambientales, a programme of UCR (Universidad de Costa Rica). Students and professors working with Kioscos Socioambientales help community movements in many ways, particularly by facilitating their access to professional and academic analysis and research, as catalysts for collective decision-making and by helping to connect community movements with common interests. The people of Kioscos have worked with many successful ecological movements, e.g. against gold mining, oil exploration in the Caribbean or displacement of communities for mega-projects such as airports. Kioscos is a well-



established University programme with its own budget, means of transportation and recognition of the work of the students in the form of credits. Not only communities profit, but students learn by participating in this kind of work.

In the elections in early 2014, Costa Rica finally left behind its two party system of Anglo-Saxon mould. The result is that the two parties which have run and corrupted political life since the 1970s were rejected in favour of the new centre-left PAC (Citizens Action Party), which won the presidency and many seats in parliament and local governments. Further to the left, the Frente Amplio (Broad Front) increased its representation in parliament from 1 to 9 seats out of a total of 56. These almost revolutionary changes bear many sweet fruit, such as: having competent university professors as ministers instead of cronies of one or another oligarchic dynasty; three local HEP projects have been shelved for at least a year – in our region alone, however, there are still more than a dozen HEP projects queuing for their construction permits; a new wind of openness to the general public blows through many government institutions; civil society has been prominently included in the development of the 'National Energy Plan for Costa Rica to 2030', including rural areas like ours where workshops have been organised to collect the opinions of representatives of citizens' movements, business and government. (Time will tell if a truly democratic decision-making process will follow or if we are looking at yet another show to fool people better.)

Long term vigilance remains necessary, however. There are substantial risks that our victories might be lost after the next national elections. Local oligarchs and the USA are not likely to give up their development prey without a fight.

Conclusion: In spite of all statements to the contrary, resistance and political activism can make a difference – even in the third millennium.

From little acorns...

Long standing ENCA member *Doug Specht* gives a personal account of how a small project on behalf of ENCA has snowballed into a global project attracting attention from across the development community.



It feels like a very long time ago that I was sitting in a cold draughty corner of the library in the neo-gothic Hart House at the University of Toronto. It was actually an unusually mild winter in Canada in 2012, but a thick snow still lay on the ground as I pored over report after report of Canadian owned mining concessions in Central America. I had become rather concerned about some of the funding the University was receiving, and how this might impact on the developing world, and many of the communities ENCA works with in Central America. The University receives a great deal of funding from GoldCorp, a company which had many times (dis)graced the pages of the ENCA newsletter, but not because of their philanthropic actions.

These concerns led me to explore just how extensively Canada is involved in mining in Central America. With the backing of ENCA, and a background in geography I set out to map each and every Canadian owned mine in Central America and its related human rights and environmental concerns.

The map, which was many months in the making was finally published on the ENCA website alongside our March 2012 newsletter in which a well-received article on the appalling record of Canada's extractive sector was featured.

At the time I thought that was the end of the project, but actually it was just the beginning. People liked the map, they found it useful to visualise where the mines were, which companies worked with who, and which communities might be affected, either in the immediate vicinity, or perhaps down river. There was a significant issue though as the map was becoming out-dated faster than I could add to it, and in some places it was impossible to map as fast as the situation unfolded. At first I requested the help of other people to keep the map updated,

but a lack of time and an API* that at the time was hugely complex, meant there were few takers.

A bigger problem was yet to come: It was one of a crisis of conscience. Since its founding, ENCA has prided itself on working with grassroots communities, supporting local initiatives and bottom-up models of development; so why then was I sitting in a grand university courtyard, now in the summer sun, writing about issues in communities to which I had never been?

Two issues seemed to be at play, firstly the barriers to mapping, namely cost and education, meant that many who might have contributed to the map were simply unable to access the resources to do so. The second, and more complex, is the legitimacy placed on western scientific knowledge over local knowledge.

I set out to combat all of these issues in one move, to develop a new GIS mapping tool that can be used for free, and with little more than 10 minutes training and using the slowest of internet connections. In this way I believed, and still believe, local communities would be able to build maps that would accurately portray the situations they are facing and in a way that is seen as legitimate by the wider world.

To ensure this new project was heading on the right path, ENCA's many years of experience were drawn upon, along with support from the University of Amsterdam and three months with Universidad del Valle in Colombia testing prototypes and researching

how communities share knowledge.

Technical expertise came in the form of my brother, Todd - now a partner in the organisation, he has been a web developer for many years. He has dedicated many hours to this project.

Eventually, almost three years after starting the ENCA mining map, last month we launched a full version of VOZ, the name chosen to represent our hope that we are not just mapping these issues, but are giving people a louder voice. We are now working with many NGOs, including ENCA and Friends of the Earth to reach communities in crisis and build a network of mappers.

Unlike the ENCA mining map, we did not set out to map all that is wrong in the world, but to build a platform to share experience, knowledge and solidarity with others, even when geographically separated. We believe we have managed to achieve that aim, and we are eternally grateful to ENCA for starting this project and steering us, along with many others, on the right path.

VOZ is now accessible on Desktop, Tablet and Smartphone and can be accessed here: <https://1voz.org>

Photo: Rhett Butler, Mongabay.org.

* Application programming interface



Latin America Conference 2014

London | 29th November | TUC Congress House

ENCA will be well represented at this year's Latin America Conference. With ENCA members giving talks on Volunteering in Central America, Mining in El Salvador and TTIP, as well as hosting a stand.

Come and meet other ENCA members and the Latin America Solidarity community.

Tickets: latinamerica2014.org.uk



ENCA gets a new, green, website

It has been a long time in the making, but we are finally there with our new website. One of the principal reasons for us changing our website is the concern about the carbon footprint of the ICT sector, which now accounts for similar levels of CO₂ emissions as the aviation industry. To help combat this we have been working with The Woodpecker Project and GreenCloud to move our website to be hosted on renewable energies. We are now able to claim that our website is TrulyGreen™.

While moving to our new servers we took the time to spruce things up a little too, and have given the whole site a makeover. All the same great content is there, archived newsletters, James' travel blog, the ENCA mining map, and now it is easier to find and just a little more pleasing on the eye.

We will be adding a number of other features to the website over the coming months, including making it easier for organisations in Central America to apply for grants from ENCA by making our application forms available through the website. We will also be improving our donations pages, meaning you will be able to renew your subscription, make one-off donations or set up standing orders all directly through our website.

Additions and updates to the website will of course be noted in this newsletter, but for now take a look around and let us know what you think!

www.enca.org.uk

El Salvador's Labour Ministry Files 800 Claims against Companies for Violations of Workers' Rights

News item reproduced here by kind permission of *CISPES* (Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador). Please note that as a socio-environmental organisation ENCA believes that the terms of trade and labour are environmental issues just as much as the condition of the flora and fauna of the world of nature.

In September, as the recently elected Sánchez Cerén administration celebrated 100 days in office, the Ministry of Labour filed 793 claims with the Attorney General's Office against companies for labour violations.

The fines requested, which will contribute to the national budget a total of \$583,000, are based on inspections made by Ministry of Labour personnel. The majority of the infractions were found in the security, manufacturing, service and trade industries, with the most common violations being failure to pay salaries and overtime or respect vacations, or refusing to allow the Ministry of Labour Inspectors to enter the premises. According to Ministry Inspector General Jorge Bolaños, the goal for the country, beyond the collection of the fines, is to advance in building a culture of compliance with labour rights and to avoid impunity.

Under the previous administration of President Mauricio Funes (2009-2014), the country's first ever progressive government, the Labour Ministry began a

significant transformation from a pro-management institution hostile to workers' claims towards an enforcer of labour standards. From 2005-2008, under the right-wing administration of Tony Saca, the Ministry carried out an average 7,194 inspections annually; from 2009-2013, that average jumped to 27,348 workplace inspections per year.

When President Sánchez Cerén assumed office in June, he appointed long-time feminist advocate Sandra Guevara to continue to advance Salvadoran workers' rights as Minister of Labour. A full report of the Ministry's work over the first 100 days under Guevara's leadership is available at:

www.cispes.org/media/el-salvador-watch-newsletter/esw-articles/esw-feminist-solutions-new-el-salvador-interview-sandra-guevara-las-melidas/

Meeting Dates

Sun 8th Feb 2015; Sun 14th Jun 2015; Sun 18th Oct 2015

ENCA meetings are held at the NSC's office at the Durham Road Centre, London, N7 7DT. 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 to share.