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‘The new geopolitics of hunger’



(Photo credit: Oxfam – from Nigel Twose ‘Cultivating Hunger’)

*Extracts from an article by João Pedro Stedile (Via Campesina)
First published by IPS*



Editorial

In this issue we devote the first half of the ENCA Newsletter to the causes and effects of the global food crisis as they manifest themselves in Central America. Despite the space used we are still only able to scratch the surface of the issues and have to omit many case studies which are based in Central America. We follow this theme with articles about mining problems and animal trafficking in the region, to both of which themes we could devote a whole newsletter. We hope readers will follow up the links we have given to references and websites (not least our own at www.enca.org.uk) in order to gain a fuller picture of these problems around the region.

‘The new geopolitics of hunger’

*Extracts from an article by João Pedro Stedile (Via Campesina)
First published by IPS*

In the 1960s about 80 million people suffered from hunger worldwide. In this period global capitalism was peaking and transnational companies were expanding throughout the planet, dominating markets and exploiting cheap labour and the natural resources of peripheral countries.

This was the world into which the Green Revolution was born, with its promise to end hunger. Its mentor, Norman Borlaug, received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970. The real objective, however, was to introduce a new system of agricultural production based on the intensive use of industrial inputs. Productivity per hectare increased and global production quadrupled. Yet the number of people suffering from hunger grew far faster, from 80 million to 800 million.

Today 70 countries depend on imports to feed their people, demonstrating that the new model of agriculture served to concentrate production and the global food business in the hands of no more than 30 transnationals, including Bunge, Cargill, ADM, Dreyfuss, Monsanto, Syngenta, Bayer, Basf and Nestlé to name a few of the most powerful.

Recent bad news tells us that, according to estimates, reserves of oil ... will not last longer than 30 years; and another worrying assessment warns us that global warming is progressing dangerously. Faced with these prospects, an unholy alliance has been formed between the oil companies, car manufacturers and agro-industrial companies to promote the large scale production of agrofuels (which are deceptively called ‘biofuels’) such as ethanol in countries with an abundance of land, sun, water and labour. In the last five years, millions of hectares previously dedicated to food production and controlled by campesinos have been appropriated by large companies and deployed for the planting of monocultures of sugar cane, soya, maize/corn, African palm or sunflower destined to produce ethanol or vegetable oil.

Thus the manipulation of the Green Revolution is being repeated. ... Agrofuels, however, will not resolve either the energy dilemma or global warming. Scientists warn us that devoting all of the planet’s arable land to agrofuel production would only replace 20% of current oil consumption.

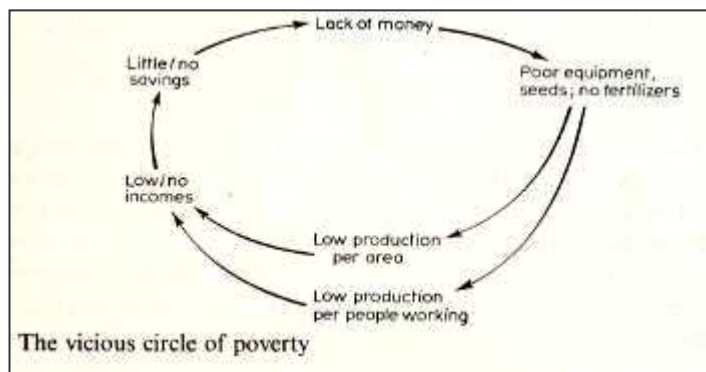
We were already living in an irrational situation as far as food production and prices go, when along came the financial crisis. Many holders of huge sums of financial capital, whether in the form of money or fictitious capital (such as treasury deeds, bonds or mortgages), fearful of incurring losses, rushed to invest in commodity futures and to buy natural resources – land, energy, water – in

peripheral countries. As a result of these capital movements, the prices quoted for food products throughout the world now bears no relation to the costs of production and nor to the volumes of supply and demand. Now they vary rapidly according to stock market speculations and oligopoly control which transnational companies exercise over the global food markets. That is to say that humanity is in the hands of a handful of transnationals and big-time speculators.

The result: according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, famines have increased recently; in only the last two years affected populations have risen from 800 million to 925 million¹. And millions of campesinos in Asia, Latin America and Africa are losing their land and emigrating. Faced with this situation, La Via Campesina² which unites many campesino organisations around the world is putting forward a radical transformation of the system of food production and trade, to wit:

“We defend the principle of food sovereignty: that in each region and each country governments should implement policies which stimulate and guarantee the production of and access to all necessary foodstuffs for their respective populations.

There is no region in the world which does not have the potential to feed its own population. As Josué de Castro, author of ‘The Geopolitics of Hunger’ explained in the 1950s, hunger and a lack of food do not stem from a geographical or climatic condition, but are the results of the social relations of production.



We hold that humanity must consider food a natural right of all human beings. This implies that agricultural produce should not be treated as a market whose end product is commercial profit, and that small-scale farming should be encouraged and strengthened since that is the only policy which can sustain rural populations. And from the above, along with the goal of having food which is healthy and safe, it follows that we reject the use of agro-toxins.

Until now governments have been deaf to our demands. But unless they adopt radical policy changes, the contradictions and social problems will worsen and sooner or later will explode.”

¹ ‘State of Food Insecurity in the World 2008’ UN Food and Agriculture Organisation.

² La Via Campesina is an international movement of peasants, small- and medium-sized producers, landless, rural women, indigenous people, rural youth and agricultural workers. It was founded in 1993 and its website can be consulted at www.viacampesina.org

Salvadoran Perspectives on the Food Crisis

A number of articles in Revista Ecotopia (produced fortnightly by UNES, the Salvadoran Ecological Unit) have addressed the global and national food crisis discussed above and we include below a few thoughts extracted directly from these articles. (www.unes.org.sv)

Food Crisis 'Product of 20 years of not supporting farmers'

Javier Rivera, representative of the Civic Network Against Genetically Modified Food in El Salvador, declared that the crisis of food security in the country "is the product of 20 years of the government not supporting farming". ... According to Rivera, in recent years the crisis has grown and has impacted heavily on the more vulnerable sectors due to climate change, the implementation

of intensive farming practices and the use of chemicals which have caused a depletion of nutrients in the soil.

Guadalupe Cortez, representative of the Lutheran Church, suggests that 70% of developing countries are net importers of food. She claims that 80% of people who suffer hunger in the world are peasants or subsistence farmers, and claims that this “shows that world food policy does not seek to feed people, but to convert the crisis into a great business venture”.

Representatives of the network state that it is necessary for the government to seek alternatives that truly help to resolve the crisis. They consider that the government should immediately stop the use, promotion and commercialisation of genetically modified products in the country. Besides this, the government "should guarantee food security and dignity for its people before the economic interests of large transnational businesses and should promote an agriculture that is socially, ecologically, politically and economically sustainable" stated Cortez.

[Taken from *Revista Ecotopia* 216 (Oct. 2008). Originally published in *Diario CoLatino*.]

Obama's Green Fuels

Silvia Ribeiro, writing in *La Jornada*, suggests that Barack Obama's promotion of agrofuels as an element of his 'new green economy' is misguided. She points out that the cultivation of fuel crops would supplant the cultivation of food crops and that this would largely occur in the countries of the south rather than in the US itself.

She suggests that the appointments of Tom Vilsack as Agriculture Secretary and Steven Chu as Energy Secretary will work in the interests of transnational companies which wish “to aggressively promote the development of new and risky generations of agrofuels based on new transgenic and synthetic crops. Vilsack is particularly associated with the big biotechnology companies whilst Chu is a promoter of continued large-scale carbon use as well as a passionate believer in the development of a ‘fourth generation of biofuels’”.



Courtesy: Corporate Watch

Ribeiro points out that the only truly green thing about the new generations of agrofuels will be the money that they earn for the large agribusiness, petrol and chemical companies.

[Taken from *Revista Ecotopia* 222 (Jan. 2009). Originally published in *La Jornada*.]

Low use of organic compost in El Salvador

An article by Eugenia Velásquez, published in the Salvadoran daily newspaper *El Diario de Hoy* and reproduced in UNES's *Revista Ecotopia* 218, reports the disappointing rate of use of organic compost in the country. According to the report, organic compost is used for only 0.69% of crops grown in the country and the land cultivated organically amounts to only 9,000 manzanas [approx. 15,000 acres].

Although organic production is cheaper and cleaner than agrochemicals, it lacks the stimulus and support of the state. As Mauricio Sermeño, director of UNES, says, “We see organic agriculture as the right alternative because if it doesn't exist it means that we cultivate with poisons, which is what chemical pesticides are.” He asserts that, far from encouraging the use of organic fertilisers, the government provides incentives for the purchase of artificial pesticides. Sermeño referred specifically to Mirex and Paraquat, two chemicals listed in the 'Dirty Dozen' for their high toxicity towards the environment and health. “Mirex is designed to combat mosquitoes and is still sold throughout the country in hardware stores as if they were selling churros ...”

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The Ministry of Public Health estimate that each year around 50,000 people suffer some form of acute intoxication by pesticides. At least 200 die annually through the misuse of these substances. Sermeño points out that sale of these substances is uncontrolled despite existing regulations.

Amongst all this doom and gloom about the direction being taken by modern agriculture, it is heartening to hear of the work of IPES, the Salvadoran Institute of Permaculture which has its base in Suchitoto. IPES promotes the use of organic techniques of cultivation and pest control. ENCA member Peter Bloodworth spent most of 2008 working with IPES and we hope to include a report from him on the work of IPES in the next edition of the ENCA Newsletter. In the meantime, readers can consult the IPES website at www.permacultura.org/elsalvador.html

Continuing with themes associated with the food crisis we next give extracts from Costa Rica's Biodiversity Coordination Network (BCN) which describes the proposed Seed Law as 'the coup de grace for National Agriculture'.

Proposed Seed Law Is New Threat to Food Security

While talk abounds of a food crisis and the need to boost the country's agricultural production, the Agricultural Commission of Costa Rica's Legislative Assembly unanimously approved a complete overhaul of the Seed Law, a move which promotes the interests of transnational seed companies.

Should this succeed in becoming law, it will mean that:

- ***All commercial seeds in Costa Rica will need to be registered and approved by the National Seed Office, and comply with its requirements and procedures.*** This means legal action and fines for any farmer who sells or exchanges non-approved seed. ...
- ***Under the promise of raising quality, seeds must comply with rigid standards ensuring uniformity, distinctness and stability.*** However, diversity and homogeneity don't mix, and this requirement for homogeneity will effectively make traditional native seed varieties illegal. These are the very seeds that are able to adapt to the variety of climates, soils and agricultural practices employed by campesino agriculture.
- ***Traditional seed will need to be registered,*** and will transfer to seed companies the raw material to select new commercial varieties.
- ***The homogenisation of agriculture will severely reduce food diversity.*** Legally restricting which seeds are permitted for use ignores the wealth of genetic diversity represented in traditional seeds. Loss of seed varieties represents erosion of the genetic pool, reduction in pest and disease resistance, greater use of fertilisers, pesticides and fungicides, and fewer food options available for the population.
- ***Food costs will rise for everyone.*** Greater agricultural inputs and imposed registration and certification costs will inevitably filter down to the consumer.

The regulations classify farmers simply as 'users or consumers of the seed', and the seeds as 'final product'. This begs the question of who's going to create this 'final product'? Presumably the large seed companies like Monsanto who operate a quasi monopoly on seed sales in Central America. And what becomes of those farmers who have produced and nurtured these seeds through generations of care and effort?

Shady dealings

These measures were approved in secret: only 13 institutions were consulted, of which the majority were governmental or industry bodies, and including only one of the four public universities and one

farming body, both of which declared themselves opposed to the proposals. No consultation took place with organisations representing campesinos, indigenous people, community groups or environmentalists, all of whom work with seeds on a daily basis, nor the Costa Rican organic agriculture movement Maoco, or the Biodiversity Coordination Network, who have been frequent commentators on the issue. ... “In the end, what they're doing is taking control of seeds out of the hands of campesinos and handing it over to large corporations”, said José Oviedo, member of the National Farmers Union of Costa Rica (UNAG).

The Seed Law proposal is a result of international pressure to standardise national regulations, and in this way ensure commercialisation of the seed industry for the benefit of transnational companies based in Europe and North America. In not one country in the world have such reforms had the objective of relieving hunger, or supporting small producers. ... This proposal is a huge blow to the rights and interests of small producers in Costa Rica, to their traditional knowledge of old varieties, to food diversity, to food security and sovereignty. ...

The Biodiversity Coordination Network (RCB) will do all it can to stop these proposals becoming law, and calls on campesino, indigenous, and environmental organisations, as well as solidarity organisations throughout the country, to join this fight.

In 2008 the BCN was nominated for the ‘Lone voice in the belly of the beast’ Award as part of the Captain Hook Awards for Biopiracy – see www.captainhookawards.org/nominations/2008/ More details of the BCN can be found at <http://redbiodiversidadcr.codigosur.net>

Sugarcane Worker Illnesses Investigated

Pursuing the theme of food production, we now briefly move to Nicaragua about whose banana plantation workers we have often reported in previous ENCA Newsletters. In this case, however, we refer to the illnesses suffered by sugar cane workers, generally in the same region of the country, the department of Chinandega, as the banana workers, whose plight we have reported many times before.

In November 2008, Blake Schmidt wrote an exclusive report for The Nica Times. His investigation exposed the following:

- 3,500 cane workers have died in the past decade of kidney disease, with 1,000 currently suffering.
- The sugar export giant Nicaragua Sugar Estates Limited hires workers for six month contracts.
- Contract renewal depends on test results for creatinine – a waste product in the urine which indicates kidney disease.
- Chronic renal syndrome has become a defining fact of life in Chichigalpa and surrounding communities where the San Antonio Sugar Mill is the main employer.
- A 2005 Pan American Health Organisation report on the growing kidney disease ‘epidemic’ in Nicaragua estimated there were as many as 1,000 sugar cane workers with the disease in Chinandega concentrated in neighbourhoods of sugar cane worker families.
- A mix of heavy farming chemical use, extreme poverty and extreme weather conditions are the main culprits of the disease, with some studies suggesting the presence of heavy metals in drinking wells.
- Contamination from aerial fumigation and irrigation run-off from manually sprayed crops are widely suspected according to the US-based Centre for International Environmental Law (CIEL) whose work on agrofuels we reported on in ENCA Newsletter 45.



For the full article by Blake Schmidt we refer readers to The Nica Times website, www.nicatimes.net and for further work on this issue we refer readers to the website of CIEL, www.ciel.org

Mining plans dig up environmental concerns

Communities 'bury' Pacific Rim for mineral exploration – El Salvador

A number of social organisations opposed to mineral exploration and exploitation symbolically buried the Canadian mining company Pacific Rim in Plaza Morazán in the Centre of San Salvador. The event was held to increase public awareness of the dangers of mining activities which mineral exploitation would bring to the country, as the extraction of ores damages the environment and wreaks havoc with people's health.

David Pereira, who is a member of the Centre for Research on Investment and Commerce (CEICOM) and who helped ENCA during its 2001 environmental tour of El Salvador, said that the activity demonstrated the strength of the struggle against the transnational company and the mining projects that it is carrying out in the north of the country. "Pacific Rim continues threatening to sue the state if the government doesn't give them authorisation for mineral exploitation. We are convinced that the mining of ores in El Salvador is not viable" said Pereira.



During mineral exploitation cyanide is used to separate the heavy metals. Research by mining expert Robert Marán and geologist Dina Lorios at the University of El Salvador's Institute of Vulcanology indicates that contamination with cyanide, heavy metals and acid would damage the environment, agricultural activities, cattle ranching, fishing and ecotourism.

The Episcopal Conference of El Salvador, the National Development Commission and the former Environment Minister, Hugo Brown, all rejected mineral extraction because of the small size of national territory, the high population density, the hydrological crisis and the institutional weakness of the country. Luis Alonso González, a member of the Salvadoran Ecological Unit (UNES) affirmed that there is no mining company which does not pollute the environment once it has started exploitation.

During the event, organisations which make up the National Movement Against Mining collected signatures for a citizen's letter which rejects mining activity in the country. The citizen's letter draws on two elements; the first shows that technically the mining of metal ores in the country is not viable; and the second covers the collection of signatures from people all over the country. The letter was delivered to the President of the Republic, Elias Antonio Saca, to ensure his awareness at first hand of the risks and the public rejection of mineral exploration

Sources: Revista Ecotopia 219 (Dec 2008). First published by Diario Colatino

Also in December 2008 Pacific Rim announced its intention to sue the Salvadoran government for hundreds of millions of dollars in damages if it is not allowed to mine for gold and silver near San Isidro in the north of the country. The claimed damages arise from the government's refusal to issue permits after the company submitted an environmental impact assessment and the claim would be made under Chapter 10 of the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). It is thought that the move by Pacific Rim is an attempt to influence the elections to be held in El Salvador at the time when this newsletter reaches the printer.

60% of El Salvador's water supply is at risk from mining projects – El Salvador

A study presented by a Swiss expert in chemistry established that up to 4 million Salvadorans could be affected by acid rain and water pollution through planned mining projects.

The water and food supplies of Greater San Salvador are in danger if even half the mining projects planned for El Salvador are carried out. So stated Florian Erzinger, specialist in the environmental chemistry of water systems at the Zurich Polytechnic in Switzerland, in a report on the effects on health in the metropolitan area of San Salvador. The study was promoted by the Salvadoran Ecological Unit (UNES) and Caritas El Salvador jointly with various social organisations united in the campaign to reject mineral exploitation. Transnational companies have in view a score of mining projects in El Salvador.

According to Erzinger, up to 60% of the Salvadoran land could be affected by contamination by cyanide, arsenic, lead, zinc and aluminium which are left as waste by the mining industry, even if only half of the 25 projects which have applied for operational authorisation in El Salvador are allowed to proceed. In the worse scenario, the water of the River Lempa, which is the supplier for 30% of Greater San Salvador's population, will not be suitable for human consumption if these projects go ahead.

Erzinger pointed out that cyanide waste can also be taken in through inhalation or through skin pores. It will not be necessary to consume contaminated water to suffer the effects of this industry, according to the European expert. Cyanide acid, used in mining for the extraction of gold and silver evaporates into the environment at 60°C. Erzinger warned that in a climate like El Salvador's this could present a very real problem.

Another problem resulting from mining, according to the specialist, is the considerable reduction in underground water, since mining pumps water directly from the deepest water tables and needs between 55 and 110 litres of water per second, equivalent to the water consumption for a complete family over the course of a day.

*Sources: Revista Ecotopia 218 (Nov 2008)
News first published by La Prensa Gráfica*

District attorney's office to investigate President Arias over destruction of forest – Costa Rica

By Arturo Gudiño

Costa Rican President Oscar Arias and Minister of Environment, Roberto Dobles will be investigated for perverting the course of justice. Ecologists and opponents to mining celebrated the announcement from the District Attorney's Office. It would be the first case of a president being tried for perversion of justice.

The Attorney general, Francisco Dall Anesse, ordered an investigation into the alleged crime because of a decree that authorized the removal of 262 hectares of woodland in Las Crucitas in San Carlos. The investigation looks at the case surrounding the decree laid down in October 2008 that authorized the devastation of the forest of Las Crucitas to make way for an open cast mine operated by Canadian Infinite Industries.

Political leaders of the opposition and ecologists celebrated the decision of the District Attorney's Office, while the government abstained from discussing the case. ... The government has described the development of the Las Crucitas Mining Project, by Infinite Industries Inc., as being in the

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public interest and a matter of national importance. The District Attorney's Office reported that "in coordination with the District Attorney's Office of San Carlos it will continue a criminal trial over the environmental damages caused".

The Penal Code recommends prison from two to six years for any 'judicial or administrative official that decrees resolutions contrary to the law, or based them on false facts'. Arias and Dobles emitted the decree that would remove 191 hectares of primary forests, causing a number of animal species to face extinction.



A man hangs a banner reading "No to the mining industry" during a protest of ecologists in front of the Environment Ministry in San José in October 2008.

Despite the quick call for an investigation the ecologist and lawyer Edgardo Araya said that two days after the original decree was signed around 50 lumberjacks, each with 3 assistants entered the forests of Las Crucitas ... and began to fell trees within the 262 hectares owned by Infinite Industries. "They were devastating forest from the Friday until the resolution that ordered them to stop the devastation was delivered on the Monday. I estimate that they would have devastated some 20 hectares in the Hill Tatú", said Araya.

Araya said that one of the main objectives of Infinite Industries, after planning for the mine was issued, was to remove the yellow almond trees – which are in danger of extinction and protected by the Constitution. They also provide food for the Great Green Macaw and other endangered species. Araya has suggested that in the area of Hill Tatú there are only 140 almond trees left.

Araya indicated that The District Attorney's Office is set to carry out some investigations to determine the magnitude of the damage inflicted on the forests of Las Crucitas in the time between the decree being signed by the President and the order to stop.



The Great Green Macaw, whose habitat is under threat from the mining activities at Las Crucitas

Throughout, the government has argued that the mine would generate great economic development for the 11 years of its operation. It suggests that the initial investment required would be US\$65 million, and that this would be quickly recovered. It would lead to the direct employment of 253 people and indirectly to 1,265. The City of San Carlos would receive 2% of trade profits through taxation, approximately US\$1,441,158 for eight years, a total of US\$11,529,263 during the lifetime of the mine. The government has also suggested that social projects would benefit from the mining activity and that they would receive up to US\$364,063 p.a.. Furthermore, the mine would be paying the central government tax of US\$8,790,289 p.a., a total of US\$70,322,209 over the life of the mine.

These figures are all speculative, based on observing similar mining projects in other countries. There are no guarantees that the financial gains will be as prolific as the government has suggested. However, what is guaranteed is the destruction of the forest, with the loss of its flora and fauna. This is very real, immediate and irreversible. If this mine continues to go ahead it will cause massive damage to the biodiversity of Costa Rica and the planet in general.

Government Says No More Mine Permits – For Now – Costa Rica

Adapted by Doug Specht from The Tico Times, 12.12.08

The government has announced it will no longer grant any mining concessions, though it has also reserved the right to change its mind. “The position of the government at this moment is to not award more open-pit mining concessions,” said Mario Zaragoza, spokesman for the Environment, Energy and Telecommunications Ministry (MINAET). That could change, however. “If an application is presented, it will still be analysed. It will not be rejected,” Zaragoza said.

Only one mining company, Industrias Infinito, a subsidiary of the Canadian mining firm Infinito Gold, had a valid mining concession, for the Las Crucitas mine near the Nicaraguan border. No other applications are in place. Marlene Salazar, sub-director of MINAET’s Department of Geology and Mines, stated that the agency is, however, currently processing “some” applications for mining exploration, but she declined to reveal how many.

The Arias administration continues to find itself under heavy fire from environmentalists and academics over its plans for the Las Crucitas area. “It does not appear, however, that at this moment, [the government] is prepared to confront mining” said Allan Astorga, a renowned geologist at the University of Costa Rica.

Researcher Rebuts Mine Co. Attacks – Costa Rica

Adapted by Doug Specht from The Tico Times, 24.12.08

A leading academic and biology researcher is speaking out in his own defence after finding himself in the midst of the heated battle over the Las Crucitas gold mine in northern Costa Rica. Olivier Chassot, research director at the Tropical Science Centre, defended his work and reiterated concerns that Las Crucitas would put the area’s ecosystem, as well as the critically endangered Great Green Macaw, at risk. “Over the past two months, the [mining] company has carried out a campaign of paid ads against me personally,” says Chassot. “We have always provided exact scientific information, and we are the victims of a campaign financed by the mining company to damage our image.”

The adverts which suggest that Chassot has confused his information and ask “So, Señor Chassot ... what's the truth?” also show maps which suggest the Great Green Macaws’ nesting sites are outside the boundaries of the mine. Chassot does not deny that the majority of nesting sites fall out of the specific area, but he is quick to point out that the Macaw travels up to 35km from its nest, and this would take it into the mining region where cyanide is to be heavily used to extract ores. The mine cuts right across the macaws’ migration routes and will destroy vast amounts of yellow almond tree which are crucial to its survival, says Julio Sánchez of the Tropical Research Centre.

TAKE ACTION

Friends, we URGENTLY need your help. The current Costa Rican government, declared a public interest for the open pit gold mining project Las Crucitas in the San Juan river near the frontier with Nicaragua.

Apart from the social and environmental impacts produced by the mining companies, this public interest declaration allows the clear cutting of 190 hectares of a forest that contains important tree species. At present, we hope to build great pressure from local communities and the environmental movement. We URGENTLY need your help by sending the attached letter. We hope you can help us to stop this destructive open pit gold mining project.

Thanks so much

COECOCEIBA-Friends of the Earth
Costa Rica

**You can download the letter from
our website**

www.enca.org.uk

and click on Campaigns Page

Animal trafficking in Nicaragua

In January ENCA was asked by the FUNDECI/GAIA Institute to sign up to a petition and article to be published in El Nuevo Diario, one of the two main daily newspapers in Nicaragua. Extracts from the text of the article follows.

'We say our natural heritage is NOT for sale' - Nicaragua

Nicaragua is a true wonder of wildlife. The mountains are home to the jaguar and the tapir, its water to the bull shark and the bass; the boas abound in the farms, along with the always present toucans. Barely 25 years ago, the parakeets that inhabit the peninsula of Chiltepe would fly to Managua, and sit in the almond trees and mangos of the city during the day. Until the early 1990s, a colony of sloths lived in the trees of an urban park there. The theme of wildlife is also established in the Nicaraguan language.

Nevertheless, our wildlife live in hard times. The laws and accompanying willing intentions do not protect them. In the corners of the city and across the country, wildlife is being trafficked and sold, in full view of passers-by. Recently the animal traffickers have been using the media, utilising the classified ads pages in newspapers, in their search of clients. Among the animals offered are the red parakeet and the spider monkey. Both animals are becoming increasingly rare across the country and there are strict regulations regarding their export put in place by CITES.

The wildlife traffickers act with full knowledge of the laws, but are also aware of a lack of enforcement of these laws. For example, an itinerant salesman approached the car of a minister of the government with an endangered yellow parrot in hand; the minister notified him that the sale of the animal was prohibited. The trafficker told the minister that he would not change his practice in light of a threat of words that does not carry action or sanctions.

All the while that there are reserves trying to protect the animals of Nicaragua and people campaigning for more legislation, there are still large numbers of people who seek to profit from the sale of endangered animals in the region.

We the below signatories, made up of representatives of institutions and individuals dedicated to the protection of the environment in Nicaragua, wish to express our concerns about the illegal trade in animals in Nicaragua. We ask that people should not buy or sell wild animals so as to help us to conserve the biodiversity of this our Nicaragua.

Jeffrey McCrary, FUNDECI/GAIA.

As if to underline the importance of this problem, we had earlier received an email (extracts below) from ENCA member Paulette Goudge, who lives in the Department of Carazo in Nicaragua.



“I have become very involved over the past two years with some local people who came to me for help because they are working to prevent wildlife being captured and exported from this area (and, indeed all over Nicaragua). The trade is huge and having a really dire impact. Some of those involved are undoubtedly armed and life is, therefore, quite dangerous to say the least for the Nicaraguans with whom I am working. Now is a particularly vulnerable time especially for parrots. They are usually sold in Costa Rica (whose own wildlife is, of course, much more protected – for example, Costa Rica doesn't touch its own turtles or put them in private gardens - just gets them from Nicaragua!). I know from personal experience that the number of chocoyos (parakeets) has halved in 5 years in our local nature reserve and I am pretty sure that some of the security guards there are involved in the trade.”

NEWS SHORTS

Some success in Olancho

In November 2008, Padre Andres Tamayo of the Olancho Environmental Movement (MAO) informed us that as a result of their pressure there is now a total ban on the extraction of timber from 13,000 sq km of Olancho. It is estimated that 600,000 cubic metres of timber have been saved since the ban came into force and 80% of illegal felling has been stopped. Additionally, it was always one of the MAO's principal demands that the corrupt government forestry development corporation, COHDEFOR, should be closed down and replaced by a different forestry management organisation. This has now been achieved and René Gradiz, one of the MAO's workers, serves on the committee overseeing the transition from COHDEFOR to the ICF.

This is good news indeed, but there is still much action required and the illegal sawmills have not gone away – and neither have the threats to members of the MAO. On our website we have posted a recent article by Paul Jeffrey of the Catholic News Service about the MAO's continuing struggle to defend their land against commercial logging.

Wind energy in Nicaragua

In January this year Nicaragua began operating 19 wind turbines (one of which is shown in the photo) in the southern department of Rivas with a potential to generate 40 megawatts of energy. It is aimed that they should provide 6% of the country's energy needs. The lead investment came from the Central American Economic Integration Bank (BCIE) and the lead developer is Arctas Capital Group LP of Houston, Texas. 80% of Nicaragua's daily production of 500 megawatts of electricity comes from burning fossil fuels.



Baterias Record, El Salvador

Space does not allow us to include details of the lead contamination being caused by Salvadoran company Baterias Record to several communities close to its factory in La Libertad department. The case appears similar to that of the pollution caused by the Pennwalt factory in Nicaragua (documented in very early editions of the ENCA Newsletter) before it was closed down in the 1990s. We refer readers to an article in *Revista Envío* available at www.envio.org.ni/articulo/3686

World Social Forum

The World Social Forum was held in Belem, Brazil, at the end of January. We should like to include the Forum declarations here, but instead have to refer readers to the Forum website at www.forumsocialmundial.org.br

Thanks to Doug Specht, Nick Rau and Martin Mowforth for translating several articles in this issue of the newsletter.

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