

ENCA



Environmental Network *for* Central America

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BELIZE ACTS TO END OFFSHORE OIL EXPLORATION



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 the exploitation of natural resources benefits the many and not just the few and is carried out within sustainable and renewable bounds.

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Belize acts to end offshore oil exploration

Good news from Belize

By ENCA member Martin Mowforth

In January this year the government of Belize voted to end all oil exploration in its waters. The policy is intended to protect the Belize Barrier Reef World Heritage Site, the world's second largest coral reef after the Australian Barrier Reef. The reef is home to many endangered marine species such as hawksbill turtles, rays, various species of sharks and manatees.

It is rarely acknowledged in the mainstream media, but the ban is in part due to extensive lobbying by environmental groups in Belize since as early as 2006. Significant amongst these groups has been the Belize Coalition to Save Our Natural Heritage. But the decision has also been widely welcomed by international organisations such as the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).

Oil drilling puts at risk not just the marine biodiversity that is dependent on the reef, but also the country's lucrative tourism industry which employs directly at least 25 per cent of the economically active population and indirectly and occasionally many more. Especially significant within the tourism industry is the dive sector which is dependent on the state of the reef. Belizean waters include three of the Caribbean's four atolls: Lighthouse Reef; Glover's Reef and the Turneffe Islands. Reef related tourism, fishing and other activities are estimated to

have significant economic impact on a half of the country's population.

By contrast with Belize's decision, also in January this year Donald Trump opened up nearly all US waters to oil drilling in a move cheered by the oil industry. The decision affects many areas previously protected on environmental and conservation grounds. Clearly his memory covers only a short time span which can be no great surprise – Deep Water Horizon in the Gulf of Mexico appears to have been forgotten already.

On the other hand, Belize's decision lights the way for developing nations to take control of their own resources and to make decisions for the benefit of their own peoples and environments. Candy González (of the Coalition and also of the Belize Institute of Environmental Law and Policy, BELPO), however, points out that, despite the headlines, "it is a moratorium, not a ban." She adds that "that is one of the problems with it" and that it is "Not what we wanted, but it is something."

Sources:

- Greg Beach (8th January 2018) 'Belize votes to indefinitely end all oil exploration in its waters', *Inhabitat*.
- Graeme Green (13th January, 2018) 'Belize bans oil activity to protect its barrier reef', *The Guardian*.
- Adele Ramos (5th December 2015) 'Belize beats UNESCO deadline to ban offshore exploration', *Amandala*.
- Akshat Rathi (8th January 2018) 'As Trump opens more waters for oil exploration, the tiny nation of Belize shows a better way', *Quartz*.
- Candy González (6th February 2018) Personal communication.

Multi-stakeholder conference celebrates social dialogue and cooperation in the banana industry

The following short item was taken from the Banana Trade Bulletin produced by Banana Link. We are grateful to Banana Link for their permission to reproduce the item here.

The third conference of the World Banana Forum (WBF) in Geneva in November demonstrated the value of our work to promote constructive dialogue towards achieving fair, equitable and sustainable practices in the banana trade. The conference, attracting over 300 delegates from 42 countries across all continents, celebrated many significant achievements of multi-stakeholder dialogue, including:

- an Occupational Health and Safety training manual
- a set of best practices for sustainable production
- a practical guide for measuring and reducing carbon and water footprints
- a global multi-stakeholder Task Force to combat the disease Tropical Race 4 that threatens the existence of the most common strain of bananas
- a search for a commonly agreed method for calculating decent

standards of living for workers at exporting-country level

- the facilitation of successful labour relations dialogue in Peru and West Africa.

Banana Link facilitated the participation of nearly thirty delegates representing our trade union and small farmer organisation partners from banana exporting countries in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America, to ensure those with the least power in the industry could actively influence conference discussion.

Ahead of the World Banana Forum (WBF) conference, Banana Link and the International Union of Foodworkers (IUF) coordinated a preparatory meeting for the delegates from trade unions and small farmer cooperatives representing more than 600,000 people, which developed a set of proposals for the conference, calling for:

- the replacement of large scale monoculture by diverse ecological

production systems that increase resilience to disease and climate change

- an end to the use of toxic agrochemicals
- a new approach to industrial relations that treats workers and their unions with dignity and respect through internationally recognized standards of freedom of association and collective bargaining
- fair distribution of value along the supply chain, enabling workers to secure a living wage
- women to have an active and meaningful role at all levels of decision making.

Banana Link is based in Norwich and we recommend that readers visit its website - <http://www.bananalink.org.uk/> - for the latest news on production and consumption issues of many tropical fruits, not just bananas.



Some of the conference delegates who attended the preparatory meeting hosted by the IUF

Exploring alternatives to hazardous pesticides in Costa Rica

ENCA member Dr Stephanie Williamson reports on project work by the Regional Institute for Research on Toxic Substances (IRET) at the National University (UNA) of Costa Rica.

Despite its 'green paradise' image, Costa Rica has one of the highest intensities of pesticide use in the world. Pesticide use is particularly high on export crops of banana, pineapple, melon and coffee. Much of this production is on large farms but medium and small-scale farmers are also involved. Pesticide use is often high on vegetables grown for local consumption too.

To raise national awareness of the level of use of hazardous pesticides in Costa Rica, agronomist Fernando Ramírez and his team at IRET surveyed pineapple and coffee farmers to find out which pesticides they are using. The team also analysed government data on pesticide imports. Their findings revealed that in 2015 over 10,000 tons of highly hazardous pesticides (HHPs) were imported. Coffee farmers reported using 18 different HHPs, while pineapple

farmers reported 8 HHPs in common use.

The team has shared these findings with government decision makers, farmer associations, university students and agricultural extension staff, along with training on understanding how pesticides can harm people and the environment. An important message for farmers was that not only the 'red' labelled pesticides under Costa Rica's hazard colour coding qualify as HHPs, due to their acute toxicity to humans, but others are problematic too. These include known and probable carcinogens, pesticides causing foetal abnormalities or harming the reproductive system, plus numerous pesticides highly toxic to bees, aquatic life and those that persist for months or more in soil or water.

Part of the reason for continued reliance on harmful pesticides is that farmers and policymakers often feel there is no option but to use pesticides or they fear that alternatives will be less effective. IRET therefore carried out pilot field

trials to explore safer alternatives. In pineapple, they looked at alternative methods to the HHP ethoprophos for controlling nematodes, microscopic worms which attack the roots of young pineapple plants. Ethoprophos is a priority for phase-out as it is acutely toxic to humans, putting farm workers at risk, and it is also extremely harmful to soil life. The team trialled two different biological pesticides, based on fungi which feed on nematodes, plus 'wood vinegar', distilled from burning woody material, and compared these with the standard ethoprophos treatment. Results indicate all three alternatives can be as effective as ethoprophos. Even better is that the alternatives are much cheaper than ethoprophos and can be applied without special equipment or extensive training. An interesting result was that pineapple plants were significantly lower in weight in plots treated with ethoprophos, suggesting harmful side-effects on soil organisms needed for growing a healthy crop.

The project held a regional workshop on experiences in growing coffee without the use of HHPs, with speakers from Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. Presenters highlighted the importance of improving soil health (physical structure, chemical composition and microflora/fauna) to nurture coffee bushes more able to resist pest attack and diseases. Farmers from Cooperative Nahuala in Guatemala are reviving soil life by making solid fertilisers on-farm (worm compost, composted chicken manure). The co-op has a small 'biofactory' to make their own organic biofungicides, bioinsecticides and biofertilizers. They report good results in coffee rust control but explain that organic products take more time to work than synthetic fungicides so



Motor-strimming at Monsol farm. (Photo credit: Juan R. Montero Gamboa)

farmers need to understand that using organic methods is not a quick fix.

The Ecological Coffee Cooperative La Labor (COCAFELOL) in Honduras is helping its members recover from major outbreaks of coffee rust disease but without relying on fungicides. It trains farmers on how to improve biological activity of the soil and to enhance nutrition of coffee bushes, making groves more resilient to pest and disease attack, especially under changing climatic conditions. COCAFELOL have gained good experiences using home-made mineral preparations and biofermented products, plus recycling pulp from coffee processing as fertiliser.

In Costa Rica, medium-sized farm Monsol described their success in eliminating herbicide use, controlling weeds instead with trimmers and manual slashing. Along with pruning of shade trees, this generates around 50 tons of green material cuttings per hectare each year, which the farm owners view as a valuable resource. They use some of this material to mulch the soil around coffee bushes and apply home-made biofermented microbial products to the remainder to speed up its breakdown into compost. Non-competitive plants are allowed to grow between coffee rows to protect the soil from erosion. By recycling horse manure, waste from livestock feeding stalls and making their own worm compost, Monsol farm has hugely reduced its use of synthetic fertiliser, while rebuilding soil fertility in an area where many conventional farms suffer from degraded soils.

These positive experiences show that reducing reliance on agrochemical inputs is feasible, technically and economically, for large and small farms.

For more information about the project *Phasing out Highly Hazardous Pesticides in Costa Rica*, visit the web pages hosted by PAN UK at <http://www.pan-uk.org/phasing-out-hhps-costa-rica/>

For more information about the work of IRET, go to: <http://www.iret.una.ac.cr/>

New Costa Rican Law Allows Workers to be Reinstated Quickly

The following article features an old friend of ENCA, Didier Leitón Valverde, from the Costa Rican SITRAP union. It is taken from Banana Trade News Bulletin No. 57 (November 2017) and is reproduced here by kind permission of Banana Link.

After years of work and much political and legislative wrangling the Labour Procedures Reform (RPL in Spanish) finally came into force in Costa Rica in July 2017. The independent trade unions that have struggled for years to defend workers they consider to have been sacked unfairly in the banana and pineapple industries, having to put up with tribunal procedures that could take up to 5 or 6 years, are seeing the first tangible results from the new legislation.

The law now means, amongst other advances, that hearings and decisions on reinstatement after unfair sacking can be expedited in just a few weeks from sacking to reinstatement. Since the RPL came into force two women and eight men working at different pineapple and banana plantations have all regained the jobs from which they were unfairly dismissed, thanks to their affiliation to the SITRAP trade union.

The workers took their cases to the Labour Ombudsman which is the new body established to present cases in the Labour Court. They used the special rapid procedure for cases of alleged discrimination that is one of the measures included in the Reform. In all ten cases in the last few weeks, the pineapple and banana workers, sacked because they were members of the union, got their jobs back in Grupo Acon, Del Monte and Dole plantations and packhouses.

The reinstatements were ordered by judges within less than one week of the cases being presented. In cases where the employer is reluctant to accept the court order, Labour Ministry staff are empowered to accompany the worker back to their former job.

The trade union's General Secretary, Didier Leitón Valverde, comments that:

“this shows us that the RPL is benefiting working people and shows that some people were wrong to say that it would be of no value to workers. It also demonstrates that there are good professionals in the Ombudsman's office and Labour Courts who are interpreting the legislation properly. People who did not join the union before out of fear that the employer could sack them indiscriminately are now losing their fear.”
Didier Leitón Valverde

Banana Link website:

<http://www.bananalink.org.uk/>

SITRAP website:

<http://www.sitrap.net/quienesSomos.html>



Didier Leitón Valverde

End of Year Summary from GHRC

The following article reproduces, in part, Annie Bird's 2017 end-of-year summary of events in Guatemala and Honduras. Annie is the new Executive Director of the Guatemala Human Rights Commission (GHRC). The report concerns many of the campaigns and struggles that ENCA has followed and publicised over the last few years. It is reproduced here by kind permission of the GHRC and of Annie Bird.

The human rights challenges in Guatemala have only seemed to grow. Poverty has increased in the past two decades and militarisation is increasingly used as a strategy to stifle dissent. Violence, often suffered by the most vulnerable sectors of the population, goes largely unpunished. Decisions made in Washington, DC, whether by agencies of the US government or multilateral development banks, can generate a human rights crisis. US drug policy and demand play a particularly devastating role in undermining the justice system in Guatemala and in militarisation. This is why we work from Washington to promote respect for human rights in Guatemala.

Fighting Impunity

The fight against impunity has been a focus of Guatemala's human rights community since the signing of the 1996 Peace Accords, and GHRC has been a major support in that struggle. The **International Commission Against Impunity (CICIG)** was created to take apart clandestine criminal networks involved in corruption and grave human rights abuses. In the same way that GHRC pressured for the creation of CICIG in 2006, GHRC supported the continuation of CICIG when it faced a crisis last August. The crisis began when CICIG initiated an impeachment proceeding against Guatemalan President Jimmy Morales, accusing him of receiving illegal campaign funding from organised crime networks. Morales, in turn, declared the head of CICIG a *persona non grata*. I was in Guatemala to see the crisis unfold and report to key congressional offices. As the crisis continues GHRC reiterates the importance of CICIG's work with congressional offices, development banks, and the State Department. Although the head of CICIG remains in the country, still

working against impunity, Morales appears to have gained the upper hand, refusing to resign even as hundreds of thousands of Guatemalans have demanded that he step down. Criminal networks have only been emboldened by this outcome and attacks on rural communities increased.

Supporting Communities' Right to Justice

As large-scale development projects move in to illegally exploit the land and resources of Guatemala's most marginalized populations, GHRC supports the affected communities. One example is the **Council of Cho'rti Communities, COMUNDICH**. COMUNDICH is recovering land taken illegally from Cho'rti communities by individuals involved in organised crime, tied precisely to the networks protected by Morales' party. Over the past four years seven leaders of COMUNDICH have been murdered in retaliation, with impunity. Seven more Maya Cho'rti defenders have been imprisoned, while 48 additional community members have arrest warrants pending, all because of the influence of criminal networks within the judicial system.

GHRC recently awarded the **2017 Alice Zachmann Human Rights Award** to COMUNDICH, represented by Indigenous mayor Elodia Castillo. While in DC, she had meetings in Congress, the State Department, the cross-agency Human Rights section of USAID, and sister organisations. GHRC was by her side to insist on justice for those murdered, to decry the misuse of the criminal justice system as retaliation for use of the same justice system to recover land rights, and to insist affected communities' rights to consultation and consent before any large project is undertaken.

We also continue to support Lolita Chavez, an authority with the **Ki'che Peoples Council**. While monitoring illegal logging in early June, she was pursued over three days by armed men, criminal networks she explains are protected by Morales' political networks. She fled Guatemala and now, upon returning, is subject to false prosecution. We represent her and Ixil women's rights activist Juana Baca before the **Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR)**; in this capacity we report on

violence, but also on criminal investigations initiated by her and the malicious prosecution against her. We are also investigating this crisis' possible ties to the REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation) initiative.

Stopping Evictions and Supporting Community Led Development

President Trump's Chief of Staff, **General John Kelly**, came to the White House from two years as Chief of the US Southern Command (SouthCom), with a brief detour as Secretary of Homeland Security. His priority, then and now, is the promotion of transnational corporate investment in Central America through the **Alliance for Prosperity**. As he said himself in a May 4 event in the Atlantic Council, "We [SouthCom] had to outmaneuver the Interagency [executive agencies] because they were not interested [in the Alliance for Prosperity]." **SouthCom**, as he made clear, was the motor behind the Alliance for Prosperity, a development strategy which in practice promotes investments that often further impoverish communities. During 2017, its first year, approximately \$750 million in US assistance was budgeted to support the Alliance. On June 15 and 16, the Departments of Homeland Security, State, and Treasury, with leadership from Kelly, hosted a Miami conference to promote the Alliance and corporate investment.

Kelly touts the Alliance's Plan as a way to stem migration and drug trafficking. The problem is that the plan is created and implemented by the governments of Guatemala and Honduras, which are deeply tied to organised criminal networks, extending from local mayors and prosecutors up to the highest levels. These same networks that terrorize communities also define the development priorities. Investors in projects like dams and mines gain illegal concessions to resources belonging to indigenous and small farming communities. They obtain the concessions through influence trafficking and corruption and then use violence to impose the projects. Poor communities, meanwhile, whose children are forced to migrate, do not

benefit from 'development'; they are further impoverished.

Across Guatemala, hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children living on land sought by investors in industries like hydroelectric energy, mining and crops used for bio-fuels are under constant threat of forced evictions, denied their rights to secure title to their lands. For example, the communities that inhabit the **Laguna del Tigre and Sierra de Lacandon National Parks**, part of the Maya Biosphere Reserve, live in complete vulnerability. Villagers of Laguna Larga fled their homes taking refuge in Mexico in advance of over a thousand soldiers and police, who then set up a military base in their school. The eviction was requested by the National Council for Protected Areas (CONAP), which claimed, without any legal justification, that the community was illegally occupying land and responsible for depredation. While it is true deforestation is a serious problem, it is equally evident that the poor communities scapegoated by CONAP do not have the trucks and other resources necessary to haul the Maya Biosphere's old growth trees to markets, and that CONAP and the environmental brigades of the military have allowed narco-cattle ranchers, whom area residents blame for the deforestation, to proliferate.

GHRC collaborated with the **Human Rights Legal Clinic** to present a petition for human rights abuses in defence of 37 communities evicted in the northern Petén, including Laguna Larga, and requested protective measures on their behalf. In September GHRC coordinated meetings for the Human Rights Legal Clinic lawyers representing the communities in Congress, the State Department, the IADB, and the IACHR. Shortly after, the IADB suspended a loan to CONAP, and the IACHR awarded protective measures. Although the communities have outlined a plan of environmentally sustainable, community-led development, the government refuses to engage in a serious dialogue. Together with the American Friends Service Committee, during the first week of November, GHRC promoted another round of meetings, educating Washington policy makers about the Petén. GHRC works in similar ways in the **Polochic Valley** with the **Campesino Unity Committee (CUC)**, the communities threatened by palm interests and mining in the **Achi communities of Rabinal**, who are under threat of eviction. They live atop nickel deposits now in demand as the Fenix

nickel processing plant, among the largest in the world, goes into full operation.

We support the Chixoy-dam affected communities, who show that investment on their terms and as they define it, through the **Chixoy Dam reparations plan** can end the legacy of poverty left by genocide.

Ending Militarisation in the Northern Triangle

Because the United States' policy is increasingly regional in focus, GHRC has undertaken some provisional work on human rights issues in Honduras. A push toward militarisation characterises US efforts in both countries. United States special forces are now training Central American special forces at a rate three times that of a decade ago. US special forces in Guatemala have increased **training of the infamous Kaibils** in their facility in Poptún, Petén, and of Honduran special forces in the infamous 15th Battalion training facility in the Bajo Aguán region of Colón, Honduras. Both places are epicentres of drug trafficking; many reports tie Kaibils to the infamously brutal Zeta network, and a growing body of evidence links Honduran military related to the 15th Battalion with trafficking.

The creation of the **Military Police for Public Order (PMOP) in Honduras**, eight military battalions to police the civilian population, is a serious setback in Central America's recovery from militarised states and related extreme violence in the 1970s and 1980s. In the **Bajo Aguán Valley** of Honduras, US Special Forces conducted a series of trainings in 2011 and 2012 in the 15th Battalion, while cooperatives reported over 150 death squad killings in the area. US trained Captain Mariano Diaz was an officer on the base at the time and is now imprisoned charged with the murder of Honduran indigenous rights activist Berta Cáceres. Before his arrest he was a PMOP instructor. PMOP has been accused of running death squads.

GHRC is collaborating with **Honduran human rights organisations** to document 34 killings of electoral fraud protesters in November and December, over 20 of those by PMOP, which opened fire on the crowds and shot protestors, often as they fled. The State Department failed to denounce these killings. Early reports indicate that it appears the four student leaders who played a

leadership role in protests were killed, and an indigenous leader injured, outside of the context of the protests, leading to concern that death squads may be operating.

In partnership with the **Council of Popular and Indigenous Organisations of Honduras (COPINH)** and with the support of seasoned Guatemalan human rights lawyers and experts, GHRC is helping to monitor the investigation into the murder of Berta Cáceres and to seek prosecution at the highest levels. We coordinated the November presentation in Washington of the findings of the International Advisory Panel of Experts (GAPE), a group of international lawyers, who found that since May 2016, Honduran authorities have had sufficient evidence to arrest the individuals at the highest levels of leadership in the DESA hydroelectric corporation for Berta's murder, and to extend the investigation to government officials. Nevertheless, they failed to act. GHRC organised a congressional briefing and set up pivotal meetings in Congress, the World Bank, and State Department for members of the GIAPE. In the aftermath of the elections in Honduras, GHRC organised a press conference for lawyer Ariel Madrid, who works with the **Broad Movement for Dignity and Justice (MADJ)**, one of Honduras' most targeted groups, and other human rights leaders who video-conferenced in from Honduras, and is collaborating with MADJ and other Honduran organisations to document the post-elections repression.

GHRC is collaborating with the **Garífuna federation OFRANEH** seeking justice for four Miskitu bystanders killed in a **DEA-led operation in the town of Ahuas** in 2012. In October GHRC's Guatemala office coordinated a delegation to the **Bajo Aguán**, with long-time Guatemalan partners **UDEFEQUA** and **Prensa Comunitario**. The Guatemala-Mexico border and the Kaibil's home base of the Petén are focuses of militarisation. GHRC asked the IADB to not fund a border-militarisation loan. That loan is no longer planned. GHRC also educated IADB officials about militarisation around the San Andrés dam in San Mateo Ixtatán.

By Annie Bird

GHRC website: www.ghrc-usa.org

IDB Considers Multimillion Dollar Loan to Impose Migratory Controls across Mexico-Guatemala Border

A blog post by the Centre for International Environmental Law (CIEL)

Reproduced by kind permission of CIEL

Originally posted August 7, 2017

Recently, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) was poised to provide US \$200 million to Guatemala to strengthen “competitiveness” and “security” by implementing fiscal and migratory controls at border crossings with Mexico.

This project did not immediately stand out among the dozens of projects collected each week by the Early Warning System (EWS) in the region. Indeed, while the EWS seeks to alert communities of all projects under consideration for Bank finance, we focus on projects that have a high risk of causing adverse impacts or rights violations in nearby communities – typically large-scale infrastructure projects, mining, hydroelectric dams, among others.

Yet harmful impacts are not only caused by the physical footprint of a project or

by displacement or contamination associated with the operation of a project. Sometimes the way a project is structured, or the choice of its implementing partner, raises equal concern.

In this case, the scale and impact of the project were hard to determine, but I immediately noted the government agency that would receive the \$200 million loan and be responsible for overseeing the proposed fiscal and migratory controls: it was the Guatemalan Defence Ministry.

Supporting an Expanded Role for the Military?

Having worked on Guatemalan human rights issues for eight years, this raised serious red flags. The IDB project involved activities that fall outside the mandate of the Defence Ministry, an

issue that would raise concern in any country. Yet in Guatemala, these concerns are exacerbated by the recent legacy of intense state-sponsored violence and the nation’s ongoing struggle to define a clear – and appropriately limited – role for the military. For example, fiscal controls fall explicitly within the mandate of a different agency, and empowering the military by giving it control of the programme budget would expand its duties unnecessarily.

Moreover, the military has been linked to numerous corruption scandals and has been shown to have connections to transnational organised criminal groups even reaching its highest levels. For example, there are documented cases of weapons thefts from Guatemalan military bases, indicating a direct flow of arms from the military to criminal organisations. This is echoed by a report by the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) on arms trafficking, which found evidence of “intentional diversion of military or police arsenals to the black market.”

“Better Control of Migrants On Their Way to the US”

The fact that the Defence Ministry is the executing agency isn’t the only red flag. IDB objectives listed in project documents also raised concerns. For example, the project explicitly aimed to impede migration of those seeking to travel to the United States. This objective has been part of a regional effort – pushed by the US and funded by the IDB and others – to address the unprecedented number of migrants and refugees reaching the US border in recent years, including unaccompanied minors, from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. In a recent open letter to



Family crossing Río Suchiate at Tecun Uman on the Guatemala-Mexico border. The IDB planned to give millions to the Guatemalan military to bulk up security at this and other border crossings. Credit: Kelsey Alford-Jones.

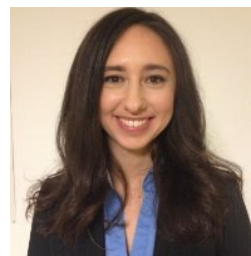
the IDB, dozens of organisations called on the bank to recognise the complex root causes of migration, which include high rates of generalised violence, as well as targeted violence against women, LGBT people, children, and other vulnerable communities. It is tragic that the response to this regional humanitarian crisis is to block passage of migrants and refugees by bulking up the military's presence at the border. Importantly, this initiative could also violate international law.

With the project flagged in the EWS, I reached out to partners in Guatemala to share its details and my analysis. I also ensured the information reached border communities who would be impacted by implementation at border crossings. Then, to ensure these concerns were not passing under the radar, I reached out directly to the US government, both in meetings and in a memo that was circulated to US Treasury officials, the US office of the Executive Director of the IDB, and the IDB project team. Not long after, we were informed that the implementing agency was being reconsidered, and it would no longer be the Defence Ministry. The IDB website

also suggests the Bank has halved funding from \$200 million to \$100 million. Nevertheless, we have yet to see this change reflected on the IDB's website or receive formal confirmation.

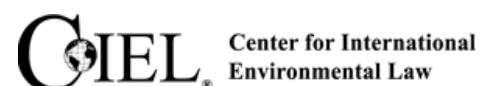
This is a partial win. Guatemalans are more aware of the funding their government is requesting, and the new implementing agency will, hopefully, be the proper one to put new fiscal controls into effect. Yet the overall funding proposal continues to raise concerns, both in the lack of clarity on the specific impacts of the project and in the suggestion that 'border security' includes limiting the ability of refugees and asylum seekers to flee their own country.

The EWS team will continue to track the project as it evolves, and having done analysis and outreach while the project is still in the pipeline, we are now well placed to support communities who may be impacted in the future.



By Kelsey Alford-Jones, Senior Campaigner for the People, Land and Resources Program at the Centre for International Environmental Law.

This project was initially monitored and analysed as part of the Early Warning System, a joint initiative by the Centre for International Environmental Law and the International Accountability Project.



Since 1989, the Centre for International Environmental Law (CIEL) has used the power of law to protect the environment, promote human rights, and ensure a just and sustainable society.

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Berta Cáceres: Victim of broad plot involving DESA executives and a digital smear campaign carried out by a fake network

By ENCA member Pamela Machado

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A year and a half after the murder of Berta Cáceres, evidence of a broad plot to kill the activist has been disclosed by major global outlets. The New York Times¹ revealed on October 28th last year that a team of five international lawyers found compelling evidence that a plot had been carried out for months prior to Berta Cáceres' murder. The plot, which involved state agents and senior executives of *Desarrollos Energéticos (DESA)*, included the planning, execution and cover-up of Berta's assassination.

The report showed a frequent exchange of messages between three high ranking DESA executives and two who were tracking Berta's movements and other members of COPINH. "There was this criminal structure comprised of company executives and employees, state agents and criminal gangs that used violence, threats and intimidation," said Roxanna Altholz, the associate director of the Human Rights Law Clinic at the University of California, Berkeley and a member of the lawyers' group.

Berta and COPINH had long been fighting DESA over the construction of a dam on the Gualcarque River. Officially, the law required DESA to consult with the Lenca community to progress work. It was known, however, that Berta and COPINH opposed the construction since the start when the company received the concession to build the project in 2009.

Intrigued by the revelation in the news, multimedia artist and writer Erin Gallagher² investigated a fake network of social media accounts that performed

a digital smear campaign against Berta and COPINH in December 2015, three months before her assassination.

Evidence gathered by Erin Gallagher revealed that a campaign had been plotted for years prior to the assassination of Berta because of her opposition to the Agua Zarca hydroelectric dam project.

Most of the accounts were created in November or December 2015, signalling

that the fake network was created to get into action soon. The profiles were described by Gallagher as 'generic' as the profile pictures looked like 'they could be any normal Honduran citizen' and most of the profiles did not have cover photos. Moreover, their usernames and handles followed a pattern.

Erin Gallagher stressed the date when the campaign took place: December 11th 2015. Just one day earlier, the Honduran



5:26pm: "I understood that yes the community had been consulted. We should listen to what the hydroelectric company says"

[@MP_Honduras](#) Es increíble como la gente no deja que el país progrese, la gente de COPINH ya no credibilidad tiene

—[@VilmaGodoy1](#)

5:27pm: "It is amazing how people don't let the country progress, the people of COPINH have no credibility."

[@MP_Honduras](#) disculpen, pero eso es reflejo de las acciones provocadores de COPIHN.

—[@nancyo8398842](#)

5:31pm: "Sorry, but that is a reflection of the provocative actions of COPIHN."

court had convicted a military officer for the murder of Tomás García, another member of COPINH and a Lenca indigenous leader.

On the evening of the 10th, the Honduran Public Ministry tweeted about the conviction of the military officer and said that *“the indigenous leader died protesting the construction, without prior consultation of the community, of the Agua Zarca hydroelectric dam.”*

The very next day, the fake network got into action. Leaving replies to the Public Ministry, the fake profiles make untrue claims such as, for instance, that DESA had in fact consulted the Lenca community; that the indigenous community ‘wouldn’t let the country progress’; or even suggesting that Tomás’ murder was the result of COPINH’s provocative actions.



At the date of publishing, November 11th 2017, Erin Gallagher had discovered that all social media accounts that took part in the campaign were still live and that most of them had never tweeted again since.

As she highlights, Berta and Tomás were only two victims among the COPINH members who had suffered threats and attacks for several years, just as this digital smear campaign is only a small part of larger attempts to undermine the Lenca community’s

efforts to protect the Gualcarque river, which is sacred to them.

Sources:

1. The New York Times. *Who Ordered Killing of Honduran Activist? Evidence of Broad Plot Is Found.* 28 October 2017.
[https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/28/world/americas/honduras-berta-caceres-DESA.html?_r=1]
2. Erin Gallagher. *Fake Honduran Twitter: the digital campaign against Berta Cáceres and COPINH.* 11 November 2017.
[https://medium.com/@erin_gallagher/fake-honduran-twitter-the-digital-campaign-against-berta-caceres-and-COPINH-3d1ea62e61ab]

Human Rights Award for COPINH

The Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Peoples of Honduras (COPINH) has been awarded the International Human Rights Prize by the Siero Council, following unanimous agreement by the Jury. The nine thousand euro prize was given on 10th December in a gala in the Polesco Auditorium.

COPINH reached the final last year after nomination by the Latin America Solidarity Committee and had received the backing and endorsement of numerous European and American organisations. The nomination was also supported by the Siero Local Solidarity Council.

COPINH was founded in March 1993 for the defence of the environment and the indigenous Lenca people. One of its founders was the

ecologist and activist Berta Cáceres who was assassinated in 2016. COPINH is a collection of more than two hundred native communities and has transformed itself into a movement fighting against projects like dams, deforestation, the destruction of sacred places and the exploitation of indigenous people.

The Jury was chaired by the Social Welfare Councillor, Natividad Álvarez, along with other committee members, Paula Onis (Foro), Javier Pintado (Somos Siero), Edgar Cosío (IU), Sergio García (Ciudadanos), Juan Camino (Pinsi), the Director General of Cooperation for Development,

Begoña Serrano, María Concepción Camporro and José Ramón Paredes representing the Local Solidarity Council. No representatives of the socialist group, PP, or the Fresneda Neighbourhood Organisation attended. The councillor Paula Onis lamented the lack of nominated candidates – there were only 3 and one didn’t fit the criteria – and so she proposed giving greater publicity to the prize.

*Translated by Maya Elston,
international development student*

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El Gran Canal

Speculation by ENCA

Early in 2017 the government of Panamá switched its political allegiance, or at least friendship, from Taiwan to China. At more or less the same time, 'The Violence of Development' website speculated on the causes of the lack of activity on developments in Nicaragua's Gran Canal giving the following possible reasons:

- *The decline in the fortune of Wang Jing, owner of the HKND company which has the canal concession; or*
- *The Sandinista government's stated policy that all the environmental impact analyses have to be finished before work can begin; or*
- *The Chinese government putting the project on hold as a reward to Panama for cutting off its links with Taiwan; or*

- *The current lack of attraction to international financial investment, made especially precarious because of Trump's commitment to protectionism.*

In June 2017, Global Construction News reported that:

A \$1bn project to build a new deep-water port and container terminal near the Caribbean entrance to the Panama Canal has begun. Both its developer and the firm building it are Chinese.

This has given rise to further speculation on the fate of El Gran Canal, including the possibility that the Chinese government has terminated any notion that China will step in to cover the lack of investment in favour of the Nicaraguan canal and the decline in Wang Jing's finances.

Border dispute between Nicaragua and Costa Rica

The International Court of Justice in The Hague, Netherlands, ruled in January this year that Nicaragua must compensate Costa Rica for the damages caused by its illegal construction works near the mouth of the Río San Juan. This was the court's first ever verdict relating to the costs of environmental damages. Nicaragua will have to pay \$378,890 (USD) to cover the environmental costs along with other costs incurred by Costa Rica.

The verdict followed a December 2015 verdict which judged that Nicaragua had violated Costa Rican sovereignty by establishing a military encampment and by digging channels in the river within a disputed frontier zone.

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Meeting Dates 2018

February 18th | June 10th | October 14th

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.