

# ENCA



Environmental Network *for* Central America

[www.enca.org.uk](http://www.enca.org.uk)

Issue 75 April 2019

## El Salvador Elections

A report from the ENCA delegation to El Salvador

## Guapinol Twelve

Jailed Honduran mining activists fight for justice

## Migration Caravans

We share stories of those forced to leave Central America



# FIGHTING PLASTIC WASTE 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.

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# In Roatán, Honduras prohibits the use of plastic straws and bags

There is a global movement against the use of plastic bags and straws (popotes in México, pitillos in Colombia, cañitas in Perú, pajitas in España, sorbetes in Argentina, pajillas in many other places), because they are causing serious damage to the environment and to maritime animals.

The municipal authorities of Roatán in the Bay Islands department of Honduras has issued a municipal decree prohibiting the use of plastic straws and bags on the island.

***The use of plastics is causing enormous damage to the planet***

The decree, issued in January, is particularly relevant to restaurants, cafes and other similar businesses. Fines will be administered on those establishments which fail to comply with the decree, but it falls short of sanctioning people who throw plastic litter on the beaches or in the streets.

The use of plastic bags in supermarkets will also be regulated. Fines of between 500 and 2,500 lempiras (approx. \$20 - \$100) will be applied to those who do not comply. If business owners ignore the decree they will be fined an additional 10 lempiras (40 cents) per straw found in their establishment and could even find their business closed down.

## 14 countries have prohibited the use of plastics.

Plastic bags are considered a lethal element for both climate change and animal species. According to figures from the United Nations, plastics kill around 1 million marine birds and 100,000 marine

mammals every year. Moreover, their decay may last up to 400 years, during which time their decomposition may seriously affect the environment.

These factors have been decisive in persuading at least 14 countries to prohibit their use with the aim of reducing the figure of 500,000 million bags which are used each year around the world.

In January 2018, Panamá prohibited by law the use of plastic bags in businesses with the exceptions of bags for food and moist products. Shops have until the end of 2019 to provide replacement bags, dependent on the type of shop.

Costa Rica has also made progress on eliminating plastic bags and other single use plastics, although these advances are not being applied so speedily.

Perú is another Latin American country considering measures to reduce the use of plastics and to promote recycling. Chile has also proposed a law to prohibit the use of plastic bags in businesses throughout the country.

By: **CRITERIO Editorial**  
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Tegucigalpa  
8 January

***Also on plastics we recommend a new report produced by the Centre for International Environmental Law (CIEL). The report can be found at:***

<https://www.ciel.org/news/plasticandhealth/>

## Panamanian supermarkets have just 6 months to end the offer of plastic bags

From *El Economista*  
January 2019



*Panamanian supermarkets have 6 months to stop offering the use of plastic bags*

The supermarkets and small businesses of Panama have six months from today [18th January 2019] to stop offering disposable bags free of charge to their customers due to a pioneering law in Central America which seeks to promote the use of renewable bags.

In a communiqué, the Authority for Consumer Protection and the Defense of Competition (ACODECO) explained, however, that most grocers will have a year to comply with the law.

The authority, which oversees the implementation of the law and which will issue fines to those businesses which do not comply, made it clear that businesses will have the chance to cover the costs of new bags for their customers. "If they decide to charge their customers, ACODECO will ensure that they do so at cost," said the same communiqué.

In January 2018, Panama approved an unpublished law which prohibits the use of bags containing polyethylene in all types of commercial establishments and which seeks to replace them with less contaminating alternatives such as biodegradables, cardboard, textile material or thread.

Polyethylene bags are a highly polluting type and may take up to almost 400 years to decompose while biodegradables may only take 25-30 years.

Several months ago, the Central American Parliament also discussed an initiative to regulate the use of expanded polystyrene, a plastic known in Panama as 'foam', which is mainly used to wrap food in.

The United Nations estimates that each year 8 million tonnes of plastic are dumped in the seas, that is equivalent to dumping a lorry-load of plastic every minute which annually kills a million birds and marine turtles. The UN calculates that if this situation continues, in the year 2050

there will be more plastic in the oceans than fish.

## Costa Rica aiming to become free of single-use plastics by 2021

An article in Far Out Magazine by Nathan Ellis (16<sup>th</sup> March 2019) reports that Costa Rica made a pledge in 2017 to become the first country in the world to be free of single-use plastics by 2021. Following its pledge on World Environment Day in June 2017, the country launched a national strategy to replace plastics with recyclable and water-soluble materials.

It is also widely reported that Costa Rica produces 4,000 tonnes of solid waste a day. Of this it is estimated that at least 11 per cent is untreatable plastic waste that pollutes the environment and harms wildlife. It is this quantity that the country is trying to eradicate.

## ENCA STUDY TOUR TO BELIZE?

The idea of organising an ENCA environmental study tour of Belize in 2020 or 2021 has been put forward by a number of ENCA supporters. At the last ENCA meeting (10<sup>th</sup> March), we briefly discussed the merits (solidarity, learning and personal contacts) and demerits (contribution to climate change) associated with such a tour. The arguments for and against will also no doubt be thoroughly debated in future meetings. At this stage, however, we are simply trying to gauge the potential level of interest in this possibility.

So, we would be grateful if supporters (and friends and contacts) who might be interested in participating in such a tour could send a brief expression of interest by email to Martin Mowforth on [mmowforth@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:mmowforth@plymouth.ac.uk) **An expression of interest will not be taken as any form of commitment.**

## Opportunity to visit Nicaragua this summer!

- Take part in a solidarity delegation with an AGRO ECOLOGY focus
- See Nicaragua through the eyes of farmers, the rural workers association ATC, and the global Via Campesina movement
- Stay in local hotels, agricultural training centres, and with farming families
- Find out how agro ecology is taught and put into practice, especially empowering women and young people, and prioritising food sovereignty and sustainability
- Participate in the celebrations of the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Sandinista Revolution on 19 July

**Dates: Programme from 11 July to 21 July 2019 (add travel days)**

Costs: \$ 1500 (\$ 1000 concessions) covers in-country costs except personal expenses

Organised by Friends of the ATC solidarity network in conjunction with the ATC and La Via Campesina Nicaragua: <https://friendsatc.org/delegations/>



# THE GUAPINOL TWELVE, HONDURAS

On Saturday, February 23rd, 12 Honduran activists who have been defending the drinking water of numerous communities from a mine owned by members of Honduras' powerful oligarchy were jailed in an extreme misuse of the justice system.

The twelve had been defending the drinking water of numerous communities against possible pollution, loss of protected area and threats of violence from a mine in the Montaña de los Botaderos Carlos Escaleras National Park which protects the drinking water of hundreds of communities in the departments of Olancho and Colón, especially in the Bajo Aguán region. The Honduran Public Prosecutor's Office is pursuing charges against at least 32 defenders of the Guapinol River; many are facing serious charges that could result in decades in prison.

The major concern of the residents of Tocoa is the imminent destruction of the ecological reserves within the Carlos Escaleras National Park, previously known as the Botaderos Mountain National Park. This is the area where the springs are found of the Rivers Tinto, Mame, Monga, Cuaca, San Pedro, Guapinol, Tocoa, Tavjica, Bonito, Izquierdo and Chiquito, all of them sources of potable water for the regions of Tocoa and La Abisinia.

In 2010 and 2011 the EMCO Mining Company, which later changed its name to Inversiones Los Pinares, gained two concessions from INGEOMIN (Honduran National Institute of Geology and Minerals) to exploit iron oxide deposits in the core of the Carlos Escaleras National Park, where it is illegal to build roads and mines due to the impacts on water sources. The Institute of Forest Conservation recommended that the Ministry of Natural Resources (SERNA) should reject the concessions. In December 2013, however, outgoing president Porfirio Lobo ratified a bill that

reduced the area of the 'nuclear zone' of the Park. This corrupt legislation was clearly intended to accommodate the mining concession. In January 2014 EMCO was granted the concessions. Consultation, as required in the Protected Areas Law, had not taken place.

In the neighbouring department of Atlantida, an EMCO subsidiary, Alutech, has been accused of using threats and intimidation to force people to sell their land. According to local people and the parish priest, the company established an encampment of armed and masked men on the edge of town. In response, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights instructed the Honduran government to provide protective measures for two local priests and sixteen local residents.

The Carlos Escaleras National Park is named in honour of Carlos Escaleras, the first General Coordinator of COPA, a body of local unions and agricultural cooperatives, who was murdered in 1997. He was killed due to his efforts to protect the Guapinol River from contamination by a proposed palm oil processing plant planned for construction by the Cressida Corporation which later became the Dinant Corporation. Though a convicted material author of the Escaleras murder testified that Dinant Corporation's founder Miguel Facusse had ordered the murder, the prosecution went no further.

EMCO owner Ana Facusse is Miguel Facusse's daughter.

Upon learning that they were subject to arrest warrants for blocking the road during an attempted eviction in September, 13 community leaders and human rights defenders voluntarily presented themselves to the Court of National Jurisdiction in La Ceiba on 25<sup>th</sup> February. When they got there, they were informed that more charges had been made against them for arson, illegal detention and illicit association. These latter charges mandate preventative detention and were a clear indication that the intent of the charges was to imprison them. Twelve of the thirteen were sent to prison to await trial. They are likely to remain in prison until the trial takes place, which could be anything up to 2½ years.

As ENCA has reported in the recent past, this type of criminalisation of legitimate rights defenders is happening increasingly in Honduras.

We express our deep concern regarding the detention of the 12 environmental defenders from the sectors of Guapinol and San Pedro in Tocoa, members of the Municipal Committee for the Defense of Common Property of Tocoa, and we make an urgent call to the EU and its Member States to pay special attention to this case in their political dialogue with the State of Honduras.



# PROGELSA denounced for paying inhabitants to create a confrontation on the river Petacón

On Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> January 2019 a group of inhabitants from the community of Muluaca in the municipality of Lepaterique arrived at the place where the inhabitants of Reitoca, (department of Francisco Morazán) control the territory which has halted the construction of the hydroelectric project on the River Petacón.

The aim of the inhabitants of Lepaterique is to displace the inhabitants of Reitoca who are resisting the hydroelectric company claims to build their project on the River Petacón.

It is evident that the inhabitants of Lepaterique are being backed by the

company PROGELSA, since they are in possession of many supplies and all of them are dressed wearing 'yellow jackets' with 'messages of peace', the organisation of Madre Tierra pointed out in a communiqué.

Madre Tierra declares that it sees the tactics used by PROGELSA and SERMACO with sadness and as a display of cowardice. These tactics use conditions of poverty in which the community of Lepaterique live, to confront them against the peoples of Reitoca, brother against brother; whilst those who benefit from the conflict will always be the companies.

- A related note: The Movimiento Madre Tierra (MMT) in Honduras is directed by Dr Juan Almendares, a well-known environmentalist and human rights advocate. The MMT is the official Honduran branch of Friends of the Earth International and supports the people of Reitoca as an heroic people's stand against the privatisation of water.
- For more on MMT, see <https://www.facebook.com/madretierrahn/>

From CRITERIO  
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January 16, 2019

Translated by ENCA member Rick Blower

## Dina Meza visits the UK

In December 2018 Dina Meza, a celebrated Honduran independent journalist who has featured various times in ENCA Newsletters, was invited to the UK to speak at the FCO's Human Rights Day event. During her time in London Dina Meza met with the Minister for Human Rights, Lord Ahmad, All Party Parliamentary Group on Human Rights, as well as representatives of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to discuss the human rights situation in Honduras as well as restrictions on freedom of expression and attacks against journalists in the country. She also met with NGOs and donors.



*"We are joined by Dina Meza. She is a journalist in Honduras who is working to defend freedom of expression and information. And in case Dina, and after meeting her this morning, I would add this, a modest lady, and if she fails to tell you this herself is that she was named by Fortune magazine as one of the world's 50 greatest leaders of 2018. Why? Because of her work in this sphere. Thank you Dina for being here." - Lord Ahmad*

Committed to defending freedom of expression and information, Dina has spent years investigating and reporting on human rights violations across the country. She is currently the Director of ASOPODEHU and the President of PEN Honduras, an organisation that supports journalists at risk. She is also the founder and editor of the online newspaper 'Pasos de Animal Grande', which provides information and legal support to at-risk professionals, students and journalists.

In April 2018 Fortune magazine selected her as one of the world's 50 greatest leaders of 2018, highlighting her key role in bringing international attention to the

assassination of activist Berta Cáceres, as well as the state violence surrounding Honduras' volatile 2017 elections.

Dina works at incredible personal risk and has previously had to flee Honduras for her own safety. Due to the threats she faces she receives protective accompaniment from Peace Brigades International.

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**A 2017 interview with Dina can be found on The Violence of Development website at:**

<https://theviolenceofdevelopment.com/dina-meza/>

**It is available in both English and Spanish.**

# Migrant Caravans from the Northern Triangle Countries

*At the height of the migrant caravan crisis (which has not gone away) in November 2018, the daily Salvadoran newspaper La Prensa Gráfica produced an article of 'Stories of forced displacement due to violence' written by Ricardo Flores. There were six personal stories in the article and ENCA member Jill Powis translated them for us. We have only space here for three of the stories, but all six will appear in The Violence of Development website.*

**Nelson** was disappeared and then murdered for refusing to leave his home. The first warning came in 2014 from a neighbour, a woman who had links with members of the Barrio 18 (18<sup>th</sup> Street) gang. She told him that he had to close down his business, which supported his family of seven, on the grounds that "he was selling the same product as her." After that came more warnings, including death threats, to make him leave, together with his whole family. It was October 2015 when they decided to leave, to stay with relatives, but Nelson, a fictitious name to protect his [family] identity, decided to stay "to guard the house." His relatives believe that he was killed because, before he was threatened, he worked for a community organisation running violence prevention schemes to improve life within the community.

Prior to Nelson's death, the family had sought protection from the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office (*Procuraduría para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos* - PDDH), but this opened a case file only after his murder. The PDDH informed the police and the Public Prosecutor's Office (*Fiscalía*), and all that happened was that some family members who gave evidence were named as key witnesses in the legal process.

Cristosal [see note below] lodged an application for protective measures for Nelson's family with the Constitutional Court on 9 June 2017. The application was accepted four months later, but by this time they were already out of the country. They had lost their jobs, their homes, the right to freedom of movement and the young people were forced to abandon their studies.

**Sofia** was held captive and raped by a gang for being the daughter of a policeman. When the teenager disappeared, her father went to the police, but they failed to respond immediately. When they finally found her, the police accused Sofía (not her real name) of being a member of the gang.

The Public Prosecutor's Office offered protection measures, but only for Sofia, a

minor; and so the family, five people in total, preferred to move, where they remained in hiding. Despite not leaving the house, the gang members managed to find them and continued to issue them with death threats. This meant that they were

forced to move house again until they got help to leave El Salvador.

In view of the poor response by state institutions, the Constitutional Court accepted the application for protection measures for all five members of the family, but by this time they had already left the country.

**Victoria**, her adult daughter and two children lived in a house where they had a family business. One afternoon, an armed gang came to the store. Victoria (not her real name) was shot dead at the scene, while her daughter suffered bullet wounds to various organs. Her relatives had to take her from the hospital because the gang continued to look for her and they feared that she would be found. When she recovered, three months later, she decided to move with the two children to a house belonging to another relative. However, an informer from the gang found her and warned them to leave the area "if she did not want to have any problems".

As a result of this fresh threat, the woman was forced to move again with her children to another relative in another region of the country. Unlike the other cases, this family did not want to take advantage of the government shelter system, but instead wanted measures that would allow them to be protected by the authorities in the place where they had relocated.

Cristosal presented their request to the Constitutional Court and it was accepted on 11 July 2018, when it ordered protective measures.

The trial for Victoria's murder resulted in the conviction of those responsible, who are currently awaiting sentencing.

## Notes

- It is worth mentioning here that ENCA members will be making a presentation on the migrant caravan crisis in Exeter during May and at the El Sueño Existe festival in Machynlleth (Wales) in August.
- We are grateful to Jill Powis for the translations.
- Cristosal works to advance human rights in Central America through rights-based research, learning, and programming. They accompany victims of violence to provide protection when they need it most, repair the lingering effects of human rights violations, and build human rights frameworks to create conditions where peace is possible.



## UNES exposes illegal logging

Sources: *Salvadoran Ecological Unit (UNES,*  
<http://www.unes.org.sv/2019/02/22/justicia-resarcimiento-danos-cerro-aguila/>  
*and La Prensa Gráfica*  
 21 February 2019

The Salvadoran Ecological Unit (UNES) has alerted Salvadoran society to serious environmental damage caused in the Apaneca-Illamatepec Biosphere Reserve within the Cerro El Aguila Protected Natural Area in the departments of Sonsonate and Santa Ana. The El Aguila range is the most important area for water provision in the country and provides shelter for hundreds of species of flora and fauna.

Since mid-February about five manzanas (approx. eight acres) have been deforested including some mature trees over a meter and a half in diameter. Such a level of felling will affect the area's ability to absorb water, warned UNES. The police have verified that the felling was conducted illegally.

A representative of UNES commented: "We are in a country facing a serious hydrological crisis, we are the second most deforested country; the government must apply its conservation and protection policies. We are one of the 15 most vulnerable countries in the world as regards the threat of natural phenomena and we have sparse vegetative cover." She

added, "This case is yet another example of the State's institutional weakness in matters environmental."

UNES called on the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MARN) and the Ministry of Agriculture and Cattle Ranching (MAG) to carry out their duties to protect and conserve environmental resources and to investigate this destruction. Additionally, the Human Rights Ombudsman, Raquel Caballero, has called for protective measures for the municipal leaders of Juayúa and of the Sonsonate Roundtable for Sustainability who are now at risk after denouncing the felling.

## Semi-submersibles used in drug trafficking

Salvadorans are part of a network that transports cocaine to the US in semi-submersibles

Authorities say there is a combined network of central and south Americans involved in drug trafficking. Salvadorans are part of a network of narco-traffickers transporting cocaine hidden in semi-submersibles from South America to the US. This is the thesis of the FGR, the General Prosecutor's Office, after analysing evidence seized in three of the ships in the last months.

The results show there are Salvadorans involved in supplying mobile phones, GPS devices and fuel. However, it has not ruled out that there are other Salvadorans also participating in transportation, even though so far they have only detained Colombians, Ecuadorians and Guatemalans aboard the narco-submarines.

"It is not only South Americans who carry the drugs, it is a combination of Colombians, Ecuadorians, Guatemalans, Hondurans, Nicaraguans and Salvadorans in the semi-submersibles, which indicates that there is a connected network between South and Central America with the purpose of carrying the drug to the United States," said Cecilia Rivas, anti narco-traffic prosecutor.

Evidence confirming this thesis was found on the phone that the police confiscated from Guatemalan José Nery Rodríguez Santos, taken in October 2017. Rodríguez was part of the crew transporting a ton and a half of cocaine in a drug-loaded submarine seized in El Salvador. The phone had a contact with a Salvadoran number.

A computer analyst from the National Police's Anti-Narcotics Division found that the Salvadoran contact communicated via phone with Rodríguez Santos and the three Colombians who were travelling on a ship 231 nautical miles from Acajutla, Sonsonate.

Since last year, the Salvadoran Naval Force has seized two other semi-submersible ships with cocaine, always in Acajutla. The Ministries of Defense and Security agree that in recent years the Salvadoran sea has become "the favoured route" of South American drug traffickers.

Among the local groups involved are the fishermen settled in San Diego, La Libertad, a structure led by ex-policeman José de la Cruz Claros Amaya, aka Sony; the Quezada de Metapán, a group from Mara Salvatrucha Sailor Locos Salvatruchos, Sonsonate, and other more local groups such as the one led by the mayor of Pasaquina, La Unión, the former mayor of Carolina, San Miguel, and the mayor of San Antonio de la Cruz, in the department of Chalatenango.

*La Prensa Gráfica*  
 24 Nov 2018

*Translated and adapted by ENCA member*  
*Pamela Machado*



Photo: *La Prensa Gráfica.*

## PINEAPPLES AND BANANAS IN COSTA RICA

*Since the last ENCA Newsletter (No. 74) we have received numerous reports about the problems associated with the monocultivation of pineapples and bananas in Costa Rica. Due to space already allocated to other issues, we provide here a brief summary of the material received along with a hope that we shall allocate more space in our next issue (No. 76) to tropical fruit production issues. Our very brief summary follows.*

- On 7<sup>th</sup> January we received news from the Sabanilla Cedros Patriotic Front that the Buena Vista Fresh pineapple company had sacked 120 unionised workers who had protested to the Ministry of Work that their annual bonus had not been paid. "The sackings are a clear attack on our union rights," said a SITRAP representative.
- On 11<sup>th</sup> January we received news from *ecocatolico.org* that thousands of small farmers (most contracted to the large companies) were switching to other crops because the sale of pineapples was not paying them enough to cover all their costs. The situation is said to have gone from a bonanza to a crisis.
- Despite the above, on 15<sup>th</sup> January we received news from the Costa Rican Federation for the Conservation of Nature (FECON) that the Maquenque and Barra de Colorado Wildlife Refuges were being invaded by new pineapple producers. Such production is prohibited in Protected Areas, but FECON suggests that the news is met by a lack of action by the state.
- Despite Costa Rica's traditional hostility to trade unions, on 20<sup>th</sup> January 700 SITRAP members gathered in Guápiles for their Annual Assembly. The cumulative effects of SITRAP's membership drive, the space afforded to it by the passing of a Labour Reform Law in 2016 and the pressure brought to bear by customers in Europe (and by the organisation Banana Link) led to the signing of an agreement in a Del Monte plantation just before the Assembly.
- On 21<sup>st</sup> January, Juan Fernando Lara reported in the Costa Rican daily newspaper *La Nación* that several ministries of the government knew about the contamination of the water supply of several communities of the Río Cuarto of the province of Alajuela with the herbicide bromacil (prohibited in 2017), but did nothing about it. Bromacil has been widely used on pineapple plantations despite its prohibition.

A busy January then.



## VEHICLE POLLUTION IN CENTRAL AMERICA

In recent months both El Salvador and Costa Rica have begun to take steps towards reducing air pollution from vehicles. As all visitors to the region are well aware, there are many locations and times of day in the region's cities where and when the air is unbreathable due to excessive vehicle emissions.

Costa Rica's President Carlos Alvarado has signed decrees to incentivise electric and zero emission vehicles and to promote mobility by other modes of transport. The First Lady, Claudia Dobles, who is leading the initiative, said, "We are incentivising zero-emission technologies with the aim of achieving our goal of decarbonisation whilst at the same time enabling the population to make use of more sustainable and efficient transport."

The Costa Rican decrees also promote actions such as the provision of shower facilities at work for those who travel to work by bicycle. Bus and train travel are also promoted along with car-sharing, the use of hybrid vehicles and increased recharging locations for electric vehicles.

In El Salvador, the National Council of Environmental Sustainability and Vulnerability (CONASAV by its Spanish initials) has presented a series of reforms to the Land Transport Law. In essence the reforms aim to reduce atmospheric pollution in the country.

After establishing that current levels of air pollution have reached dangerous levels, the CONASAV reforms focus particularly on the reduction of emissions by public transport and allow the police force to confiscate vehicles which exceed specific thresholds of pollutant emissions. The reforms also recommend the replacement of public service vehicles that are over 20 years old and that this new measure should be implemented within three years.

The World Health Organisation has placed El Salvador among the Latin American countries with the highest levels of atmospheric contamination and has associated these levels especially with public transport.

*Compiled by ENCA member Martin Mowforth*



## El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua analyse progress in the Gulf of Fonseca

*In November last year (2018), El Economista reported on a meeting of government delegations from El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua to assess progress in initiatives affecting the Gulf of Fonseca. The report is translated here.*

Today the governments of El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua held the 16<sup>th</sup> Trilateral Technical Meeting on the Gulf of Fonseca, which is shared by the three countries on their Pacific coasts.

The meeting was headed by the then Minister of Foreign Relations of El Salvador, Carlos Castañeda, the Honduran Sub-Secretary of State for International Cooperation and Promotion, María del Carmen Nasser, and the Nicaraguan Chancellor, Denis Moncada.

According to the official communication, the officials were evaluating advances in the investment and economic development projects, the trilateral governance mechanism, a schedule of work, and a possible meeting of the heads of State.

The projects evaluated in the technical meeting included a ferry connecting La Unión (in El Salvador) and Corinto (in Nicaragua), along with a ferry linking La Unión with the zones of Amalapa and San Lorenzo (in Honduras) and Potosí (in Nicaragua).

They also reviewed progress in the plans for a Gulf of Fonseca zone of employment, economic development and logistics park of some 3,200 sq. km.

Representatives of the Central American Bank of Economic Integration (BCIE by its Spanish initials) and of the multinational IDOM (Works and Assembly Engineering and Management) also participated in the meeting due to their potential interest in the design and execution of the works.

The meeting was held as part of the mandate of the presidents of the countries involved, which on 4<sup>th</sup> October 2007 declared the Gulf of Fonseca to be a 'Zone of Peace' ♦

## Update on Berta Cáceres Trial and Justice

Further to our note about the Berta Cáceres murder trial in the last ENCA Newsletter, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2019 marked the 3<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of Berta's assassination and the attempted killing of Mexican environmentalist and human rights activist Gustavo Castro. Seven members of the Honduran military and executives of the Energy Development Company (Desarrollos Energéticos, DESA) that planned to construct the Agua Zarca dam, have recently been convicted for the murder.

To mark the anniversary, Bertita Zúñiga, Berta's daughter, led a demonstration demanding full justice. Despite the conviction of seven 'material authors', the intellectual authors of the murder are still unpunished. Although evidence against the CEO of DESA, Roberto David Castillo Mejía, has now been formally presented by the Honduran prosecutors, there remain others who fit the description of 'intellectual authors'. These include:

- the European banks that financed the dam;
- the DESA company secretary, Roberto Pacheco Reyes, a former justice minister;
- the DESA company vice president, Jacobo Nicolás Atala Zablah, president of the BAC Honduras bank and a member of one of the most powerful and wealthy families in the country;
- cousins of the Atala Zablah brothers, the Atala Faraj family, who own the FICOHSA Bank.

At a vigil protest from 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> March held in Berta's home town of La Esperanza, the demand for full justice was made by demonstration. The call for full justice is a crucial one because since Berta's assassination hundreds of other Hondurans have been criminalised and/or murdered for political reasons. Nowhere is this clearer than in the article about the Guapinol 12 in this ENCA Newsletter. ♦

*By ENCA member Martin Mowforth*

## Honduran Journalist Gunned Down Outside Home

A Honduran journalist was shot to death Sunday in southern Honduras, making 54-year-old Gabriel Hernández the country's first reporter to be killed in 2019. Gunned down outside his home in the city of Nacaome located south of the capital of Tegucigalpa, the reporter worked for Canal Valle TV.

National Police said that Hernández was walking into his home when he was stopped by a gunman who then shot him several times, leaving him "seriously wounded." He was taken to a hospital in Nacaome where he died of his injuries. There is no word yet on why Hernández may have been shot.

According to the National Commissioner for Human Rights in Honduras (Conadeh), 75 journalists were murdered between 2001 and 2018 in Honduras. The human rights organisation said in February that of the 229 journalists and lawyers murdered during that same time, more than 90 percent of the cases are still unpunished. The same impunity rate exists for the over 6,200 women killed during those years.

Impunity is a problem that "especially affects the most disadvantaged, social peace and frustrates the expectations and opportunities for justice and development in the country," Conadeh director, Roberto Herrera, told local reporters last month.

Journalists, along with human rights defenders and lawyers have faced increased threats and risks of doing their job since the 2009 overthrow of elected President Manuel Zelaya. 62 journalists were killed in Honduras between 2006 and 2017, according to the Latin American Federation of Journalists, but only two of these killings occurred prior to 2009. A 2017 report by the U.S. Department of State says that journalists often "self-censored due to fear of retaliation from organised crime or corrupt government officials" as they face continual threats and harassment by gangs and authorities alike. The 2018 Honduran murder rate averaged ten deaths per day. That number has since spiked to 13 during the first two months of this year, according to the Observatory of Violence of the National Autonomous University.

## MINA LA INDIA, NICARAGUA

Report by ENCA member James Watson

ENCA is receiving reports about the Nicaraguan mining project in the district of La India – a concession by the Nicaraguan government to the British Condor Gold mining company, which covers some 313.26 km<sup>2</sup>, in a mixture of underground and opencast work.

The Nicaraguan government's newsletter Informe Pastrán quotes Condor Gold's Nicaraguan manager, engineer Aiser Sarria Sirias. He explains that this project will be an example for the modern mining industry, in full understanding and compliance with international standards in terms of environmental protection and sustainability, risk prevention and safety.

A report from the Communal Movement of Mina La India, however, refutes these claims. The Movement has filed a claim within the World Bank's ombudsman system, stating that the project violates both national and international laws, with a resurgence of repression of local activists. Members of the community are concerned about the depletion of groundwater resources, access, impact on the ecosystem, possible seismic activity risk, and involuntary displacement.

They report that on November 15<sup>th</sup> (2018), Santa Cruz de la India was occupied by riot police to interfere with local opposition organising. Houses have been searched and anti-mining activists interrogated without legal grounds, they claim. Olman Onel Salazar, a member of the community and the National Movement against Industrial Mining MONFAMI, is currently in hiding from this persecution.

ENCA can highlight that Nicaragua is regrettably no exception to the regional pattern of local communities fighting against the well-known impacts of mining, while the government and international mining industry tries hard to suggest that their projects will of course be the exception and escape such downfalls – despite the enormity of their impact. ♦

## A further brief note on the crisis in Nicaragua

Three of the ENCA members who participated in the CIS election observer delegation in El Salvador (Nick, Doug, Martin) were also able to travel to Nicaragua for a few days before returning to the UK. While the focus of ENCA remains on the environment, such issues are impacted by the wider social and political situation. We therefore feel it important to provide an update on our understanding of the situation, albeit based on admittedly limited information.

Whilst our editorial comments in ENCA 74 are still relevant, we found that:

- there is widespread fear of being detained, either by the police or by paramilitaries;
- activity on the streets at night (especially by the young) is much reduced in comparison with pre-crisis levels;
- the police are considerably more aggressive than they were before the crisis; perhaps this is a little understandable given the casualties they have sustained, but the pre-crisis widespread respect for the police has certainly been replaced by a post-crisis widespread fear;
- according to accounts received, the young are disproportionately targeted for detention;
- there is unquestionable fear of taking part in protest marches or demonstrations, and any demonstrations which do occur are quickly shut down by police;
- despite all of the above, there is also widespread acknowledgement of the gains made by Nicaraguan society under the pre-crisis government of Daniel Ortega;
- however, there is now widespread disapproval of the Ortega/Murillo control over all departments, ministries and activities of the government;
- despite the above, there is also condemnation and disapproval of the

possibility of US intervention in many parts;

We wish to emphasise that these impressions were gained over only a few days. We met and spoke with many people and organisations during that time, and whilst we can reliably describe some of the opinions which were expressed to us as 'widespread', we cannot say precisely how representative these opinions are. These impressions lead us to conclude much the same as we did in the ENCA 74 editorial piece, namely that:

... 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. ... 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 *[if that is indeed the policy direction in which they are heading]*. 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.

We would add that the impression that we gained of the public distaste for the control exercised by the Ortega/Murillo government grew over each day of our visit. Despite the return to a superficial daily calm and 'norm', the crisis still exists. ♦

## Regional Institute sees Guatemala's budget 'vulnerable to corruption'

The Central American Institute for Fiscal Studies, *Instituto Centroamericano de Estudios Fiscales*, stated in December that it was worried about the 2019 budget approved by the Guatemalan congress as it includes spending agreements which are 'vulnerable to corruption' and mismanagement.

In its analysis, the regional entity identified some 'negative aspects' such as the assignment of 145 million quetzales (US\$ 18.8 million) to the construction of plants to treat residual water and solid waste, from the Ministry for Social Development 'without any justification or technical studies'.



It also expressed concerns about the allocation of 105 million quetzales (US\$13.6 million) to the Army Engineers Body, 'without any justification or technical studies', and 70 million quetzales (US\$9 million) to the purchase of construction material for the refurbishment of several hospitals in the countryside.

Another point signalled by the regional entity is the amendment which authorizes municipalities to 'finance spending incurred in human capital investment', because it considers the draft of the article 'deficient and open to lax interpretations' risking 'abuses and corruption'.

For these reasons the Institute highlighted the need to 'not tolerate any assignment vulnerable to corruption and abuses' and has said that the allocations of spending in the budget 'must be legitimate and coherent to the needs of the population and democratic governability'.

December 2018, *El Economista*  
Translated by ENCA member Pamela  
Machado (Extracts only)

## 26 Human Rights Defenders killed in first 11 months of 2018

*Further to our ENCA 74 three-page feature on the dysfunctionality of the Guatemalan political elite during 2018, we received the following letter from the Guatemalan Human Rights Committee (GHRC) in December. It serves as a suitable follow-up to the articles in our earlier feature. We urge all ENCA members and supporters to visit the website of the GHRC ([www.ghrc-usa.org/](http://www.ghrc-usa.org/)) and to support the organisation in whatever way they can.*

Dear Friends,

This year, human rights defenders have been murdered at a rate not seen in years, with at least 26 defenders killed as of November, a pattern of killings that appear the work of death squads particularly targeting indigenous natural resource rights defenders. Many more are under threat from organised criminal structures that have captured the state, from rural judges up to the highest levels of government. Journalists, community organisers and human rights defenders are subject to wide scale false prosecution by corrupt prosecutors. Our partners record 920 such arrest warrants in the Alta Verapaz department alone.

Making the bad situation worse, the International Commission Against Impunity (CICIG) will likely close next year. President Jimmy Morales, facing illicit campaign finance charges, took Guatemala to the edge of a "technical coup" by preventing CICIG chief Ivan Velasquez from returning

to Guatemala and cancelling CICIG staff visas in violation of Constitutional Court rulings. Driving home the point, in an August 31 press event announcing he would not renew CICIG's mandate, Morales surrounded himself with over forty fatigue-clad military officers, as US-donated armed vehicles parked outside CICIG, human rights organisations, and even the US Embassy. Secretary of State Pompeo did not react well, praising Guatemala's cooperation in the drug war, and ignoring the aggressions. While it seems that a strong reaction from Congress led the State Department to take a stronger position in support of CICIG, we must remain vigilant.

CICIG has been a strong ally of defenders, prosecuting corrupt judges, prosecutors and other authorities who participate in corruption networks that prey upon indigenous and small farming communities. These criminal networks are concentrating control of land in order to profit from both extractive industries' and international investors' interests in promoting renewable energy, including US government development funds. If these networks succeed in pushing CICIG out, Guatemalan human rights defenders need support from international human rights advocates in 2019 more than any time over the past 20 years.

Sincerely,

Annie Bird, Director

### **\*\* ENCA seeks a new Treasurer \*\***

Janet Bye has been ENCA's reliable, consistent and thorough treasurer for the last 20 years. But in June this year she is handing over the books and duties to our new treasurer. The only problem is that as yet we don't have a new treasurer. **So this is an appeal for a volunteer to take on the role of ENCA treasurer.** Janet assures us that the responsibilities are not too great and not too time-consuming - but she just needs a rest from it.

Could anyone interested in helping this little organisation that hits above its weight but that needs to manage its finances please contact Janet Bye on [janet.bye@btopenworld.com](mailto:janet.bye@btopenworld.com) and Sheila Amoo-Gottfried on [sheils.amoo-gottfried@talktalk.net](mailto:sheils.amoo-gottfried@talktalk.net). (Sheila is the ENCA secretary.)





## ENCA observers at elections in El Salvador

As on numerous occasions in the past, several ENCA members joined the delegation of election observers organised by the Centro de Intercambio y Solidaridad / Centre for Exchange and Solidarity (CIS) in El Salvador. This was the 13<sup>th</sup> observer delegation run by the CIS since 1994 when the first elections were held after the signing of the Peace Accords.

The difference between the elections in 1994 and those held this year could hardly be more stark. The 1994 elections were particularly notable for: the high number of assassinations, mainly of candidates from the left; the tens of thousands of names of the dead on the electoral lists (some of whom voted); the small number of voting stations (making voting difficult for many of the rural population); and serious attempts at fraud through ballot box stuffing, the bussing-in of Hondurans to vote and manipulation of the count.

By contrast, the 2019 elections can be called free and fair, and reflect a new maturity about the electoral process in El Salvador. This does not mean that they

were without irregularities, but these were of minor significance and were mostly the result of genuine misunderstandings of the intricacies of the electoral process by the myriad electoral officials rather than due to attempts at fraud.

It is worth mentioning that the CIS election reports and recommendations have been instrumental in bringing about these changes, a fact that is now reflected by the high press and media attention at the CIS post-election press conference. Over the years the CIS recommendations have led to:

- a large increase in the number of voting stations leading to increased accessibility to the voting process and now widespread suffrage;
- a clean-up of the voting lists by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) – although it is contended that many errors can still be found on the lists;
- the system of checks and balances throughout the process is now more developed and efficient;
- despite the high level of violence in Salvadoran society, the warnings of violence to come in this election did not materialise.

The result of the 2019 election saw the rise to the Presidency of Nayib Bukele, a former mayor of San Salvador and former member of the leftist Farabundo Martí

National Liberation Front (FMLN), with 54% of the vote. The vote for Bukele was a clear rejection of the two traditional parties, the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) which won 31% of the vote, and the FMLN (14%), both of which must now go through a self-critical analysis if they are to regain their former supporters.

We await the roll-out of Bukele's policies to see how socially and environmentally friendly he plans to be, especially with regard to El Salvador's prohibition of metal mining, and the privatisation of natural resources and national utilities such as El Salvador's most precarious resource of water.

The ENCA members who participated in the CIS observer delegation were Nick Langridge, Esma Helvacioğlu, Doug Specht, Sofia Ollvid, and Martin Mowforth.

*Further thoughts on Bukele and his presidency can be found in an article by Doug Specht for The Conversation: <https://theconversation.com/el-salvador-young-maverick-bukele-wins-presidential-election-but-countrys-future-remains-uncertain-111775>*

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### Meeting Dates 2019

**June 23<sup>rd</sup> | October 10<sup>th</sup>**

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.