

ENCA



Environmental Network *for* Central America

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Berta Cáceres One Year On



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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Remembering Berta

This issue of the ENCA Newsletter coincides with the anniversary of the assassination of Berta Cáceres, former leader of the Civic Council for the Popular and Indigenous Organisations of Honduras (COPINH). Berta was assassinated on March 2nd 2016 at her home in La Esperanza, Honduras.

Berta Cáceres had spent much of her time in recent years leading the struggle to halt the construction of a hydroelectric dam on her community's land in Intibucá, western Honduras. The dam threatened a vital water source that was deemed sacred by the indigenous Lenca people.

As a recent Global Witness report¹ stated:

"Less than a year before her death she had delivered a moving address to a packed auditorium as she was presented with the 2015 Goldman Environmental Prize for exceptional bravery in environmental activism. Dedicating her award to 'the martyrs who gave their lives in the struggle to defend our natural resources', Berta said, 'Mother Nature – militarised, fenced in, poisoned – demands that we take action'. Tragically, not even the international limelight could save her."

ENCA recently took part in a webinar (internet conference) run by the Honduras Solidarity Network (HSN) on 'Commemoration and Action: Justice for Berta Cáceres in Honduras'. The organisers and leaders of the webinar were Vicki Cervantes of the HSN, Karen Spring of Rights Action and HSN and Chuck Kaufmann of the Alliance for Global Justice. The websites of all three organisations are given in the footnote below.²

In this issue of the ENCA Newsletter we have reproduced a statement that reinforces COPINH's remembrance of Berta, renews the strength and vigour of the organisation she founded and calls for action throughout the month of March in commemoration of Berta.

We follow COPINH's statement with a statement made by the family of Berta regarding the progress, or otherwise, of the prosecution of those responsible for Berta's assassination.

You can listen to the webinar through our website at:

<https://enca.org.uk/berta-caceres-commemoration-webinar/>



1. Global Witness 'Honduras: The Deadliest Place to Defend the Planet', January 2017, London.
2. Honduras Solidarity Network: www.hondurassolidarity.org/
Rights Action: <http://rightsaction.org/>
Alliance for Global Justice: <http://afgj.org/>

“Berta lives on, COPINH is strong” – COPINH calls for month of action

STATEMENT FROM COPINH

On March 2nd, 2016 they assassinated our sister Berta Cáceres. They thought they would get rid not just of her as a leader recognised throughout Latin America and around the world, but also would end a struggle, a political project, that they would destroy the organisation of which she was both founder and daughter, COPINH (the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organisations of Honduras).

One year since she spread her wings, since the crime that tried to steal her clarity and leadership from us, the peoples of the world who recognise her legacy are here,

walking in her footsteps, confronting the patriarchal, capitalist, colonial and racist system that is imposed upon our peoples. We have been and will continue confronting the deadly projects of transnational corporations and imperialism in every corner of the planet.

In March we won't just painfully remember that horrendous crime; above all we will celebrate life: the life of Berta, who was born on March 4th and the life of COPINH, which was founded 24 years ago on March 27th.

For all of these reasons, we invite you to use every day of March to multiply:

- Actions of protest, resistance and struggle against the deadly policies of transnational corporations...
- Actions to defend the bodies and lives of women in the face of the patriarchal and colonial system...
- Actions against the criminalisation of grassroots movements, against militarisation and commodification of the lands and all dimensions of life...

- Actions to denounce the Honduran State in front of its embassies in every country of the world...
- Actions of solidarity with COPINH and with the organisations of the grassroots Honduran social movement...
- Actions to spread the thinking and example of Berta's life...
- Moments of reflection and spirituality...

We call for these types of actions to be

developed and spread through every corner of Abya Yala and the world. As movements, organisations and people, let's accompany COPINH, embody it, multiply its march.

In all of these potential proposed actions, and

all others that your creativity gives rise to, let the world shake with the cry of: “Berta lives on, COPINH is strong!”

With the ancestral strength of Berta, Lempira, Iselaca, Mota and Etempica, we raise our voices full of life, justice, liberty, dignity and peace.



BERTA LIVES ON, COPINH IS STRONG
#justiciaparaberta
#SoyCOPINH
#bertavivecopinhsigue

Statement from Berta Cáceres family concerning arrest of alleged 7th 'material' author

Public statement concerning the arrest of Henry Javier Hernández Rodríguez January 15, 2017

The legal team representing the daughters, son and mother of Berta Cáceres, as well as COPINH (Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organisations of Honduras), since the arrest of Henry Javier Hernández Rodríguez, declares:

a) Henry Javier Hernández Rodríguez has been charged by the Honduran Public Prosecutor with the assassination of Berta Cáceres and was issued an arrest warrant. According to the theory of the Public Prosecutor, Hernández Rodríguez is a retired private in the Honduran military, and was a direct material author of the crime and is connected with two other soldiers who have been accused and imprisoned.

b) Mr. Douglas Geovanny Bustillo and Mariano Díaz Chávez, both with the officer rank of Major – Bustillo was retired and Chávez was active at the time of the assassination of Berta.

c) The criminal charge against Hernández Rodríguez is not new. What we expect is progress in the investigation against the criminal structure, the intellectual authors who gave the order to execute the crime. We also continue to wait for criminal charges against senior government officials, and against the Honduran government, who had specific duties to protect the life of Berta Cáceres and instead of protecting her, put her at greater risk.

d) We learned of the capture of Hernández Rodríguez from the media! The Public Prosecutor has not made any attempts at communicating with us. We regret that this institution continues ignoring the rights of victims, maintaining an illegal and unjust secrecy.

e) A plea hearing has been scheduled on the 16th of January at 10am for Hernández

“We have no replacement planet, we have only this one - and we have to take action”



Rodríguez and on January 19th a preliminary hearing will be held for Sergio Ramón Rodríguez Orellana, Douglas Geovanny Bustillo, Atilio Edilson Duarte Meza, Mariano Díaz Chávez, Elvín Emerson Duarte and Heriberto Meza Rápalo Orellana. We will attend these hearings as Private Prosecutors, with the disadvantage of not knowing whether the Public Prosecutor has made any progress in the investigations into the facts of the case and the participation of the accused.

f) We advise the public that in the little bits of information we have learned of the investigation, serious inconsistencies and weaknesses in the Public Prosecutor's approach to the case have become evident. These inconsistencies and weaknesses can be interpreted as strategic actions to create impunity for the criminal structure, the intellectual authors who masterminded the crime against Berta Cáceres.

We reaffirm our commitment to achieve comprehensive truth and justice of this crime. We will continue to demand that the state of secrecy surrounding the investigation be lifted for the victims and we demand that independent international experts be included in the current investigation.

Karen Spring writes:

For 2016, the US government approved \$750 million USD for the Alliance for Prosperity (AfP) for the Northern Triangle countries – Honduras being one. Despite widespread and well-documented violations of basic human rights, rampant impunity, total lack of confidence in the judiciary and state security forces, the US has simply continued its decades-long policy of imperialism, neoliberalism, and militarisation in Honduras. The only thing that has changed with the US's support this year is the plan's name.

As the Honduras-based Coordinator for the Honduras Solidarity Network (HSN), your financial contributions support the work that I do with Honduran communities and organisations in resistance to the unjust neoliberal economic model and US and Canadian foreign policy. 2016 has been an extremely difficult year for the Honduran movement and their allies like the HSN and other international groups. For me, 2016 will be remembered as the year that indigenous activist Berta Cáceres was assassinated in her home. Berta provided endless guidance to activists like myself and she was one of the most exceptional Honduran political analysts and

movement leaders in the region. She is greatly missed. Berta is just one of many activists who have been killed in Honduras since the 2009 military coup.

What made 2016 different from previous years is how daring the Honduran government has become in targeting critics of its neoliberal policies and enhanced its fear and terror campaigns against those who resist. Unfortunately, we expect 2017 to be very similar. International solidarity allies should not shy away from Honduras or feel discouraged – this is the moment when solidarity is needed the most!

But at this very moment of great need, funding for the HSN is running out. By March 2017, the gift that has enabled me to be the Honduras Solidarity Network's hands, eyes, and voice on the ground will run out. It is only through the support of people such as yourself that this position will continue beyond March.

As ENCA supporters already know, ENCA generally prefers to send the paltry funds which ENCA manages to raise directly out to projects and causes pursued by local organisations in Central America. There is no doubt, however, that for our

information, we in ENCA depend not just on information straight from the 'horse's mouth' in Central America, but also from North American organisations such as HSN, AFGJ and Rights Action. The websites of each of these three organisations are given as footnotes on page 2 of this newsletter, and we urge individual supporters of ENCA to share a little of their wealth (?) by making individual donations to these organisations.

Additionally, we wish to publicise the work of Global Witness, a London-based non-governmental organisation and investigation agency whose aim and mission can be stated thus:

Many of the world's worst environmental and human rights abuses are driven by the exploitation of natural resources and corruption in the global political and economic system. Global Witness campaigns to end this and carries out hard-hitting investigations, exposes these abuses, and campaigns for change.

In particular we wish to publicise Global Witness's most recent report, 'Honduras: The Deadliest Place to Defend the Planet' (January 2017), and to urge all our supporters and readers of this newsletter to read it. It can be found at:

<https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/environmental-activists/honduras-deadliest-country-world-environmental-activism/>

Costa Rica's environmental reputation

In early January this year it was widely reported that in 2016 Costa Rica had produced 98% of its electricity without fossil fuels. This is an achievement that few countries have managed, including those that are much larger and richer than Costa Rica, and it is of course an achievement of which Costa Ricans are rightly proud.

Two factors, however, serve to undermine this achievement. First, the reliance of the renewables sector on hydro-electricity generated from large-scale dams; and second the growing use of cars in the country which means that, despite its renewable electricity generation, its demand for oil continues to increase.

Lindsay Fendt in San José reported for *The Guardian* on 5th January this year¹ that despite the country's recent investments in wind and geothermal plants, it still regularly produces more than 70% of its electricity each year from dams. Solar power, Fendt suggests, "has been pushed aside due to political concerns that home-generated [solar] power would cut into the state electricity company's profits."

Moreover, she reports that although the Reventazón hydro-electric dam became fully operational last September and can power over half a million homes, it was heavily

criticised by environmental groups for its location in a critical wildlife corridor. Its alteration of the flow regime of the Reventazón River also attracted protests.

Costa Rican transport can certainly not claim any pretensions to sustainability, with a massive recent growth in car ownership to a level of 287 cars per 1,000 population – a level above both the world and the Latin American averages. Furthermore, only 2% of the country's vehicles are hybrids or electric cars that can use the renewable electricity grid. The resulting pollution levels are giving cause for concern, especially in the capital San José.

So, behind Costa Rica's reputation for environmental sustainable development – a reputation well-deserved relative to most other countries – there remain issues relating to pollution levels which reflect questions over the decisions made by Costa Rican politicians.

1. The Guardian: www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/05/costa-rica-renewable-energy-oil-cars?

Serious abuses of labour rights in Costa Rica and Honduras

ENCA Newsletters 67 and 68 addressed some of the problems of banana production in Central America, especially relating to whether we can place our faith in the certification of the product. We continue this focus on banana production with an examination of the practices of the major importing company Fyffes. We are grateful to Banana Link for permission to reproduce extracts from their article.

Freedom and fairness for Fyffes workers

The Make Fruit Fair! campaign is calling on Fyffes – the number one importer of bananas to Europe, and among the largest global marketer for Supersweet pineapples and winter season melons – to respect the rights of workers in its global supply chains.

Since the summer of 2015, the Make Fruit Fair! campaign has collected evidence of very serious violations of core labour standards at specific Fyffes' subsidiaries: ANEXCO in Costa Rica and Suragroh and Melon Export SA in Honduras, where a largely female workforce, reliant on temporary seasonal work, is particularly vulnerable.

These violations include: failure to pay minimum wages and social insurance (an estimated £2.5m in pay and social insurance have been withheld); exposure of workers to hazardous agrochemicals; failure to respect freedom of association including threats, harassment and sacking of union members; and blocking collective bargaining processes.

In the case of Suragroh, Make Fruit Fair partners Banana Link and the

International Union of Foodworkers (IUF) have alleged breaches of the UK's Ethical Trading Initiative Base Code for failure to respect unions and pay living wages, and Fyffes has refused to participate in local mediation to remedy these.

The Honduran Labour Inspectorate has also found non-payment of minimum wages and other statutory benefits. Additionally, a 2015 report by the U.S. Department of Labour confirmed allegations that Suragroh failed to pay the

minimum wage, among a lengthy list of other violations.

Workers are required to provide their own work equipment such as hoes, machetes and shoes, the costs of which can amount to an entire week's income.

Workers are also exposed to hazardous chemicals, many reporting headaches, sickness and high temperatures as a result, and report a lack of information about and training to avoid and be protected from the dangers of chemical exposure. In December 2015, about 100 women suffered poisoning, 14 of whom were hospitalised, after they were accidentally dropped off downwind of herbicide and chlorine spraying in an adjoining plot.

You can read more about working conditions at Suragroh in the following locations:

- International Labour Rights Forum – Melon Workers in Honduras Confirm Abuses by Irish Fruit Company Fyffes: <http://laborrights.org/blog/201607/melon-workers-honduras-confirm-abuses-irish-fruit-company-fyffes>
- The Guardian – Fyffes melons at centre of labour abuse claims from Honduran workers: www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/nov/29/fyffes-melons-labour-abuse-claims-honduras-workers
- A blog by Giorgio Trucchi of the Latin American Region of the IUF contains a number of reports (In Spanish): <http://informes.rel-uita.org/index.php/sindicatos/item/fyffes-ya-perdio-la-verguezna>

Meanwhile, at ANEXCO, dialogue facilitated by the Costa Rican Ministry of Labour has failed to provide a space in which local unions can negotiate with ANEXCO management and Fyffes, and the local unions report continued failure to comply with core labour standards enshrined in Costa Rican legislation.

The rights abuses at ANEXCO are the subject of an ongoing Make Fruit Fair urgent action launched in September 2015. The key demands of respect for labour rights and an end to harassment and discrimination against union members have yet to be met.

Both cases clearly illustrate that Fyffes is also in breach of OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises for the failure to “Respect the right of their employees to be represented by trade unions”.

“Fyffes in Honduras does not respect the fundamental rights of women workers; the majority of employees are women who

have up to 26 years of work without social security rights or social benefits. We demand respect for freedom of association and collective bargaining.” – Iris Munguía, Coordinator, COLSIBA (the Regional Coordination of Latin American Banana & Agro-Industrial Workers’ Unions)

Banana Link and many of our partners from Europe and Latin America wrote to Fyffes Chairman, David McCann, in November last year asking him to take action to address these issues, but received no response.

Despite Fyffes’ claim on its website that “if something isn’t working, we change the way we do it”, the company has failed to take responsibility in Costa Rica and Honduras.

No company, especially a company that professes to respect the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, should benefit from the appalling abuses suffered by those at the bottom of their supply chain.

An alliance of civil society organisations and trade unions, including unions in Costa Rica and Honduras, are calling on Fyffes to ensure that local plantation management

- ends the discrimination of union members at Anexco (Costa Rica) and Suragroh (Honduras)
- recognises unions at both Anexco (Costa Rica) and Suragroh (Honduras) and engages in collective bargaining with these unions to provide opportunity for workers to be represented in negotiations on pay and working conditions on plantations.

We are also calling for shareholders and directors with responsibility for Fyffes

“I got pregnant, and they do not allow pregnancy”

– Marys Suyapa Gómez, sacked for being pregnant after working at Suragroh for 15 years

- to establish and implement a global company wide policy to ensure the respect of workers’ rights throughout its supply chains, including the right to join an independent trade union and for unions to engage in collective bargaining

“Fyffes must take responsibility for ensuring that their local managements in Costa Rica and Honduras recognise and enter into good faith negotiations with local unions and that company-

wide freedom of association and collective bargaining is respected at every level.” – Ron Oswald, General Secretary, International Union of Foodworkers.

Fyffes and Fairtrade

Fyffes are a significant trader of Fairtrade certified bananas in the UK. The Fairtrade mark is given to individual products not entire companies or their business practices. In the case of Fyffes only some of their produce is Fairtrade certified – the produce from the Fyffes subsidiaries in Costa Rica and Honduras is not covered by Fairtrade certification. Although Fairtrade Trader Standards do place ethical requirements on Fyffes, these requirements only cover farms that are part of certified supply chains, not those on non-certified farms.

Fyffes and UK supermarkets

We believe that supermarkets have a responsibility for ensuring ethical standards are respected throughout all of their supply chains. Most supermarkets in the UK buy some, or all, of their bananas through Fyffes. We, therefore, believe that these supermarkets have a responsibility for raising our concerns about labour rights with Fyffes. We have contacted all the UK supermarkets and the majority have responded and are in dialogue with Fyffes. But two supermarkets – Asda and Lidl – have not responded to our communications.

Relevant websites:

Banana Link – www.bananalink.org.uk
 Make Fruit Fair! – www.makefruitfair.org
 Ethical Trading Initiative – www.ethicaltrade.org
 International Union of Food Workers (IUF) – www.iuf.org
 Fair Trade Advocacy Office (FTAO) – www.fairtrade-advocacy.org



María Gómez (65), who worked for nearly 30 years as a supervisor at Melon Export SA, says she will not be able to retire after so many years spent on the plantations, but will have to keep looking for work.

More Repression, More Fightback! El Salvador's Labour Movement Defends the Minimum Wage

Given ENCA's usual critical analysis of development issues in Central America, it is pleasing to be able to share some progressive news, in this case from El Salvador where workers were granted a significant increase in the minimum wage. The news came to us from Alexis Stoumbelis, Director of CISPES (Committee in Solidarity with People in El Salvador) but was accompanied by the following article of explanation by Luke Walsh-Mellett in Labour Notes – <http://labornotes.org> – which unfortunately also makes it clear that transnational corporations are fighting hard against the improvements. By Luke Walsh-Mellett

On January 1, workers in El Salvador won a big increase in the minimum wage – in some cases doubling their pay. But before they had time to celebrate, the multinational companies who thrive on the country's still-low wages counterattacked with mass layoffs, judicial manoeuvres, and a bid to undermine the eight-hour day.

"With the increases in the minimum wage, which are absolutely historic, we delivered an enormous blow," said Estela Ramírez of the Textile Workers Union, SITRASACOSI, which was organised by women workers blacklisted from the free trade zones for their organising.

"Now part of their campaign is to fire people, to carry out a terror campaign that businesses will leave and people will be without work. I think that this year will be one of enormous struggle, and we hope to have the support of our international allies."

HOW WAGES GOT RAISED

The National Minimum Wage Council, a regulatory body made up of government, labour and private sector representatives, sets minimum wages in El Salvador's private sector. After the left-wing Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) won the presidency in 2009, the possibility emerged that labour and the government could vote together against the private sector on this council for the first time in the country's history and bring some long-overdue relief to working families.

But union representatives on this and similar councils had, for decades, been controlled by business interests and were notoriously corrupt. They counted members of long-defunct unions as affiliates in order to claim to represent a larger percentage of workers. The depth of their betrayal was widely revealed last June, when labour representatives sided with big business to approve a paltry minimum wage increase rather than the government's much heftier proposal.

Under the FMLN government, the Ministry of Labour has remained relatively conservative. Due to the continuing power of the country's oligarchs, the FMLN has had to tread carefully. However, outrage from large swaths of the population over the council's decision gave new Minister of Labour Sandra Guevara the gumption to hold new elections for labour representatives, opening up the process to public and private sector unions and ensuring a level of transparency that had never existed before. The progressive labour movement agreed on a common slate of candidates, and won.

This level of unity was not necessarily a guarantee. Salvadoran labour law makes it relatively easy to start a union – only 35 members are needed – but extremely difficult to negotiate a contract, especially in the rabidly anti-union private sector. The labour movement has thus often been besieged by competition, including within workplaces, to win enough members to bargain.

Seven years ago, recognizing the historic opportunity the FMLN's victory represented, progressive and left unions

began to organise broad-based federations based on a shared class interest that would allow them to compete with the existing representatives. The new elections to the Minimum Wage Council created the opportunity they had been waiting for.

The council moved quickly to approve a new minimum wage to take effect January 1 [2017]: \$300 a month in commerce, service, and industry, and \$224 a month in rural agriculture. The largest increases came in the *maquila* or textile industry, notorious for low wages and difficult working conditions, where the minimum wage increased nearly 40 percent from \$211 to \$295 a month, and for seasonal coffee and cotton pickers, who will see their wages more than double from \$98 to \$200 a month.

EMPLOYERS ARE MAD

Though the hike merely brings El Salvador on a par with neighbouring Honduras and Guatemala, business is not accepting the change quietly.

"At first the reaction was one of surprise," said Wilfredo Berríos of the Salvadoran Union and Social Front. "Then it was recalcitrant and miserly." The blowback includes judicial challenges, threatening to close factories, and proposing their own labour 'reforms' that would undermine the wage increase, specifically in the textile *maquilas* and call centres.

Both sectors have become very important in the Salvadoran economy. Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, right-wing governments and international financial

institutions like the International Monetary Fund decimated the country through privatization and attempted to create an export-oriented economy dependent on foreign investment.

Multinational corporations seeking low wages dominate the textile sector, which makes up 46

percent of El Salvador's exports and employs more than 73,000 workers. The industry boasts that it makes up nearly half of all manufacturing jobs in the country; manufacturing overall represents 22 percent of workers in the formal sector.

Factories run in large part by Salvadoran, Taiwanese, and Korean owners produce for brands like Adidas, Walmart, and Hanes. Fruit of the Loom itself is the largest single private-sector employer in the country, employing an estimated 12,000 workers directly across four of their own plants, and thousands more through contractors.

The call centres are a newer phenomenon, although they have grown exponentially by taking advantage of the influx of English-speaking deportees from the United States. As some of the largest private sector employers, *maquila* and call centre owners don't hesitate to throw their weight around.

ELEVEN-HOUR DAY: THE NEW NORMAL?

Within weeks of December's minimum wage victory, the private sector renewed its push to 'flexibilize' the eight-hour day. Ramírez noted that this proposal was previously introduced – and defeated – in 2011. Flexibilization would mean "the loss of a victory of the working class, a loss of rights, a setback," she said.

The 'compressed week' proposal would change El Salvador's Labour Code to allow employers in textiles and call centres to institute a four-day week with 11-hour

shifts. Ramírez and SITRASACOSI say this schedule would functionally eliminate overtime pay, leading to a loss in monthly earnings, and jeopardize other rights enshrined in the Labour Code, including paid holidays, that are based on an eight-hour day.

Multinational corporations seeking low wages dominate the textile sector, which makes up 46 percent of El Salvador's exports and employs more than 73,000 workers.

But they're most concerned about the physical strain that an extended workday would push onto an already overexploited labour force. The change would also fall hardest on women, who are usually responsible for most of the domestic work in the home.

It's unlikely that flexibilization of hours would be confined to textiles and call centres, Ramírez said, calling this first attempt "a pilot program."

ALL ABOUT PROFITS

Employers have also pushed back against the minimum wage victory in and out of court. The National Association of Private Enterprise (ANEP), the country's main business lobby, challenged the election of the labour representatives to the Minimum Wage Council and asked the Supreme Court to overturn the increase.

A number of large businesses announced layoffs, blaming the wage increase. SITRASACOSI members said the company Textiles Opico, which according to the company's website produces sports apparel for "the likes of Nike, Adidas, Under Armour, Levis, GAP, Reebok, Softe, Dallas Cowboys, Dick's Sporting Goods, Academy Sports and several other name brands and retailers," used the new minimum wage as an excuse to fire more than 80 workers in one day, among them many union leaders.

Luke Walsh-Mellet is a solidarity activist currently based in El Salvador.

Labour Notes – <http://labornotes.org>
CISPES – <http://cispes.org>

Further Good News

LETTER OF THANKS

17th November 2016

With this letter, the organisation Professionals for Social and Business Auditing (PASE) acknowledges receipt of a donation of £400 (GBP) (equivalent to \$470 USD) from the Environmental Network for Central America (ENCA), specifically to cover administrative office costs incurred by PASE's Legal Services office and La Isla Foundation. The donation will be divided equally (50% each) between the two to cover administrative costs of each project or office.

The two organisations of PASE and La Isla Foundation thank the UK organisation ENCA for the aid and solidarity collaboration with these two organisations located in the department of Chinandega in the west of Nicaragua with the aim of giving social, legal and economic support to the communities affected by Chronic Kidney Disease of non-Traditional Sources (CKDnT).


Alberto Legall López
Coordinador de Proyecto
PASE


Jugh Salgado
Presidente
Fundación Isla



The effects of free trade treaties

By Marco A. Gandásegui

Translated by Rick Blower, February 2017

The situation in the Panamanian agriculture sector reached its limit with the recent government attacks aimed at the producers. Taking advantage of the lack of planning, the government promoted the purchase of rice from abroad in order that the speculators bankrupted the national producers.

The operation was conceived and executed with skill by the politicians at the service of the interests of the neoliberals. A handful of speculators have their clutches on the government. They create and make firms disappear in the land registry with the sole objective of transferring millions of dollars from the tax coffers to their secret accounts.

How can this be justified? While the producers prepare the rice harvest for the market, the government approves the purchase of millions of bushels [of rice] from overseas and begins to unload it in the national ports? The four export companies authorised for this operation were created with this sole purpose. The producers, from Darien up to Alanje, through Chepo and Coclé, have protested but without a reaction from the presidential palace. The speculators are too busy celebrating to the sound of their cash machines. To respond to governmental indifference, the producers organised a march towards the Palace of the Herons.

During the march towards the Presidency, agricultural producers demanded solutions. In a communication the general secretary of the Independent Movement of National Refoundation (MIREN), Juan Jovane, stated that “the people demand a quick and effective solution to the scandalous onslaught of the government against national agricultural production and the

food security of the Panamanian family.”

He denounced the government for corruption and theft “from the workers of the cities and the producers in the fields.”

In the statement from MIREN, they “proposed an orderly and planned system of agriculture, based upon scientific criteria and in which serious and responsible politics takes the lead.” In the case of rice, those governing have in their hands the statistics which speak of their deceit.” They know very well what is the national demand and they have the necessary information to know how many hectares of land are required to satisfy that demand.”

Nowadays, the national producers sow 92 thousand hectares of rice and harvest 6.2 million bushels. With a work plan, the rice producers can sow double and harvest even more. The government can re-open the silos to store whatever is surplus and have it ready for when there are poor harvests. In the past, Panama even exported rice. With these mercantile practices, we have returned to the most corrupt years in our history where governments and speculators conspire to ruin the rice producers and other agricultural producers.

The statement from MIREN signals that the situation for the rice growers is replicated for each agricultural category. “Those in government and their bad associates – speculators and financiers – make their calculations not to satisfy the needs of the country. When they come to power, their plans consist of creating more confusion and taking advantage of the opportunities to steal more.”

The business of importing rice has triggered hardship for the consumers. Between 1970 and 1990 Panama was self-sufficient: it did not import rice. In

2000, after the Free Trade Agreement with the United States, Panama imported 1.8 million bushels, and in 2010 these imports of rice increased to 2.5 million bushels. The amount in 2015 was 2.3 million. Who have become millionaires? The speculators and the monopolists associated with the government.

MIREN endorses the demands of the national producers that match the needs of the people. Their communication says that “we support the planning of production on behalf of the farmers to ensure healthy competition and to eradicate the tentacles of the monopolists entwined in the government.”

The sector worst hit by official corruption is the small rice producer. Between 1990 and 2010, of the 1,154 small producers, only 717 remain. There has been an increase of 35% among the larger producers.

For their part, MIREN demands a re-negotiation of the Free Trade Agreement with the United States which in a matter of a few years will definitely finish off what little remains of Panamanian agriculture.

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www.marcoagandasegui14.blogspot.com
www.salacela.net
<http://www.alainet.org/es/articulo/182538>

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Remittances

– a possible Trump effect

Not too surprisingly given that ENCA has been working in the region since the late 1980s, we have some 'inside' sources who provide us with interesting snippets of information every now and then.

Our latest comes from within the BCIE (the Central American Bank of Economic Integration) and concerns the possibility that US President Trump may tax the remittances not only of Mexican nationals residing in the USA to their families in Mexico, but may also extend this tax to nationals of all the Central American states. There are serious concerns that the currently untrumpeted intention to tax remittances to pay for the construction of the Border Wall with Mexico could seriously affect the economies of Central American states which include the remittance statistics in their currency reserve projections. The knock-on effect of such an action would be extra hardship suffered by all those families whose major money-earner works in the USA.

Table 1 Total remittances to Central American countries and Mexico, 2015

Country	Remittances 2015 (US\$ millions)	Remittances as % of GDP 2015
Belize	156	4.7
Costa Rica	527	1.2
El Salvador	4,280	16.8
Guatemala	6,285	9.9
Honduras	3,719	17.4
Mexico	24,771	1.9
Nicaragua	1,190	9.7
Panamá	645	1.6

Sources: Central Banks of each country, as given in Orozco, M., Porras, L. and Yansura, J. (February 2016) 'The Continued Growth of Family Remittances to Latin America and the Caribbean in 2015'. Inter-American Dialogue.

Table 2 Central American Migrants Entering US via Border Crossing

Country	2010	2014
Honduras	27,733	38,480
Nicaragua	4,662	5,502
Guatemala	36,772	42,264
El Salvador	34,619	44,676
Sub-region	103,786	130,922

Source: Orozco, M., Porras, L. and Yansura, J. (February 2016) 'The Continued Growth of Family Remittances to Latin America and the Caribbean in 2015'. Inter-American Dialogue.



A related economic issue arises from the BCIE's estimate that Honduras needs to create 140,000 jobs this year in order to match demographic projections to the employment requirements of the economy. The best case scenario, however, suggests that a maximum of only 100,000 jobs could be created. Clearly, this has implications for social stability which in turn also has implications for attempted migrations northwards to the USA.



Protecting Human Rights Defenders in Central America

On Saturday 26th November ENCA and Peace Brigades International (PBI) ran a workshop at the 2016 Latin America Conference held in Congress House, London. The panel seminar was entitled 'Defending Territory and Resisting Megaprojects – Threats to Human Rights Defenders in Central America', and it addressed the issue of how best to protect defenders of human, environmental and land rights in Central America.

In June 2016, Global Witness published a report entitled 'On Dangerous Ground' which showed that 2015 was the worst year on record for killings of land and environmental defenders – that is, people and local organisations who struggle by peaceful means to protect their land, forests and rivers from imposed development megaprojects such as mines, export crop plantations, dams and reservoirs and other energy and resource extraction operations. These people come under serious threats originating from the companies and governments which promote such megaprojects, and nowhere

are these threats greater than in Central America.

Over the last 27 years, ENCA has worked with many local environmental organisations in Central America. These include COPINH (the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organisations of Honduras) whose leader Berta Cáceres was assassinated in March 2016. COPINH has since suffered several other assassinations and attempted assassinations.

PBI is an organisation that arranges 'unarmed bodyguards' who accompany people under threat of some form of violence because of their peaceful protests against the violation of their land, communities, rivers or forests by so-called 'development' projects. In the seminar, PBI was represented by Adam Lunn who spent a year accompanying Guatemalan organisations that were defending their land against hydro-electric power projects. ENCA was represented by Doug Specht and Martin Mowforth. Doug has

developed an online mapping and fact facility about mining companies in many parts of the world, especially Central America. He also runs the Voz website (<https://en.1voz.org/>) an online human rights mapping and fact facility. Martin has been a member of ENCA since 1989 and a regular visitor to Central America serving frequently as a link with numerous Central American socio-environmental organisations.

Helen Yuill of the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign (NSC) chaired the workshop and mention should also be made of the organisational work that ENCA member James Watson put in before the conference was held.

The seminar, attended by over 30 people, covered the nature and origins of the violence faced by human rights defenders along with the mechanisms which can be used to defend them against the threats. ENCA and PBI are currently considering further joint work to protect defenders of land rights, environmental rights and human rights in Central America.

The conference was attended by over 500 people and came at a critical moment for Latin America in the wake of the election of Donald Trump and the death of Fidel Castro. More than 500 campaigners, politicians, trade unionists, journalists, students and academics took part from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Ecuador and the UK.

For a report on the conference, go to: <https://latinamericaconference.wordpress.com/2016/12/>

See also PBI website: www.peacebrigades.org/



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Meeting Dates 2016

Sunday 18th June and Sunday 15th October 2017

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.