

ENCA



Environmental Network *for* Central America

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Conservation in Danger

Protecting Central America's turtles comes at a high price.

Carbon Neutrality

Can Costa Rica meet its 2021 deadline for carbon neutrality?

Threats to Bosawas

Central America's largest reserve comes under threat.



INTO THE DEPTHS OF HELL

See page 4



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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A worker waits at the San Juan mine, Honduras. (ORLANDO SIERRA/AFP/Getty Images)



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Turtle Conservationist Safety

ENCA member *Jason Searing* who spent several months working as a volunteer with the organisation 'Sea Turtle Rescue – Nicaragua' in Los Zorros examines the dangers faced by conservationists in Central America.

Costa Rica

There are growing concerns over the safety of conservationists involved with the protection of sea turtle populations. A recent story from Costa Rica has brought to public view the violent activities of turtle egg poachers. Conservation projects have requested help for the safety of their workers whilst carrying out their duties – a request that has either been overlooked or to which the response has been ineffective. In this report we look at the circumstances around the death of Costa Rican sea turtle conservationist Jairo Mora, the dangers of such activities and possible routes to reduce such happenings.

A rapidly declining sea turtle population has meant that the survival of one of the world's oldest species is under threat. There have been many projects set up to safely hatch laid eggs in turtle hatcheries along coastal areas. The aim of these is to give newly hatched turtles a better chance of surviving.

Sea turtle eggs, however, have been a gastronomic delicacy in Central America for many years. Digging up the nests of sea turtles has meant that coastal communities have a food source during the wet season when fishing is much more difficult due to adverse weather. Also there is a financial incentive to sell the eggs to local markets, which can supply an income of between \$40 and \$90 per nest, based on \$1 per egg. This practice has been a lucrative activity for the poor and under-employed residents of coastal communities for decades, despite the illegality of the trade. This means that conservation projects are

having to pay the market price in order to avoid them travelling to the dinner table.

Sadly the efforts of one such sea turtle conservationist have resulted in his death. Hours before his murder, Jairo Mora came upon poachers digging up turtle eggs at the notoriously dangerous Moín Beach, near Limón on Costa Rica's northern Caribbean coast. According to the Tico Times, Mora tried to negotiate with the poachers, finally convincing them to let him have half of their eggs, which he had hoped to re-home in a safer area.

Negotiations like this happen all over Costa Rica – where six species of sea turtles nest each year – and are part of a tradition that can be traced to the late 1950s and Archie Carr, a US zoology professor who co-founded the Caribbean Conservation Corporation and helped establish the Tortuguero National Park.

Later that night, Mora encountered a different group of poachers who kidnapped him and four women volunteers, then beat him, stripped him and tied his body to the back of a car. The poachers dragged him through the sand and left him to suffocate on the beach he had vowed to protect. A passerby discovered his motionless, naked body early the next day. Mora was 26.

One of the suspects for the killing is Felipe Arauz, known as 'Renco', a 38-year-old Nicaraguan immigrant with a record that includes drug trafficking, kidnapping and violations of the Wildlife and Fauna Act. According to investigators, it was his car that dragged Mora to his death. Arauz allegedly helped escalate turtle egg

poaching from a small side business to a planned, lucrative criminal enterprise, according to witness statements.

During the 2013 nesting season, police are noted to have patrolled Moín Beach, but not with Mora. And despite the police presence, threats from poachers reduced the efficiency of the beach protection teams. If armed police are an ineffective tool against the poachers, then this leaves sea turtle conservation workers in a vulnerable state.

The Costa Rican conservation organisation Fundación Neotropica and the family of Jairo Mora recently commemorated the first anniversary of Jairo's death by re-naming the Jairo Mora Sandoval Gandoca-Manzanillo National Wildlife Refuge in the region of Gandoca where Jairo was from.

Nicaragua

SeaJoy is a company which claims to use armed protection of the local turtle nesting sites. In the Nicaraguan Padre Ramos estuary, their annual display of releasing newly hatched sea turtles is a public spectacle. However there are criticisms about how much of their work

actually involves sea turtle protection. The primary activity of the company is commercial shrimp farming, a process which is destructive to the local environment. The release of a few hundred baby sea turtles is a token gesture in return for the shrimp breeding which takes place in the Estero Padre Ramos. Also while hiring armed guards to protect the beach they say they are protecting the nesting sites of sea turtles. Local environmentalists, however, state that the nesting sites are in other locations, much further away from the shrimp farm, and that in fact the guards are used to protect SeaJoy's perimeter rather than turtles.

While SeaJoy has the financial luxury of hiring guards, organisations involved in sea turtle protection have no such resources. Two non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the same zone have been refused help from the Nicaraguan government's Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources (MARENA). While MARENA shows its support of sea turtle protection on its website, they have not been forthcoming with officials to protect the nesting sites

on the Cosigüina Peninsula. They had agreed to send armed guards to patrol the area during nesting season, but so far nothing has materialised. It means that these NGOs have had to take their protection of workers into their own hands, by making sure their own conservation teams are armed during the collection of eggs for safe hatching.

It is quite threatening to come across poachers on the beach. Some of the time they are armed with machetes or possibly firearms. This means the possibility of negotiating a trade for the eggs is a scary prospect. Many poaching teams have crossed the borders from El Salvador to Nicaragua to obtain eggs at an escalated price, which means their determination to achieve their aim is even greater than in previous years. Sea turtle eggs are now selling on the markets in El Salvador for about \$2 each. Not only does this make poaching on more populous beaches more lucrative, it also means that NGOs have to compete with the prices the poaching teams receive for their eggs.

The ICAPO (Iniciativa Carey del Pacífico Oriental) project (El Salvador and Nicaragua) believes its use of former poachers has helped increase the number of Hawksbill turtles hatched each year, while the organisation 'Sea Turtle Rescue - Nicaragua' has found that they have had to compete with market prices to ensure the safety of the Olive Ridley Turtle. Despite the depletion of their resources, their dedicated team released over 13,000 baby sea turtles last season, 2013/2014.

Awareness campaigns such as the one presented by Tortugas Nicas have been partially successful. Their cinema advertising, posters, stickers and t-shirts are becoming a Nicaraguan icon highlighting the endangered species and illegal trade in sea turtle eggs. While there is a market willing to buy the eggs, however, it seems the battle with poachers will continue.



Costa Rican police recover turtles after a raid



The Depths of Hell in Honduras

OFRANEH report on the Honduran mine collapse, and the connections between mining and organised crime in the country, with translation by *Rights Action*.

The proliferation of 'legal' and 'illegal' mines across Honduras, prior to and following the passage of the new and totally questionable Mining Law, benefits the prosperity of a minuscule group of transnational companies, organised crime and their political leaders.

The recent accident in a gold mine in San Juan de Arriba, in the village of Cuculmeca Hill (Municipality of Corpus, department of Choluteca), which trapped 11 miners, seized the attention of a country engrossed in World Cup soccer and the apocalyptic violence that a small group of traffickers of misery has subjugated all of Honduras to.

Three of the eleven miners were rescued from the informal mine's labyrinths, where another fatal mining accident killed two miners in July 2013. To add insult to injury, Mr. Juan Hernández, current president of the country,

President Juan Hernández called mining "modern slavery", and indicated that some mining companies "have ties with organized crime". These companies exist and operate within a framework of maximum exploitation of the labour force and the total destruction of the environment, regardless of whether they are transnational or local, 'legal' or 'illegal'. The code of conduct established by the mining companies is similar to that of drug trafficking cartels. No difference exists between Goldcorp, Five Star, the Templars or their numerous local counterparts.

Mining had governed Honduras since colonial times; it was only in the early twentieth century that swaths of land were given to fruit companies. Unfortunately, everything seems to indicate that during the twenty-first century, the country will be devoured by

the social fabric of the country dissolves at breakneck speed. The social disaster reaches unprecedented levels, to the extent that children are leaving in hoards, seeking supposed opportunities or simply fleeing from the prevailing violence.

The scenes captured in the photographs of the San Juan de Arriba mine area, similar to those photos of children catapulting themselves on train tops in Mexico, demonstrate the decomposition of a country that has collapsed, where the satraps in power, crying crocodile tears, persist in lying about the catastrophe that engulfs us.

Everything indicates that the eight buried miners have already died. Nevertheless, their families continue in their hope to find their corpses at the very least. The same occurs with Honduras as a whole, in the middle of the social catastrophe that we are living there are still remnants of hope for Honduran men and women. It is hope founded in the belief that one day we will be able to rid ourselves of the dictatorship of organised crime that has had a steel grip on power for the last decades. In this way, we could neutralize the beast that systemically drives the sad exodus of children who flee from the depths of Hell in Honduras.

These companies exist and operate within a framework of maximum exploitation of the labour force and the total destruction of the environment

demonstrated the executive power's irresponsibility, writing a "tweet" that announced the rescue of the 11 miners. Unfortunately, that news was false, indicating the level of the president's disconnection from reality.

transnational extractive companies and international capital, via mafias and hired killers that control political power.

At the same time that the mining labyrinths of the Cuculmeca Hill crumble,

Sambo Creek July 11, 2014

Organización Fraternal Negra
Hondureña, OFRANEH

Infinito Gold files lawsuit against Costa Rican government over cancelled gold mining contract

Zach Dyer, reproduced from The Tico Times



The Canadian mining company Infinito Gold has been locked in a lengthy legal battle with the government of Costa Rica since an appeals court revoked the concession in November 2010.

After months of sabre rattling, Infinito Gold Ltd. announced that it had filed for a Request for Arbitration with a World Bank court in its protracted dispute with the Costa Rican government over the cancelled Las Crucitas gold mining concession. The concession was revoked in 2010 following environmental concerns and doubts about the concession's legality.

The Canadian mining company seeks to recoup at least \$94 million in expenses incurred during the cancelled project's development between 1993 and 2010, plus interest and legal fees, according to a statement released Monday. Originally Infinito Gold claimed \$1 billion in lost profits, but the British Columbia-based enterprise has backed away from that number in the lawsuit.

The mining company claimed that Costa Rica violated the Costa Rica-Canada Bilateral Investment Treaty when an Administrative Appeals Court revoked its mining concession in San Carlos, Alajuela, in 2010. Yokebec Soto, spokeswoman for Industrias Infinito S.A., the wholly-owned subsidiary of Infinito Gold that managed the Crucitas concession, told The Tico Times that she could not give more details about the case. In a statement, she said the company hoped to reach a "friendly agreement" with Costa Rica during the arbitration.

The Company emphasizes that, contrary to some media reports, its objective in pursuing its legal remedies is to recoup the

costs that have been spent, plus interest, in developing the project over the past 20 years, as opposed to the profits it reasonably expected to earn had it been allowed to fully develop the project.

In 2008, Infinito obtained the concession from President Óscar Arias' administration, but an Administrative Appeals Court later ordered the Prosecutor's Office to open an investigation of the president for signing off on the project when environmental studies were still pending. That case has since been closed.

In November 2010, the appeals court revoked Industrias Infinito's gold-mining concession. The company exhausted its legal recourse in Costa Rica after it lost its appeal in November 2011 with the Supreme Court's Civil and Administrative Law Branch.

In April 2013, the company announced that it would take its case to the World Bank's International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes if the two were unable to resolve the issue during the six-month window required under the investment treaty.

An online petition protesting the company's case against Costa Rica has collected more than 300,000 signatures. Costa Rica's Legislative Assembly unanimously banned open-pit mining on Nov. 9, 2010, weeks before the Administrative Appeals Court issued its ruling against the Crucitas project.

When it comes to such issues, local democratic institutions should prevail, not foreign corporations seeking to exploit natural resources.

These matters should not be decided by the World Bank's investor state arbitration tribunal or any other foreign tribunal. To make things worse, in the course of Pacific Rim's intervention in the political affairs of El Salvador, four anti-mining activists have been murdered in the project area.

ENCA signed on to the following letter to the World Bank to support both the Salvadoran and Costa Rican cases currently under consideration by the ICSID.

We urge you to review the role of the International Centre for the Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) and to determine if it supports the Bank's mission of ending poverty and promoting responsible and sustainable economic development.

We urge you to undertake this review through an open process with public hearings and the ability for mining affected communities and their allies to present evidence of the harm done by corporations using the investor - state arbitration process to undermine the public interest laws and regulatory structures in countries of the Global South.

We stand with the people of El Salvador in their demand that their domestic governance processes and national sovereignty be respected. The Pacific Rim ICSID arbitration is a direct assault against democratic governance. We stand on the side of democracy.

Sincerely,

CC Meg Kinnear, Secretary-General, ICSID
V.V. Veeder, Tribunal President

Six-year-old mining dispute between El Salvador and Vancouver-based miner still seeking a conclusion

ENCA has reported for many years on the ongoing legal battle between the government of El Salvador and Vancouver-based Pacific Rim Mining. The dispute which concerns the cancelling of Pacific Rim's mining licences in the country on the grounds of environmental concerns is now expected to be settled next year.

The controversy dates back to 2008 when the government refused to authorize Pacific Rim to begin mining operations. The company, which is now a subsidiary of Australia's multinational gold producer OceanaGold (TSE, ASX: OGC), launched a \$315 million damage claim against El Salvador claiming that the government failed to issue the necessary mining licences for the company's El Dorado gold project.

Pacific Rim maintain that the government of El Salvador has broken investment laws by refusing to issue the permits, a position the newly re-elected FMLN have said they plan to continue to uphold.

The International Centre for the Settlement of Investment Disputes – an agency of the World Bank - will be hearing the case. The tribunal will determine firstly if the government of El Salvador has broken investment laws by refusing to issue the permits. Should they decide that there has been a breach, the tribunal will also decide how much compensation is merited.

Pacific-Rim has stated that the arbitration will be final, and that a merit-based decision is expected after the submissions and testimonies.

Pacific Rim is not the only Canadian mining company El Salvador is fighting against.

The government of El Salvador is also pushing for a halt of Vancouver-based Goldcorp's Cerro Blanco gold-silver project in southern Guatemala over water contamination concerns. The government and environmentalists claim

the mine will greatly endanger the water quality in the Lempa River, which supplies not only to Guatemala but also drinking and irrigation waters for Honduras and El Salvador.

Edited by *Doug Specht* from an article on mining.com

Escobal mine ramps up production

Tahoe Resources Inc. has reported that its controversial Escobal mining project in southeastern Guatemala, approximately 70 kilometers from Guatemala city is to ramp up its production levels.

After reporting first quarter net earnings of \$24.8 million or 17 cents per share and revenue of \$89.9 million, to which the 100% owned Guatemala Escobal silver mine contributed significantly, the Vancouver-based mining company reported announced it will move increase operations at the site to 3,500 tonnes per day, in line with the company's long standing strategy for the mine.

This increase in production and profit continues to be fuel by violence, open criminal cases and environmental concerns.

The Escobal mine, Tahoe's only project, was approved without the free, prior and informed consent of the surrounding communities and continues to lack the social license to operate. Tens of



thousands of people have voted against the mine in 14 community consultations to date. Tahoe and the Guatemalan government continue to dismiss community voices and decision-making processes.

The company said it will expand to 4,500 tonnes per day with a target of 20 million ounces of silver annually. Escobal mine began production last September and reached commercial production in January.

Garífuna seek help from international court in Costa Rica to recover land

Honduras' Garífuna people have asked an international court located in Costa Rica to help them recover ancestral land which they say has been lost to development.

The town of Triunfo de la Cruz on the Caribbean coast brought its suit to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in San José.

Ángel Castro Martínez, a 72-year-old community leader, told the court the loss of ancestral lands meant people at times could not even visit their cemeteries and was forcing those with no land to leave. "We have seen all the young people leave to find work. They go to the United States or Panama, and when they come back, they have lost their culture, they don't speak our language anymore," he said. The lawsuit says that of 2,800 hectares (7,000 acres) of ancestral lands, only 240 hectares remain.

His neighbour, Eugenia Flores, 31, spoke in Garífuna through an interpreter, saying tearfully "our culture has been crushed, our way of life. If it keeps up like this, we will lose everything."

An estimated 400,000 Garífuna people live in Honduras alone. They are descended from West Africans who intermarried with indigenous Arawaks and Caribs, and their language mixes elements from all of them.

Edited from an article in The Tico Times.

U.S. Government Ties El Salvador to Monsanto

The President of the El Salvadoran Centre for Appropriate Technologies (CESTA), Ricardo Navarro, has demanded that the U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador, Mari Carmen Aponte, stops pressurizing the Government of El Salvador to buy Monsanto's GM seeds rather than non-GMO seeds from domestic suppliers.

"I would like to tell the U.S. Ambassador to stop pressuring the Government (of El Salvador) to buy 'improved' GM seeds," said Navarro, which is only of benefit to U.S. multinationals and is to the detriment of local seed production.

The U.S. has been pushing the El Salvadoran Government to sign the second Millennium Challenge Compact. One of the main conditions on the agreement is allegedly for the purchasing of GM seeds from Monsanto.

At the end of 2013 it was announced that without 'specific' economic and environmental policy reforms, the U.S. government would not provide El Salvador with \$277 million in aid money through the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC).

It is now clear that by 'specific reforms' the MCC means reforms that allow GM crops and their associated pesticides to be forced on El Salvador's Government and citizens.

Is it a coincidence that the MCC delayed its initial agreed aid payments following the announcement by the El Salvador Government that they were banning the

use of Glyphosate (Roundup) and 52 other dangerous chemicals in September 2013?

Glyphosate (Roundup) herbicide sales are the main money earner for the Biotech industry worldwide and the chemical is also the base of the whole system that allows GM Crops to be grown.

The El Salvadoran Government's ban on Glyphosate came amidst a mysterious kidney disease that is killing thousands of the region's agricultural labourers. Central America's health ministries signed a declaration in March 2013 citing the ailment as a top public health priority and committing to a series of steps to combat its reach, the Centre of Public Integrity revealed.

Over the last two years, the Centre for Public Integrity has examined how a rare type of chronic kidney disease (CKDu) is killing thousands of agricultural workers along Central America's Pacific Coast, as well as in Sri Lanka and India. Scientists have yet to definitively uncover the cause of the malady, although emerging evidence points to toxic heavy metals contained in pesticides as a potential culprit.

"There is a harmful corporation on the planet called Monsanto ...it is truly disturbing that the U.S. is trying to promote them..." concluded Navarro, who hopes that the Members of the El Salvadoran Legislative Assembly do not accept any manipulation by the U.S.

Edited from an article by Sustainable Pulse

Carbon neutrality by 2021?

Marcelo Teixeira examines whether Costa Rica can hit its carbon neutrality targets by 2021. With edits by *Dan Grebler* (Reuters); first paragraph added by *Dan Stevens*; and updates provided by *Martin Mowforth*.

Most of us living in Costa Rica realised that the goal of Costa Rica obtaining carbon neutrality by the year 2021 was a goal that was not going to be attained. The general idea of promoting businesses to be environmentally friendly and offset their carbon credits is a good one, but the overall goal of carbon neutrality in Costa Rica was a long way off. Luis Guillermo Solís who was elected President earlier this year sees the need to adjust this goal.

In April, Costa Rica's PAC (Citizens' Action Party), won a four-year presidential term, and dropped the country's commitment to carbon neutrality by 2021. "We don't think it would be possible to reach carbon neutrality by 2021, because the most important tasks to reduce emissions in the country are yet to be done," Patricia Madrigal, the Citizens' Action Party environmental adviser, told Reuters in March.

She said changes in the transport and energy sectors, to increase fuel efficiency and renewables production, are necessary because the nation lacks the means to reduce carbon dioxide emissions in key sectors by the target date. Madrigal said the PAC has no intention of abandoning the carbon neutrality goal, nor other climate policies, but believes a more realistic year to reach the target would be around 2025 if reforms are carried out as planned.

Costa Rica announced in 2009 the intention to become the world's first carbon neutral country by 2021. The decision and policies adopted to reach the target were praised by environmental groups and multilateral organisations dealing with climate change. The Central American country has managed a successful reforestation plan using a system that pays landowners for protecting forests, funded by a carbon tax on fossil fuels. It increased forest cover from around 20 percent of the total area in the 1980s to about 50 percent currently, although ENCA's Martin Mowforth questions how much of this increased proportion was achieved through the creation of monoculture plantation forests which are not good for biodiversity.

The restoration of forest cover is generating carbon credits, which Costa Rica intends to use to offset part of its emissions.

The government also convinced several companies to neutralise emissions. It set a voluntary carbon market and a bank to assist businesses to buy offsets.

There was no mention, however, of carbon neutrality in a document released by the group with environmental guidelines for a PAC government. The previous government of Laura Chinchilla recognised the 2021 commitment as challenging, but believed it to be a mistake to postpone it. "We knew since the beginning it would be difficult, but it is something possible – to be done," said William Alpizar, the country's climate head. According to Alpizar, it was easier to reduce emissions in agriculture and forestry, but much more complex to do it in the transport area, which accounts for almost 70 percent of all emissions related to energy use. He said the country would need to reduce around 5 million metric tons of CO₂e (carbon dioxide equivalent) by 2021 to be carbon neutral.

Only a couple of other countries have pledged to neutralise emissions, but have set very distant target dates.

Costa Rica, a 'green democracy' with urgent environmental challenges

Translated and adapted from an AFP report by *Martin Mowforth*

Costa Rica enjoys a wide reputation as a 'green democracy', but the pressures of growth have increased its ecological debt over the last decade, presenting the new government with an urgent challenge.

The almost 2½ million tourists who visit the country each year marvel at the beauty of its parks and natural reserves which cover 25% of the national territory and in which is conserved a rich biodiversity. Costa Rica is the only country in the Americas and one of the few in the world to have banned hunting for sport; and it has managed to remain free of open cast mining and of oil exploration and exploitation.

But the paradise beaches, beautiful forests and dormant volcanoes hide problems about which experts have warned us for some time: namely, the deficient administration of the protected areas and a growing contamination of the air, soil and water sources, among others. Despite the problems, which are considered serious by ecologists, the issue was practically absent from the debates in which the presidential candidates took place earlier this year.

The three major candidates in the first round of voting – Johnny Araya of the governing right wing National Liberation Party, José-María Villalta of the leftist Broad Front and Luis Guillermo Solís of the centrist Citizen Action Party – all have similar perspectives on the problem. Environmentalists, however, bemoan the lack of specifics in these proposals and the absence of definite commitment of any of the candidates to treat these

issues as a matter of urgency. Randall Arauz (of the Recovery Programme of Marine Turtles, Pretoma) stated, "We are concerned about the lack of definite programmes on the part of any of the candidates and about their ignorance on environmental issues in general, especially those relating to marine conservation."

The 2013 State of the Nation, a prestigious annual report by the public universities, warns that "in the last decade the country has increased its ecological debt from 3% in 2002 to 11 % in 2012" which means that "each Costa Rican consumed on average 11% more than the land's capacity." The report also warns that over 96% of grey waters are discharged into the rivers without any treatment, converting the fluvial network into a system of open sewers.

Ecologists have particularly denounced the huge pineapple plantations – Costa Rica is the world's largest pineapple exporting country – which are causing agro-chemical contamination and serious environmental imbalances in various parts of the country. Organisations like Pretoma confirm that Costa Rica seems to have turned its back on the sea, allowing all kinds of irrational exploitation of marine resources and contamination of the coastline.

The most serious problem, however, and the most difficult to combat, is the generation of

greenhouse gases which in the last decade rose by 43.2%, due principally to the rapid growth in car use, according to the State of the Nation report. "The atmosphere is already too contaminated and governments have permitted this lack of control", said Luis Diego Marín, coordinator of the PreservePlanet organisation. According to Marín, conservation areas are also suffering growing deterioration because the State is not providing the resources required for their maintenance.

Social conflict related to environmental issues has risen and has even included violence. Last year, the assassination of Jairo Mora, a young ecologist who was protecting marine turtles in the Caribbean, shook the country. "Jairo vive" shout environmentalists in their demands for justice and protection, not just for natural resources but also for those who work in conservation.

(For more on Jairo Mora, see other article in this issue of the ENCA Newsletter.)

The three major candidates in the first round of voting all had similar perspectives on the problem:

- to declare access to water a human right and to include it in the Constitution;
- to change the mix of urban transport with a view to reducing the use of fossil fuels;
- to maintain the moratorium on open cast mining or to prohibit it in perpetuity by law;
- to strengthen the protected areas by establishing the State's obligation to provide appropriate resources for their maintenance;
- to promote policies which will prevent and sanction illegal timber extraction.



Threats to Bosawas

Helen Yuill of the NSC reports on the environmental issues facing the second largest rainforest in the Americas

The Bosawas Biosphere Reserve in northern Nicaragua is a hilly tropical forest designated in 1997 as a UNESCO biosphere reserve. Covering 2 million hectares - roughly the size of Wales - Bosawas is the second largest rainforest in the Americas after the Amazon in Brazil. It forms part of the Meso-American Biological Corridor that runs the length of Central America.

21,000 indigenous Mayangna and Miskito people live along its rivers. It is home to 150,000 insect species, rare jaguars, eagles and crocodiles as well as the world's last populations of Baird's Tapir and the Central American Spider Monkey.

In a landmark 2007 decision the Nicaraguan government recognised the full legal title of the Mayangna to their communal lands. However, according to a delegation to the region organised by the US based Nicaragua Network in February this year, "all of the positive work of the demarcation and titling under Law 445 is being threatened by the invasion of colonisers from other parts of Nicaragua."

Mayangna and Miskito people who live in the area say 30,000 hectares a year are being deforested by 'colonists'. According to Mayangna leaders large-scale logging and land clearing for agriculture by migrants constitutes a very serious threat to the future of the forest. "Really these people are land speculators. They come in; they burn the forest and put in pasture; then sell it and move to another area."

Researcher Dr Thomas Lovejoy pointed out how critical the protection of Bosawas is: "Nicaragua has one of the three great blocs of remaining tropical rainforest in Central America," he said. "As a consequence, the

struggle to protect this precious and unique part of biological diversity is of hemispheric, and global, importance."

The Nicaragua Network delegation reported on the extent of the violations of law 445, the almost non-existent presence of government authorities, and corruption that revolves around lawyers and government officials who, according to the complaints of the Mayangnas, are trafficking land in protected areas.

However, the government is now taking action to enforce the law and has launched a National Reforestation campaign. On 11 June, the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MARENA) announced that they will accompany the Indigenous Territorial Government of the Mayangna Sauni who have submitted a complaint against four traffickers in indigenous and protected land.

Representative Alberto Mercado added that MARENA is working with the Ecological Battalion of the Army to try to stop colonists from entering Bosawas by placing barricades across the roads into the

Reserve. However, he also warned that MARENA lacks resources and the "Reserve is immense and has many entrances."

Meanwhile, the government announced that as part of the activities to celebrate the 35th anniversary of the 1979 Revolution, the Sandinista Youth and the Guardabarranco Young Environmentalists carried out activities to raise awareness of the critical importance of the Reserve and to propose solutions.

William Schwartz of the National Forestry Institute (INAFOR), announced government plans to reforest 2,000 hectares with 2.2 million trees in the Reserve, part of a plan to reforest 23,115 hectares nationwide. Schwartz added that the Army Ecological Battalion, students, private businesses, organised citizens, and government institutions would be joining the National Reforestation Campaign. He said that it was important to support the efforts of the indigenous peoples who over the years have been the ones who have taken care of the forests.



Location of Bosawas Biosphere Reserve | Map by Google Maps

Letters

Please send correspondence to enca.info@gmail.com

ENCA member Dominique Olney who runs The Little Cob in Matagalpa, Nicaragua, sent us a letter before Xmas. Unfortunately, we only have space for a few extracts from the letter, but they're quite illuminating about some aspects of life in Central America.

Hello good ENCA people,

I was very impressed with the ENCA newsletter, found it very easy and pleasant to use; the flip page option is great. I am passing it around to several people in Matagalpa who will appreciate it.

Here I found everything in very good order when I got back. ... There is a new couple living on Little Cob's premises and the young woman (Kandy) has taken great pride in keeping the place clean and beautiful. Unhappily the love story between Kandy and Jose, the assistant of my builder, will probably mean that they will not be there much longer ... Giovanni, the very jealous husband and the local macho culture are making life slightly difficult. ...

Back in the swing of the workshops and so glad to have Natasha helping (or rather, to be helping Natasha). Johanna, a Nicaraguan friend of Natasha is coming once a week and this is very good for Little Cob. After the first workshop, Natasha and I were caught in an amazing downpour; the 'road' became a crazy river bed as we were waiting for the bus so we sheltered in the house of one of the kids. Natasha's heart sunk as we stepped into the badly assembled shack – mud floor that our shoes sunk into, a skinny little grandma in rags but China and her daughter Perla, who attends the workshops, welcomed us with big smiles and warm greetings, handing us the only

pieces of poor furniture they own: two rickety chairs that had to be dried before we could sit down. Within 2 minutes we were presented with plates of enchiladas.

... One sad thing happened a few days ago, Yvette, soon 15 and doing very well in the 3rd year at the secondary school, bumped into her grandfather's earth stove and was badly burnt by the tipped pan of boiling honey... her foot is in a bad state, her leg also badly scolded, and she can no longer walk to school so will not be able to complete her year ... She was in the first batch of Littlecobblers that helped build the walls. Her grandmother didn't let the mum take her to the hospital (fear the child may be raped), and 9 days later, Jacqueline and I 'kidnapped' Yveth to take her to the hospital. She'll be there for a good few more days and was over an hour in the operating room. The 9 year old little girl in the opposite bed is in with a serious machete wound: her 7 year old brother nearly took her hand off ...

In the hospital Emergency section there is one drinking water tap and people share one cup to drink from. But this time I didn't see stray dogs walking into the op room. There is progress!

Last Saturday I walked up to the Jicaro community to visit the first friends I made when I settled in Matagalpa: 4 old lady potters (There were 7 of them in 1999, now the youngest is 86). They were born high up in the hills above Matagalpa, and spent their lives there making simple but beautiful pots with the clay they gather around their house. They never went to school, yet such wise, gentle people. ... Juanita, the 'youngest', has been ill for several weeks and in the 3 hours I was

there with them, a steady stream of local farming women came by, each depositing something on her lap: 6 bananas, a piece of bread, some home baked corn biscuits, etc. ...

So there you are – a little flavour of Matagalpa.

Dominique

(The Little Cob:

<http://littlecob.wordpress.com>)

Extracts from a letter received from ENCA supporter Daryl Loth, a resident of Tortuguero, Costa Rica, 7th January 2014.

"There are still lots of animals to see in the national park. There was a census done last year by GVI International at the south end of the park and they have so far identified 16 jaguars living off the fauna (including sea turtles) within the park.

There is still a small group of residents and business people outside of Tortuguero who are pushing so that a road will finally come here, but they keep getting shut down by constitutional law. There are now two judgements on record of the Constitutional Supreme Court upholding the National Park Service in their defence of the flora and fauna that would be affected by a road if it were to come through to Tortuguero. Even though we have this in our favour, we are keeping our fingers crossed just in case.

Daryl Loth

Nicaragua's interoceanic canal: will the benefits outweigh the risks?

Published by Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign August 2014

On 13 June 2013, the Nicaragua National Assembly approved a law to grant the Hong Kong Nicaragua Development Company (HKND) a 50 year concession, renewable for a further 50 years, to build and operate a 173 mile interoceanic canal across Nicaragua. If this Project goes ahead it will be one of the largest infrastructure projects ever undertaken in Latin American history. The Nicaraguan government argues that the construction of the Canal will not only lift the country out of centuries of under-development and high levels of poverty but also significantly contribute to protecting the environment nationally and globally. Critics argue that the associated social, economic and environmental risks are far too high a price to pay. In the NSC's special report they look at the arguments for and against this controversial mega project.

www.nicaraguasc.org.uk | FB: Nicaragua-Solidarity | Twitter: @NSCAG_UK

CKDu gets reported upon in NY Times

We have been reporting on chronic kidney problems faced by banana and cane workers in Central America for many years. While the exact cause of the illness remains a mystery, the links between the chemicals used on the land and failing health are plain to see.

These issues have recently been highlighted in the New York Times, which ran a piece in June 2014 about the health risks faced by sugar cane workers in Nicaragua.

Residents, the NYT report states "say they began noticing the sickness shortly after the Nicaraguan government, which had nationalised the sugar industry, returned the mills to private owners in 1992. As the operations at San Antonio rapidly expanded, driven partly by American and European appetites for sugar and a move into ethanol production, families say the cane cutters — many of whom had been born in a hospital on the mill grounds and went to a school there — grew sick in larger numbers."

For more on the NYT article see: http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/09/world/americas/deadly-illness-in-nicaragua-baffles-experts.html?_r=0

For more on the effects of CKDu in El Salvador, see our article on page 7, and in ENCA 60.

A big thank you

We would like to take this opportunity to extend our thanks to 'The Manchester Group'.

'The Manchester Group' has raised £600 for ENCA by running a food stall on our behalf.

The group, made up of volunteers who have all been to and/or know people from Central America. They are also all involved in sustainable food and environmental and social justice work in Manchester. The group use their love of cooking (especially Central American and Mexican cuisine) to help raise funds for causes they believe in and support.

The group supports communities who are resisting development that is forced upon them and replacing that with their own priorities and local, sustainable projects. We are very grateful to them for their support of ENCA

If you would like to raise money for ENCA and require some materials, please contact us - see page 2.

New website

Over the last year we have been working hard on the ENCA newsletter to improve the format and ensure that we are pulling together the most relevant and high quality reports and summaries.

We have redesigned the layout to make it easier to read and to find the article you are looking for, improved our table top appeal by changing the cover to feature a bolder image, and have been able to squeeze in even more content by changing the way we lay out the pages.

There has been a lot of positive response to these changes, and we are really glad that you are pleased with the changes we have made.

It is now time for us to follow suit with our website. We have bold and exciting plans for the site, but we would also like to know what you would like from a new ENCA website.

If you have suggestions, please direct them to us at: enca.info@gmail.com.

ENCA meeting dates

12th October 2014

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.