

# ENCA



Environmental Network *for* Central America

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

Issue 77 November 2019

## CKDnT

Improving research into and treatment of chronic kidney disease

## Plastics

Guatemala repeals ban on plastics

## Indigenous Rights

Communities in Panama call for international investigation into violations



# INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY AGAINST MINING





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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# International Allies

*A new organisation in El Salvador, International Allies Coalition Against Mining in El Salvador, often just referred to as International Allies, has sent ENCA the following letter.*

Dear friends and allies,

In October 2019, it will be three years since the government of El Salvador successfully defended itself against Pacific Rim/OceanaGold, a transnational mining company that sued the small nation under the ICSID [International Court for the Settlement of Investment Disputes] for a sum of US\$250 million dollars for not granting a mining exploitation permit. The company had never met regulatory requirements to obtain a mining permit and ultimately lost the suit. This was an important turning point in a twelve-year struggle, led by a wide coalition of communities, social organisations, faith groups, academics and political parties that demanded a nationwide prohibition on all metal mining in the small country. In March 2017, El Salvador made history as its legislative assembly passed a unanimous law to prohibit mining. Our International Allies coalition played an important supporting role with Salvadoran mining-affected communities and local organisations to also challenge trade agreements and arbitration tribunals that facilitate the exploitation of people and natural resources, and give corporations powerful tools to impose their interests at great cost to people and the environment.

As international allies we have come a long way since then. Inspired by the victories in El Salvador, we have expanded our work to different parts of Latin America where we are engaged with local communities and local organisations fighting multinational companies gambling with people's rights at investor/state tribunals. Also, in the Philippines, we are working with local environmental organisations and government institutions that are trying to stop OceanaGold from obtaining an extension of its exploitation licence as a result of the serious environmental and

social impacts they have already endured from its Didipio gold mine.

*Along with their letter International Allies sent details of several of their campaigns around Latin America, two of which are from Central America. We have included these accounts here (below) as they serve as updates on these two particular campaigns which ENCA has actively supported in the past.*

## Supporting the implementation of the mining ban in El Salvador

We have continued to support the activities of member organisations of the National Roundtable Against Metallic Mining, a grassroots coalition that led a local movement to prohibit mining in March 2017. Since the mining prohibition, local organisations have continued to advocate with government authorities measures to ensure a proper implementation of the prohibition laws. The environmental movement has now formed the National Alliance against the Privatization of Water to fight attempts by the Legislative Assembly to privatize the management and distribution of water resources as the new government of president Nayib Bukele moves the country towards a more business friendly environment.

## The peaceful resistance of La Puya in Guatemala vs. KCA

International Allies, such as IPS, MiningWatch Canada, CIEL, and Earthworks are collaborating with other international and Guatemalan organisations to support communities peacefully resisting the 'El Tambor' gold mining project. Communities in the municipalities of San José del Golfo and San Pedro Ayampuc, just north of Guatemala City, who are part of 'La Puya' worry that this mine will jeopardize >>

the health and the environment, especially given already scarce water supplies. For their peaceful resistance, they have faced defamation, criminalization, targeted violence and violent repression. The project has been suspended since 2016 by decision of the Constitutional Court over the Ministry of Energy and Mine's failure to consult with Indigenous people prior to granting the license. The company, Nevada-based Kappes, Cassiday & Associates (KCA), is also the subject of an investigation for illegal extraction of natural resources for not having suspended operations immediately. Neither did it obtain a valid construction license for its mine.

Despite many questions over the legitimacy and legality of its mining project, KCA is retaliating with a US\$300 million international arbitration suit against Guatemala that it launched in November 2018 under the terms of the Dominican Republic-Central America Free

## Trade Agreement (DR-CAFTA).

This has put the peaceful resistance at greater risk, particularly as Guatemalan authorities publicly blame them for the suit. It also puts undue pressure on Guatemalan courts deliberating pending cases at a time when the Guatemalan government has been in open confrontation with the Constitutional Court and sacked the UN anti-corruption body, CICIG [*International Commission Against Corruption and Impunity in Guatemala*].

In response, we have been facilitating opportunities for Guatemalan community members and organisations to learn from the experiences of Salvadorans, as well as coordinating efforts with a wider network of allies to build solidarity and to focus international attention on La Puya's peaceful struggle and KCA's abusive suit.

## More information

- National Roundtable Against Mining Demands the Implementation of the Mining Ban: <http://tiny.cc/ke5gfz>
- National Roundtable against Metal Mining Demands technical closure of mines: <http://tiny.cc/ih5gfz>
- Marcelo's Legacy: The environmentalist who fought against metal mining in El Salvador: <http://tiny.cc/ij5gfz>
- Trans-local mining activism connects Nevada and Guatemala: <http://tiny.cc/vl5gfz>
- Over Two Hundred Organizations Denounce Multimillion Lawsuit: <http://tiny.cc/np5gfz>
- North American mining company sues Guatemala in La Puya case: <http://tiny.cc/hr5gfz>

International Allies Coalition Against Mining in El Salvador · 23 Calle Poniente, San Salvador, El Salvador · San Salvador, CA 00000 · El Salvador  
<https://www.stopesmining.org>

## Inter-regional railway to link Panamá with Mexico?

In Sept. 2019 the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (BCIE) and the Central American Parliament announced feasibility plans to create a regional railway to link cities and countries along the length of the isthmus. Due to the high investment costs, the railway would need to be funded by a public-private sector partnership. The most likely stage to start construction will be an electric passenger train to link the Costa Rican cities of San José, Cartago, Heredia and Alajuela, at a cost of US\$ 1,400 million. The Bank will shortly approve credit funding for this 86km length of railway, with 42 stations and trains running every 3-5 minutes. The Salvadoran and Guatemalan governments have requested Bank assistance to fund feasibility studies for reactivating the former Pacific and Transoceanic rail lines in these respective countries. Each Central American country member of BCIE has access to around US\$450 million per year for public investments.

The regional railway would create hundreds of jobs and immediate economic growth, improving the region's competitiveness through moving goods and people more quickly and at much lower cost than by road. The Bank now recognises rail as the development stimulus for an industrial revolution in the region because it is no longer viable to keep building roads, due to the high level of traffic congestion. However, making fully regional rail connection a reality remains a long way off still.

Source: summarised from newspaper article 'BCIE y Parlacen ven factible tren de Panamá a México para unir región', *El Economista*, 26<sup>th</sup> Sept. 2019.

## Government of Panamá searches for incentives to promote recycling

On 2 October, *El Economista* reported that the government of Panamá was looking for ways of incentivising recycling. Speaking at an international symposium on sustainability organised by the Industrial Union of Panamá, the Environment Minister Milciades Concepción said that recycling by industry is practically nil: "Here we can't set up recycling plants because there are no incentives," he declared.

According to official figures the Bay of Panamá receives 175,000 tonnes of waste each year, much of which is composed of plastics. The Director of Urban and Household Hygiene Pedro Castillo said that "on recycling we are years behind."

Cerro Patacón is the main landfill dump for the city of Panamá and the 150 informal recyclers who work there find the collection of plastic material to be less attractive than the collection of other materials because of the low demand for plastics.

The United Nations Environment Programme calculates that in Latin America only 10 per cent of all waste material generated is recycled, and that this rate is lower in areas of poverty. UNEP also estimates that each year 8 million tonnes of plastic reach the sea, and that if this continues, by 2050 there will be more plastics in the oceans than fish.

# Chronic Kidney Disease in Sugar Cane Workers

*The last time we reported on the epidemic of chronic kidney disease of non-traditional causes (CKDnT) was in ENCA 71 (November 2017). At that time PASE (Professionals for Social and Economic Transparency) was concerned about the lack of information in the European Union about the effects of sugar cane production on plantation workers and their families, despite the fact that the EU was increasing its import of sugar and rum from western Nicaragua where the CKDnT epidemic was especially strong. PASE worked with the La Isla Network (LIN) around the cities of Chinandega and Chichigalpa and had difficult relations with the San Antonio Sugar Mill in Chichigalpa (one of the largest in Nicaragua) and with the Nicaraguan government. These relations made the conduct of their research into the causes and treatment of CKDnT difficult and both organisations suffered a crisis of funding in part as a result of this problem.*

*We are pleased now to report that the La Isla Network and the San Antonio Sugar Mill have repaired their relations and have recently received major funding for their work as their news release outlines below.*

## La Isla Network Recipient of Major Funding for the Adelante Initiative

LIN supporters may have wondered why we have been so quiet as of late. One thing we have learned is that constant blasts on social media and flash-in-the-pan press attention does not advance the research into CKDu (Chronic Kidney Disease of undetermined causes); nor does it create the on-the-ground structural changes needed to save lives. It is often prudent to put our collective heads down, build alliances, and do the hard work of deconstructing a problem and then work towards building a solution. When we have something to say, we say it, and right now we have something very exciting to share.

Over the last few months we have been working with our Adelante Initiative partner, San Antonio Sugar Mill, in acquiring substantial financial support for

our occupational health intervention, The Adelante Initiative. The project is supported by the DEG and the BMZ, two German institutions dedicated to sustainable development that come together via their Developppp programme. This support grew out of a smaller project under the DEG's business support services where LIN was the first NGO in their history to be a contractor with DEG. Here we formed the basis for an occupational health and safety programme that we can bring to scale. The new funding support of nearly \$2 million USD will continue The Adelante Initiative for 2019 and into 2021.

The San Antonio Sugar Mill and LIN are also continuing to invest their own resources into the project and additional support is provided by other project partners who are critical to the success of Adelante. The Nicaragua Sugar Producers Association will be essential in ensuring the project grows both within Nicaragua and the region. Our long-time allies at Bonsucro will ensure the findings are disseminated internationally and what we are doing is being incorporated into an improved Bonsucro Standard. To that end, I would like to announce that LIN's Ilana Weiss is part of the working group on the Bonsucro Standard Revision and is focused on ensuring healthy labour conditions are a priority in the new standard.

## The Big Picture

The DEG recognises that international development is ineffective if aid to certain industries is contributing to the detriment of the workforce and surrounding communities. The DEG and all of our Adelante partners believe that occupational health, and addressing CKDu

specifically, must be a priority.

The aim is to validate and adapt these efforts to other affected sugar producing regions, as well as other industries whose workforce is at risk from heat stress, CKDu, and other related occupational illnesses. We look forward to continuing our work with the San Antonio Sugar Mill and remain pleased with how productive this relationship has been these last two years.

Together, we have garnered important allies in the development sector and together we are sending a message via both conviction and data, that no industry should ignore the health of their workers.

We will have a lot more to share in the coming months, including an Adelante Initiative podcast series that is hosted by sustainable business, human rights and environment commentator Ian Welsh, who will explore different aspects of the initiative's work, dedicated to creating safe and productive work practices in the sugarcane industry and beyond.

Thank you for your support. You have helped LIN make the leap from a scrappy advocacy organisation, to a network of committed institutions which have the expertise, passion and leverage to drive real structural change at the highest levels of development and industry.

**As we say these days around LIN, Adelante (onwards).**

**Further details can be found at:**

<http://adelanteinitiative.org/about/>

<https://laislanetwork.org/>

<http://isaresource.com/2017/03/29/la-isa-network-ingenio-san-antonio-joined-forces/>





# Guatemalan Government bans plastics; then repeals ban.

*Further to our round-up of plastics-related legislation in Central American countries (ENCA 75, April this year) and our update in ENCA 76, ENCA member Lucy Goodman has provided translations and a summary of two articles which between them illustrate the cynical greenwash deployed by governments in their relationship with environmental protection. In this case, the government of Guatemala is shown to be the cheating 'greenwasher'. (Both articles were originally sourced from the Spanish News Agency EFE and appeared in El Economista 20/09/19.)*

In September the Government of Guatemala announced the prohibition of the use and distribution of single-use plastic bags and other plastic items in order to contribute to the protection of the environment and gave a two-year deadline for adapting to this measure.

The Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources published the government agreement in the official daily newspaper (Diario de Centro America), announcing the restriction that also applies to plastic straws, plates, cups, containers and plastic or polystyrene food packaging.

This movement does not restrict or limit any municipal initiatives with the same purpose, as within several constituencies in the country, similar measures have already been in place for a while. The Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources will be verifying, inspecting and monitoring compliance with this legislation itself, and will train legal persons to apply the corresponding sanctions for non-compliance.

The only exempt plastic items will be those "for medical or therapeutic purposes", as well as imported items that are "factory sealed with plastic material or expanded polystyrene".

Showing a photo of a tortoise tangled in plastic, the president Jimmy Morales celebrated on social media this decision in which "Guatemala says no to plastic" and affirmed that this changes the country for future generations to come. "It's time to change our form of consumption, for our nation and the future of our children" he proclaimed.

Subsequently, in a press conference, the president reiterated his pleasure with this decision, that there are other products available for use, and that there are two

years to accomplish the transition and find the right substitutes.

Questioned about the loss of jobs in the plastics sector, Morales advocated seeing the benefits and asked for it not to get "dramatic" and "to find a solution to the issues".

The Plastics Commission of the Guatemalan Exporters Association, formed of 60 manufacturers and export companies states on its website that the sector creates some 10,000 jobs directly and 60,000 indirectly, and the plastics industry is the "industry of export, indirectly the most important in the country". The principal export destinations of these products are Central America, the Caribbean, the United States and Mexico.

*[ENCA editorial comment: it is rumoured that President Morales knew that the measure would be repealed by any right-wing successor to the presidency. Enter stage right: President Elect Giammattei.]*

## President-elect of Guatemala to repeal the agreement to ban plastic

Guatemala's President-elect Alejandro Giammattei announced on Wednesday that when he takes office on January 14th, he will repeal the agreement that prohibits the use and distribution of single-use plastic bags, among other products.

"It will be repealed on the 14<sup>th</sup> January. Plastic usage is not prohibited; there are other more important things to do. We must focus on

culture, education, environmental awareness" declared Giammattei to the press after he left a meeting with the Chamber of Commerce. *[ENCA editorial comment: as if that is what he is going to do. Please find us a Guatemalan politician who we can believe.]*

Giammattei had warned that he would look into this agreement because in his view there is a "much deeper" problem. *[ENCA editorial comment: indeed there is; it is the deep corruption within Guatemalan state politics and the Chamber of Commerce.]*

Various commercial sectors have spoken out against the measure because they consider the real problem of contamination is in the management and control of solid waste, while the Plastics Commission of the Guatemalan Exporters Association states that 10,000 direct and 60,000 indirect jobs are at risk. *[ENCA editorial comment: the real problem of contamination is in the state of Guatemalan national politics.]*



# The environment in Belize:

## Little Rain; Stagnant; Polluted Rivers; Dengue

*In August this year, The Guardian (London) published an article entitled 'Why tiny Belize is a world leader in protecting the ocean'. The article was written by Jo Griffin and can be found at: <http://tiny.cc/3j4gfh>*

*The article lauds Belize for its Managed Access programme of fishing in nine protected zones of the marine environment. It also very appropriately points out the problems of enforcement and mentions some of the other pressures on the programme, but in general it gives the impression that Belize is a world leader on tackling environmental issues. The Managed Access programme may well be a praiseworthy scheme, and there is no doubt that the country is home to many people who try to earn an honest and sustainable living with excellent ideas and practices relating to both society and the environment. But the impression that Belize is a world leader on environmental issues belies the corruption that lies behind so many political and economic decisions there. As Candy González of BELPO (Belize Institute of Environmental Law and Policy) said upon reading the article: "And all is right in the world. There is no climate change; there is no corruption; people aren't starving; our rivers are not polluted, sending poison to the Reef..."*

*Also, in August this year, the Belizean twice-weekly newspaper Amandala published an editorial piece entitled: 'The sad state of our Belize rivers: little rain; stagnant, polluted rivers; dengue'. The article paints a somewhat different picture of the country. We reproduce the editorial below.*

*We are grateful to Amandala, in the form of editor Russell Vellos, for permission to reproduce this editorial piece here. Amandala is a Belizean tabloid newspaper; published twice weekly, it is considered the "most widely circulated newspaper in Belize".*

<https://www.amandala.com.bz>

**On** the environment and health fronts, it has not been a good year. We are a little past halfway through 2019 and we are in a drought that's beginning to compare with 1975: at least two of our rivers have never been this unhealthy, and we are in the middle of a frightening dengue outbreak. We are also in the midst of making final preparations for that time of year, our nervous annual storm watching season. We normally don't look favourably at weather systems coming off the west coast of Africa, but this year we might welcome a storm, if it doesn't reach Category 1, and if it throws some, not too much, water our way.

The big drought of 1975 drove a lot of small farmers backward because, at the encouragement of the Marketing Board and the Ministry of Agriculture, they had taken loans from the DFC to expand their farms using improved technology. Farmers in the Cayo District, especially, borrowed money to bulldoze small parcels, prepare the land with rubber wheel tractors, and purchase fertilizers and seeds. They ended up owing, and many of them never recovered. The interest on their loans ate them up. They would never venture past plantation (milpa) agriculture again.

Grain production has largely been taken over by the Mennonite group, and they have been hard hit by the lack of rain this year. The good news is that many in this group are not as vulnerable as were the small farmers in Cayo back in 1975. It has been a bad season, especially for farmers producing crops in the grass family.

For nearly three decades citizens living along or near the Macal River have been pointing out that the river was in danger. The Macal has been dammed three times, with the Mollejon in the 1990s, the Chalillo in the 2000s, and the Vaca, around 2010.

There were some questions asked when the Mollejon, a run-of-river dam with limited water storage capacity, was built,

but when the talk began for the construction of the Chalillo dam, designed to store water to be released to the Mollejon in the dry season, there were major challenges.

Some experts knew that this second dam could seriously impact the Macal River, negatively, and some argued that the impacts would be catastrophic, that the beauty and the quality and the life of the river would be ruined. Many also expressed concerns about the site of the dam. It was argued, some say proven, that claims that the dam was being constructed on granite rock were false.

After successfully navigating through the courts – the challengers to the Chalillo dam took the matter all the way to the Privy Court – another dam to store more water, the Vaca, was constructed on the Macal. The experts might know if it is one, two, or all three that killed the river.

A very famous Belizean said, "Progress Brings Problems." Many knew the dams would cause problems, and a few of them have never wavered from keeping their concerns in front of the authorities and the Belizean people.

For a long time the leaders for the protection of the Macal River have been George and Candy Gonzalez of BELPO (Belize Institute of Environmental Law and Policy). They were among those who challenged the construction of the Chalillo dam, and they were upfront with their views when the Vaca dam was proposed too.

The website, [waterpowermagazine.com](http://waterpowermagazine.com), in the story, "Vaca dam challenge goes to court", said that BELPO had "gone to the court for an injunction, as well as a compliance order (or writ mandamus), ordering the Department of the Environment to enforce the country's environmental laws. The plaintiffs maintain that there should be no talk about building a third dam at Vaca when the environmental compliance plan for >>

the second dam, Chalillo, is not being complied with.”

In a March 29, 2019 letter to the Amandala, “20 Years of Misinformation”, one of many letters that BELPO has sent to this newspaper over the years, the organisation said, “Those who pushed for the deal to build the dams on the Macal River, three politicians and a senator, have no shame as to what their actions have cost the people along the Macal and Belize Rivers.

“The water in the Macal River is polluted and people shouldn’t drink it or swim in it. Many of the fish in the river have high levels of mercury, which affects the central nervous system and is most dangerous to children and pregnant women. There is still no workable dam break early warning system.”

A footnote to the letter pointed out that Dr. Candy Gonzalez was “one of two NGO representatives on the National Environmental Appraisal Committee (NEAC) for over 7 years and was the sole ‘no’ vote in the 10-1 decision to give environmental clearance for the Chalillo Reservoir/Dam.”

The water is behind the dams now, a done deal, and the Macal River has become a stagnant waterway, with the beauty gone, with fish with mercury levels that make them inedible, with water lilies growing in pools of dead water where once there was a vital, flowing stream. All that can be considered at this time are measures to mitigate the damage, as much as possible. This calls for honesty and urgency on the part of our environmental and agricultural scientists, and engineers.

The New River has been spitting up dead fish during the dry season for decades, and everyone knew that there were things going on in that river that were similar to what happens sometimes to the Crooked Tree Lagoon. Whenever rains are below normal, especially in periods that can be considered as drought conditions, there is oxygen starvation and this is evidenced by fish dying.

On the New River it goes a lot deeper than oxygen starvation. The story there is also about serious pollution. When the crocodiles have belly ache you know you have a very serious problem. Dr. Marisa Tellez, the Executive Director of the Crocodile Research Coalition, in a story reported on Channel Seven News, said she has been studying the crocodile population in Belize and what they found with the crocodiles in the New River was disturbing.

Dr. Tellez said, “We were finding crocodiles that were highly lethargic. Their skin was peeling off. Their skin was turning a whitish-bluish tone. We found many young crocodiles with no teeth.”

Most everyone knew there were things going on with the New River that were different from what was going on in the Crooked Tree Lagoon, and the lack of rain this year has forced these issues to the fore. The New River is being assaulted by factory effluent, human waste, and waste from agricultural developments. There is another task here for environmental and agricultural scientists, and engineers.

The problems on the Macal and New rivers are not the only environmental concerns for this country. There are other rivers/creeks that are under siege, there is concern for the quality of the sea in front of Belize’s largest population centre, Belize City, and there is concern that ships coming to our country might not be respecting our environmental laws. Our authorities have their triumphs, one of them being a far more advanced system for solid waste disposal, but for the most part they seem overwhelmed, and failing.

Another huge problem for Belize at this time is a scary dengue epidemic that is already a horror story. Reports are that we have nearly 2,000 cases this year, far more than double any previous year, and the experts are saying that when the rains come, to help our farmers, we might see an increased incidence of dengue.

Dengue is a debilitating, sometimes fatal disease. The WHO (World Health Organisation) says that in 1970, “when Latin America lived largely dengue-free,

the region only had the DEN-2 serotype. Then DEN-1 entered the scene in 1977, followed by DEN-4 and a new strain of DEN-2 in 1981, this last virus triggering the Cuban epidemic. DEN-3 was the most recent virus to reappear, after many years absence.

“While infection by one dengue virus provides lifelong immunity to that serotype, it increases the risk of severe illness when an individual is later infected by any of the other dengue serotypes. As a result, hyperendemicity – the circulation of multiple serotypes – produces more DHF cases and more deaths.”

The problems with the Macal and New Rivers, and the dangerous dengue situation, are not going away by themselves. The response of our authorities is wanting.

<https://amandala.com.bz/news/rain-stagnant-polluted-rivers-dengue/>

*Anna Nwagwu is a supporter of ENCA who has just finished a stint of volunteering in Belize (September 2019). Towards the end of her time there she and her boyfriend James Jordan went on a tour of the New River through the Belizean tropical rainforest in Orange Walk province. She sent us a short summary of some highlights – or perhaps we should say ‘lowlights’ – of the tour.*

“The tour operator wore a face coverage/mask because of the strong smell of the poisoned river, to avoid directly inhaling the toxics within the river which are the waste of the American sugar factory nearby. The tour operator politely asked us to not touch the water under any circumstances. There were certain sections of the river where the whole surface was covered by dead fish and wherever tree branches/bushes touched the river, they were dead and grey. In fact the river had a thick grey layer on top of it.

People who live nearby complain about the smell getting stronger and stronger. Belizeans say that the reason for the layer or film of dirt is the extreme drought during the rainy season as well as the sugar factory which releases its waste and sewage into the river.”



## Panamanian indigenous organisations call for international investigation into rights violations caused by transmission line in Panamá

*In August ENCA received the following press release from the Centre for International Environmental Law (CIEL) regarding the potential damage that may be caused by the construction of an electricity transmission line across indigenous land in Panamá. We are grateful to both CIEL and MODETEAB (Movement for the Defence of the Territories and Ecosystems of Bocas del Toro) for their permission to reproduce their statement in the ENCA Newsletter. Appropriate addresses and websites are given for both organisations below the release.*

Panamá City/Washington, DC — On International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, a coalition of Panamanian indigenous organisations and international allies presented a submission to the United Nations (UN) and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) about the risks various indigenous communities are facing as a result of a planned transmission line.

Cutting through the ancestral lands of these communities, the electric transmission line would threaten not just one of the last intact tropical rainforests in Panamá, but also the economic, social, and cultural survival of the indigenous peoples living in the affected area. Through this submission, the signatory organisations denounce before the international community the environmental and social damage that the project would cause. Further, they denounce the ways in which the project has violated the right of indigenous communities to be consulted before projects of this magnitude are approved.

“Having been excluded from a process of effective consultation, our community objects to the project, especially in light of the grave and irreversible impacts it will have for our communities,” said Feliciano Santos, Coordinator of the Movement for the Defence of the Territories and Ecosystems of Bocas del Toro (MODETEAB). “For us, this project represents much more than a simple incursion into our territories, because if we lose access to our lands, we will be at risk of losing our homes and ways of life, in addition to our cultural values, ethnic identity, and traditions forged in our ancestral territories.”

As the submission explains, ETESA — Panamá's state-owned Electric

Transmission Company — has pushed forward the Transmission Line IV project without adequately consulting the affected indigenous communities. This violates their right to consultation and free, prior and informed consent, which is protected under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as well as numerous human rights instruments.

In addition, it is expected that the project will pave the way for new development projects, including a coastal highway, massive mining projects, and real estate speculation, which would lead to dispossession of land, the destruction of traditional ways of life, and the deforestation and pollution of the affected areas. In spite of these foreseen risks, the State of Panamá has refused to adopt adequate measures to protect the economic and cultural rights of these communities, in addition to their rights to land and to live in a healthy environment.

For this reason, the signatory organisations decided to communicate their concerns to the Special Rapporteurs of the UN and the IACHR, requesting that they investigate, evaluate, and monitor the situation and that they urge the State of Panamá to take immediate preventative measures to suspend the planning and construction of the transmission line until the affected communities' concerns have been fully addressed.

“The international community should take note that this situation is indicative of a pattern of projects illegitimately imposed by the Panamanian authorities within indigenous peoples' territories,” said Sarah Dorman of the People, Land, and Resources Programme at the Centre for International Environmental Law (CIEL). “The Panamanian State must fully comply

with its international obligations, including the duty to respect indigenous peoples' right to prior consultation and consent, as well as the duty to protect the rights of indigenous peoples to conserve their territories and natural resources, to enjoy their own means of subsistence, and to maintain their distinctive spiritual and cultural relationship with their lands.”

### Contacts:

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- Sarah Dorman, Programa de Pueblos, Tierra y Recursos en el Centro para el Derecho Ambiental Internacional (CIEL), [sdorman@ciel.org](mailto:sdorman@ciel.org), +1 202-742-5854

### Note for editors:

The communication was addressed to the Special Rapporteur of the UN on the rights of indigenous peoples, Victoria Tauli Corpuz; to the Special Rapporteur of the UN on human rights and the environment, David Boyd; to the UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, Karima Benounne; to the Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of the IACHR, Antonia Urrejola Noguera; to the Special Rapporteur on Economic, Social, Cultural, and Environmental Rights of the IACHR, Soledad García Muñoz; and to the Rapporteur for Panamá of the IACHR, Flávia Piovesan.

### CIEL

Since 1989, the Centre for International Environmental Law (CIEL) has used the power of law to protect the environment, promote human rights, and ensure a just and sustainable society. Its headquarters are in Washington DC ([info@ciel.org](mailto:info@ciel.org)) and its European office is in Geneva ([geneva@ciel.org](mailto:geneva@ciel.org)). [www.ciel.org](http://www.ciel.org)



# Serious abuses of labour rights in Costa Rica and Honduras

*At the beginning of October this year we received the following report from Banana Link, to whom we are grateful for their work and reports.*

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

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

In the case of Suragroh, Make Fruit Fair partner Banana Link and the International Union of Foodworkers (IUF) has alleged breaches of the UK's Ethical Trading Initiative Base Code for failure to respect unions and pay living wages, and Fyffes has refused to participate in local mediation to remedy these.

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

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

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

Meanwhile, at ANEXCO, dialogue facilitated by the Costa Rican Ministry of Labour has failed to provide a space in which local unions can negotiate with

ANEXCO management and Fyffes, and the local unions report continued failure to comply with core labour standards enshrined in Costa Rican legislation.

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

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

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

## Case Studies:



*"They never contributed to social insurance and now I will not be able to retire or finally rest after so many years spent on the plantations. I have to continue looking for work to survive." – María Gómez (65) who worked for nearly 30 years as a supervisor at Melon Export SA.*



*"I got pregnant, and they do not allow pregnancy" – Marys Suyapa Gómez, sacked for being pregnant after working at Suragroh for 15 years*



*"Fyffes in Honduras does not respect the fundamental rights of women workers; the majority of employees are women who have up to 26 years of work without social security rights or social benefits. We demand respect for freedom of association and collective bargaining." – Iris Munguia, Coordinator, COLSIBA (the Regional Coordination of Latin American Banana & Agro-Industrial Workers' Unions)*

# Agroecology in Nicaragua: transforming the way people live and their relationship to the land

By ENCA member and NSC representative  
Helen Yuill

According to an International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report of 7 August 2019, our food system – including farming and grazing, transportation, packaging, and feed production – produces a catastrophic 37% of greenhouse gas emissions.

With the sharp rise in international awareness of the gravity of the climate crisis, the 200 million strong international movement of small farmers and indigenous peoples, La Vía Campesina, is playing a key role in not only denouncing our current system as unsustainable but also proposing and putting into practice alternative models that protect the environment as well as people.

On 17 December, 2018 the UN approved a declaration of the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas, the outcome of a 17 year struggle by La Vía Campesina and other organisations. The declaration “endorses the protection of livelihoods of peasants and all small-scale food producers feeding the world.”

The Rural Workers Association (ATC) in Nicaragua was a founder member of La Vía Campesina in 1993 and plays a prominent role nationally and internationally in advocating for agroecology, food sovereignty and climate justice.

The ATC has two areas of work: defending the employment rights of rural workers in the coffee, banana and tobacco sectors; and supporting co-operatives and communities growing coffee, maize, beans, fruit, and vegetables using agroecological methods.

In line with La Vía Campesina principles and practice the ATC views agroecology as much more than organic farming. It's about transforming the way we live and our relationship to the land. This transformation can only be achieved through a holistic integrated approach that includes poverty reduction, gender equality, overcoming dependence through food sovereignty, the cultural recovery of traditional medicines, political activism, building the social economy, and community,

intergenerational and international solidarity.



## Empowering women farmers: the Gloria Quintanilla Co-operative

One of eight communities that the ATC is supporting is a co-operative of 22 women in the village of Santa Julia south west of Managua where 79 families live.

The land was a heavily polluted coffee plantation owned by the Somoza family. Since being granted the land under the Sandinista agrarian reform programme in the 1980s, the women have successfully transformed the area through using agroecology. This has strengthened their self-sufficiency in food and also enabled them to secure extra income through selling food to neighbours and in the local markets.

As well as organic coffee, the women grow bananas, plantains, cassava, yam, vegetables, maize, bamboo and a wide variety of fruit. These are grown under taller trees that provide shade from the intense tropical sun. Seeds are produced locally, saved and exchanged with other farmers.

This diversification increases resilience to crises whether they are related to climate chaos or political upheavals. To overcome water shortages the co-operative together with the local community harvest water in the rainy season in underground tanks and pits and use it to water plants in the dry season.

The strength of the co-op lies in the way in which older women and younger women work together, and its commitment to community solidarity and promoting gender equality. One member commented: “Now we are rich in terms of our organisation as a co-operative.”

## Agroecology: the next generation

*“Agroecology is a revolution! [W]e are killing the Earth ... the most urgent task we face is the search for ways to protect it.” Marlen Sánchez, director, Latin America Agroecology Institute, Nicaragua (IALA).*

A fundamental area of the ATC's work is providing training for the next generation of small farmers. This is carried out through an ATC youth network and the setting up of an IALA.

The first group of students aged from 17 – 30 from Central American and Caribbean La Vía Campesina organisations are due to graduate in November this year. The objective of IALA is to provide a very broad, holistic training — technical, political, and ideological — as the basis for not only working towards food sovereignty but also fundamentally transforming society and people's relationship with the land.

The campus itself is an agroecological farm created and maintained by the students, course facilitators, and workers.

The course creates a shared learning community with training that covers the principles and practice of agroecology. Time spent in the IALA is alternated with time spent on practical application in their home communities.

Equally important as the training in environmentally sustainable agriculture is political preparation so that the students are able to have a multiplier effect in strengthening their own communities and organisations on their return home.

*Helen Yuill from the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign (NSC) visited Nicaragua on a delegation organised by Friends of the ATC, a US solidarity network building solidarity with and support for the ATC. Over the coming year NSC will be developing a programme of raising awareness and solidarity links with the ATC including the organisation of a speaker tour of the UK by an ATC representative in 2020.*

Further information:

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

FB nicaraguasc

Twitter NSCAG\_UK



# Ten months without rain caused severe droughts in Honduras

*The following is a summary of two articles from the Salvadoran daily La Prensa Gráfica which itself used reports from the Spanish News Agency EFE. They were translated and summarized by ENCA's Brazilian member Pamela Machado who is currently living in Lisbon, Portugal. We are grateful to Pamela, La Prensa Gráfica and EFE for the information.*

*As if Hondurans do not have enough problems to face, with a corrupt, gangster-run, narco government in control, ultra-high levels of violence and poor and deteriorating public services, its producers now suffer drought conditions.*

In September a lack of water led Honduras to be declared in a 'state of emergency' after 10 months without rainfall. The drought had serious consequences for agricultural production, cattle and the levels of drinkable water available. The dry weather is a result of climate change and these circumstances are likely to occur again next year, warned president Juan Orlando Hernández.

The most affected departments were Olancho, El Paraíso, Yoro, Francisco Morazán, Valle and Choluteca. In Olancho, one of the main producers of crops, incidents of fires were registered during the last days of August, an uncommon circumstance for this time of the year. The capital Tegucigalpa was also

heavily affected as the two most important reservoirs that supply the capital had a 20 percent decrease in capacity. Residents of Tegucigalpa were forced to get water from small streams and rivers outside or purchase water from private tanks.

The drought has wrecked crops, compromising agricultural productivity and the income of many families. It is estimated that almost 50 per cent of corn and beans production of 2019 was lost as a result of the scarcity of water supply. Livestock production was also deeply affected. Ramos, a rancher from Olancho, has never seen such a severe drought in his 56 years of activity, he said to EFE, the Spanish News Agency. Ramos believes ranchers like him have some guilt as cattle ruin natural areas.

Méndez, another rancher from Olancho, agrees: "We have damaged nature so much and now we have to pay the bill." Méndez's words reflect the reality that is seen in the Valle de Agalta, where the forests are being destroyed, many of them no longer have trees, as a result of cattle in the region's pastures.

Agriculture is a primary source of income and economic activity for the Honduran population; however, despite its importance for the subsistence of families, farmers face numerous limitations in their activities. These

include poor infrastructure, corporate and political interests and dominance of plantation land owned by international enterprises.

In addition to these challenging conditions, developing nations like Honduras tend to feel the impacts of climate change more acutely, but are less equipped to respond to it. Climate change affects farmers and ranchers directly, many of them depending on the activity for a living.

As the consequences of climate change become increasingly evident, an economy heavily dependent on weather conditions provokes hunger and poverty and accentuates inequality. In order to survive the poor harvest, many Honduran families and workers see no other option than to find alternatives to increase their income. Immigrating to neighbouring cities and countries, and even making their way up to North America, has proved to be a frequent escape out of the precarious conditions in their home country.

Securing improvements in the conditions of agricultural workers in Honduras would be an important factor in tackling the harsh effects of climate change, creating more sustainable methods for agriculture and leaving farmers less vulnerable to environmental shocks. But in order for effective changes to happen, government support, adequate policies, and most importantly a will to change, are necessary.

## Phillip Wearne

In ENCA Newsletter no. 73 (June 2018), we published an obituary of Phillip Wearne who in his last two years of life had become an active and essential member of ENCA. The knowledge and understanding of the rest of us who attended ENCA meetings were improved enormously by Phillip's remarkable knowledge and understanding of the Central American region and the issues of development which shaped it. His sudden and untimely death at the age of 60 deprived us and many others of his wisdom and advice.

In sorting out and managing Phillip's estate, his three sisters, Jane, Sue and Liz, have seen fit to make a substantial donation to ENCA in the hope that it:

*"... will contribute to ENCA's continued sponsorship of small, sustainable, grassroots projects and development activities. It will be a fitting tribute to our brother's memory and a lasting legacy to know that he continues to have a positive impact by promoting sustainable human development, poverty reduction and political empowerment of grassroots communities in Central America. It was an area of the world which captured his heart and mind."*

ENCA is extremely grateful to Jane, Sue and Liz and will do everything we can to ensure that the extra funds will be used precisely as they describe.

## ENCA'S ENVIRONMENTAL STUDY TOUR TO BELIZE

Further to our early notice of a possible environmental study tour to Belize, it now seems likely that ENCA will run its proposed tour during July, or August or September of 2020.

The tour group will spend between 14 and 21 days in the country, making a range of visits to developmental, environmental and community projects and sites of concern and relevance to the issues of environment and development. The precise dates and duration are currently uncertain but will be fixed at the next ENCA meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2020. By that time a full programme of visits and meetings will also be announced.

It is intended that the travel disadvantages of such a tour will be offset by:

- Solidarity benefits between host communities / organisations and ENCA.
- Financial contributions to host groups.
- Work (such as plastic-picks and beach clean-ups or specific work contributions requested by our host groups) will be undertaken.
- Contributions will be made to specific Belizean tree nurseries or reforestation schemes.
- A group contribution to a specific global carbon offset scheme.

It is intended that tour participants will make their own way to Belize for the start date and also make their own return travel arrangements. A payment to ENCA will cover the in-country costs of accommodation, most meals, travel within the country and entry fees where required.

We should be grateful if persons interested in participating in the tour could express that interest to Martin Mowforth on [mmowforth@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:mmowforth@plymouth.ac.uk)

## CIS - Saint Oscar Romero 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Delegation

Solidarity and the Struggle for Social Justice in El Salvador Today!  
March 19 – 26, 2020

Saint Romero: Solidarity and the Struggle for Social Justice in El Salvador today, Programme will include:

- Romero Vigil and processions Saturday, March 22 and March 24
- Visit Romero's home and the chapel where he gave his life and Cathedral and tomb of Saint Romero
- Visit women imprisoned for still births and obstetric emergencies, accused of abortion, and women who have been released due to organisation and solidarity.
- Visit Romero and Paso Puente Communities and learn of their struggle for social inclusion after living years in squalor conditions – no water, plumbing, shacks made of plastic, tin and old bed springs, rampant illiteracy, discrimination by authorities, and injustice. Learn of the difference solidarity and working as partners with mutual respect can make.
- Visit women empowered through CIS small business programme /formerly SEW
- Analysis: the roots of violence and migration; the struggle for water as a human right, impact and strategies of the new government of Nayib Bukele in El Salvador.

Applications due by: online or mailed attached due by January 19 [delegations@cis-elsalvador.org](mailto:delegations@cis-elsalvador.org).

Payment due by: February 19<sup>th</sup>.  
<http://www.cis-elsalvador.org/index.php/en/payment>  
[s](#) (menu-delegation fee)

## Invitation to an evening about agroecology in Nicaragua.

London, 19/11/2019 at 7 pm, Highgate Library, Chester Rd N19 5BX

Nicaraguan food and drinks available. There will be a report on the Institute of Latin American Agroecology, where students learn about confronting climate change and achieving food sovereignty. Free entry.

Organised by Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign

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## ENCA members take part in Global Climate Strike actions.

On 20<sup>th</sup> Sept. 2019 ENCA member Stephanie Williamson joined over 120 cyclists riding from Tower Bridge to Parliament Square to support the student strikers' calls for immediate and far-reaching government action to address the climate emergency.

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## New Chair and Treasurer

Following the ENCA meeting in October 2019 we have appointed a new Chair and new treasurer. We would like to thank Nick and Janet for their dedication and hard work as they step down, and welcome Doug and Esma into their new roles.

**Chair: Doug Specht.** Doug is a senior lecturer at the University of Westminster and has been an ENCA member for 13 years.

**Treasurer: Esma Helvacioğlu.** Esma works in safeguarding and child protection for charities and has been a member of ENCA for 5 years.

**enca.org.uk**  
 **@ENCA\_News**

### Meeting Dates 2020

**March 29<sup>th</sup> | June 21<sup>st</sup> | October 18<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.



