

ENCA



Environmental Network *for* Central America

www.enca.org.uk

Issue 74 November 2018

Crisis in Nicaragua

Tourism damaged, and mining companies banging at door

2018 in Guatemala

Killings and environmental degradation rip through country

SLAPPS

Lawsuits used to oppress those who protect the environment



THOUSANDS FLEE VIOLENCE IN CENTRAL AMERICA



ENCA aims to work directly with people in communities who are seeking to arrest environmental degradation and who are often struggling against the repression and violence of armies and police forces acting under the command of wealthy individuals, transnational corporations and corrupt politicians. We campaign with them to place environmental rights within national constitutions and to ensure that the exploitation of natural resources benefits the many and not just the few and is carried out within sustainable and renewable bounds.

Contact Details

Email: enca.info@gmail.com
Website: www.enca.org.uk

Chair: Nick Rau
0208 809 4451
hnnrau@yahoo.co.uk

Secretary: Sheila Amoo-Gottfried
0208 769 0492
sheila.amoo-gottfried@talktalk.net

Treasurer: Janet Bye
01473 254695
janet.bye@btoopenworld.com

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

Editors:
Martin Mowforth
Doug Specht

Cover Photo:
John Moore | Getty Images

Caravan of migrants flee Honduras



It isn't often that Central America hits the mainstream news media in the western world, but recently there has been reporting of the caravans of migrants fleeing from Honduras towards the United States.

ENCA readers and Central America watchers will be aware that Honduras is a failed state run by organised crime and a small, intensely corrupt elite. The government of Honduras is illegal, having stolen last November's election from the party which won it, making a mockery of democracy and the rule of law in the process.

In the words of Rights Action, the people in these caravans are fleeing "violence and government repression, endemic poverty and exploitation, organised crime, corruption and impunity." Sandra Cuffe, a journalist focusing her work on the northern triangle of countries in Central America, reports on the human stories behind one of the caravans, in her Al Jazeera article:

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/10/alternatives-thousands-flee-honduras-bound-caravan-181016193005484.html>

On hearing of the first caravan's attempts to pass into Guatemala, US President Trump warned that if the migrants were not stopped, the US would cut off millions of dollars in aid to Honduras. To most people such a short-sighted policy might

seem designed to force yet more Hondurans into making the arduous trip northwards in search of a better life.

As the caravan has progressed, the Trump administration has done its utmost to turn this human tragedy into a political point scoring moment, and a national emergency. Trump has spent the last few weeks tweeting lies and false statements about the caravan, including suggesting that "criminals and unknown Middle Easterners" are in the caravan. When this notion was widely debunked, a new tactic was undertaken by the administration, with Mike Pence falsely claiming that the caravan was arranged by leftist agitators and funded by Venezuela as part of an attempt to swing the mid-term elections.

In reality the caravan is unlikely to reach the US in time for the election, and furthermore there is no evidence that the caravan is anything other than desperate people forced from their homes by the oppressive US backed Honduran government. Legally too, the members of the caravan have a right under US law to apply for asylum upon reaching the border.

If their claims are not accepted, they will be turned away. There is no national emergency, there is no ominous threat. There is only a group of desperate people looking for a better life. Trump is reportedly aware that his claims about the

caravan are false. An administration official has been noted as saying “it doesn’t matter if it’s 100 percent accurate ... this is the play.” The “play” was to demonize vulnerable people with falsehoods in order to frighten Trump’s base to the polls.

While the toll taken by those travelling in the caravan is hard, they have thus far been reasonably well supported as they pass through areas of Mexico. But Trump’s violent rhetoric in relation to the caravan has already claimed its first lives. Prior to committing the Tree of Life massacre, the shooter, openly blamed Jews for the caravan of “invaders”, a position based upon another unfounded comment by Trump that the Caravan is being funded by George Soros. The shooter made it clear that he was furious at HIAS, founded as the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, a Jewish group that helps resettle refugees in the United States, before killing 11 Jewish worshipers.

While ENCA has a focus on supporting environmental movements in Central America, it is increasingly the case that the unstable global order ushered in by a US administration that plays fast and loose with the truth like no other before, and one which is willing to whip up hatred and violence on a whim, will have deep-set consequences for Central America and the wider region.

The rhetoric around the caravan, that fails to recognise the systemic violence that these people are trying to escape, has already led directly to people being killed. The kind of disregard shown for the truth in this case is also part of a global discourse of mis-information, that has also seen a resurgence of the Right Wing across Latin America, most notably in Brazil. And it has also helped fuel the violence in Nicaragua (see page 4).

The numbers involved in the caravans, their routes, their condition and their accounts are constantly changing and it is quite likely that the situation will be different from its current situation by the time you receive this newsletter. So our reporting here is limited and we urge readers to continue to keep an eye open for further news in appropriate media.

Berta Cáceres Trial Update

The trial in Honduras of eight men accused of the murder of Berta Cáceres – see previous ENCA Newsletters – was due to start on 17th September but was suspended when the Cáceres family lawyers accused the three judges of bias and abuse of authority and requested that they be replaced. The request was rejected, but in another appeal the lawyers demonstrated the judges’ incompetence due to a series of pre-trial decisions and omissions which violated due process and showed bias.

These decisions and omissions included the analysis of mobile phones and computers, a gun and bullets retrieved two years ago. The victims believe that evidence has been concealed and the investigation was too narrow, leading them to surmise that the trial amounts to a political cover-up and a granting of immunity to the dam-building company DESA (against which Berta was leading a campaign). The Board of DESA includes some of the Atala Zablah family, one of the most powerful families in Honduras.

Initially the appeal was accepted, but later the judges declared that the trial would open on the weekend of 20th October without legal representation for the victims who are the Cáceres family, COPINH (the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organisations of Honduras) and Gustavo Castro who was also shot during the killing of Berta Cáceres and who witnessed the events. The judges declared that the victims’ lawyers had abandoned the trial and that the victims would be adequately represented through the public prosecution. Effectively this move ousted the victims’ lawyers and has thrown the case into chaos.

Bertita (Berta Zúñiga Cáceres), Berta’s daughter and now director of COPINH, tweeted: “the court has removed our lawyers and left us without representation for the trial of those accused of murdering my mother. What worse trial could we have?”



Making sense – or not – of the propaganda from and about Nicaragua

A comment by the editors of the ENCA Newsletter

If there is one thing that everybody can agree on, it is that after several months of anti-government protests in Nicaragua, opinions in the country and beyond are now sharply polarised.

For months now, ENCA members, along with others who have contacts, friends and interest in Nicaragua, have been receiving a bewildering array of reports from a wide range of sources within and outside the country. Many of these are extremely worrying and include disturbing reports of violence committed by both pro-government and anti-government forces. Regardless of the source, many of them are supported by evidence from elsewhere, although many others have later proven to be false – ‘fake news’ if you like, and false propaganda spread on social media sites, and later picked up by the international media and spread even further. So it becomes very difficult to know what and who to believe.

Supporting a government that is either arranging or turning a blind eye to paramilitary goon squads which pick up people they suspect of being in the opposition is the kind of tactic which will turn Nicaragua into something similar to the countries of the northern triangle. At the same time, supporting an opposition that has so far thrown its policy hat in with the US and Salvadoran extreme right and with the use of violence would counter and violate everything that ENCA has stood for during its existence.

After discussions within ENCA’s internal email list and at our latest meeting, there was a consensus that was also fearful of the opposition and everything that they represent. The violence meted out at some of the barricades has also included torture and killings and there is evidence that sniper fire has been used against government supporters and police; there is no reason to consider the protests as non-violent.

That makes these protests very different from those waged by land and environmental defenders who are non-violently confronting the forces of power to

save their land or communities or environments from the extractive model of development that is imposed largely in the name of transnational profits or national elites. Throughout its existence, ENCA has argued against neoliberal economic development and has supported those in Central America who are on the front line in the battle against it. So, there is no way we would wish to support the opposition. At the same time there is also no way we would wish to support the Nicaraguan government given the goon squad tactics which have spread fear into many communities.

There are clearly multiple truths at play in the situation in Nicaragua. These are played out in the media battle and some of these truths contradict other truths; but another related truth is that it seems that most of those who take part in this battle refuse to acknowledge the validity of other truths. (SOS Nicaragua springs to mind as the worst denier of anything but their own ‘truth’, but the attempts of the Nicaraguan ambassador to the UK to deny a platform to the opposition at the El Sueño Existe festival is another example of such denial). These issues are also dealt with in a further article by ENCA member Doug Specht for *The Conversation*: <http://tiny.cc/Nicaragua>

We shall continue to monitor the situation in Nicaragua and will give commentaries in future newsletters if appropriate. In the meantime, this brief comment is followed by two summary articles relating first to the effects of the crisis on the Nicaraguan tourism industry and second on the exploitation of the crisis by the Cónдор Gold mining company.

The editors of the ENCA Newsletter wish to make it clear that, although our statement reflects both a correspondence within the internal ENCA e-list and discussions at a recent meeting of ENCA members, it does not represent an 'ENCA position' on the conflict within Nicaragua. The editors have no doubt that other views on the situation exist within ENCA and also that it is doubtful whether such a thing as an 'ENCA position' could be definitively agreed by all ENCA members.

Nicaraguan Tourism takes a hit

By ENCA member Martin Mowforth

Despite the very best efforts of Anasha Campbell, Co-Director of Nicaragua’s Tourism Institute (INTUR), it is clear that the rising star of the Nicaraguan economy – tourism – has been dealt a huge blow by the crisis caused by the anti-government protests since April this year. In August the *Tortilla Con Sal* blog published an interview with Campbell in which she failed to make even one explicit reference to the protests or their effects on the country’s tourism industry.

It is of course understandable that the INTUR and its officers should try to amplify their claims of an attractive and rapidly expanding industry – that’s precisely what it was before the troubles began in April. In fact it had already gained an enviable reputation and was fast overtaking all other sources of foreign income in the country. But it was rather disingenuous to try to hide the devastating effects of the crisis on the industry – although, to be fair, what the blog published was probably only a small proportion of the whole interview.

By the end of August most of the road blocks or barricades had been dismantled and movement around the country was once again possible. (Incidentally, that did not indicate that the troubles had come to an end.) *Associated Press* reported that the tourism sector had “become Nicaragua’s top source of foreign currency in the past two years,” but had shed as many as 70,000 jobs as a result of the protests. Revenue at hotels and restaurants fell by 45 per cent in June compared to 2017, according to Nicaragua’s Central Bank, whilst construction fell by 35 per cent and retail 27 per cent.

El Economista reported that the National Chamber of Tourism (Canatur) had estimated a \$400 million loss in tourism compared with 2017. Canatur’s study calculated that 83 per cent of tourism companies had reduced their services by at least 30 per cent, and that since the >>

start of the protests more than 60,000 people had been laid off in the tourism sector along with 16,000 reduced to part-time work.

Within three months of the start of the protests, the city of León's most up-market hotel, El Convento, had been forced to close for lack of guests. Similarly in La Concha, ENCA supporter Paulette Goudge's Spanish School and Eco-Hotel La Mariposa (<http://mariposaspanishschool.com/>) also had to close, although it is good news to hear that they have now re-opened for bookings. Towards the end of August, the first cruise ship to call for three months docked off San Juan del Sur. Around the same time, Nicaraguan tourism businesses asked foreign governments to change their travel advisories which strongly advised travellers not to visit Nicaragua.

There may be the initial signs of recovery, but these are small and the country now has a long way to go to reach the dizzy heights of the previous season. More importantly for many people who lost their jobs in tourism during the crisis, there may be some small hope that a recovery of the industry will create anew their jobs. But it is highly unlikely that the recovery will be rapid – a reputation will not be rebuilt overnight; although as we have seen, it can be lost overnight.

Sources:

- Alliance for Global Justice (22 August 2018), *NicaNotes – Briefs: 'Cruise ship 'Crystal Symphony' arrives in San Juan del Sur' and 'Tourism businesses ask foreign government to lift travel alerts'*.
- Associated Press (11 September 2018), *'Months of deadly unrest devastate Nicaragua's economy'*
- El Economista (20 September 2018), *'Nicaragua dejará de percibir \$400 millones en turismo por crisis'*.
- La Mariposa (September 2018), *'Closure of La Mariposa'*, La Mariposa e-list communication.
- La Mariposa (4 October 2018), *'We are taking a risk, but let's make it work for everyone – we are now open'*, La Mariposa e-list communication.
- teleSur (25 August 2018), *'Tourism, Democracy and Development in Nicaragua'*, an interview by Tortilla Con Sal with Anasha Campbell, co-director of Nicaragua's Tourism Institute.
- United States Department of State (12 September 2018), *Travel Advisory for Nicaragua*.

Mining company exploits the crisis in Nicaragua



Written by Alfredo Carías

15 August 2018

Translated by ENCA. We are grateful to Alfredo Carías for permission to reproduce this article here.

In the midst of the socio-political crisis which is hitting Nicaragua, the mining company Cónдор Gold has taken advantage of its influence and various legal spaces to obtain an environmental authorisation to continue exploiting the natural resources of the Santa Cruz de La India community.

The people of the Mina La India community did not recognise the dubious public hearing process carried out by Cónдор Gold which it claims validates the opening of an opencast cleft of approximately 600 meters in the zone. This would put the security of the families who live in the area at risk. "Once again the people of Santa Cruz de La India are not giving in and are not selling themselves. So we say: Get out Cónдор Gold; our awareness is stronger than your false promises", explained Olmán Varela, a representative of the National Environmentalist Movement Against Industrial Mining (MONAFMI).

Despite the community's rejection of the mining project, the company has received the environmental permit from the Nicaraguan authorities for the construction and operation of a processing plant that will have the capacity of 2,800 tonnes a day, an

authorisation not considered transparent by the community.

Heizel Torres, a mining expert of the Centro Humboldt, complained that the government of Nicaragua modified the environmental regulations to the benefit of the mining companies by eliminating the environmental

impact studies, as was evident in the Mina La India case. This arbitrary act by the government violates due process which should be the right of a community – the right to establish a free, prior and informed consultation seeking the consent or not of the community before the start of an extractive project which may affect health and ecosystems in the area.

As a consequence, the population of Santa Cruz de La India rejected the approval of the environmental authorisation granted to the Cónдор Gold mining company and in a public statement demanded the immediate departure of the company from the community.

The resistance of the Mina La India community dates from 2015, when the company entered the area and provoked a social conflict between the people and the company, leading to confrontations with peaceful protests and huge marches and even the persecution and criminalisation of environmental defenders by local authorities acting under the company's orders.

The social and environmental conflict rose to an international level due to MONAFMI's complaint to the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights (CIDH), in which it was revealed that they had suffered threats and harassments for defending their communities. Their statement was made due to the lack of an internal resolution to the problem on the part of the Nicaraguan state.

2018 in Guatemala

A bad year for land, environmental and human rights defenders and for those fighting governmental corruption – a bad year all round

*Following the GHRC's 2017 report on Guatemala (given in ENCA 72) and Pamela Machado's reports on water privatisation in Q'eqchi Mayan areas of the country (given in ENCA 73), we include here excerpts from a number of 2018 reports of the dire situation in Guatemala. These reports are compiled from numerous sources by ENCA member **Martin Mowforth***

TeleSur correspondent attacked during reporting

In August, Rolanda de Jesús García Hernández, a teleSur correspondent in Guatemala and an indigenous Q'eqchi Mayan, was attacked and robbed of her equipment while reporting on a hydro-electric project and illegal logging by unknown attackers who threatened to kill her. García and another teleSur correspondent, Santiago Botón, were in the Cahabón River valley – see ENCA 73, pp. 3-4 – to investigate illegal logging believed to be connected to the Oxec Hydro-electric project.

Along with community leader Francisco Tec, García interviewed locals on Sacte mountain and filmed some of the affected

areas. "I managed to film some images, some shots with the locals. At the other side we saw there were some employees from the Oxec company. After a few minutes, they started yelling at us."

The employees then approached the reporting team and tried to take the cameras. They then shouted sexually suggestive threats at García. The reporting team decided to leave the area, but got separated. García stopped at a small river, where she was surrounded by six men who threatened her with machetes. The attackers then seized the camera and threw it into the river.

"Our boss gets mad when someone enters his private property," one of the men told García, stressing that the group knew who she was and where to find her. After threatening to rape and kill her then throw her body into the river, the men finally released García when she promised never to return.

People living on the Cahabón River say erosion and flooding have increased dramatically with the illegal logging allegedly related to the Oxec Hydro-electric company, but the government is ignoring their plight. "We can't remain silent, it's important to denounce this truth," García said. "We've been the witnesses of several arrests and criminalisation against the leaders, and now the press is being persecuted."

The Oxec Hydro-electric company has denied any responsibility for the incident or having knowledge of García's journalistic work.

Indigenous Mayan Ixil midwife and activist murdered

Juana Ramírez Santiago, a 57 year old Mayan Ixil community leader and human rights defender, was shot dead in Guatemala's Quiché department on 21st September. She was a founding member of the Network of Ixil Women and a prominent midwife in her community. She had received threats and had filed a complaint with the Public Ministry.

Her husband, Pedro Chel Bernal, said "She was a woman who supported the community with her work as a midwife. I was told two teenagers approached her and shot at her."

The director of the Network of Ixil Women, Juana Baca, condemned the murder: "She was a women dedicated to bringing life into the world and founder of the organisation, always looking after the wellbeing of the Ixil women."

The murder follows that of Juana Raymundo, a 25-year-old Ixil nurse and member of the Committee of Campesino Development (CODECA), who was killed on July 28, also in Nebaj. Her body showed signs of torture.

"We demand authorities investigate and shed light on this murder that dresses in mourning another family in Nebaj," said Baca. "They have to arrest those responsible. This crime cannot go unpunished." Miguel de León, the Indigenous Mayor of Nebaj, demanded an effective investigation: "Nebaj has turned violent, especially for social leaders."

Human Rights Prosecutor Jordán Roldas called for improved security measures to protect the lives of human rights defenders in Guatemala >>



Rolanda de Jesús García Hernández

The Human Rights Defenders of Guatemala Protection Unit (Udefegua) has registered 135 aggressions, 13 murders and two attempted murders against activists between January 1 and June 8 of this year.

Sources:

Mesoamerican Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders,
teleSur (various)
Prensa Libre (various)

Domingo Vásquez of CCCND (Guatemala) visits Europe

Domingo Vásquez, a Maya Ch'orti human rights defender from Guatemala, spent the first half of October on a Europe-wide speaker tour as a guest of Peace Brigades International (PBI). Domingo is a member of the Central Campesina Ch'orti 'Nuevo Día' (CCCND) and a member of the Indigenous Council of the Maya Ch'orti community of Pelillo Negro, Jocotán in Chiquimula department.

Domingo's visit follows that of Omar Jerónimo, also of the CCCND, in 2015. Their organisation supports community struggles to get recognition as indigenous communities and defends the ancestral Maya Ch'orti territory from hydro-electric and mining projects. Several hydro-electric plants are either planned or already under construction in the region. The CCCND, Omar and the struggles of the Maya Ch'orti against hydro-electric projects were featured in ENCA Newsletter Nos. 65 and 67.

The recent security situation on the ground for CCCND members is extremely serious. **So far this year 18 human rights defenders in Guatemala have been assassinated for the work that they carry out.** Thirteen of these were land and environmental defenders. Many members of CCCND, including Domingo, face threats, attacks and criminalisation.

Recently Omar has had to go into hiding because of the seriousness of the threats he has received. PBI has provided protective accompaniment to the CCCND since 2009. Omar said "We have reports



Domingo Vásquez, a Maya Ch'orti human rights defender from Guatemala

that ex-military personnel and gangs have arrived in our area. There have been 52 death threats in the last three months, 22 people have been criminalised, two people have been thrown in prison and 27 have been attacked. Over 20 of us have a price on our head. I have been told mine is \$100,000, but I can be killed for \$100. Last month my car was sprayed with bullets. We have been warned that the assassinations will go on. We are all scared, but you should not let fear stop you working in the community."

It was unfortunate for ENCA that PBI and Domingo were unable to fit the ENCA meeting of 14th October into their very full schedule of visits and speaking engagements. But like PBI, ENCA remains committed to assisting and supporting the CCCND whenever, wherever and however possible.

CICIG and 'President' Jimmy Morales

Before becoming 'president' of Guatemala, Jimmy Morales was a comedian. Many Guatemalans believe that he is more of a comedian now than he was before his presidency.

On 19th August, The Guardian published an article by John Vidal entitled **'How Guatemala is sliding into chaos in the**

fight for land and water'. That was followed shortly afterwards by a communication from Rights Action entitled **'Killings and exploitation, corruption and impunity: The global economy operating normally in Guatemala'**.

The Rights Action communication included the following unattributed quotes to describe the current security situation in Guatemala:

"Anyone who opposes mines, evictions, palm oil plantations or who even takes part in roundtables to find solutions to the rising tide of violence against land rights defenders is likely to be targeted."

"A high-level, UN-backed mission will report this week that the killings have probably been orchestrated by powerful political and financial interests, with links to the drug trade and the military".

"... No sign of concern in Washington DC or Ottawa that Guatemala is not a very good place to promote North American business and investors' interests."

It is in this security environment that the threat of an auto-coup in Guatemala has been present since 31st August when Jimmy Morales first suggested that he would not renew the mandate of the United Nations sponsored International Commission Against Impunity (CICIG). >>

On making his announcement he was surrounded by dozens of military officers and CICIG's offices were surrounded by military jeeps. The next day, the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo tweeted his support for Morales.



Jimmy Morales

This all unfolded just days after the commission was getting closer to investigating the president and his National Party (NP), for illicit campaign financing during Morales' 2016 run for head of state, among other charges.

In September, the CICIG director, Iván Velásquez, a Colombian, and Thelma Aldana, chief justice of the Supreme Court of Guatemala, were awarded the 2018 Right Livelihood Prize (also known as the

'alternative Nobel prize') for their "innovative work in exposing abuse of power and prosecuting corruption, thus rebuilding people's trust in public institutions." On his return to Guatemala, Velásquez was barred entry. The Constitutional Court ruled against the ban and the country's Human Rights Ombudsman, Jordán Roldas, called on the court to criminally prosecute Jimmy Morales and his ministers for contempt of court. The Constitutional Court warned that the government would be committing a crime by failing to comply with the ruling allowing Velásquez to enter Guatemala.

When asked whether or not Morales would abide by the Constitutional Court (CC) ruling to reinstate the commission that the president unilaterally shut down in late August, the head of state responded: "Galileo Galilei was told not to say that the earth moved, and then he said the earth moves. That's the answer." *[Editor's note: whatever it means, I feel sure that Jimmy Morales would get on very well with Donald Trump.]*

At the same time, around the country there were massive protest marches against Morales and in favour of CICIG.

Guatemala's Fuego Volcano Erupts Again

As if the disasters of Jimmy Morales, militarisation, impunity, threats to human rights defenders, US interference, and many related problems were not enough for Guatemalans to endure, the Fuego Volcano recently erupted for the second time this year.

In June, Fuego erupted causing an avalanche in the south of the country, close to the capital, leaving 190 people dead and 238 others missing. Thankfully, this latest eruption which began on 12th October, does not seem to be so devastating, although its constant explosions, columns of ash and pyroclastic flows have led to various evacuations from the area.

Over 900 people are still in temporary accommodation following the first eruption in June. They, and others, await the building of homes promised by the government after the earlier eruption.

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>



The European Union authorises the sale of campesino seeds

8 May 2018

By Axel Leclercq

For 'Biodiversidad en América Latina y El Caribe' <http://www.biodiversidadla.org/>

After years of struggle, defenders of biodiversity have finally got some satisfaction. From May this year [2018] you can have access to your seeds without being outlawed for it. Victory! As of May, organic farmers can sell the seeds of their own produce. Thus decided EU Deputies, much to the disgust of Monsanto and similar companies.

Until now, only seeds listed in an official catalogue could be legally commercialised. As the French newspaper Le Figaro indicated, "the majority of these seeds belonged to multinationals such as Monsanto. The result was a standardisation of fruit and vegetables, a standardisation of our diet and an impoverishment of biodiversity."

But last Thursday [Thursday 3rd May 2018] Deputies of the European Union put an end to the 'criminalisation of so-called campesino seeds. With a view to new legislation whose aim is to support organic agriculture, they adopted a measure which permits organic farmers to sell seeds from their 'domestic' crops.

This decision, which becomes active in two and a half years, in 2021, brings to an end 37 years of restrictions – the commercialisation of seeds outside the official catalogue was prohibited by a 1981 decree.

All organic farmers will be able to develop their own varieties and to commercialise them as had always happened in the past. The aim is to promote the vitality of our biodiversity, to revive thousands of varieties of fruit and vegetables which exist and to counter the worrying statistics supplied by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and re-broadcast by Le Figaro: namely, that three-quarters of our current foodstuffs come from only twelve plant species and five animal species.

Mass turtle deaths

Around 300 endangered Olive Ridley sea turtles were found dead and floating off Mexico's southern coast in August. This follows a similar die-off close to Jiquilisco Bay on the coast of El Salvador in November 2017.

It is thought that the most recent case may be due to asphyxiation, fish hooks or harmful algae, but the matter is still under investigation. In the earlier case of the Jiquilisco die-off, the turtles are believed to have died in what is known as a 'red

tide', in which nutrients or chemical runoff causes toxic algae to bloom, releasing deadly compounds into the water.

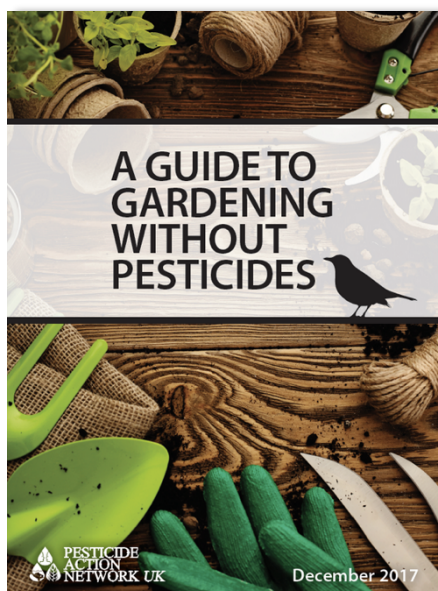
UN Green Climate Fund awards \$36 million to El Salvador

The Green Climate Fund is part of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and is designed to assist developing countries in their efforts to adapt to climate change and to mitigate its effects. In October, the Fund awarded \$35.8 million (USD) to El Salvador for a project to address climate change.

The project is entitled 'Upgrading of climatic resilience in agroecosystems of the dry corridor of El Salvador' – Reclima by its Spanish initials. It is designed to strengthen the climatic resilience of farmers who face the growing risks of increasing temperatures, irregular rains and other events attributable to variations in the climate.

The project will be supported by the Salvadoran Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources and by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

Source: *El Economista*, 19 October 2018.



Gardening without pesticides

In order to assist home gardeners in moving away from the use of potentially harmful pesticides, PAN UK has compiled a gardening guide to dealing with some of the most commonly found garden pests.

More and more people are moving towards a more organic approach in growing flowers and food crops. We hope that this guide will assist both those that are already growing without pesticides and those that wish to explore the possibilities.

Available from: <http://www.pan-uk.org/gardening-without-pesticides/>



National Strike in Costa Rica Against Tax reform Proposals

By ENCA member Martin Mowforth



In the last edition of the ENCA Newsletter (No. 73) we included a short article welcoming Costa Rica's new President, Carlos Alvarado Quesada, to his new post. At the time of printing this edition, Costa Rica is still in the grip of a national strike against his tax reform proposals, the Law to Strengthen Public Finances, generally referred to as the 'combo fiscal'.

The financial and tax reform measures in the combo fiscal impose higher taxes on the working and middle classes but make only minor changes for the large companies and the financial sector. They also include reductions in public spending and a freeze on salaries in the public sector. In essence, they amount to a set of neoliberal austerity measures on the Costa Rican population.

The general strike began on 10th September and was called by the Asociación de Profesores de Segunda Enseñanza (Secondary School Teachers Association, APSE). The strike was joined by all public sector unions, most private sector unions and students. There are reports of violent police actions at protest

marches, blockades and occupations associated with the strike. But there are also reports of protester violence against specific targets such as the publicly owned petrol refinery, RECOPE.

At the beginning of October, various estimates of the costs of the strike include financial losses for several sectors put at around US\$60 million. The tourism sector has been especially hard hit with at least 50 per cent of restaurants taking heavy losses. The daily newspaper La Nación reported on the Costa Rican Chamber of Restaurants (Cacore) estimate of takings by affected restaurants being only 35 per cent of usual takings. The road blockades have also restricted the actions and visits of many tour groups. The La Nación report also remarked on the disruption of work, transport and trade for small and medium-sized businesses of all sectors.

On the other hand, FECON (the Costa Rican Federation for Conservation of the Environment) reported that the opacity of the combo fiscal will continue to favour the companies which pollute the environment. Specifically, they claim that

the new law will actually benefit 70 per cent of the ships which over-fish the national waters and 68 per cent of the companies which gain their profits from deforestation. They further claim, with evidence from the Panama Papers, that Costa Rica has become a global financial paradise with obscure financial laws allowing companies and individuals to hide their wealth and the means by which they gained it.

Historian David Díaz Arias has suggested that "Costa Rica has become one of the ten most unequal countries in the world," and that this conflict has shown that "to some people and the press, public employees are potential 'terrorists' and 'criminals'." Political scientist María-José Cascante has pointed out that whilst there is a general social consensus that some kind of fiscal reform is needed, in the context of this conflict it is a question of who is going to be affected by the combo fiscal and to what degree.

The strike organisers are demanding a new tax law that favours the working class and say that they will continue with their strike until the combo fiscal is overturned.

Sources:

- *La Nación*, 4 October 2018, 'Costa Rica: 24 días de huelga dejan al menos ₡32,000 millones por pérdidas en distintos sectores.'
- *El Economista*, 2 October 2018, 'Zonas francas mantendrán exoneración al IVA en reforma fiscal de Costa Rica'.
- *Madre Tierra*, 28 September 2018, 'Defraudación fiscal tiene un enorme impacto ambiental'.
- *Patricia Blanco*, 27 September 2018, personal communication.
- *teleSur Noticias*, 11 October 2018.

SLAPPS: Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation

Courts are for those who seek justice, not revenge. Yet a growing number of powerful corporations are using the courts for just that — to silence those who dare to speak out against them.

The following short article by CIEL refers to the use of SLAPPS in the USA, but the criminalisation of protesters and activists is a tactic frequently used in Central America against those who oppose large-scale 'development' schemes such as mines, hydro-electricity dams, plantation agriculture and similar. Many of ENCA's partner organisations in Central America are experiencing the same onslaught of SLAPPS as those in the USA, so it is appropriate that we include this article here despite its focus on North America rather than Central America.

CIEL (Centre for International Environmental Law, www.ciel.org)
24 Sept 2018

Courts are for those who seek justice, not revenge. Yet a growing number of powerful corporations are using the courts for just that — to silence those who dare to speak out against them.

These lawsuits, known as SLAPPS or 'Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation', aren't meant to win in court. They often rely on outlandish claims of corruption, collusion, and conspiracy that won't prevail in a court of law. Yet corporations with deep pockets use SLAPP suits as a way to waste the time and exhaust the resources of public-interest journalists, activists, and non-profits. These lawsuits have a chilling effect — discouraging activists, silencing critics, and limiting free speech. And they're part of a much broader trend of attempts to shrink civil society space and shut down

activism — from the adoption of anti-protest laws in states across the US, to restrictions on political rights at the upcoming climate negotiations, to the murders of environmental defenders in record numbers last year.

After indigenous groups, environmentalists, and concerned citizens protested the Dakota Access Pipeline in 2016 and 2017, Energy Transfer Partners, the company behind the project, filed a \$900 million lawsuit against our partners accusing them of racketeering and corruption. The actions of one of those groups, BankTrack, consisted of sending public letters to financial institutions that were backing the pipeline — far from criminal.

Even CIEL has been the target of companies' underhanded tactics. The day after Mr. Trump's election, our own president Carroll Muffett was the recipient of a subpoena by ExxonMobil for our work exposing Exxon's long-held knowledge of the climate crisis and attempts to stifle regulations that could have prevented it. The subpoena is part

of a broader campaign of intimidation against climate advocates who are working to bring the truth to light.

That's why we helped to launch the Protect the Protest Task Force, joining nearly twenty other organisations to unite our knowledge and expertise to confront these threats. From experienced lawyers and journalists, to communications professionals and activists, we stand stronger together: An attack on one is now an attack on all.

As part of the coalition, we are helping to raise awareness of SLAPP tactics and expose the worst offenders, as well as providing resources and mobilizing a network of attorneys to defend against SLAPPS, especially for individuals and small organisations with limited resources.

Corporate bullying of activists threatens our democracy. All of the social progress we've made throughout history has depended on the ability to speak out against injustices, so we're taking a stand.



LATIN AMERICA CONFERENCE '18 ADELANTE!



**SATURDAY 1ST DECEMBER, 9:15AM
CONGRESS HOUSE, LONDON**

The Trump Presidency has overseen a worrying rise in US interventions in Latin America, with the blockade of Cuba being tightened, sanctions threatened on Nicaragua, and Trump pushing for military intervention in Venezuela. But the resurgent right-wing in Latin America is facing resistance, with the Left winning the Mexican election, and trade unionists and popular movements mobilising to defend social progress across the region. Come along to hear eyewitness accounts and get involved in standing up to Trump's interventions in Latin America.

With contributions from over 50 campaigners, politicians, trade unionists and academics from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Venezuela and the UK.

ENCA will also be hosting a panel on **Fake News, Social Media and the Fight for Democracy in Latin America**. Suggesting that while Latin America has long suffered from being obscured in global news, and while digital media has been lauded as being able to bring Latin American voices to the world stage, the age of social media and fake news might have ushered in something much worse than obscurity. An omnipresent news and rumour system is seeing populations divided, blood on the streets and is creating a whole new relationship between politics and information. Our panel, organised by members of the Environmental Network for Central America (ENCA), will bring together experts in media and communications to ask how can we seek truth and fact check this new media driven world, and to question if there is any hope for democracy in a Trumpian world order.

Book tickets here:

latinamericaconference.co.uk/

**Time: Registration from 9.15am.
Start 10am. End 5pm.**

**Venue: Congress House, Great
Russell Street, London WC1B 3LS**

Organised and supported by Cuba Solidarity Campaign, Venezuela Solidarity Campaign, Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign, Unite the Union, TUC and supported by many other organisations.

enca.org.uk
@ENCA_News

Meeting Dates 2019

March 10th | June 23rd | October 10th

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.