

ENCA



Environmental Network *for* Central America

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Drug smuggling and the pineapple trade

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Remembering the life and work of Nica's climate advocate

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Culling Lionfish to preserve Belize's reefs



**BUKELE,
BITCOIN,
AND CLIMATE CHANGE**



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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Nayib Bukele's Twitter profile
picture in June 2021

Bukele eyes Bitcoin to renew El Salvador's economic independence, but the economic and environmental impacts might not add up

By Doug Specht

On 9th June 2021, El Salvador's congress approved President Nayib Bukele's proposal for Bitcoin, one of the world's largest cryptocurrencies, to become legal tender within the nation. This will move the currency from a form of payment that businesses can choose to accept (Bitcoin is already legal in El Salvador, as it is in most countries) to one that they have to accept. Celebrating his win, Bukele quickly changed his profile picture on Twitter to one in which lasers are shining from his eyes, a move that did not go unnoticed by other crypto enthusiasts such as Elon Musk. To these enthusiasts, the act is seen as paving the way for Bitcoin to become more mainstream and accessible. Others, though, question why any government would wish to link themselves to a currency that sees wild volatility—in the week following the Salvadoran Congress' approval, Bitcoin's value fluctuated between US\$38,200 and US\$31,428, having previously hit more than US\$58,000 through May.

So why would Bukele want to bring such a currency to the country? The reasons are complex and multifaceted. First, Bukele has earned a reputation of being technologically savvy and paints himself as much a social media star as a president. This, along with his promises to be radically different from the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) and the Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (ARENA), political parties that have dominated Salvadoran politics since the end of the Salvadoran Civil War, helped him win over young voters in 2019, leading to his election. Bukele enjoys announcing his ideas and policies on Twitter. Unlike former US president Donald Trump, though, his content is clever and nuanced and often draws upon

longstanding Internet jokes and memes. Although Bukele's personal futurist ambitions are surely the catalyst for this move, it is El Salvador's complex financial and political history that have paved the way for the adoption of Bitcoin.

In 2001, El Salvador moved away from its own currency—the colón, which was adopted in 1892—and made the US dollar its legal, and only, currency. Although places such as Ecuador undertook dollarization to stem runaway inflation, El Salvador's move was less driven by a moment of economic crisis—though it did reduce interest rates in the short term. Instead, it was the consequences of living in the United States' backyard that forced El Salvador's hand. Political turmoil, the bloody civil war, and US foreign policy led to the emigration of many Salvadorans to the United States. This saw trade links and remittances grow as expats transferred dollars back to El Salvador. In 2016, these remittances accounted for 17 percent of El Salvador's GDP, around US\$4.6 billion. The US has also accounted for up to 60 percent of El Salvador's export trade. These transactions were smoothed by dollarization, but as the colón stopped circulating, El Salvador's central bank ceased to have any role in monetary policy, with this now resting in the US Federal Reserve's hands. The long-term benefits to El Salvador have been questioned, and many have called for the end of the US dollar in El Salvador and for the country to regain control of its reserves.

Bukele has announced this regaining of control, as well as both the boosting of the economy and increased ease of transferring remittances as reasons for >

Bitcoin adoption. However, his assertion that the Salvadoran GDP will increase by 25 percent if 1 percent of Bitcoin is invested in the country has been widely questioned by economists, who note that his cited Bitcoin market cap of US\$680 billion is unstable and that most bitcoin owners will not be looking to invest in El Salvador. Furthermore, given that El Salvador has one of the lowest rates of Internet connectivity in the Americas, it is hard to see how the wider population will be able to embrace Bitcoin for the collection of remittances or otherwise.

If the economic reasons for Bitcoin adoption are questionable, it might still be seen as a politically astute move. Talk of smoothing remittances will win over overseas voters. It will also be seen as a step towards further independence from the US, a policy that can win votes on both the political left and right. El Salvador might have been economically better off if it had adopted a cryptocurrency that was more stable, but these, being linked one to one to the US dollar, would have been much less of a political statement.

As a way to court voters, though, with perhaps little real economic gain, the

adoption of Bitcoin might have some deeply significant and very real impacts on the lives of Salvadorans—unintended consequences of Bukele's desire to appear ultra-modern. The digital mining of Bitcoin, like other crypto currencies, involves – in simple terms – using sophisticated and high-powered computers to solve extremely complex computational maths problems, the completion of which is rewarded with the production of a new bitcoin which can be store in a digital wallet, and then used for purchases and trading. This process is hugely power intensive, using dozens of terawatts of electricity per year—more than the whole of countries such as the Netherlands. And with a large amount of Bitcoin mining taking place where electricity is the cheapest, the environmental impact is huge. China has the most Bitcoin mining facilities of any country by far, and although the country has been slowly moving toward renewable energy, about two-thirds of its electricity comes from coal. The Cambridge Centre for Alternative Finance estimates a single transaction of Bitcoin has the same carbon footprint as 680,000 Visa transactions. Other currencies such as Ethereum have made promises of being more environmentally friendly, but with little oversight of the

crypto-mining industry these promises are hard to measure.

With El Salvador being highly susceptible to climate change, pushing for the use of such an environmentally damaging currency seems short-sighted. The World Bank already predicts that weather-related events and other hazards caused by climate change mean El Salvador is incurring annual losses of around 2.5 percent GDP. Severe weather events driven by climate change have also led to a significant loss of life, habitats, and biodiversity in the last 30 years. Unregulated and unabated crypto mining will further drive climate change, making living in many parts of the world increasingly difficult, including Central America.

Bukele claims to be bringing El Salvador into the future with cryptocurrency. His choice of Bitcoin, though, rather than those that claim more environmental credentials or those that are securely connected to the US dollar, suggest that this is little more than a political gimmick—and one that could have serious environmental consequences that cannot be outweighed by any financial gains.



The Jilamito Hydroelectric Project in Honduras

The SOAW is the School Of The Americas Watch, a US advocacy organisation founded in 1990 to protest the training of mainly Latin American military officers by the United States Department of Defence at the School of the Americas (SOA). Since 2000 the SOA has been called the Western Hemispheric Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC). Prior to that time the School Of The Americas had become popularly renamed the School Of Assassins. Most of the Latin American military human rights abusers spent some of their training time in the SOA. In April 2021, along with the Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective, the Broad Movement for Dignity and Justice in Honduras (MADJ) and 60 other US and Honduran organisations, the SOAW sent a letter to US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen urging

the US to oppose financing for the Jilamito Hydroelectric Project in Honduras.

For years, members of local communities, organised in MADJ, have maintained an encampment defending the Jilamito River from this project. They have faced death threats, violence, and criminalisation. The local mayor and other local leaders face criminal charges for defending the river. One month after they were indicted, Carlos Hernández, the mayor's defence lawyer, was murdered.

The US Development Finance Corporation (DFC) has publicly stated it will finance the project as part of investing \$1 billion in the private sector in Honduras. MADJ has repeatedly denounced threats, human rights violations, and allegations of

corruption related to the project. Despite this, IDB Invest, the private sector arm of the Inter-American Development Bank, has approved a \$20.25 million loan for the project. The US is by far the largest shareholder of the IDB.

The letter to the US Treasury Secretary noted that there are numerous parallels between the Jilamito Hydroelectric Project and the Agua Zarca Hydroelectric Project, for opposing which Berta Cáceres was murdered. In addition to the violence, criminalisation, and threats faced by project opponents, both projects were approved in the period after the 2009 military coup in Honduras when natural resources were rapidly handed over to Honduras' elite. MADJ has denounced corruption and irregularities related to the concession process, as well as environmental damages, but unsurprisingly the Honduran judicial system has yet to resolve their complaints.

More than 60 organizations call on the United States to oppose the international financing of the Jilamito hydroelectric project in Honduras citing serious human rights violations.

The US justifies support for projects such as the Jilamito Hydroelectric Project – via so-called 'development' banks – by claiming such 'development' will prevent migration. On the contrary, the violent, militarised imposition of the US neoliberal economic model – which includes the privatisation of natural resources – is itself a root cause of migration from Central America. This is not 'development' – it serves to privatise and concentrate natural resources in the hands of the elite – and is frequently imposed through US-backed militarisation and repression of the communities and organisations who defend their water, land, and rights.

SOAW: <https://soaw.org>



Honduras – tourism

In February this year, *El Economista* reported that Honduras had lost \$1.3 billion (USD) and 100,000 jobs in the tourism industry in 2020 according to CEPAL/ECLAC, the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. The losses were caused by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and later in the year the tourist infrastructure losses caused by Hurricanes Eta and Iota. The Honduran Tourism Secretary described 2020 as the worst year for tourism ever experienced in Honduras. Forgive us for pointing out that it may have been unwise to become dependent on such a fickle industry as tourism.

Belize – re-opening borders for tourists

At the end of May this year, Belize officially re-opened its land and sea borders for foreign tourists. Incoming tourists have to show proof of a negative Covid test taken within 72 hours of arrival. Those without a test result will be subject to a rapid test at the point of entry. Tourists also have to show proof of booking at a Belize Tourism Board approved Gold Standard certified hotel. Belize is not alone in its desperation to attract foreign tourists back to the country; nor in its development of over-dependence on the tourist industry.

Panama – free trade zones

In February this year, *TeleSur* reported that Panama's Trade and Industry Ministry (MICI) had approved the establishment and opening of five new free trade zones (FTZs) with the hope that they would generate at least 10,000 jobs. The facilities in the new zones will be largely related to agribusiness and infrastructure supplies. They are publicised as being created under sustainable and environmentally friendly models. Forgive us for being a little sceptical about the description of agribusiness-related activities as being sustainable and environmentally friendly. Forgive us also for being a little

sceptical about the quality of and levels of pay for the jobs created in FTZs.

Northern Triangle – recent White House initiatives

A recent report from the Guatemala Human Rights Commission (GHRC) notes that in its attempts to address the root causes of migration from the Northern Triangle countries (El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras) to the United States, the White House is providing a \$4 billion (USD) 'Northern Triangle Aid Package'. Additionally, numerous millions of additional dollars to be routed through the notorious US Agency for International Development (USAID) along with the package aim to promote a transition to clean energy by supporting private sector entrepreneurs and innovators working in, among other industries, renewable energy. Forgive us and the GHRC for pointing out that hydroelectric projects in Guatemala and Honduras have led to repeated and deadly violence at a local community level as well as the destruction of whole communities. The frequent violence and destruction associated with such schemes rather destroys the claims of sustainability made by the package of aid. As the GHRC put it, "a development model that favours the elite while disrupting, displacing and violating the rights of many long-established and often indigenous communities will not address the root causes of migration but will continue to exacerbate the suffering of Guatemala's most vulnerable communities."

Northern Triangle – remittances

In January this year, *El Economista* reported that remittances from the United States to families and households in the Northern Triangle countries had recovered after the initial dramatic fall in March and April 2020 as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. In fact all three countries had experienced a small increase over the year compared with 2019. The World Bank, however, expects that the outlook for remittances

in 2021 is not so good, in part because of the continued incidence of Covid-19, but also because of low levels of employment in the migrant receiving countries.

Regional – the Escazú Agreement

In April this year, the Escazú Agreement (first drawn up in 2018) entered into full force. It is the first regional environmental agreement in Latin America and the Caribbean and the first ever agreement to include specific provisions for the protection of environmental human rights defenders. It specifies the rights of defenders, including their right to freedom of expression, free movement, and peaceful assembly. The number of defenders killed in the region and worldwide has steadily increased over the last few years. According to a report by Front Line Defenders, 264 human rights defenders were killed in the Americas in 2020 – an average of five people killed every week. [*Centre for International Environmental Law – ciel.org*]

Regional – World Water Day

March 22nd this year marked World Water Day, held every year on that day since 1993. A core focus of the event is to support the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6: water and sanitation for all by 2030. In Central American countries, rural areas are often overlooked by different levels of government and their (water) needs are unknown or ignored by specific sectors of the economy which tend to view social and infrastructural problems as not their business. A November 2020 UNICEF report warned of an impending sanitation crisis in Central America, made all the more severe by the effects of Hurricanes Eta and Iota. UNICEF was particularly concerned about the existence of a great deal of stagnant standing water following the hurricanes which would enable the breeding and spread of more disease, including Covid.

Union efforts save workers' jobs and homes in hurricane ravaged Guatemala

In April this year a Banana Link news report included the following item regarding banana workers in Guatemala. This was just one report among many in the Banana Link news sheet, which can be found at: <https://www.bananalink.org.uk/category/news/>

The Izabal Banana Workers' Union of Guatemala (SITRABI) is the oldest private sector union in Guatemala and represents over 3,000 workers at the Del Monte plantation and their supplier farms on the Caribbean coast. Today, approximately 92% of workers at these farms are members of the union.

During the events of hurricane ETA late last year, the plantation – comprising of 8 smaller farms and the workers living quarters – was flooded, with four of the eight farms facing severe flooding and two of them completely losing their crops altogether, according to Selfa Sandoval, SITRABI's Culture and Social Protection Secretary.

After the floods, the Del Monte management was of the view that maintaining this source of employment in the region in the wake of the hurricane would be very difficult indeed. A huge investment would be needed in order to restore the plantation after the flooding, which had damaged and destroyed river borders, bridges, tracks, roads and drainage systems. Office buildings, packing plants and workers living quarters were also damaged, and would all need cleaning and repairing.

In its communications with the union, the company had announced that it would, therefore, be necessary to cut 400 jobs. Workers, both male and female, would be affected. In a region with few other employment

opportunities available, workers and their families faced losing everything: their home, their job, their income and their community, as they faced the inevitability of moving elsewhere to find work.



When the company subsequently announced that workers and their families would be permitted to continue living in their homes on the banana plantation for only another three months, the workforce was consumed with anxiety about the future of their families. During the hurricanes, the schools had also been significantly damaged. Lives had already been turned upside down, and workers and their families were holding on to what they had left – hope that in the future, life could resume as normal.

SITRABI worked to represent the best interests of their members, maintaining daily communication via calls, visits to the farms, meetings and WhatsApp messages. The structure of the union, according to Selfa, had been designed to ensure that representatives can remain in close communication with workers at all times.

Following discussions, SITRABI put forward various proposals to the company to address workers' fears. After an analysis of the situation, with

the endorsement of the SITRABI General Assembly, it was agreed with Del Monte that the current Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) that the union had negotiated with the company would be extended, with the condition that not a single worker would lose their job or their home.

Other workers in the region have not been so lucky, with three other local plantations having ceased operations completely, with the resulting job losses for their workforce. SITRABI has remained an ally to other local banana unions, denouncing the closure of plantations and resultant job losses.

SITRABI, representing a workforce of around 3,000, has managed to protect almost the entire workforce during this challenging time. During the period of uncertainty, when employees have been unable to work and earn a living due to the flood damage, SITRABI also supported workers with the provision of basic food and hygiene necessities following donations from international allies at Fairtrade, UNISON and Banana Link among others.

In total, only around 100 plantation workers have ended up leaving their posts – and those that have left, have done so voluntarily – some choosing to emigrate to the United States, and others taking early retirement.

Currently, things are progressing well. The plantation is recovering and being restored day by day, and workers are relieved that this important source of employment and livelihood in the region has not been lost. In the future, SITRABI hopes to negotiate specific clauses relating to the prevention and mitigation of future natural disasters into CBAs.

Cocapples anyone?

By ENCA member Martin Mowforth

As if problems of labour exploitation, community relations, political bribery, water and soil contamination are not serious enough for pineapple transnational companies in Costa Rica, since 2018, and possibly before, shipments of the fresh fruit and processed fruit have become vehicles for cocaine smuggling operations.

In August 2018 the Spanish police announced that they had seized 67 kilograms of cocaine stuffed inside dozens of hollowed-out pineapples at Madrid's main wholesale fruit and vegetable market. The shipment had been offloaded at the Portuguese port of Setubal from a ship from Costa Rica. They had then been transported overland to Madrid. The police statement said each pineapple had been "perfectly hollowed out and stuffed with compact cylinders containing 800-1,000 grams of cocaine" and was coated with wax to conceal the smell of the chemicals in the drugs and to avoid its detection (Tico Times, 2018).

In February 2020, in Costa Rica's Atlantic coast port of Limón, a shipment of over 5,000 one kilogram bags of cocaine (with an estimated value of 126 million euros) was exposed in a container full of canopy plants which were destined for Rotterdam. This was the largest drugs bust in Costa Rica's history (de Geir, 2020). Three months later, the police in Costa Rica intercepted 1,250 one kilo parcels of cocaine hidden in a shipment of pineapple juice which was waiting to be shipped to the port of Rotterdam. Other 2020 drugs interceptions were also made in January (amongst a shipment of bananas), March (pineapples) and April (bananas) (NL Times, 2020).

In August 2020, another container of pineapples destined for Rotterdam was

seized by the Costa Rican Drug Control Police (PCD) with \$22 million worth of cocaine hidden inside it – 918 packages totalling approximately one ton. The Minister of Security absolved the fruit exporting company of any blame, explaining that the drugs were introduced at some point between the company and the port (Allen 2020).

In February this year (2021), the PCD reported another seizure of cocaine in the Atlantic coast port of Moín, on this occasion including 2,000 packages of cocaine (approximately two tons). Again the packages were hidden in a shipment of pineapples and were destined for Belgium (Agence France-Presse, 2021).

Not surprisingly, Costa Rica now requires that all shipments of fresh pineapple and its related products should be scanned at Costa Rican ports by the General Directorate of Customs (Zúñiga, 2021). The requirement was made by the Costa Rican government in order to defend the reputation and positive image of the country, things that have already been well-tarnished by the Costa Rican pineapple industry.

Sources:

Tico Times (2018) 'Cocaine-stuffed pineapples shipped from Costa Rica to Europe', 5th August, San José. (Sourced from Agence France-Presse.)

De Geir, J. (2020) 'Video: Costa Rica's biggest-ever cocaine bust was headed to



Netherlands', *NL Times*, 17th February (Amsterdam).

NL Times (2020) 'Costa Rican authorities seize 1,250 kilos cocaine destined for Rotterdam', *NL Times*, 13th May (Amsterdam).

Allen, A. (2020) 'Authorities Seize \$22 Million Worth of Cocaine Found in Pineapple Shipment', *ANDNOWUKNOW*, (www.andnowuknow.com), 21st August, Sacramento, California.

Agence France-Presse (2021) 'Costa Rica seizes two tons of cocaine hidden with pineapples', 5th February, Paris.

Zúñiga, A. (2021) 'Costa Rica draws the line: All pineapple shipments checked for drugs', *Tico Times*, 9th February, San José.

Tobacco Caye Marine Station's Lionfish Culling Campaign

In Newsletter No. 68 (November 2016), an article entitled 'Spiny lobsters and the Guna Indians of Panamá' gave details of an ENCA funding programme to help the Guna lobster divers of the San Blas Islands create 'casitas cubanas' designed to protect the young and adolescent lobsters from the predatory lionfish population that not only threatened the lobster population but was also damaging an important part of the Guna economy. The lionfish population is thought to have burgeoned after numerous releases from private marinas, and it is clear from the Tobacco Caye Marine Station's recent newsletter that they still present a major problem for the diversity of marine life on the reef. We are grateful to Zara and James who run Tobacco Caye Marine Station (TCMS) in Belize for permission to include their news and information in this ENCA newsletter. More details of the TCMS programmes can be found on their website at: www.tcmsbelize.org. News of their lionfish culling campaign follows.

The Belize Fisheries Department conducted a population assessment in 2015 and estimated that 733,257 lionfish were present on the Belize Barrier Reef (including the main barrier, backreef and atolls). Across the Belize Barrier Reef, the South Water Caye Marine Reserve where Tobacco Caye is located was estimated to have the highest numbers of lionfish. In No Take Zones (NTZ), the observed density of lionfish far exceeded predicted threshold levels, indicating that urgent management to prevent loss of fish biomass and species richness is required in NTZ areas. Tobacco Caye is located within a conservation zone of a marine protected area, which is defined as an NTZ. That is why Tobacco Caye Marine Station's lionfish culling campaign is of

paramount importance, to remove observed lionfish below the threshold value.

A big thank you to the generous donations via the TCMS Go Fund Me campaign and from visitors to Tobacco Caye. We have been able to sponsor local fishermen through lionfish catching workshops, hosted by TCMS and then pay \$10 (BZD, equivalent to 5 US dollars) per lionfish caught to supplement their income from fishing.

We are now proud to announce that TCMS will be hosting its first ever lionfish tournament where we will have 10 teams of 3 fishermen competing to catch the most amount of lionfish within half a day. We will also have individual competitions for heaviest caught by weight, smallest caught by length, most lionfish filleted in 10 minutes and who can make the best ceviche! If you are able to help sponsor the event either by donating something or helping us raise

funds for the cash prizes we would be extremely grateful for any and all support!

A special thank you goes out to T.R.E.E.S. (Totes from Tatters, Sting Master and Lionfish Central) for already sponsoring the event.

ENCA's article on the Panamanian lionfish problem can be found at: <https://enca.org.uk/blog/2016/11/02/newsletter-68/>

James of the TCMS joined ENCA remotely from Belize on 27th June this year and gave us an enlightening and fascinating presentation on the work of the TCMS. A preview of that presentation can be seen on the Tobacco Caye youtube channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TOc39qLdew&ab_channel=TobaccoCayeMarineStation



US policy changes? Don't hold your breath

CISPES is the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador. The organisation's latest newsletter provided information about an effort to re-direct US policy towards the region of Central America. We are grateful to CISPES (www.cispes.org) for informing us of this effort, a bit of background to which is given below.



In mid-June this year, over 130 social movement organisations in Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and the United States called on the US Congress to seriously re-consider US economic policy towards Central America.

Economic inequality is one of the main drivers of instability throughout the isthmus and it fuels everything from gang violence to corruption, to immigration. For more than a century, the US has promoted economic policies that benefit local elites and US corporate interests. CISPES and the social movements believe that the Biden administration is trying to sell the same economic policies as new.

The historic role of US development 'aid' towards Central America has been to subsidize the extraction of cheap labour by local elites, corporations and the private sector and ensure the flow of natural resources northward.

Accordingly, following Vice-President Harris' first trip to Central America, over 130 organisations in Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and the United States are urging Congress to "re-consider several key aspects" of U.S. economic development assistance towards the region.

In a "good-faith effort" by the US to address the root causes of forced migration from Central America, they wrote in a letter to the chairs of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees, to "begin with a process of awareness and accountability for how the United States has, historically and in recent years, contributed to the current conditions in El Salvador, Honduras and

Guatemala that continue to cause thousands of people to have to leave their homes in order to survive."

The letter and a full list of signers are available for download here: <https://bit.ly/36miof2>

Shortly after receiving the CISPES Newsletter, ENCA received an update from the La Isla Network celebrating its invitation to join Vice President Harris's Migration Task Force. As a reminder to our readers, La Isla Network is dedicated to ending the epidemic of chronic kidney disease of undetermined causes (CKDnT) through a collaborative, multidisciplinary approach. They attempt to improve working conditions, standardise research protocols, support responsible transitions to modernised industrial practices, and provide data-driven policy recommendations to address the CKDnT crisis. The organisation's update follows.

La Isla Network is honoured to be an invited advisor to the United States Office of the Vice President's Migration Task Force, assembled in partnership with the US Department of Labour's International Labour Affairs Bureau (DOL ILAB).

At the first roundtable, convened to address the migratory pressures facing families in Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala, La Isla Network CEO Jason Glaser highlighted that supporting dignified, safe, and fairly compensated labour practices must be the key target of US foreign policy goals within the region.

La Isla Network has consistently shown

that poor and unsafe labour has a destabilising effect on communities by leading to premature heat-related sickness and death of primary income earners. What results is often dangerous patterns of child labour, as children fill the economic void left by the death of their parents.

As climate change continues to put the health of millions of workers in this region at risk, the reality is that the pressure on families to migrate to find safer and more equitable work will only increase. It is therefore essential that we empower these families with safe and equitable work within their home countries, and this must begin by ensuring that the work being offered is covered by adequate occupational protections from heat. Safe and fairly compensated work is the pathway towards stronger economies and healthier democracies.

La Isla Network is currently working in partnership with our colleagues at the Ray Marshall Center at the University of Texas at Austin to draft a report outlining these suggestions for mitigating migratory pressure in the Northern Triangle. We look forward to updating you on this important work as it develops.

The La Isla Network website is at: <https://laislanetwork.org/> and we recommend our members to visit the site for much fuller information.

The approaches and emphases of both CISPES and La Isla Network may appear rather different, but both require an overhaul of US policies towards the countries of the Northern Triangle of Central America, indeed towards the rest of the world.

Dr Paul Oquist

In the last ENCA Newsletter (No 81) we included an article entitled 'Nicaragua, COP26, Climate Justice and Reparations' by ENCA member and Coordinator of the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign Helen Yuill. The article concerned the Nicaraguan view (and mostly Global South view) of climate change as represented by Dr Paul Oquist, presidential advisor to Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua. The newsletter was already at the printers when Dr Oquist died suddenly in April. For those who follow the progress or regress of the annual COP meetings, while Paul Oquist was present and involved in the negotiations it felt like there was always hope that the world's leaders would come to their senses and do the right thing regarding climate policies. He embodied the hope of many climate activists in the world and spoke truth about the climate directly to power. His sudden and unexpected death has taken away much of that hope, and we need to urgently find it elsewhere.

Because of his significance in the policy debates associated with climate change, we include here a tribute to Dr Oquist written by Helen Yuill

It is with great sorrow that we report that Dr Paul Oquist died of Covid-19 in Managua at the age of 78. A truly great man who was always very warm, humble, respectful and with an encyclopaedic capacity to absorb, analyse and communicate complex information.

In NSC's work on climate justice and Nicaragua's right to national sovereignty we have had the great honour and privilege of having worked with Paul organising events and meetings and reflecting his very far-

sighted vision and proposals for profound global changes so critical to addressing the climate crisis and deepening global inequalities.

Dr Oquist's political life was characterised by an extraordinary energy and single-minded commitment to fighting for justice and above all defending the truth as unpalatable as it might be to the world's largest polluters, corrupt banks and corporate money launderers.

Born in the US, Dr Oquist lived and worked in Chile, Ecuador and Colombia before moving to Nicaragua in 1981 to contribute his knowledge and experience to preparing Nicaraguan specialists in programmes to rebuild Nicaragua in the spirit of the Sandinista Revolution.

On the return to power of the Sandinistas in 2007 he rose to national and international prominence when he was appointed Minister Private Secretary for Public Policy to the Nicaraguan Presidency >>



The call for UN reform

During the UN presidency of former Nicaraguan foreign minister Miguel D'Escoto 2008 – 2009, Dr Oquist acted as his senior advisor at a time when D'Escoto was promoting reforms to make the UN a fully representative body of G-192 rather than 'the dominion of some exclusive clubs'. At the time of the 2008 meltdown Dr Oquist commented that *'no state or states has a monopoly on financial or any other form of wisdom.'*

Over a period of 20 years Dr Oquist served on numerous international and regional bodies on climate change, sustainable development, renewable energy, water, reforestation and many more.

Refusal to sign Paris Agreement as 'the path to failure'

Dr Oquist, as Nicaragua's representative to COP21 in Paris in 2015, 'made waves' by being the only country to refuse to sign the Agreement, arguing that a weak voluntary agreement was a 'path to failure' and would simply pass on the climate change problems caused to future generations. *"We don't want to be an accomplice to taking the world to 3 to 4 degrees centigrade and the death and destruction that represents,"* Oquist said. *"It's not a matter of being a troublemaker; it's a matter of the developing countries surviving."*

He condemned the Agreement as *'the rescue of countries that have caused global warming, passing the cost to those least responsible who will die in the largest number unable to make good their losses, much less adapt to the increasing intensity of climate change'*.

Nicaragua signed up to the Paris Agreement in 2017 in order to use its influence to support developing countries. Dr Oquist was subsequently

appointed co-chair of the UN Green Climate Fund, a key body to providing climate change related finance to developing countries.

Changing our mindset from one of changing nature to one of changing ourselves

In April 2020 Dr Oquist published a book called 'Equilibria: the Philosophy and Political Economy of Existence and Extinction' in which he calls for a *'change of mindset from changing nature to one of changing ourselves.'* He goes on to highlight how we have become alienated from the natural environment by the capitalist myth of *'eternalism, limitless, mindless growth of consumption and production on a planet with finite, rapidly degrading resources.'*

Dr Oquist concludes that *'What is required is transformation through a Survival Social Movement that constructs a low-carbon, climate-resistant and resilient, sustainable societies with far greater equality.'*

COP26 in Glasgow: Nicaragua calls for climate justice to include reparations

In the lead up to COP26 (this year), Dr Oquist argued that the high level of social and economic destruction caused by Covid-19 and its impact on humanity will be *'small, transient and recoverable' compared with the potential total, irreversible destruction of the climate crisis.'* This is a view now shared by millions across the globe including UN General Secretary António Guterres.

As well as demanding a greater sense of urgency, ambition and action on the part of the largest polluting countries, Nicaragua is calling for a major climate finance investment taking into account not only mitigation and adaptation but also reparations for deaths and damage caused by climate change in

countries that bear little or no responsibility for the crisis.

'We mourn the loss of an unforgettable man who leaves an exemplary legacy of love and commitment to the service of Nicaragua... his extraordinary vision, brilliant mind, profound spirit and exceptional ethos to build a better world will live forever.' (Nicaraguan Embassy in the UK)

Two video clips of Dr Oquist may be of interest to our readers.

The first is a short interview with him during the 2015 COP21 talks which resulted in the Paris Agreement.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E4DS4FrN6ToY> (4 minutes)

The second is a clip of his presentation to the Oxford Union Debate in 2016.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w3hsxMEREpo> (10 minutes)

Sources from Garifuna community continue to suffer violence (page 12)

- <https://kaosenlared.net/honduras-tres-lideres-de-la-comunidad-afrodescendiente-garifuna-son-asesinados-por-sicarios-del-estado/>
- Telesur, 4 March 2021, 'Gunmen Kill Garifuna Indigenous Leader in Honduras'
- Rights Action, 8 March 2021, 'Garifuna people between jail and grave – Two more killed'
- <http://www.web.ellibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/2741-honduras-garifunas-entre-carcel-y-tumba-matan-otros-dos>
- Federación Internacional Por Los Derechos Humanos: 'Honduras: Criminalización de las defensoras garifunas Marianela y Jennifer Mejía Solórzano', available at: <https://www.fidh.org/es/temas/defensores-de-derechos-humanos/honduras-criminalizacion-de-las-defensoras-garifunas-marianela-y-jennifer-mejia-solorzano>
- Vice World News, August 2020, '5 Black Men Kidnapped by 'Police' in Honduras Are Still Missing', available at: <https://bit.ly/3e3k9Ck>



Garífuna community continue to suffer violence

By Martin Mowforth

For The Violence of Development website: theviolenceofdevelopment.com

The organised crime and drug trafficking syndicate of Honduras (also known as the government of Honduras) continues to promote tourist developments and other extractive industries throughout the country and to favour foreign investors, especially Canadian and US, over Honduran people. A particularly disadvantaged and threatened group is the Garífuna community based largely on the northern coast of the country, as articles in Chapter 8 of The Violence of Development website expose. Sources used in this article are found on page 11.

On 4th March this year two Garífuna rights defenders were assassinated in La Ceiba. They were Martin Abad Pandey and Víctor Martínez. Martin Pandey was President of the Garífuna community council, and both were members of the Corozal community. In February in the same area Fernando Padilla was also murdered by hired assassins. Two Garífuna environmental defenders, Jenifer Sarina and Marianela Mejía Solórzano, were also detained.

Pandey was noted for his entrepreneurship through his small grocery store, his help for members of the community and for his work with Garífuna youths. Luther Castillo, a Garífuna rights activist, explained: “My Corozal village is once again a victim of organised crime, which has installed itself in sight of the security entities in the area. They cynically facilitate the criminality that murders our people, extorts our entrepreneurs, and plunders our resources.”

Naama Ávila, a lawyer and defender of the Garífuna people, also described the response of the security forces as cynical. She described the communities as living in fear because the foreigners who come and impose themselves on the community are soon followed by daily acts of violence. Ávila knew Pandey and said, “I am a witness of his love for the people, his work, his humility, and his desire to see Corozal move forward.”

According to the Honduran Black Fraternal Organisation (OFRANEH), the two Garífuna environmental defenders, Jenifer Sarina and Marianela Mejía Solórzano, were arrested on trumped-up charges of usurpation and damages to a

real estate company whose origins are Canadian. Both of them are leaders of the community of Cristales whose land is under threat in the department of Colón and both are members of OFRANEH. In their initial hearing on 7th March, the judge denied access to national and international human rights organisations and the court was filled with army personnel and police which generated an atmosphere of hostility towards the community members who attended. This is and was a clear example of intimidatory criminalisation – see the article on SLAPPs (Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation) in the final section of Chapter 9 of The Violence of Development website.

At the publication of this ENCA Newsletter it will be almost one year since the forced disappearance of the Garífuna Five, leaders of Triunfo de la Cruz, forcibly removed by a squadron in military fatigues. Since then, defenders of life have demanded the government give an explanation for the whereabouts of the five, Alberth Snaider Centeno Tomás, Milton Joel Martínez Álvarez, Suami Aparicio Mejía, Albert Sentana Thomas and Junior Rafael Juárez Mejía.

Many suspect government complicity in the crime: the administration of President Juan Orlando Hernández, which until recently has been strongly backed by US administrations, is accused by activists of being behind “a well-crafted plan to exterminate the Garífuna community.” Palm-lined and pristine, Garífuna territory has long been coveted by tourism developers and palm oil barons historically favoured by this government of organised crime.

In relation to these and many more crimes, OFRANEH urges the national and international community to come to the aid of the Garífuna community fighting for the defence of their ancestral territory and the protection of their rights as a distinct and at-risk people.

Sources on page 11

enca.org.uk



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Meeting Dates 2021

October 31st (Please note this is a change of date)

ENCA meetings are usually 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.

In light of COVID-19 meetings may have to be held online