

ENCA



Environmental Network *for* Central America

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Arms Sales to Honduras


Organisations call upon UK government to stop sales

Longo Mai

A report from the Earth School in Costa Rica

Natural Disasters

Political and social fighting in wake of disasters



STRUGGLES FOR WATER IN GUATEMALA



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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In this issue of the ENCA Newsletter, we have two articles by ENCA member Pamela Machado illustrating struggles for the control of water resources in Guatemala. In the first, she outlines the problems of the Q'eqch'í people around the Cahabón River in the department of Alta Verapaz. In the second, she translates a review of a book recently published by the Guatemalan ecologist group Madre Selva regarding the resistance of Q'eqch'í Mayan communities against hydro-electric projects in the same department.

Pamela is a Brazilian member of ENCA who has recently completed a degree in journalism at the University of Westminster.

Q'eqch'í lives in danger as they fight to protect their land against hydro-electric projects in Cahabón

By ENCA member Pamela Machado

The battle against the construction of dams and hydro-electric projects that have caused misery to the Q'eqch'í in Cahabón for years do not seem to be ending anytime soon.

An investigation carried out by the Madrid-based *El Salto Diario* revealed in November 2017 that a hydro-electric project owned by Spanish magnate Florentino Pérez, president of Real Madrid FC, 'stole' more than 30km of the Cahabón River from the locals. The lack of water supply affects 50,000 people – the Q'eqch'í being the majority of them. In order to access the river, the locals have to go through a security checkpoint controlled by ACS/Cobra.

The constitutional provision which determines that the population should be consulted before projects like that are built remains overseen by companies and the state. According to *El Salto Diario*, the consultation in Santa María Cahabón last

August [2017] resulted in 27,000 votes against the construction of (another) dam along the river – but unsurprisingly the building went ahead anyway. No compensation was given for the people affected in Cahabón.

Bernardo Caal, a Q'eqch'í leader, told online radio station *Cadena Ser* that he fears he will have the same fate as Berta Cáceres. His fears are not unfounded. In May this year, the situation of human rights and land rights defenders in Guatemala escalated to dangerous levels. In the span of five days, three land rights defenders were murdered: Luis Marroquin, from CODECA (Comité de Desarrollo Campesino), CCDTA community leader José Can Xol, and Mateo Chamám Paau, also a CCDTA member. The three of them are Q'eqch'í Maya. [Ed. At the end of May, ENCA signed onto a letter to Guatemalan President Jimmy Morales requesting a heightened defence of the >>



Photo credit: Christopher William Adach / Flickr

precarious situation faced by human rights and land rights defenders in Guatemala.]

The murders followed statements by President Jimmy Morales where he openly criticised the work of human rights defenders, particularly CODECA, posing questions on whether Morales' statements were taken as a 'go-ahead' to execute leaders of communities who oppose the projects.

The hydro-electric projects are part of the goal of the Guatemalan Ministry of Energy and Mining and the Inter-American Development Bank to double production by 2025.

Water privatisation is in fact not a problem exclusive to Guatemala. Widespread corruption across the entirety of Latin America and political mismanagement are given as the reasons for the privatisation of resources. However, it is no news for the sceptic that corporations and states can be accomplices in exploring and exploiting resources in their own interest. ♦

Sources:

Emma Gascó, *El Salto Diario*. November 2017
<https://www.elsaltodiario.com/multinacionales/florentino-perez-roba-un-rio-en-guatemala>

Jeff Abbott, *Upside Down World*. February 2017
<http://upside-downworld.org/archives/guatemala/guatemala-hydroelectric-dam-conflicts-bring-back-past-horrors-for-indigenous-communities/>

Pablo Morán, *Cadena SER*. November 2017.
http://cadenaser.com/programa/2017/11/03/punto_de_fuga/1509728777_744944.html

Letter to President Jimmy Morales. 29 May 2018. Initiated by FoodFirst Information and Action Network (FIAN) and Peace Brigades International (PBI) and signed by 61 organisations (including ENCA).

The Mayan resistance to private concessions of rivers sees some light in Guatemala

Published on 14 March 2018 by ACAFREMIN (Central American Alliance Against Mining). We are grateful to ACAFREMIN for permission to reproduce the article here.

Translated by Pamela Machado

The Guatemalan ecological group Madre Selva recently published a book narrating the resistance of the Q'eqch'í Mayan communities from Santa María Cahabón, in the northern department of Alta Verapaz, to the Oxec and Oxec II hydro-electric projects.

The book, entitled '**Let's free our rivers**' and edited by researcher Simona Violetta Yagenova, hopes to inform the Guatemalan population about opposition to the privatisation of the rivers, emphasising the process of defence by surrounding communities to stop the development of projects along the Cahabón river and its tributary, the Oxec. The book, supported by the Hienrich Boll Stifting Foundation, brings a historical analysis of the social fight against hydro-electric projects.

Both projects belong to the Energy Resources Capital Corp group, registered in Panamá, and they received definitive

authorisation to operate from the Ministry of Energy and Mines on 7 August 2013 and 12 February 2015 for Oxec I and Oxec II, respectively.

The investigation narrates how, from 2012 to 2015, the population of Santa María Cahabón had suffered from assassinations and evictions of community settlers, as well as the imprisonment of some of their leaders who opposed the installation of the two projects.

The movement grew from an extensive defamation campaign, which included the criminalization of one of the directors (Bernardo Caal, detained on 5 February [2017] for supposedly committing the offenses of illegal detention and robbery), charges orchestrated by the corporate and local powers, with the connivance of the Executive and Judiciary bodies.

The Cahabón river, which is 19,596 kilometers long and spans across the >>



north and east of the country, is made up of over 50 rivers and streams, among those the Oxec, Canlich and Chiacté, where six hydro-electric plants are currently operating: the Renaces I, II, III and IV (owned by Multiinversiones Corp), the Oxec I and II and the Chichaic.

The construction of many dams, says the document, seriously changes the fluvial ecosystem around the riverbeds, destroying habitats, modifying the flow and changing the basic water parameters.

After a detailed analysis of the different actions, previous consultations, support and resolutions by the Constitutional entity – that in May allowed the hydro-electric station to continue working despite the fact that a prior consultation, based on ILO Convention 169, had not been held – the Madre Selva publication

affirms that there were contradictions in the resolution.

The book concludes that doing “community consultations in good faith are mechanisms of social regulation, conflict resolution and decision making that are collectively built.”

Last December, the Guatemalan Chamber of Industry celebrated the end of a community consultation process led by the Ministry of Energy and Mines, between September and November in 11 neighbouring communities, where they supposedly reached agreements that were then transferred to the Supreme Court of Justice. However, this process was criticised by activist groups like Madre Selva.

When presented with the results, the Minister of Energy, Luis Chang, said that the agreements delivered to the Supreme Court focus on establishing relationships in an atmosphere of harmony, and that the company will comply with environmental mitigations during and after the construction and operation of the project.

That is a statement opposed by the book **'Let's free our rivers'** which holds that the Guatemalan state has historically “deprived the local people in successive historical periods under the flag of development and progress.”

While the Oxec I and II hydro-electric plants are expected to generate around 100 MW per year, hundreds of people and activists warn that the project has left 50 communities without water. ♦

The lion fish and fish diversity in two protected marine areas of the Caribbean Sea

By Martin Mowforth

Lionfish (*Pterois volitans*) are native to the Indo-Pacific, but are now established along the southeast coast of the U.S., the Caribbean, and in parts of the Gulf of Mexico. It is thought that their ‘invasion’ of these areas of sea over the last 25 years may have been due to humans dumping them at sea from their personal aquaria, although earlier reports that they escaped from one large, breached aquarium after Hurricane Andrew in 1992 are now thought to have been mistaken. They present a problem to many native fish as they are able to eat anything at least half of their own size on account of their extremely wide mouth and expandable stomach.

In 2016 ENCA supported a programme of protection for young lobsters on whose growth many families of the indigenous Guna Indians depend (for both nutrition and finance) in and around the San Blas Islands off the Caribbean coast of Panamá. Through the local Centre for Environmental and Human Development (CENDAH), the Guna fishermen and lobster catchers devised a system of ‘*casitas cubanas*’ under which the young and adolescent lobsters could hide during the day when they would be vulnerable to prey by the lion fish. A report of the programme was given in ENCA 68 (November 2016).

Lion fish have few predators and they eat small crustaceans and fish, including the young of commercially valuable fish and, as the Guna have discovered, lobsters. Their potential danger

is not restricted to fish species, but also relates to the health of the coral because they eat what are known as ‘grazers’ and ‘cleaners’ of the coral which eat the algae that grows over the reef. The presence of the grazers and cleaners keeps the algal levels low and allows the corals to get enough oxygen to survive and to spawn.

A paper by Cobián-Rojas and Schmitter-Soto (2018 in the International Journal of Tropical Biology) reports on the results of research with the title given above. The two protected marine areas in which the study was carried out were the Guanahacabibes National Park (Cuba) and the Xcalak Coral Reefs (Quintana Roo, Mexico); and the study carried out visual censuses of fish species in coral reef habitats during both dry and rainy seasons in 2013 to 2015.

In general, the results showed a greater wealth of species in the Cuban protected area than in the Mexican area. The species diversity was shown to decrease in only one census site in Cuba and in two sites in the Mexican area, although it is posited that this may have been due to fishing activity rather than to the lion fish. It was further posited that the effects of the lion fish on species diversity may not yet be detected. ♦

From Longo Maï, Costa Rica, a report on:

The School of the Earth – Escuela de la Tierra

By Longo Maï residents Roland Spendlingwimmer and Cristoph Burkard and ENCA member Liz Richmond

Following ten years of preparation, experimentation and planning, significant steps were made by the Escuela de la Tierra in 2017, particularly in the implementation of its programmes.

Escuela de la Tierra, School of the Earth, is the name of this initiative which aims to unite farmers, academics, artists, children and young people from Longo Maï and surroundings in a network with like-minded people from any country - all with the aim to protect and respect our environment and all living things on earth.

Professors and students of the National University of Heredia, Costa Rica, the musician and artist Guadalupe Urbina and environmental activists and campesino residents of Longo Maï cooperative were the driving forces that developed programmes and educational content, and ultimately the first building infrastructure in Longo Maï.

In January 2017 the first international permaculture seminar took place within the framework of the newly founded school. It was headed by Scott Pittman (Permaculture Institute, New Mexico) who has a 30 year career of worldwide teaching of permaculture. 30 participants from all continents, including Australia, Egypt, Greece, Canada and Panamá participated in this event in Costa Rica. The village

community of Longo Maï hosted them with its traditional welcoming culture of the 'convivencia', and a group of six young farmers of the village participated in both the theoretical and practical courses about permaculture and its principles and philosophical guidelines.

Equally important were the discussions about the protection of the forest (450 hectares or about 1100 acres) and the rivers of Longo Maï from dangers such as the nearby pineapple monocultures of Del Monte and projects such as hydroelectric power plants planning to degrade or even to dry up the wonderful mountain forest streams of our region.

Shortly after the permaculture seminar, the first building, the nucleus of the School of the Earth, was built on the terrain of Longo Maï. The half-open timber construction (200 square meters) consists of a hall for 60 people, a kitchen, a dining room, an office, two shared rooms and sanitary facilities. In 2018 the solar electricity installation will be completed.

This year, from January 27 to February 10, the second permaculture seminar has taken place. The next one is planned for 2019, again under the direction of Scott Pittman. He is a long-time cooperator of the late Bill Mollison, founder of the permaculture movement. If you are

interested in this seminar please contact www.permaculture.org or www.escueladelatierra.org.

SUMMER COURSES: During the months of June and July 2018, the School of the Earth offers a joint summer programme, accredited by the Universidad Castro Carazo of Costa Rica. Courses allow the students to spend from three to six weeks learning about ecology, society, and culture, living in the multicultural, socially diverse community of Longo Maï, in the South Pacific valley of Costa Rica. A group of international and Costa Rican teachers provide guidance and insight to help understanding and interaction with local persons and groups. ♦

For more information see:

EN <http://www.earthschools.org>

ES: <http://www.escueladelatierra.org/>

COURSES: <http://www.earthschools.org/courses-summer>

VOLUNTEERS/INTERNSHIPS: Escuela de la Tierra also has programmes for volunteers, service learning and internships. Information and applications:

<http://www.earthschools.org/international-studies>

Information about the history, community and how to visit Longo Maï see: www.sonador.info (in English, Spanish or German).



IACHR recognises right to a healthy environment

Liquefied Natural Gas project in Colón, Panamá

*The Centre for International Environmental Law (CIEL) informs us of a new and recent acknowledgement by the Inter-American Court on Human Rights (IACHR) which recognises for the first time the right to a healthy environment as fundamental to human existence. Further, it ruled that countries have a duty to respect these rights — for current **and future generations**, both within and outside their own borders.*

We are grateful to The CIEL and to Carla García Zendejas (CIEL's Director, People, Land, & Resources) for permission to reproduce their article here. [Bold emphasis is reproduced from the original text]

Courts around the world look to precedents set by the Inter-American Court, which means **the Court's opinion will have impacts far beyond the Americas.**

For example, a liquefied natural gas (LNG) project currently under construction in Colón, Panamá's second largest city, highlights the vital connection between a healthy environment and human rights. This project will have long-term, negative impacts not only on local people, but also people throughout Central America and around the world.

Last fall, I visited the construction site of the LNG terminal in Colón to hear from local partners and community members about their concerns around this dangerous project. As we traversed traffic in this busy section of town, we experienced first-hand one of their major fears: proximity.

The site of the LNG terminal threatens not only the immediate surrounding environment, but also the health and safety of thousands of people living and working in this area. The onshore infrastructure includes a dock for tankers, re-gasification plant, storage tank, gas pipelines, and power plant. Local communities say they have not been properly informed or consulted about the project nor do they have a full understanding about the hazardous materials that may be involved.

Just around the bay from the LNG plant is Punta Galeta, a Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute working to conserve and protect the local ecosystem, including sensitive mangroves and coral reefs that are already impacted by mega-development that abounds in Colón. Further jeopardizing these marine ecosystems, the outdated technology being used in the LNG project will use

massive amounts of seawater to re-gasify the liquefied natural gas and cool the power plant, **using the equivalent of ten Olympic size swimming pools of water every hour.**

And LNG tankers are among the highest emitters of greenhouse gases, so the project would also undermine global efforts to combat the climate crisis.

Now more than ever, Central American and Caribbean nations are expanding development projects to leverage and integrate each other's infrastructure needs. **As economic opportunities expand across countries, so too do the environmental and health impacts.** The Colón LNG terminal would be the first in Central America and the biggest power plant in the region. Its completion would lock Central America and the Caribbean into fossil fuel dependence – import/export, consumption, transport, use, and distribution and its related health and environmental impacts - for the foreseeable future. **The precedent set by the Inter-American Court gives new tools and legal arguments to advocates working to stop this dangerous project.**

We commend the Inter-American Court's decision, and we look forward to using it to bolster efforts from our partners to defend the right to a healthy environment in the Americas, and beyond. ♦



Artists impression of the LNG terminal in Colón

CIEL website: www.ciel.org
 Link to original article:
www.ciel.org/court-recognizes-right-healthy-environment-crucial-moment/

Costa Rica's New President Leads the Way with Fossil Fuel Ban

In May this year, Carlos Alvarado Quesada of the centre-left Citizens' Action Party (PAC) was elected President of Costa Rica.

In his inauguration speech he declared that "Decarbonisation is the great task of our generation and Costa Rica must be one of the first countries in the world to accomplish it, if not the first. We have the titanic and beautiful task of abolishing the use of fossil fuels in our economy to make way for the use of clean and renewable energies."

Before becoming President, Alvarado was a journalist, writer and political scientist who had studied at the University of Costa Rica and later at the University of Sussex where he gained a Masters in Development Studies.

There is no doubt that Alvarado is keen to pursue and promote environmental initiatives, but the task of turning the country into what he calls "the world's decarbonisation laboratory" will not be an easy one. As an article in ENCA 69 (March 2017, 'Costa Rica's environmental reputation') pointed out, although the country produces well over 90% of its electrical energy without the use of fossil fuels, around 70% of that energy comes from hydro-electricity generated from large-scale dams, whose environmental credentials are increasingly questioned. Also the Costa Rican transport sector has generated growing use of fossil fuels as a result of the growth in car ownership and use in recent years, with so far few signs of a willingness of switch to electric vehicles.

ENCA wishes Carlos Alvarado well in his presidency and his attempts to decarbonise the country.

Guatemalans vote 'YES' for ICJ Resolution of Belize Dispute

By ENCA member Martin Mowforth

On 15 April this year, Guatemalans voted in a referendum regarding Guatemala's border dispute with Belize. Despite a poor turnout (of around 25%), 95.9% of voters gave a resounding 'YES' to the question of whether the International Court of Justice (ICJ) based in The Hague should be asked to resolve the territorial dispute between the two Central American countries.

The disputed territory covers more than half the current land area of Belize, as shown on the map. The area is part-covered by a number of protected areas and is sparsely populated with scattered farming and fishing villages and tourist locations.

Guatemala gained its independence from Spain in 1821 and argues that it inherited Spain's original claim to the territory.

Belize gained its independence from the United Kingdom in 1981 and argues that the borders were defined by an 1859 boundary convention between the UK and Guatemala.

Relations between the two current governments are cordial, but the last two decades have witnessed various illegal incursions and resource thefts by Guatemalans in the disputed territory and numerous killings of Guatemalan squatters by Belizean civilians and soldiers. At times even air travel between the two countries has been affected by the dispute.

In December 2008, both countries signed an agreement to hold referendums. Although Belize has not yet set a date for its referendum, officials say that it will be held in 2019.

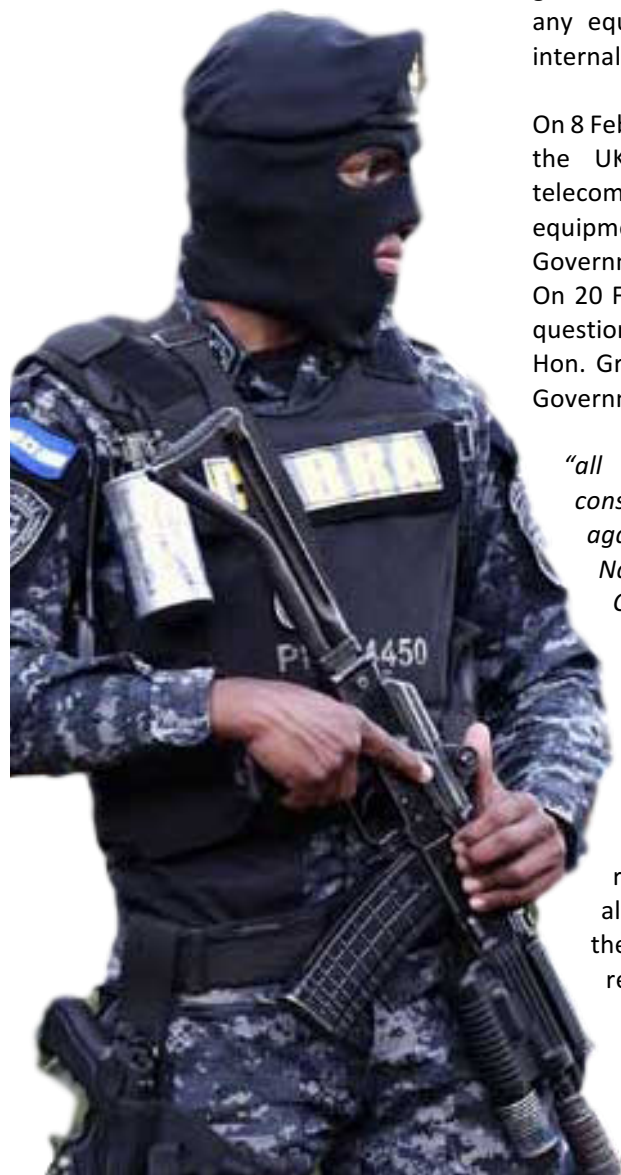


Situation in Nicaragua

Many of our readers will have noted the tragic series of events that have been taking place in Nicaragua over recent months. The situation is presently very difficult to monitor from afar, and even within the country information has proven to be unreliable or difficult to obtain. What is clear though, is that there has been a significant loss of life, and a reduction in the human and environmental rights of the people of Nicaragua. We continue to be in contact with our partners there, and will continue to support what work they are able to do under these conditions. And with this ENCA sends a message to our brothers & sisters in Nicaragua – we want peace, free movement for citizens and an end to the violence. We hope for a constructive dialogue and we send our love and solidarity to Nicaragua in these devastating times.

UK arms sales to Honduras

Few people will be aware that the UK government has sanctioned sales of surveillance and telecommunications equipment to Honduras, despite the appalling situation for defenders of human rights, land rights and environmental rights in that country. In April this year (2018) a group of UK and Honduran organisations wrote to Liam Fox, the UK Secretary of State for International Trade, to urge the UK government to ensure that no further export licences are granted to the Honduran government for any equipment that could be used for internal repression. We include the letter in this newsletter as the threats and violence which it describes are precisely those suffered by our partner organisations in Honduras.



The letter and a list of its signatories to Dr Fox follow.

Dear Dr Liam Fox MP

We, the undersigned, are Honduran and UK based human rights organisations. We are writing to express our dismay about the UK Government's sanctioning of sales of telecommunications interception equipment to Honduras, given the country's human rights situation. Furthermore, we were alarmed to learn that the export of this equipment was allowed despite the question of human rights compliance being raised multiple times in Parliament.[1] We urge you to ensure that no further export licences are granted to the Honduran Government for any equipment that could be used for internal repression.

On 8 February, The Guardian revealed that the UK granted export licences for telecommunications interception equipment to be sold to the Honduran Government just before the elections.[2] On 20 February, in response to a written question regarding the licences, the Rt. Hon. Graham Stuart on behalf of the UK Government stated that:

"all export licence applications are considered on a case-by-case basis against the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria based on the most up-to-date information and analysis available at the time, including reports from NGOs and our overseas network."[3]

Firstly, we would like to draw your attention to the fact that recent NGO reports point to an alarming human rights situation in the country as well as targeted repression of human rights defenders (HRDs), including through illegal surveillance:

- A report by Global Witness in January 2017 entitled 'Honduras: The deadliest place to defend the planet' reported that 123 land and environmental activists were "murdered in Honduras since the 2009 coup, with countless others threatened, attacked or imprisoned." [4]
- Amnesty International's 2017 report documents security incidents suffered by HRDs including killings, threats, surveillance and harassment. [5]
- A 2017 report by an independent group of experts into the murder of renowned Honduran environmentalist, Berta Cáceres, demonstrated that state security forces colluded with officials from a hydro-dam company to carry out surveillance of members of Cáceres' organisation, COPINH, as part of a strategy to control and neutralise community protest. Surveillance increased in the months and hours leading up to her assassination. [6]
- Illegal surveillance of members of COPINH and Berta Cáceres prior to her assassination was not an isolated occurrence, but part of a wider pattern of repression by the Honduran state. A 2016 report by the NGO Peace Brigades International notes that eight prominent Honduran HRDs were on a government list to be put under illegal surveillance. HRDs frequently report the use of surveillance against them, among other tactics to restrict their rights to exercise freedom of expression and association. [7]

Secondly, we note that criterion two of the consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria states the government should; *"exercise special caution and vigilance in granting licences, on a case-by-case basis and taking account of the nature of the equipment, to countries where serious violations of human rights have been established by the competent*

bodies of the UN, the Council of Europe or by the European Union;”[8]

However, these international bodies have frequently drawn attention to serious human rights violations in Honduras:

- The EU Parliament adopted a resolution in April 2016 stating that “Honduras has now become one of the most dangerous countries in the region for human rights defenders.”[9]
- The UN High Commissioner’s 2017 report on Honduras states that: “In a context of stigmatization and questioning of their work, including by government representatives, OHCHR-Honduras continues to document cases of threats, surveillance, information theft and homicides involving human rights defenders.”[10]
- In August 2016, two top United Nations and Inter-American human rights experts described Honduras as one of the “most hostile and dangerous countries for human rights defenders.”[11]

We therefore consider the Government’s assertion that “the issue of the licence was consistent with the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria and remained so at the time of export”[12] to be a misrepresentation.

Furthermore, in the wake of the contested elections in November 2017, peaceful protests broke out across the country. These were met with brutal state repression, with the OHCHR registering 23 killings, 16 at the hands of the state security forces, with at least 60 people injured, half of them by live ammunition.[13] The national human rights network ‘Coalition against Impunity’ registered at least 50 complaints related to threats and surveillance targeting individuals who

participated in protests. In some cases, victims identified the author of the threat or surveillance as members of the National Police or the Military Police.[14]

We note that in recent months the UK Government has repeatedly called on Honduras to prioritise respect for human rights, highlighting in particular freedom of speech and freedom to protest peacefully.[15] However, local organisations have expressed concern that state repression is getting worse. This analysis was echoed by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein at the UN Human Rights Council in March 2018, who stated that: “The already fragile human rights situation in Honduras, which suffers from high levels of violence and insecurity, is likely to deteriorate further unless there is true accountability for human rights violations.”[16] We are concerned that in licensing the export of telecommunications interception equipment to the Honduran Government, the UK is in fact contributing to the curtailment of fundamental human rights in the country.

Taking into account the above, there is reason to believe that the telecommunications interception equipment are highly likely to be used for internal repression. We urge you to ensure that no further export licenses are granted to the Honduran Government for any equipment that could be used for

internal repression.

We look forward to hearing from you further to the above.

Yours sincerely,

Amnesty International UK
Asociación de Jueces por la Democracia
Asociación LGTB Arcoíris de Honduras
La Asociación por la Democracia y los Derechos Humanos (ASOPODEHU)
ATALC-Amigos de la Tierra (FoE) América Latina y El Caribe
The Business and Human Rights Resource Centre
Campaign Against Arms Trade
La Coalición contra la Impunidad
Coordinadora de Organizaciones Populares del Aguan (COPA)
The Corporate Responsibility Coalition (CORE)
The Environmental Network for Central America (ENCA)
Foro de Mujeres por la Vida
Fronteras Comunes de Canadá
Global Justice Now
Global Witness
Grupo Lésbico Bisexual LITOS
Latin American Mining Monitoring Programme
Movimiento Madre Tierra Honduras
Movimiento Mesoamericano contra el Modelo extractivo Minero -M4-
Organización Fraternal Negra Hondureña (OFRANEH)
PAPDA – Haïti
Tavistock Peace Action Group
War on Want

A full list of the sources in this letter can be found at:
<https://enca.org.uk/uk-arms-honduras/>



TWO NATURAL DISASTERS HIT CENTRAL AMERICA

Both disasters gave rise to some political conflict and sparring.

Fuego Volcano

On 3rd June the Fuego Volcano erupted. By two weeks after the eruption, official figures put the number of dead at 110 with 197 people reported as missing, although other sources declared these numbers to be much greater, as whole communities were buried in the lahar of boiling ash, mud, lava and gas.

The government of Guatemala and President Jimmy Morales has come under severe criticism for its handling of the emergency on three counts.

First, the eruption was predicted by Guatemalan Institute of Seismology, Vulcanology, Meteorology and Hydrology (INSIVUMEH) and recommendations about

evacuations were made but brought no response from the authorities.

Second, after the event, President Morales declared that constitutionally Guatemala could not spend anything on mobilizing aid for the situation, a declaration that prompted anger and demonstrations against him.

Third, also after the event, 300 guests and staff at the La Reunión Hotel in Sacatepequez were evacuated shortly after the start of the eruption thanks to a decision made by the hotel manager. The question is posed as to why, if a hotel manager had the good sense to order an evacuation of the staff and guests of the hotel, did the National Coordinator for Disaster Reduction (CONRED) not show the same common sense with respect to the volcano's surrounding village populations? ♦

Indio Maíz

In April this year, a fire destroyed over 12,000 acres of the Indio Maíz Natural Reserve in Nicaragua. At various times during the reporting of the fire, blame was laid on the settlers who cleared land for agriculture and on the Nicaraguan government for supposedly rejecting the assistance of the Costa Rican fire service in tackling the fire. Both claims are now disputed with the benefit of hindsight.

The fire occurred in an area which is marshy and of little use for agriculture, undermining the accusation that it was caused either by campesinos invading from other areas or by palm oil companies (with government backing) trying to clear large tracts of land for new plantations.

The assistance of the Costa Rican fire service was not actually an issue as a spokesman for the Costa Rican fire service explained: "From what we can see, this incident has already been controlled by the army. We were at the border and had to return. We see no problem. In the moment [we offered to help] Nicaragua they didn't have the personnel to fight the fire; thankfully, over the last few hours, it now has the personnel to deal with this emergency and they are engaged in controlling and extinguishing the fire." In fact, the decision not to use the help offered by Costa Rica was taken jointly by the chiefs of the Nicaraguan and Costa Rican fire services during a meeting in Managua on April 8. ♦



Photo: Hector Guerrero and El País

Obituary

Phillip Wearne

On Wednesday 14th March this year ENCA member Phillip Wearne died after having suffered a sudden cardiac arrest whilst running a half marathon the previous Sunday. He was 60.

Phillip had become an active member of ENCA only during the last year, but it was already clear to all other members that here was someone who was not just active, but also full of ideas and experience, someone who spoke with authority, who knew the best options to take when action became necessary. His depth of knowledge and understanding of the issues faced by ENCA were more than impressive. Yet at the same time as making serious considerations of significant issues, he always showed good grace and a strong sense of humour.

Phillip was an investigative journalist who always tried to get to the heart of the issues he was researching, but above all he was a campaigner and social activist who championed the underdog. He was especially engaged with the cause of Haiti and the Haiti Support Group (HSG), and



we refer the reader who wishes to know more about Phillip's life and work to a tribute to Phillip written by Mike Gatehouse and the HSG which can be found at:

<https://haitisupportgroup.org/phillip-wearne-tribute/#comment-2006>

Amongst all the other activities Phillip was involved with, he was a "rock and leader" for his family, especially his sisters Jane, Sue and Liz. The family have held a private goodbye to Phillip and have

arranged a celebration of his life to be held from 2 pm to 7 pm on Saturday 1st September in Pollyfield Community Centre, 27 Avon Road, East-The-Water, Bideford, Devon EX39 4BL. Anybody wishing to attend should RSVP to janesuelizwearne@hotmail.com

ENCA is currently trying to obtain copies of Phillip's numerous books in order to make them available to members. We hope that future newsletters will have news of their availability. ♦

Obituary

José Efraín Ríos Montt

Former Guatemalan dictator José Efraín Ríos Montt died on 1st April this year, aged 91. During the early part of the 1980s he had been responsible for the killing, disappearances, torturing and displacement of hundreds of thousands of people. He was a graduate of the US School of the Americas (also known as the School of Assassins and now officially called the Western Hemispheric Institute of Security, or WHINSEC) and the responsibility for the assassinations and other appalling abuses committed by his security forces is shared with the US government of the day, namely that of Ronald Reagan.

It might be asked by some of our readers why an environmental group should be including an obituary of a 1980s politician. ENCA is a group which broadly goes along with the idea and spirit of *buen vivir*, a notion strongly associated with the indigenous world. Ríos Montt conducted a campaign of genocide against the indigenous peoples of Guatemala, especially the Ixil indigenous community. His regime executed many thousands of Guatemalans forcing up to half a million people to seek refuge in southern Mexico and elsewhere. 448 indigenous villages were razed to the ground and their inhabitants raped, tortured and massacred. This legacy of

Ríos Montt is still felt today within Guatemala and particularly by its repressed indigenous peoples. So this was an environmental issue as much as any other type of issue.

Our solidarity rests firmly with the indigenous peoples of Guatemala in their struggle for justice against this barbaric dictator and all his accomplices. ♦

The Centre for Interchange and Solidarity (CIS)
invites you to participate in the

13th CIS International Election Observer Mission

Human Rights and Democracy in El Salvador

Short and long-term opportunities available

In the upcoming February 3, 2019 election, the people of El Salvador will elect the President and vice President of El Salvador. The CIS Mission plays an important role in providing objective observation, maintaining alertness to political parties tempted to manipulate the process, and providing important recommendations to strengthen the democratic process.

More information:
<http://tiny.cc/CISelection>



ENCA Membership and GDPR

Our members living in the EU will be aware that on the 25th of May 2018 the new GDPR regulations came into force. This regulation is designed to increase data protection and allow you to better know what we do with your data. ENCA has always been committed to careful management of any personal data, but to make things even clearer to you we have laid out our privacy policy on our website: enca.org.uk/privacy-policy/ - You can check your membership status by contacting us here: enca.org.uk/contact-us/

And if you are not a member, join us online (enca.org.uk/join/), or using the form below:

Affiliations: Individual £8, Unwaged £4

Name _____

Address _____

Postcode _____

Tel _____

Email _____

I enclose £_____ affiliation fee

☐ I would like a free copy of a recent ENCA newsletter.

☐ I enclose a donation of £_____ for the work of ENCA.

Return to:

ENCA, c/o Janet Bye, 5 St Edmund's Place, Ipswich, IP1 3RA, UK



In July of this year numerous ENCA members, and other solidarity movements will be heading to Machynlleth in Wales for a day of cultural and educational events celebrating Nicaragua.

Festival Nicaragua Presente. 21st July 2018

The festival, now in its 14th year, is organised with the support of Unite and Victorina Press.

The event will also feature talks from ENCA members, and we will also be running a small stall, where you can renew your membership, pick up newsletters or purchase books and other materials.

For more information and booking:
<https://elsuenoexiste.wordpress.com/>

enca.org.uk
@ENCA_News

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.