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ENCA's 2007 study tour to Honduras was officially cancelled, but several ENCA members met in Honduras in July and August 2007 to make personal contact with a number of our partner organisations there and to forge new links with a number of other organisations. Much of this newsletter is focused on their findings in the country and in particular on the precarious situation in which many environmental and social activists in Honduras find themselves.

We report first on the general situation faced by environmentalists and social activists in Honduras and on the particular threats facing members of the Environmentalist Movement of Olancho (MAO); second on two of the many problems facing the Prolansate Foundation; third on the Civic Council of Grassroots and Indigenous Organisations of Honduras (COPINH); and fourth on the International Information Centre on Cover Crops (CIDICCO). Most of the group also visited Nicaragua and re-acquainted themselves with the case of the banana workers currently camped outside the National Assembly building in Managua in protest at the lack of assistance from their government in their struggle against the transnational companies which poisoned them – and we report on recent developments in this struggle too.

Below, we show just a few of the Honduran environmentalists and social activists who have been assassinated in recent years for their opposition to 'development' projects or the activities (often illegal) of companies whose only concern is to make profits. The culture of impunity in Honduras allows these companies and their owners to show a callous disregard for the lives of people affected by their commercial activities. The article that follows is a commemoration of their lives.



Carlos Escaleras Mejía



Carlos Antonio Luna



Carlos Roberto Flores



Carlos Arturo Reyes



Dionisio Díaz García



Editorial

We give humble apologies to all our readers who realise that it is now some months since we produced the last ENCA Newsletter – seven to be precise. We can give nothing but the usual excuses – overwork, etc. – but it is worth repeating the fact that ENCA has no paid workers – everything that ENCA manages to do is done through the efforts of volunteers, all of whom have other jobs and other commitments. So, perhaps you will forgive us if occasionally a newsletter is delayed a little, or even a lot, as in this case.

HONDURAN ENVIRONMENTALISTS UNDER THREAT

By Martin Mowforth

Along with several members of the Honduran environmental organisations who hosted our visit – listed on the front page – our group of ENCA members attended the launch of an Amnesty International report on ‘Persecution and Resistance: The experience of human rights defenders in Guatemala and Honduras’⁽¹⁾.

Even before our involvement with Amnesty International, it is no exaggeration to say that we had been shocked by the level of danger suffered by our Honduran counterparts in these organisations. Had we been aware of this beforehand, we would have allowed ourselves at least a couple of days after each of our visits to these organisations to absorb the reality of the threats they have to live with. A little background may be helpful to explain the situation our partner organisations face, along with a few details of some of the assassinations which have already occurred and the threats currently faced.

In the 1980s, whilst wars raged around Honduras, the country became known as USS Honduras for its role in harbouring, training and supplying the contras in Nicaragua. In that decade it developed its own death squads – like most of the death squads in Latin America, they were inspired and trained, overtly and covertly, by branches of the US government – to snuff out dissent and opposition within their own borders.

The peace accords and the end of the wars fought in the territories of its three neighbours (Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua) did not bring an end to the activities of the death squads in Honduras. The political targets were replaced by those deemed appropriate for a spot of social cleansing – street children and vagrants. Casa Alianza (a street childrens’ organisation which works in a number of Central American capital cities) reports the violent deaths and arbitrary executions of 3,395 children and youths from 1998 to 2006 (inclusive)⁽²⁾ – a systematic form of genocide, or as Casa Alianza calls it “a selective policy of extermination”.

But the death squads also began to make themselves available for other targets, one of which was provided by environmentalists and social activists who were leading protests against the indifference, disruption, dislocation and contamination caused by commercial activities and so-called development projects. Since the assassination of Jeannette Kawas in 1995, environmentalists in Honduras have been a major target for the death squads.

Jeannette Kawas was the President of Fundación Prolansate, an environmental and conservation organisation which has the responsibility for the care of a number of protected areas on the northern coast of Honduras around Tela Bay. It was as a result of her work that these areas were granted stronger protection by the Honduran state and that a large area around Punta Sal was awarded the status of a National Park. But this work did not please everyone, and the advances made during her presidency of

Prolansate were seen as obstacles to the development of a number of business projects. The organisation was involved in campaigns against transnational companies which were deforesting and polluting the local environment, and in a local controversy which approved the movement of landless campesinos (supported by the Honduran Ministries of Agriculture and Tourism) into areas under Prolansate's protection. Moreover, the area was seen as ripe for tourism investment, and land purchases by interested companies and individuals (even without the construction of tourism infrastructure) had already forced up land values and converted the area into a source of capital accumulation.

Jeannette Kawas was assassinated in February 1995, and still nobody has been brought to justice for the crime. Despite all the possible sources of violence given above, it is currently believed that the intellectual author of the crime was Jorge Montoya who had sold land for logging, the permit for which was cancelled by AFE-COHDEFOR, the state Forestry Commission, under Jeannette Kawas' prompting and local management.

Carlos Escaleras was assassinated in October 1997. Throughout the 1990s Carlos coordinated the efforts and campaigns of COPA, the Coordinating Body of Popular Organisations of Aguán, and in this role he often found himself and the organisation protesting about the contamination caused by a palm oil extraction plant owned by Miguel Facussé, a rich and powerful businessman and nephew of a former President of Honduras. Amongst others, Facussé has been accused of the intellectual authorship of the assassination of Carlos, but "the parliamentary immunity of some, the economic, political and military power of others and the complicity of judges and magistrates have been the obstacles to justice; as a result of these, the intellectual authors and material assassins have remained wrapped in impunity"⁽³⁾.

Carlos Antonio Luna was assassinated in May 1998 at the age of 42. He fought against illegal timber felling in the region of Catacamas in the department of Olancho and exposed those responsible for it. In April he received death threats, and he left with COFADEH (the Honduran Committee of Families of the Detained and Disappeared) a note to say that if anything happened to him, the intellectual authors of the threats were Lincoln Figueroa, a nationalist deputy who, it was known, had already remarked that only killing Carlos Luna would solve their problems; Jorge Chávez, a timber merchant; José Angel Rosa, another timber merchant who had repeatedly threatened Carlos with death; and the Soto family who were involved in the illegal exploitation and trafficking of timber. Jorge Chávez was captured in 2002 and served four years in jail, gaining his freedom in 2006. The other intellectual authors remain free. The material assassin Oscar Rodríguez is currently serving a 27 year sentence for the crime.

Carlos Roberto Flores was 28 when he was assassinated in June 2001. He paid with his life for his opposition to the Babilonia hydroelectric project. Six security guards of Energisa, the company responsible for the project, are accused as material perpetrators of the crime – three of them have been detained and three have fled. Accused as intellectual authors of the crime is Héctor Julián Borjas Rivera, President of the Energisa company, which had received a \$270 million loan from the Central American Bank of Economic Integration (BCIE) for the project. He has not been arrested.

José Mauricio Hernández Cáceres was assassinated in November 2002. He was killed because of his public opposition to illegal logging in Olancho. In 2004, Alexis Días Cáceres was sentenced to 20 years in prison for committing the crime with two accomplices who were given lesser sentences. Within the communities in Olancho in which José was known, it is widely believed that the intellectual authors of the assassination are Rúben Antúnez (a cattle rancher), Francisco Zúñiga (mayor of the community of Jano and an exploiter of the local forest timber) and Juan Lanza (a timber merchant).

Carlos Arturo Reyes was 23 years old when he was assassinated in July 2003. After the March For Life in 2003, his name appeared on a death list of environmentalists to be assassinated. Carlos's brother, Francisco Nahín Reyes Méndez, is believed to be responsible for the assassination. Francisco is known for his violent character and is also believed to have killed his girlfriend. It is thought that he was used by the logging companies to carry out this crime, after which he fled to the USA. But he returned several months later and is still at large in Honduras.

Dionisio Díaz García was shot dead in December 2006. He was a lawyer working for the Association for a More Just Society (ASJ) and at the time of his death was representing a number of security guards who claimed they had been unfairly dismissed by a private security firm. In common with other ASJ members, Dionisio had received numerous death threats before December.

Also in December 2006, two members of the Environmental Movement of Olancho (MAO by its Spanish initials), Heraldo Zúñiga and Roger Iván Cartagena, were shot dead in the town of Guarizama, in Olancho. They were killed in execution style by four members of the national police. The MAO has consistently campaigned against illegal logging in Olancho since the year 2000 and has not been afraid to name those responsible and to denounce corrupt officials of COHDEFOR, the Honduran Forestry Development Commission, which issues permits for felling. In May 2006 Heraldo Zúñiga stated that he had received several death threats after publicly exposing cases of illegal logging in western Olancho. That same month the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) requested information about this case from the Honduran government, which implemented protective measures for Padre Andres Tamayo, leader of the MAO. No protective measures for other members of the MAO were implemented. After the executions of the two MAO members in December 2006, the IACHR ordered the Honduran government to provide protection for other members of the MAO, but as ENCA members discovered during their visit in August 2007, no such protection has yet been provided.

The litany of assassinations could continue, but space prevents it. Today's most pressing concern is the list of those currently living under threat of death or of persecution and prosecution by the authorities acting upon accusations made by the illegal loggers and companies whose operations they oppose. Those under threat of death include those listed after the first March For Life in June 2003, when thousands of people walked more than 170 km from Juticalpa in Olancho to Tegucigalpa to demand an end to the illegal timber operations in Olancho. The march was headed by Padre Andres Tamayo, the priest in the town of Salamá, who now has a permanent bodyguard of Honduran soldiers because of the death threats he has received. Padre Andres drove us around various parts of Olancho to show us the deforestation, the areas where the MAO and local communities have blockaded roads to stop the loggers, the places where unarmed local residents have experienced tense stand-offs against hired gangs armed with AK-47s and Uzis. But what disturbs the MAO most are the threats faced by other members of the MAO who have no bodyguards and no protection despite the IACHR's instructions to the Honduran government. Recent history shows that the threats are not idle. The logging companies and all those who profit from the operation will stop at nothing to ensure the profits they gain from selling their timber to the USA and Europe⁽⁴⁾.

Notes

- 1 The reference number for the Amnesty International Report in the AI Index is AMR 02/001/2007 and it can be found at www.amnesty.org
- 2 Casa Alianza UK Newsletter, February 2007. 35 per cent (1,193) of these were children under the age of 18.
- 3 Comité de Familiares de Detenidos-Desaparecidos en Honduras (COFADEH) (2006) *Erguidos Como Pinos: Memoria sobre la construcción de la conciencia ambientalista*, Tegucigalpa, page 48.
- 4 Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) (2005) 'The Illegal Logging Crisis in Honduras: How US and EU imports of illegal Honduran wood increase poverty, fuel corruption and devastate forests and communities'. The report is available from the EIA's website: www.eia-international.org

Readers may like to know that after our two days with the MAO a letter was written on behalf of ENCA members to the Honduran President, the Honduran Attorney General, the Honduran Commission for Human Rights and the Secretary General of the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights regarding the urgent need for protection for all members of the MAO. We are also hopeful that several individual letters addressing the same issues were sent in response to our request in ENCA Newsletter 42 (March 2007).

ENCA members may also like to know that a number of ENCA members are proposing and acting as references for the nomination of the MAO for the 2008 Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders. The award is made in the month of May.

FUNDACIÓN PROLANSATE

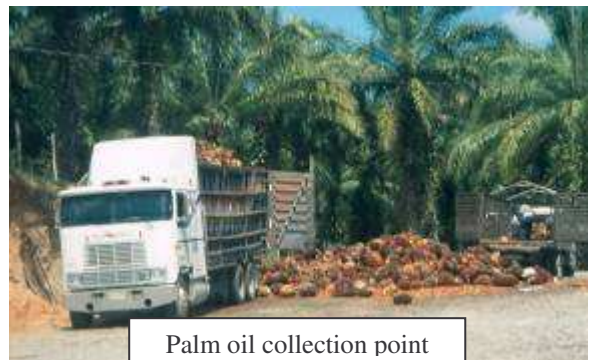
ENCA members spent four days on the northern coast of Honduras around Tela Bay. Two of these were spent as the guests of Fundación Prolansate, an organisation which was founded in 1990 and has responsibility for the protection of the Jeannette Kawas National Park, Punta Izopo National Park, Texiguat Wildlife Reserve and Lancetilla Botanical Gardens. Since its beginnings its members have struggled against encroachment by a host of persons and companies into these protected areas and in particular into the Jeannette Kawas National Park (JKNP). Our group spent two nights in Prolansate's *hospedaje* in the Garífuna village of Tornabé and were shown around the JKNP first by Lesly Villanueva and Lilliam both of whom are coordinators for the organisation's educational tours. On our second day with them, Denis Sierra (Director of the JKNP) and Don Pedro showed us a few of the difficulties they face in their work.

These difficulties include the pollution caused by palm oil cultivation, illegal land takeovers within the national parks by settlers from elsewhere in Honduras, the conflicts between the local Garífuna and these settlers, the threats of narco-traffickers and not least the pressures of tourism development. We would need the rest of this newsletter's space to relate all these problems and issues in adequate detail, so we refer our readers back to Ben Gregory's article on 'Bio-diesel and bio-ethanol developments' in ENCA 43 (June 2007) and Sarah Irving's article on the 'Los Micos Beach and Golf Resort' in ENCA 42 (March 2007); and we offer simply the briefest of updates on both of these situations as they affect Fundación Prolansate.

Palm oil cultivation

With Denis Sierra we toured the extensive area within the JKNP that is used for palm oil plantation cultivation. In brief, the immediate problems associated with palm oil cultivation which Prolansate has to deal with are:

- the loss of biodiversity associated with any system of monocultivation;
- contamination of water courses by the liquid waste run-off from the palm oil processing plants – many of the water courses disgorge their water into the Laguna de Los Micos;
- unfiltered gas contamination by the processing plants;
- the attraction of squatter farmers into the zone to try their hand at African palm cultivation – most producers of palm oil in this zone are independent and sell their produce to one of the processing factories via a cooperative or a middlemen; and
- entrenched attitudes (on the part of the farmers, land owners and processing plant management) against any ideas associated with pollution reduction or environmental protection.



Despite these problems, Denis made it clear to us that the Fundación would prefer to be dealing with palm oil cultivation rather than cattle ranching, largely on the grounds that palm oil plantations allow the relatively undisturbed daily and seasonal migration of mammals (especially jaguars) through this area that is supposed to serve as a biological corridor for such movement. Cattle ranchers are quick with their guns to shoot anything that may threaten their stock.

Note: We are informed by the Global Justice Ecology Project that the term 'agrofuels' is a more accurate label for the production of fuel from industrially produced agricultural crops such as African palm oil. The term 'biofuels' gives the false impression that these fuels are environmentally friendly, when they are in fact environmentally and socially destructive. The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation also uses the term 'agrofuels'.

Los Micos Beach and Golf Resort

Our visit around Tela Bay and the JKNP enabled us to see at first hand the area that is threatened by this tourism mega-project that Sarah Irving reported on in ENCA 42. The development will occupy some 500 hectares of land and a three-kilometre stretch of beach. Within the Los Micos Beach and Resort Centre there will be 4 luxury residences, 256 villas, malls, theme parks, horse rides and, of course, a golf course.

Despite local resistance to the project, especially from the Garífuna community, afro-indigenous peoples who have lived on the north coast of Honduras for the past 200 years, the development is now even more likely to go ahead. Since our visit to the region, Astaldi, the second-largest Italian construction company, has won a contract from the government of Honduras to build the basic infrastructure of this mega-tourist resort which objectors say will have a devastating environmental, social and economic impact on their lands.

Astaldi is set to begin filling in a large part of the wetlands in this area in order to build a golf course, activities that are totally incompatible with the Ramsar Convention, which stipulates that delicate wetlands need absolute protection. Furthermore, construction activities would alter the equilibrium of all water resources in the area, leading to changes in water reserves and thus to the benefits of the wetlands themselves. Construction would also increase the risk of floods in nearby communities and in the town of Tela during the months of heaviest rains.



Indigenous fishing in Laguna de Los Micos

A technical study undertaken by Prolansate shows that the project would have a disastrous environmental impact and would entail numerous violations of international treaties (Agreement on Biological Diversity; the Convention for the Conservation of Biodiversity and the Protection of Natural Areas in Central America - decree number 183/94), national forestry laws, environmental regulations of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), which is financing the project, in addition to internal Park regulations. The project

borders on the National Park's totally protected inner core, and Honduran laws prohibit any changes or alterations of the ecosystem in the area.

To undertake this megaproject, whose total cost will surpass 200 million dollars, Honduras will need to contract new debt with the IDB, which will also benefit Astaldi to the tune of \$15 million. This will increase Honduras' already high foreign debt which will have negative repercussions on the poorest sectors of the country.

According to an Astaldi spokesperson the tourist project will bring “development, wealth and work” to the region, but we suspect that Astaldi knows that it is guilty of being part of a project that is economically, socially and environmentally unsustainable. Letters can be written to Alessandra Onorati, director of Astaldi’s Investor Communication and Relations in Rome:

a.onorati@astaldi.com and to Secretaria de Astaldi Columbus en Honduras secretaria@astaldi.hn

More details about Fundación Prolansate can be found on their website www.prolansate.org – they also have another website www.prolansate-ecoturismo.com

COPINH - ENCA BROADCASTS IN LA ESPERANZA

By Kerstin Hansen

During our time in Honduras two ENCA members, Dominic McCann and myself, visited COPINH (Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organisations of Honduras), a broad-based grassroots organisation with its own radio station, in order to give them some second-hand recording equipment as well as a brand-new wind-up radio, which had kindly been donated by a friend.

COPINH was founded in 1993 in the Honduran southwest with the goal of obtaining land rights, protecting the environment and preserving Lenca culture. Their struggle also includes improving the living conditions of indigenous people and their access to health care and education. The radio station called “La Voz Lenca” is based at the COPINH “headquarters” close to the town centre of La Esperanza in the department of Intibuca.

Shortly after arriving at the site and interviewing leading COPINH activists, we ourselves were invited for interview on the radio. Luckily there was not much time to think about the interview or to get too nervous as everything happened very quickly. In very basic broken Spanish, we tried our best to answer questions about the purpose of our visit and our opinions about the environmental problems in Honduras.



Kerstin with members of COPINH

On the second day we were taken to the second COPINH site with the very optimistic name of UTOPIA just outside the town, where they were busy with the preparations for the installation of a more powerful transmitter, which was installed just after our return to Britain with the help of some American compañeros and Indymedia members from Mexico. COPINH have managed to obtain a licence from the Zelaya government, which means they can now transmit legally to three Honduran departments (Intibuca, La Paz and Lempira). However, Utopia is

not just a site for the new transmitter; it is also a place where COPINH grow medicinal plants and organic vegetables indigenous to the region including traditional non-hybridised maize. Inside the on-site building they run classes to promote Lenca culture and to revive the Lenca language, which is almost extinct.

However, COPINH’s struggle against water privatisation, logging, the construction of hydroelectric dams, etc., has come at a price. Members have received numerous death threats and in 2003 the brothers Marcelino and Leonardo Miranda were arrested, tortured and sentenced to 25 years in prison (covered in ENCA Newsletter 34, August 2003). Amnesty International adopted them as prisoners of conscience and in 2006 they were released. Berta Caceres, one of COPINH’s founding members, who spoke at the Amnesty International meeting in Tegucigalpa attended by ENCA, described to us the threats she had received against her family.

ENCA aims to keep in touch with COPINH and possibly fund environmentally related projects in their community.

CIDICCO

(The International Centre for Information on Cover Crops)



Our group of ENCA members spent only half a day at the main office of CIDICCO in Tegucigalpa, and unfortunately did not have time to visit any of their projects outside the capital. The organisation's office, however, is a veritable mine of information on a very extensive range of crops grown not just for cover mulch but also as food supply. Additionally, it provides detailed research on crop varieties, composts and irrigation techniques and its work is aimed especially at the small-scale farmer.

CIDICCO was formed in 1990 and in the 1990s developed the notion of '*la finca humana*' – the human plot – a notion which promotes the finca as a place of integration between humans, their food supply and all other aspects of their lives. Its personnel have a very positive outlook on the purpose of their work and they stress the positive in their events – in fact they stress that they organise positive demonstrations (of their work) rather than demonstrations of protest. Apart from its main focus of research work and the spread of information, CIDICCO has also established a small-scale credit bank (similar to the Grameen Bank).

The organisation is currently trying to raise funds for the construction of new headquarters just a short way outside Tegucigalpa. They aim that the new centre will become a venue for the sharing of knowledge, a modern communication and information technology centre, a referral service focus for their thousands of users, a green manure seed-processing plant and a training centre, especially for rural youth in the municipality of Santa Ana where it will be located. ENCA has donated \$200 towards the fund they have set up for this purpose.

NEMAGON AFFECTED BANANA WORKERS AND THE CLINICA XOCHILT

Over the last few years we have included a number of articles about the banana workers of north-west Nicaragua and their lawsuits against the transnational companies (principally Shell, Dole and Dow) which poisoned them by their continued use of DBCP (commonly known as nemagon) after the chemical had been declared too toxic for use in the United States. Several of our intrepid band of ENCA members visited and interviewed the protesting banana workers outside the National Assembly in Managua and also visited a clinic in the town of El Viejo which is of some importance to their lawsuit – the Xochilt Clinic. But a more important reason for reporting yet again on their plight and on developments in their lawsuit is that they have had some recent victories and encouragement.

In early November 2007, a California jury awarded \$3.3 million to six Nicaraguan banana workers who had said they were sterile as a result of pesticide use on a plantation operated by Dole Fresh Fruit Co. The suit accused Dole and Standard Fruit Co. of acting negligently and of attempting to hide its use of DBCP and of its consequences during the 1970s and 1980s. Dow Chemical and Amvac Chemical Corporation were also accused of withholding information about the toxicity of DBCP to the reproductive system.

Dole announced that it would appeal the decision, but ten days later a Los Angeles Superior Court increased the award by a further \$2.5 million after the jury found Dole guilty of hiding information from the workers about the negative effects of the chemical. In Nicaragua the ruling caused great optimism among those workers with cases pending in the US, especially in Chinandega department where most of the nemagon victims live.

Meanwhile in Managua the leader of the Association of Workers and Former Workers Affected by Nemagon, Victorino Espinales, announced that the 3,000 workers represented by this association are negotiating an out-of-court agreement with Dole. The members of this organisation and their families have been living in a makeshift camp opposite the Nicaraguan National Assembly in their attempt to embarrass the government into complying with its earlier promises of medical assistance and support for the affected workers.

After interviewing Victorino Espinales in July, the travelling ENCA members proceeded to the town of El Viejo where, amongst other things, we visited the Xochilt Clinic. The clinic was set up as a part of FETBASCH, the Federation of Banana, Agricultural and Service Workers of El Viejo, Chinandega. As well as giving medical attention to the workers and their families, it offers the much-needed service of providing medical evidence for the banana workers' legal battles, a service which would otherwise be too expensive for the vast majority of these workers. We left with the clinic a solar lamp, but we could see that the clinic was in dire need of a great deal of other equipment. When we returned in August, at the end of our journeys, we also left a further \$200 with the clinic for the



Arnulfo Navarrete Jarquín and Ana María Guadamúz of the Xochilt Clinic and Dominic McCann with the donated solar panel

purchase of an inspection lamp and other equipment. We also met three US students who had been working with the clinic for some months, representing an organisation called Sonrisas. We have since been in regular contact with two of these students, Lizzie Fussell and Megan McBride, who have kept us updated on both the happenings at the clinic and their pressing and crucial needs. ENCA has since made a further donation of \$1,200 to the clinic with a half of that amount being provided by one member of the ENCA group of visitors who was impressed by the depth of the need at the clinic.

An extract from an article by Christian Miller in the LA Times (29 May 2007) illustrates the difficulty of the task facing the clinic in its efforts to prove that the workers were in fact contaminated by nemagon, despite the denials of the companies involved.

It is not easy to show that DBCP caused a worker's sterility or health problems, especially in a poor country like Nicaragua. The region around Chinandega has long been dominated by agriculture, producing cotton, sugar cane and other crops. For decades, growers -- from both the United States and Nicaragua -- sprayed DDT, DBCP and other highly toxic pesticides, many linked to developmental or health problems.

Seven studies conducted from 1995 to 2002 found contamination in community wells. Locals routinely drink water tainted with pesticides, said Valeria Delgado, an investigator at Nicaragua's Center for the Investigation of Water. None of the studies tested specifically for DBCP. Studies have also found that water supplies are laced with fecal matter and other pollutants. Medical care is scarce. Diet is subsistence level. Many of the men drink heavily.

Medical officials acknowledge that they have no proof, just strong suspicions, that the town's ills are linked to pesticides. "If you work in this environment and you wind up sick, I can presume it's an effect of chemical intoxication," said Yolanda Garcia, a toxicologist at the local clinic. "I can presume, but I can't prove."

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The article can also be found on ZNET: www.zmag.org

An extract from El Nuevo Diario (13 August 2007), one of the main Nicaraguan dailies, supports the earlier part of the extract from Miller's article:

A scientific study by the Nicaraguan Centre for Water Resources Research (CIRA) and the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua (UNAN), carried out in 2006 and the first half of 2007, reveals that in the zones where banana plantations existed in the 1970s and 1980s there are residues of DBCP and other pesticides used in the cultivation of cotton and bananas. Victorino Espinales, leader of the workers affected by nemagon, said "with this we show that it's not only those who worked on the fincas who carry the poison in their blood, but it stays alive and contaminates the new generations who drink water from those wells."

SOLAR PANEL AT LOS POZITOS

ENCA member Dominic McCann installed a Solar Panel on the roof of the school at Los Pozitos in August 2004. ENCA members revisited the village during July 2007. On arrival at the community we learned that the solar panel had been stolen some time in January 2007.

The theft of the solar panel followed the main set-back to the development of the village which resulted from the removal of the teacher at the school owing to a fall in pupil numbers. This in itself means that no children in the village receive any formal education, whether at a primary or secondary level. The school now lies empty and the lack of light implies that the building no longer serves as a community centre.

Clearly the theft of the solar panel is a big disappointment. What lessons can ENCA learn from this? Were the benefits brought about by the solar panel (electric light for community gatherings) too short-lived to be worthwhile? How can we help Los Pozitos or other small communities with projects such as this in future?

It is also interesting to note that the electrical power shortages in Nicaragua have led to a modest flourishing of solar power in rural areas. ENCA may have contributed in a very small way to this growth and Suni Solar (the company from which the solar panel system was originally purchased) is now undertaking numerous projects for the Nicaraguan government.

WATER PROBLEMS IN EL SALVADOR

2007 saw many protests in El Salvador against water privatisation there. In particular the town of Suchitoto in June and July was something of a battleground between police and peaceful protestors. Police used excessive force and tactics reminiscent of the civil war in the 1980s to detain 14 people who spent weeks in prison thereafter and are now charged with terrorism. Protest in El Salvador has become significantly more dangerous over the last 12 months thanks to new legislation re-defining many acts as terrorism.

Later in the year, a Channel 4 television documentary about the effects of the Coca Cola company on water resources around the world, featured, among others, ENCA's old friend René Canjura, mayor of the town Nejapa. Also featured were shots of contaminated water flowing from the Coca Cola plant in Nejapa.

Then in November, the community of Cutumay Camones in Santa Ana department became the scene of more protests over water. Bill Weinberg's report follows.

El Salvador: water protesters demand justice

The rural community of Cutumay Camones is demanding justice following a series of violent attacks by the national police and army troops. On Oct. 12, security forces invaded Cutumay Camones, using tear gas and rubber bullets against community members, including children and elders, for protesting against the construction of a garbage dump they say will contaminate local water sources. The scene was repeated on Oct. 25, when a TV journalist was also attacked. National Civilian Police authorities have removed the officers implicated in the attack on the journalist, but community leaders are demanding further measures.

President Antonio Saca admits there was an "excess of force" applied by the riot police at Cutumay Camones, but calls it an "isolated case." Members of his right-wing ARENA party in the National Assembly have said the riot police were "just doing their job." The defense came in response to calls for action against the police by the left-opposition FMLN.

The community organisation ACOFUBEN protests that local residents have not been consulted on the siting of the dump, and El Salvador's Human Rights Ombudsman Oscar Luna has criticised the project for not having the proper legal permits from the Environment Ministry. A report prepared for the National Assembly by the Salvadoran Court of Audits found irregularities in the permit for the dump granted to Presys, a private company. The permit application did not have an adequate environmental impact report and was granted in violation of Article 25 of the Environmental Law, the report found. (More information on this story from: www.cispes.org)

(Bill Weinberg is the author of 'War on the Land: Ecology and Politics in Central America' (1991), London: Zed Books – now a little dated but an essential read for anyone interested in the subject. He is also the principal contributor to the World War 4 Report – www.ww4report.com)

COSTA RICA'S REFERENDUM ON CAFTA

Central America watchers and critics and proponents of free trade treaties will be aware that Costa Rica held its first ever referendum in October 2007 on whether to join the free trade treaty signed in 2004 with the US, other Central American nations and the Dominican Republic – known as DR-CAFTA or simply CAFTA. The 'YES' camp won with 51.6% of the vote to 48.4% for the 'No' camp. Although the vote was conducted fairly and transparently (according to the OAS who had 93 observers around the country to observe the vote), there were accusations of irregularities and 155 complaints against the process were received. These were all dismissed by Costa Rica's Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE). The campaigning that led up to the event, however, was marked by struggles over which side should use the country's flag in its campaign, by a skewed distribution of campaigning resources, by US and transnational interference in the campaign and in particular by a government memo recommending a series of illegal and unethical campaign tactics in favour of a 'YES' vote. The last of these forced the resignation of Vice-President and Planning Minister Kevin Casas.

The closeness of the result has left the country divided and the opposition has vowed to fight against the passage of the legislation necessary before the treaty can be ratified, although Elizabeth Fonseca representing the campaign for the 'NO' vote said that "we will try to improve it [the legislation], not obstruct it."

Despite the result, one possible benefit of the prolonged campaigning in Costa Rica has been the forging of new links and alliances between a wide range of organisations and groups opposed to the notion of so-called 'free' trade. Many such groups previously worked on single issues which involved few other campaigning groups, but are now finding a new cooperative strength. Whether this feeling – and that is all it is – will last remains an open question.

Other environmental news in brief

* *'The impact of natural disasters on food production and infrastructure in Central America, September – October 2007'*. An article of this title (compiled by Clifton Holland) was included in the November 2007 issue of *Mesoamerica* and we recommend it to all our readers who would like a factual and objective account of the damages caused by Hurricane Felix and the weeks of tropical storms and rains which followed it. The article can be found at www.mesoamericaonline.net and we apologise to our readers, to *Mesoamerica* and to Clifton Holland that we have insufficient space left in this issue of the ENCA Newsletter to include it here.

* In September 2007, the \$5.25 billion project to expand the Panama Canal was begun. The expansion will allow the canal to cater for post-Panamax ships, almost doubling the tonnage that can fit through the existing locks. Despite undoubted economic benefits for Panama, critics suggest that profits will not reach the

poor thereby exacerbating inequality in the country, 40% of whose population is classified as poor, many people will have to be relocated, environmental impacts have not been adequately evaluated, corruption will doom the project and cheaper alternatives to the expansion can be found.

* August 2007 saw the closure of the Río Azul waste dump east of San José, Costa Rica; but opinions were divided about whether it was a good or a bad move. Many local people made their living by collecting and recycling goods from the dump and some warn that its closure will lead to a crisis in waste management for the capital. Others have celebrated its closure on the grounds that it has been a major contaminator of water sources and that this move will stimulate more recycling.

Similar problems have arisen in El Salvador where in September 2007 unofficial open-air rubbish dumps were closed down. All solid wastes are to be transferred to authorised sanitary landfill sites. Ricardo Navarro (Director of CESTA, the Salvadoran Centre for Appropriate Technology), however, claimed that “many of the official landfill sites are nearly as bad as the open air tips”.

ENCA (non-)tour DVD available – (the tour that wasn't a tour)

Doug Specht was a member of the group of ENCA travellers around Honduras and Nicaragua and made a film of our meetings and findings. The film lasts just less than 12 minutes and is a high quality product in every sense of the phrase – Doug is a very ‘professional’ amateur in his film-making. Copies of the DVD can be hired or bought for only £2 (just the cost of postage) from Dominic McCann, 5 Elizabeth Street, Prestwich, Manchester M25 1FU, (Tel. 0161 773 0113) (Email: hansen.azymuth@btinternet.com)

Renewal of support and affiliation

Now that we have aligned all our supporter affiliation payments with the calendar year, we invite you to renew your support for ENCA by completing the form enclosed with this newsletter and returning it with a cheque to Janet Bye, ENCA treasurer, at the address given on the form. If you already have a standing order in favour of ENCA, please accept our thanks and ignore this request.

ENCA meetings in 2008

The dates for ENCA meetings in 2008 are as follows:

Sunday 10th February

Sunday 8th June

Sunday 12th October

ENCA meetings are held at the Red Rose Centre, 129 Seven Sisters Road, London N7 7QG (Nearest tube station: Finsbury Park – Piccadilly and Victoria lines).

Meetings start around 1 pm with a lunch of whatever contributions people bring and normally end around 5 pm, but sometimes carry on after that in the Red Rose Centre pub.

ALL ARE VERY WELCOME

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