

ENCA

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Goldman Prize

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Environmental Prize

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**Anti-Government Protests
Grip Central America**



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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Tens of Thousands take to the Streets

Guatemalan and Honduran citizens have taken to the streets in their thousands to protest political and criminal corruption. Here we draw together reports and analysis from ENCA Member *James Watson, Rights Action and Voz*.

The last few months have seen a growing opposition to the governments of Honduras and Guatemala with regular and large scale protests bringing the capitals of each to a standstill on a weekly basis.

Both nations have been rocked by Government-related and organised-crime scandals. These latest revelations appear to have been the straw that broke the camel's back and have resulted in tens of thousands of people taking to the streets, demanding real accountability and comprehensive political reforms.

Guatemala

Central Park, in front of the Guatemalan National Palace, has been the site of Saturday rallies for several weeks. Protesters are demanding the resignation of former army general, alleged war criminal, and now President Otto Pérez Molina. They want the government to be held accountable for the organised crime network that has been operating inside parliament, stealing at least \$120,000,000 in public funds. Vice-President Baldetti has already been forced from office. Over a dozen high ranking government officials have corruption charges filed against them; others – including the Minister of Mines and Energy – have resigned under clouds of suspicion.

Honduras

In Honduras the protests took the form of marches, but the demands echo those in Guatemala. The burgeoning 'Antorchas' protest movement started to manifest itself in mass

demonstrations at the end of May, representing a broad resistance front and perhaps the strongest hope for an end to corruption that the country has seen since the 2009 military coup.

The 'Antorchas' movement – named after the torches they carry on their marches, and also known as Los Indignados, ('The Outraged') – started in late 2014 as a youth movement in Tegucigalpa. Frustrated with the lack of real change offered by battles between the political parties, they united as a non-partisan movement against the corruption in the country. In the last few weeks, however, the movement has truly become ignited. Evidence has emerged that hundreds of millions of dollars robbed from the Honduran Social Security Institute have propped up the ruling National Party, and left thousands to die from lack of state health funds.

The theft of state money by the powerful families associated with the political parties – including money from tax-payers and international aid – had become so endemic as to be almost accepted. Whole ship-loads of food have gone missing, leaving rural Hondurans without vital aid. Every part of the state has been affected, and the recent revelations have made clear exactly the degree and human cost of the corruption. The IHSS – Honduran Institute of Social Security – has been systematically robbed by sham companies, that have overcharged for services that have never been delivered. Medicines have even been produced without active ingredients in a hugely damaging fraud against the country's public health. For many years, this has left the health system desperately

underfunded and understaffed, with huge waiting lists and hospitals giving patients lists of the supplies they need patients to buy in order to carry out their procedures.

In the last few weeks, Honduran journalists have discovered cheques from the IHSS and the false companies implicated in this fraud, that show that part of the stolen money went directly into the accounts of Honduran political parties. The 2013 elections brought to power the current president Juan Orlando Hernández, and cemented the power of his right-wing National Party which has ruled since the military coup in 2009. The elections were full of irregularities, with buses of voters being brought in to shore up the National Party, and gifts such as roofs and food being used to buy poor voters off. The cheques show that much of the money for this election fraud was stolen IHSS money. It has been calculated that almost 3,000 people have died – and thousands more left unsupported in their illnesses – as a result of these thefts.

These revelations have sparked the Antorchas protests into a mass popular movement, uniting the middle classes and previously apolitical masses with the aims of the left-wing resistance that came into being after the 2009 coup. The movement has several parts and several aims, but their main demands are the resignation of Juan Orlando, and for an International Commission against Corruption and Impunity ('CICIH' in Spanish), to root out the perpetrators. This idea is modelled on the UN commission (CICIG) that has recently seen the imprisonment in neighbouring Guatemala of the Vice President, and many other politicians, for similar crimes. In Honduras, the justice system and government are so riddled with corruption that only an external international body can fulfil this task.

James Watson has reported a palpable anger inside the protests, "increasingly their resignation with the state of Honduran services is being replaced by



true indignation at the depth of the lies and crimes of the people who claim to represent them".

For the long-term resistance, there is also huge excitement that the winds of change may finally be coming to Honduras after 6 years of sham democracy and repression. But the end result is far from a foregone conclusion. The support for the hunger strikers has led Juan Orlando to announce a national version of the CICIH. This is an utterly hollow gesture as the national courts are effectively owned by his party – in an overnight judicial coup in 2014 he illegally replaced 3 hostile Supreme Court magistrates with his own handpicked people.

Root causes

Guatemala and Honduras are widely known as 'murder capitals of the world' and 'repression capitals of the Americas'. Now, they are also known as 'corruption capitals of the Americas', as organised crime networks are exposed in both governments, stealing hundreds of millions of public funds.

The casual observer, misled by the media, politicians and history books, throws up their hands: "What can I do to help those people, with their problems, in those countries over there?" ... as if the 'West' has nothing to do with it.

Going back generations, there is no lack of efforts by courageous Hondurans and Guatemalans to bring about desperately

needed change. This has not yet occurred because of the support provided to both governments by the US and Canadian governments; each time the people overcome the systemic fear and repression, the poverty, corruption and impunity, to garner enough people-power to demand and bring about peaceful change, the elites of global businesses and investors (including the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank), and the US military, all act to quell the legitimate demands for democratic change, keeping the unjust status quo in place.

Power and wealth of the Guatemalan and Honduran elites have long come from their political, economic and military relations with the international community, particularly from the U.S. government and military, and never from any sort of valid democratic processes.

This is not a simplistic argument. Whilst the elites of Honduras and Guatemala are responsible for the repressive, exploitative and comprehensively unjust situations in their countries, it is this US and Canadian support which keeps the unjust systems in place. While this makes it hard to see how the situation in Honduras and Guatemala could be worse, it also increases respect for the people and grassroots organisations that continue to denounce the repression and violence, exploitation and poverty, corruption and impunity, and to demand fundamental democratic rights, human rights and the rule of law.

A Shining light

Human rights violations in Honduras have been making headlines over the last few months. *Doug Specht* of *Voz* explores the issues and the woman who has shone the light on the plight of Central America's environmental activists.

Globally environmental and land activists are the second most vulnerable group of human rights defenders, after those working on women's rightsⁱ. While all human rights defenders face great risks, those defending the environment and land are particularly at risk, facing killings, suffering threats and physical violence, criminalisation and restrictions of their freedoms.

In 2014, 116 environmental activists were killed globally, with more than three quarters of these being in Central and South America. 40 percent of those killed globally were indigenous peoplesⁱⁱ. These killings are often in relation to disputes over the ownership, control and use of land. While mining and other extractives, agribusiness and logging continue to be key factors in many of these disputes, there has been a marked increase in the number of killings related to hydropower projects, particularly in Honduras.

These increases reflect a growth in energy demand which has seen many developing countries increase investments in hydropower constructionⁱⁱⁱ. These projects flood land and divert vital water sources used for drinking water, fishing or irrigation, destroying livelihoods. Communities are also often displaced from their homes by force in order to make way for construction. Construction persists despite recent studies showing that large-scale dams are economically unviable and that costs overrun on average by 96%^{iv}.

Per capita, Honduras continues to be the deadliest place for activists. Twelve environmentalists were killed in 2014, with many of these being connected to struggles against hydropower dams and their impacts on local communities. People defending their rights to land and the environment in Honduras face severe risks to their lives. 111 activists were killed between 2002 and 2014,

many of which have been reported in the pages of ENCA (see numerous back issues).

These killings take place within a culture of impunity, corruption, systemic violence and extreme poverty^v. Many human rights abuses and unlawful killings take place at the hands of the police, who are ineffective and supported by a judicial system which is compromised by political interference^{vi}.

Levels of inequality in Honduras have grown rapidly since the military coup in 2009. In the wake of the coup a law was passed allowing the government to sell off the country's rivers and other water sources to the highest bidders^{vii}. Coupled with the lifting of the moratorium on new mining projects as part of the General Mining Law in January 2013, Honduras has become the most unequal country in the Americas with a small concentration of elites owning most of the land and industry^{viii}. This power is consolidated through the use of private security companies and the military^{ix}. Investments in mining, forestry, agribusiness and hydroelectric dams have been made a top priority for the right-wing government, led by President Juan Orlando Hernández^x.

On 8 May 2015 the Honduran government faced questioning on its human rights record through the UN's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process. Yet while a body of evidence is building, the Honduran NGO ACI-PARTICIPA (Association for Citizen Participation) estimate that more than 90% of killings and abuses against human rights defenders in Honduras remain unresolved^{xi}. Coupled with an IACHR report suggesting a complete absence of the most basic measures to address reports of grave human rights violations in the region [...] and the possible participation of State authorities in the alleged incidents^{xii}, the situation looks bleak.

Case Studies

Many of these cases have been reported previously in ENCA newsletters, but we draw them together here again to illustrate the extreme violence under which these environmentalists are operating.

Reflecting the global trend, indigenous peoples have been disproportionately affected by the land and environmental disputes. The Tolupán indigenous peoples from the municipality of Locomapa, Yoro department, in northern Honduras, have been threatened, criminalised and killed for protesting against mining and illegal logging in their communities. These protests included a peaceful sit-in to block the passage of mining and logging trucks through their land, and the public denunciation, on the 18th August 2013, of death threats received by text message warning the protesters to desist from their efforts to protect the environment^{xiii}. A week into the sit-in a group of private security contractors approached the protestors and opened fire, killing indigenous leaders Armando Fúnez Medina and Ricardo Soto Fúnez. Another leader, María Enriqueta Matute, fled to her nearby home, where she was tracked down and fatally shot.

On 15 July 2013, the Lenca indigenous leader Tomas García who had been demonstrating against the construction of the Agua Zarca hydroelectric dam was shot dead by the Honduran Army during a peaceful protest in Río Blanco, in the department of Intibucá. The following year, William Jacobo Rodríguez was murdered amid accusations of torture at the hands of the police guarding the hydropower project. In October 2014, Rodríguez's 15-year old brother, Maycol Rodríguez, who cultivated corn on land wanted by the dam company, disappeared and his body was later found in a river showing signs of torture^{xiv}.

ⁱ UN Human Rights Council (2007), Report submitted by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Human Rights defenders, Hina Jilani(A/HRC/4/37), p13

ⁱⁱ Goldman Prize (2015)

ⁱⁱⁱ Businesswire Press Release (21 October 2014), Research and Markets: Global Hydropower Plant Construction Market 2014-2018.

^{iv} International Rivers (2015)

^v World Bank (2013) Global Poverty Working Group, Honduras development indicators.

^{vi} Human Rights Watch (2015), Honduras Annual Report 2014.

^{vii} See Al-Jazeera (24 December 2014), Honduras dam project shadowed by violence.

^{viii} See Jacobin (11 February 2015), Honduras' five century war.

^{ix} See Frontline Defenders press release (18 July 2013), Honduras: Killing of human rights defender Mr Tomas García

^x See hondurasopenforbusiness.com

^{xi} ACI PARTICIPA (June 2014), Impunidad e Indefensión, un vistazo a la realidad de las defensoras y defensores en Honduras, p36.

^{xii} Inter-American Commission on Human Rights press release (5 December 2014), Preliminary observations concerning the human rights situation in Honduras.

^{xiii} Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (19 December 2013), Resolution 12/2013 Precautionary Measure No. 416-13

The Garífuna communities in northern Honduras have also faced a barrage of violence over land. The Garífuna territories are of interest both to investors building luxury resorts on the Caribbean coast and to organised criminals as their territory lies in a remote coastal region of northern Honduras where drug traffickers can pass unnoticed. On 17 July 2014, environmental defender Miriam Miranda and several members of a Garífuna community in Vallecito municipality were abducted by four heavily armed men. After first being told they would be killed, the group were eventually released.

The Bajo Aguán valley also continues to be a major hotspot for violence with 82 campesinos having been killed between 2010 and 2013 in a struggle with agribusiness companies and their private security forces.

Four anti-mining activists have also been killed nationally since the introduction of the General Mining Law in January 2013.

Beyond the killings, the criminalisation of human rights defenders by the state is rife. COFADEH (The Committee of Relatives of the Detained-Disappeared in Honduras) has recorded 3,064 cases of the improper use of criminal law against defenders since 2010, with members of the police and army also being involved in numerous cases of intimidation, threats and suspected killings of environmental and land activists^{xiv}.

A shining light

In a glimmer of light in this violent landscape Berta Cáceres, a founding member of COPINH, was awarded the Goldman Prize for Environmental Activism in May of this year. Praised for her defiant fight against environmental abuses in Honduras, the award also placed an international spotlight, albeit a short-lived one, on Honduras and the dangers of environmental activism as a whole.

COPINH was founded in 1993 and was born from the struggles of the Lenca peoples. Since its inception COPINH has forced the

cancellation of dozens of logging operations; has created several protected forest areas; developed municipal forest management plans; and secured over 100 collective land titles for indigenous communities, in some cases encompassing entire municipalities.

More recently COPINH has been fighting hydropower projects, campaigning for the right to consultation related to the Agua Zarca dam that would force the Lenca community off their ancestral land. Berta and COPINH have been fighting the dam on multiple fronts, from non-violent protests in the streets through to lodging appeals against the dam's financiers, the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the Dutch development bank, FMO, through the Inter-American Human Rights Commission.

This campaigning has resulted in the world's largest dam builder, the Chinese state-owned company Sinohydro, pulling out of the project.

For her efforts Berta Cáceres has been falsely criminalised by the Honduran government. In May 2013, a criminal case was filed against her for illegal possession of a firearm and for endangering the security of the Honduran state^{xv}. She has also been charged since with inciting others to commit crimes, occupation of public and private property, and damages against the hydroelectric company^{xvii}.

Furthermore, like many activists she has received numerous death threats to herself and her family. Berta blames these on the private security guards from the dam company as well as the police and army protecting the project.

While these, and similar charges against two other COPINH leaders, Tomás Gómez and Aureliano Molina have been dropped the company has appealed the dismissal to the Supreme Court and Berta Cáceres continues to live in fear and continues to receive regular threats against her life because of her continued work defending the people of Río Blanco's land and rivers.

The future

Berta Cáceres and COPINH offer some much needed hope, but even as the IFC admits failing to implement its own social and environmental policies when approving the Agua Zarca loan, the unlawful use of violence by public and private security forces to protect concessions granted without transparency and consultation, remains a deadly problem.

As the Honduran government announces plans to grant temporary environmental permits to companies on the same day of application^{xviii} and attempts to elevate the recently formed Military Public Order Police to constitutional status^{xix}, they have set out a path of increased violence and persecution against not just environmentalists, but all the Honduran people.

We offer our congratulations and thanks to Berta Cáceres, not just for the fights that have been won, but for bringing the plight of the Honduran people to the world stage, and for reminding us that now more than ever we must stand with the people of Honduras and Central America in Solidarity against the new wave of violence.



^{xiv} 1Voz.org

^{xv} See Frontline Defenders press release (18 July 2013), Honduras: Killing of human rights defender Mr Tomas García

^{xvi} ENCA 63

^{xvii} Amnesty International (4 October 2013) Honduras – Indigenous Leaders continue to be targeted

^{xviii} La Prensa (13 February 2015), Estado de Honduras otorgará licencias temporales en un solo día.

^{xix} See The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights press release (5 December 2014), Preliminary observations concerning the human rights situation in Honduras.

The Goldman Environmental Prize

Since its beginnings, ENCA has worked with many local, grassroots and small-scale organisations based in Central America. Many of the workers for such organisations find themselves representing local communities which have to struggle and protest against the violence and intrusion of large-scale, corporate 'development' projects. For such work they are often hounded, threatened and vilified. Their rights and even their lives are exposed to danger. ENCA members have supported many such people and their organisations in Central America and we continue to do so. We note that some of these people and organisations have been honoured with the Goldman Environmental Prize. The prize's latest winner from Central America is Berta Cáceres of COPINH – see previous article. We thought it appropriate to include in this edition information about the Goldman Environmental Prize, information culled largely from the website: <http://www.goldmanprize.org/>

The first Goldman Environmental Prize was awarded in April 1990 and reflected the long-time commitment to both the philanthropic endeavours and environmental concerns of founders, Richard and Rhoda Goldman.

The Goldman Environmental Prize honours grassroots environmental heroes from the world's six inhabited continental regions: Africa, Asia, Europe, Islands & Island Nations, North America, and South & Central America. The Prize recognizes individuals for sustained and significant efforts to protect and enhance the natural environment, often at great personal risk. The Goldman Prize views 'grassroots' leaders as those involved in local efforts, where positive change is created through community or citizen participation in the issues that affect them. Through recognizing these individual leaders, the Prize seeks to inspire other ordinary people to take extraordinary actions to protect the natural world.

Goldman Prize recipients focus on protecting endangered ecosystems and species, combating destructive development projects, promoting sustainability, influencing environmental policies and striving for environmental justice.

The Goldman Prize amplifies the voices of these grassroots leaders and provides them with:

- International recognition that enhances their credibility
- Worldwide visibility for the issues they champion
- Financial support of \$175,000 to pursue their vision of a renewed and protected environment

The Ouroboros

In addition to a monetary prize, Goldman Prize winners each receive a bronze sculpture called the Ouroboros. Common to many cultures around the

world, the Ouroboros, which depicts a serpent biting its tail, is a symbol of nature's power of renewal. Our photo of the Ouroboros is the one awarded in 2005 to Padre Andrés Tamayo of the Olancho Environmental Movement, surrounded by many of the other prizes awarded to him in his leadership of the movement against the deforestation of the Honduran department of Olancho. This was a movement which sadly lost momentum and power following the *coup d'état* in July 2009. Padre Andrés was expelled from the country due to his leadership of the movement against the *coup*. The *coup* government gave free rein to the illegal timber trade and impunity to those who threatened members of the Olancho Environmental Movement. That unrestricted violence of 'development' continues in Honduras to this day. There is, however, no doubt that the violence was restricted for several years (until the *coup*) after the award of the Goldman Environmental Prize to Tamayo. When the international spotlight shines on a person, community, protest or sector, the violence diminishes, and in part at least this is one of the major achievements of the Goldman Prize.



RECORDING THE LOSSES



In May, ENCA member Amy Haworth Johns interviewed artist Ben Shattuck in Nicaragua.

When facing battles against the loss of indigenous land rights and water contamination, it is easy to overlook something as constant as the horizon. In his new exhibition, US artist Ben Shattuck captures the beautiful landscapes along the proposed route for the Nicaraguan Transoceanic Canal. As the canal megaproject begins, these vistas will be altered beyond recognition.

Shattuck's previous exhibition subjects have explored Iowa's Underground Railroad and the disappearing plant species of the American Prairie. This latest project on the Nicaraguan Canal again captures scenes and items overlooked that could easily slip beyond memory.

Ben Shattuck: “[Those projects], in many ways, [are] exactly the opposite of this one: I was documenting what had been lost; the canal project is about what will be lost.”

AHJ: How did this project come about? What triggered your interests in the Nicaraguan Canal?

BS: There are hundreds of reasons for journalists to cover the canal. The environmental, social, and cultural impacts of the project are overwhelming ... I decided to fly down to Nicaragua to document this catastrophe the only way I know how: painting ... trying in good faith to haul landscape painting out of the stuffy academic realm, into a relevant and pressing art form.

Ideally, I’d go [to Nicaragua] without a political agenda ... I am not a citizen of Nicaragua, which needs economic growth and stability; to say outright that the canal should or shouldn’t be built is more complicated for me than it is for a Nicaraguan. So I tried to document only in the context of a mourning landscape painter; to show a sunset over a stretch of beach that will be overtaken by a fuel jetty and 1,000 meter wharf; to paint a

moonrise over land that will be submerged by the artificial; to paint Lake Nicaragua before it’s clouded and polluted; to essentially show a landscape before it’s traumatised; I had to paint it, like the Hudson River School painters, instead of photograph or write about it. I had to mimic them.

I plan on returning in the coming years to document changes to the landscape as they come.

AHJ: What is it like to be working in oil/acrylic paint in such a mobile fashion?

BS: I brought an easel, four brushes, a pallet, 20 tubes of paint and 25 wooden painting panels. Lugging all that down miles of beaches and through fields and forests (under 90-degree heat) was hard, but important – people would often ask me what I was carrying, and we’d end up talking about the canal.

AHJ: Where along the canal route did you visit?

BS: Brito – the stretch of Pacific beach where the canal will begin, and the site of the huge wharf – was the most impactful place I visited. When I arrived,

everyone was fishing for sardines from a rocky shoreline that will be overtaken by the wharf. People were lying on the beach in the afternoon sun, and children were playing and floating in the river. The transformation of this place will be unimaginable.

I continued along the route to Rivas [and] stood in a field by Las Palomas, a town

that will be entirely displaced by the canal. I [then] painted from Lake Nicaragua’s **Las Isletas** (near Granada). Las Isletas will not see the canal directly, but any place that touches the lake will be affected by the sediment the dredging will produce. I visited the southern tip of **Ometepe**, the volcanic island in the middle of Lake Nicaragua. The proposed canal route passes just south of [the island of] Ometepe. I painted the view from that shore, at around sunset. If all goes as planned, that view will be marred by some of world’s biggest supertankers. I visited a few places along the Caribbean coast, but couldn’t access **Punta Gorda** – where the canal will exit.

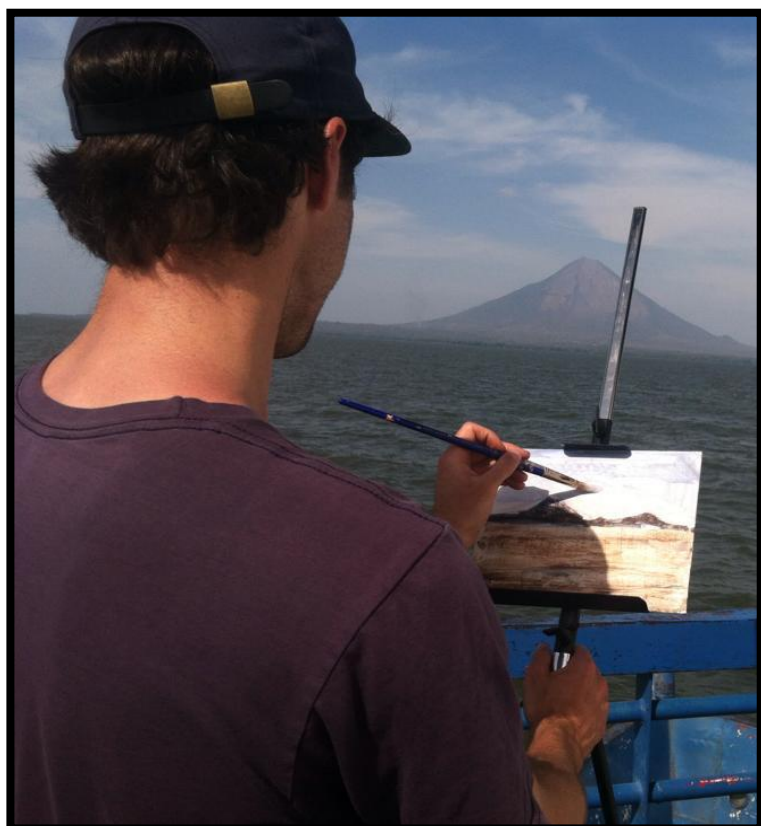
I plan to paint from these same spots through the years – to show the progress of the canal and the change in landscape.

AHJ: Public polls currently show support for the canal at 50/50. Your trip brought you to people who will be at the frontline of the construction. Did they share their main worries and issues or concerns?

BS: I can only speak from my own experiences, but I can say that almost everyone I spoke with opposed the canal.

Set up an easel and people talk to you. Paintings transcend language and culture. I’d be on the side of the road or on a hillside, and behind me, almost always, a couple of people would be watching. Sometimes someone would point to a part of the painting and shake his or her head, or nod. It was a conversation.

I conducted more direct ‘interviews’ with a few folks and, again, almost everyone was opposed to the canal – whether it was the B&B owner in Granada, the taxi driver in Las Palomas, the driver in Managua; the farmer on Ometepe; or the fisherman in Brito, among many others. Those who’ve travelled near Nueva Guinea say that the



people there are unanimously opposed to the canal. Those on Lake Nicaragua said that it would ruin the water, ruin fishing.

Of everyone I spoke with, only two wanted the canal to go through. One fisherman was excited for the canal because he said that a representative of HKND promised him a 'panga' – a small boat.

AHJ: What were your particular highlights?

BS: Painting in Nicaragua presented challenges. I had howler monkeys throw mangoes at me. I had a swarm of bees chase me into the ocean – I had to run into the water, paintbrushes in hand, clothes on, to drown the bees that had embedded themselves in my hair. I got away with a few stings on my scalp. I floated in the waves, clothes on, clutching the brushes. Aside from the headache from the stings, it was a lovely break.

I think I like the bee-sting painting the most. Not because it's the best painting – but because the sand embedded in the paint tells a story. I'm interested in how paintings can smuggle in a narrative. This narrative (the bees, the start of the canal) is literally captured in the paint.

Ben Shattuck's paintings will be up at Dedee Shattuck Gallery (Westport, Massachusetts) from July 27th – August 30th. Opening reception will be August 1st. Go to www.benshattuck.com for more information.

CANAL UPDATE

ESIA completed, but secrecy surrounds findings.

The long-awaited Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (ESIA) have finally been completed by UK company ERM (Environmental Resources Management) and delivered to the Nicaraguan government and HKND. Not surprisingly they are being withheld from the public. In June, however, an external independent panel of experts, invited by ERM to review several chapters, reported their findings. The review summary highlights numerous flaws, including insufficient sampling and lack of plans to protect forests, wetlands and mangroves.

The goal of the Panel was to review some sections of the draft Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) conducted by the company Environmental Resources Management (ERM). Two representatives from the Hong Kong Nicaraguan Canal Development Group (HKND) were present but did not make presentations. The panel was organised by Florida International University's Southeastern Environmental Research Center and College of Law and focused on the ecological and hydrological assessments conducted by ERM.

No sections of the Social Impact Assessment were presented or

discussed. The Panel called for urgent objective analysis to review the final, completed report, especially the social and economic impacts of the entire project.

The panel reviewed preliminary drafts of chapters 3, 5, 6, and 7 of the ESIA, which were provided by ERM only a few days prior to the meeting. Moreover, time for discussion by the group following presentations by ERM was limited because much of the meeting consisted of presentations by ERM. Summaries of the most salient observations are presented in the panel's report.

In all the review panel provided 15 areas of significant concern. Ranging from forestry to water and land rights issues.

The full report of the Review Panel can be found here: tinyurl.com/q6nk3zu

ERM offered a response to the report in which they thanked the panel for their views and responded to their concerns, sometimes dismissively and sometimes in a conciliatory manner. The response to the expert report can be found here: tinyurl.com/oygehac

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Turtle conservation

Alena Dzernina and David van Erkelens report from their trip to Jiquilillo, Nicaragua, where they volunteered with Sea Turtle Rescue- Nicaragua (STRN).

What is worse for the number of species, bringing the whole nest of Olive Ridley Sea Turtle's eggs to the market or killing a mature Green Sea Turtle that comes for nesting? Unfortunately both commonly take place in Nicaragua despite all regulations and conservation attempts. Our Nicaraguan trip started with a great volunteering opportunity at Sea Turtle Rescue- Nicaragua (STRN) in Jiquilillo, a not-for-profit conservation organisation with a goal to increase the number of sea turtles.

The amount of nesting female turtles has reduced by 90% during the last 40 years. Unsustainable take of eggs by local poachers is the main reason for Olive Ridley's decreasing rates. Luckily the grassroots projects like STRN, currently run by Robert Rothrock, are dedicated to preserving the species and recovery of important nesting spots. We were fortunate to help out in the turtle hatchery, take care of baby Olive Ridelys and release them into the Pacific Ocean.

Even though it can be hard to understand, turtle eggs are bought from the poachers by the NGO in order to avoid conflict between the local community and NGO. It is almost impossible to take this only source of income away from the poor, so at least they learn proper methods of handling and transporting eggs realising the importance of conservation. Turtle nests are reallocated to the hatchery for their protection within less than an hour of the purchase, and the conditions are recreated as close to natural as possible.

This year 4,668 hatchlings were successfully released by STRN, and we were very happy that around 2,000 baby turtles passed through our hands. On the other hand, this was a hatch rate of only 39.5% of the total of 116 nests (70-

110 eggs each) and 15 sacks and 37 nests produced no babies, perhaps due to being too early in the season or because of unfertilised eggs. It is difficult to find a specific reason for such a difference in hatching, therefore more research needs to be done about other successful practices. While there is already a great interest from travellers in the hatchery and turtle releases, the project hopes for more attention from local people, gaining community support and raising international awareness. There is also a necessity to reach not only poachers, but egg consumers and government that does not provide any law enforcement.

The Caribbean side of Nicaragua (particularly Pearl Lagoon) has also disappointed us with no commitment to conservation laws and officials at all levels being corrupt. First we were trying to fight the injustice of big Green Sea Turtles being poached and butchered in

the middle of the day during the closed season, but then we got to know that the problem was way bigger. Police, marine officers, community board and council, everybody loves the turtle meat and are ready to break the law which allows only certain indigenous communities to hunt this species during

a specific period. We could see animals laying upside down for days and slowly dying out there in the sun. Yet, there was no initiative that would focus on the problem of massive Green

Sea Turtle poaching in RAAS (the Southern Atlantic Autonomous Region). It does not seem like the change can come from within the country, but rather that international organisations should become more alert and present in the remote regions where the species are endangered. Only widespread awareness, education and law enforcement can increase the chances of sea turtles to survive and grow.

Please note that this article and the opinions expressed within it are those of the two authors and are not necessarily shared by ENCA.

Around 2,000 baby turtles passed through our hands.



A model to follow?

Lia Korn, a charity consultant and writer who has just spent 3 months working in Nicaragua reports on the work of Selva Negra.

“You can’t change the world, but at least the people who work here can retire to a better life.” When I met Mausi Kuhl, the co-owner of Selva Negra coffee farm in the northern highlands of Nicaragua, it was clear that what she and her husband Eddy are running is so much more than just a business. Through their determination and years of trial and error, this one-time simple coffee farm has flourished into not only an impressive model of sustainable farming, but also an inspiring social enterprise where profits really are pumped back into the community. Mausi would love for others to be able to follow this model but, as she’s finding, it’s not that straightforward.

In Nicaragua, coffee is one of the country’s primary products and the areas of Matagalpa and Jinotega that surround Selva Negra (the Black Forest in English) are typically known for producing the best crop. When you arrive here you can quickly see why – with the temperature much cooler than elsewhere in Nicaragua and rain frequent, conditions are ideal. In fact, at the Selva Negra farm and resort and amongst the lush greenery and the large duck pond you could almost be forgiven for thinking you are no longer in Nicaragua at all, but in Northern Europe – an impression which is further enhanced by the German-looking cottages that are dotted about the land – a nod to the co-owner’s original German descent. Mausi moved here when she was 2 years old.

Despite these green and fertile lands, where you feel that anything will flourish, growing coffee here is not always easy and things can quickly go wrong. Unsustainable farming practices in the area have seen much of the land surrounding the Selva Negra farm

become degraded and barren and the landowners become impoverished. Even when responsible methods are used, major fluctuations in the temperature and rainfall as a result of climate change are also presenting significant challenges – such as Coffee Rust, a disease which can quickly spread if not kept in check and can damage huge swathes of a coffee crop. Mausi, in particular, is doing her best to address these issues as they occur on her own land and she wants to help other local farmers too – not only so that they can make money to live, but also to preserve the beautiful and vibrant local habitat that exists within these hills for future generations.

How it works at Selva Negra

In Selva Negra farm and eco-lodge, Mausi, her husband and her staff have built an eco-system of both environmental and social value. The set-up of the farm itself is unusual and remarkable. In addition to the farm itself and the numerous guest lodgings and restaurant, it also houses their 200 permanent workers and, in harvest season, an additional 900 temporary workers. There is a whole community living and thriving within the farm and though of course this is no utopia, the package for workers is a good one.

José Garcia, who kindly showed me around the farm, is now in his 30s and was born on the farm where his parents have worked for almost 40 years. He works here now too as a tour guide and it was fascinating to hear his enthusiastic explanations of how the organic farming processes preserve the soil for future growth and maintain clean water. These processes also help to support the people living there. A good example of this way of working is how they crush

their coffee. They use a traditional method called water-milling, which is basically washing the pulp from the coffee cherry before it has dried. This process has been essential for producing coffee but has been criticised because of its potentially harmful effects on the environment. A lot of water is used and the dirty water can leak back in to the water supply, depleting oxygen levels and killing off water-life. The build-up of bacteria can also release dangerous amounts of methane into the atmosphere, contributing to climate change. The farm has not completely mitigated the negative effects of this process but it has certainly ameliorated them. They use rain water, which is collected in wells; after being used for washing it becomes what is usually called ‘honey water’. It is not allowed back in to the water supply but retained in tanks where it is filtered through volcanic rock, eventually allowing methane to be extracted and pumped through to the homes and restaurant on the farm where it is used for cooking. The filtered water can then be reused. So the process saves not only the water supply and the ozone layer but also saves the workers money by preventing wastage of the gas.

The social project

In addition to the many efficient operations on the farm – see website, given below – especially impressive is the fact that it operates as a social enterprise. In Nicaragua, poverty rates are at about 40% and many people live in inadequate housing without sufficient food. As a result many kids end up leaving school early to help out their families. Mausi tries to tackle this cycle of poverty, at least for her employees.

If you’re ever lucky enough to visit the community at Selva Negra, you’ll see the high standard of housing and the beautiful surrounding that has been created for and by the people who live there. This good quality accommodation

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'Rivers and forests are not merchandise, COPINH'

ENCA in Solidarity with COPINH

ENCA member James Watson reports from a month with COPINH in Honduras, and as with his last trip he will be blogging about his time there on the ENCA website.

Since a military coup in 2009, Honduras has become one of the most repressive nations in Latin America. The Honduran “oligarchy” of rich landowning families has spread its power through the corrupted government, and the country has seen increasing militarisation in order to cement their control.

COPINH – the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organisations of Honduras – represents one of the knife-edge organisations fighting for human rights in Honduras. They work in the west of the country with indigenous groups such as the Lenca, who suffer constant marginalisation. The indigenous communities face threats to

their land and natural resources, which the more powerful landowners and their connections to international business interests seek to control for profit. This frequently involves intimidation, violence, and criminalisation by the landowners and the authorities who support them.

COPINH supports direct action, legal battles, and crucial international advocacy to fight their marginalisation. In June and July 2015, ENCA member James Watson has had the opportunity to make a brief visit to COPINH. This blog reports his experiences there – we hope you enjoy it, and please share the info and actions you see here on Facebook and beyond.

James blog can be accessed through the ENCA website at: enca.org.uk

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is provided for free to all permanent employees and their families in addition to decent pay. All food is free for them, which is made possible by growing most of it on the farm and using it for the sole purposes of feeding staff and supplying the restaurant. Most of the power is also provided free of charge and produced through use of a turbine on the lake. A school and free clinic are also on-site, and Mausi even provides scholarships to children whose parents do not work there. It's great to see a business pumping its profits back into environmental efficiency and its staff.

But Mausi is trying to do more and has recently set up an NGO, to which she hopes to attract funding to further her ambitious goals – the profits she makes just can't sustain all she hopes to achieve. She's currently trying to buy land to give to retired staff so that they can live well and grow their own food when they leave the farm. Another project is to help the community outside the farm to buy cleaner and more efficient stoves, which will prevent people from having to inhale all the damaging smoke produced by the more traditional stoves here.

A crucial aim is to help other farmers to operate as she does – to preserve their land and their livelihoods. As part of this work, she invites farmers in the local area to stay at the farm to train them in more sustainable methods and she thinks this is having some success, but of course not all the farms have both the natural and financial resources of Selva Negra. Impoverished farmers who need to provide for their families often need to cut down trees to make space and to use chemicals to improve their yield. Mausi hopes to gain funding through the NGO to help farmers in the local area fund the changes which will preserve their livelihoods and the bio-diversity of the area.

Selva Negra's website can be found here: www.selvanegra.com

enca.org.uk
@ENCA_News

Meeting Dates 2015

Sunday 18th Oct 2015

ENCA meetings are held at the NSC's office at the Durham Road Centre, London, N7 7DT. Meetings are held on Sundays from 12:30 pm to 5 pm and we start with lunch which is made up of whatever people attending choose to bring to share.