

ENCA



Environmental Network *for* Central America

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Plastics

UN focuses on issues in Central America

Hydroelectric

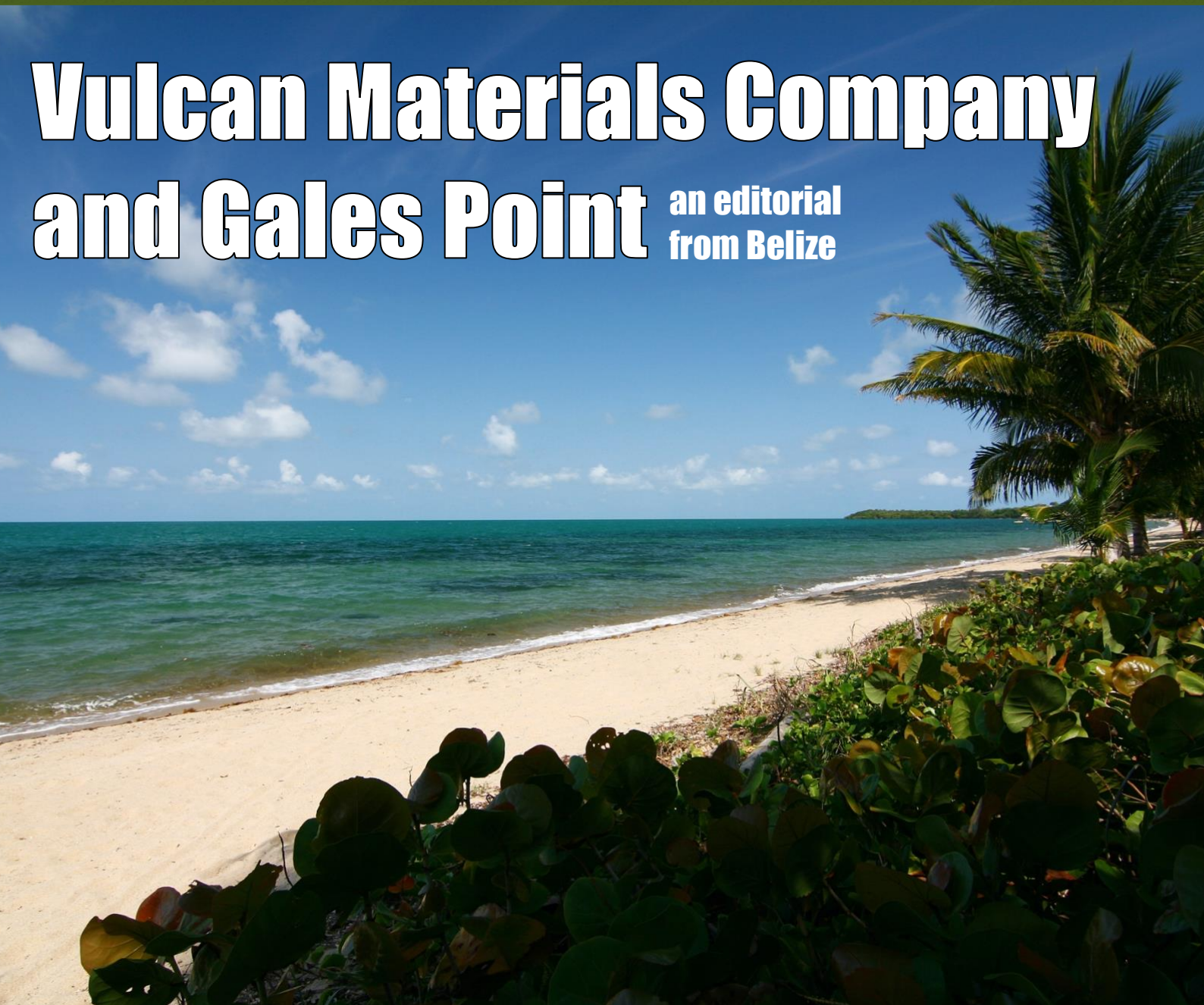
IDB withdraws HEP funding in Guatemala

Costa Rica

Tracing the ups and downs of environmental policy

Vulcan Materials Company and Gales Point

an editorial
from Belize





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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Vulcan Materials Company and Gales Point – an editorial from Belize

In February this year ENCA received information from friends in Belize about the plans of Vulcan Materials Company and its intentions to extract aggregate from limestone hills south of Belize City in the Stann Creek and Gales Point area. ENCA invited the Gales Point community to submit to ENCA an application for funding for its Vulcan Mining Resistance Campaign. After consideration of their application by ENCA members, a decision was made to award \$1,900 (USD), as requested, for the campaign.

We hope that the following article by Ed Boles will provide readers with sufficient justification to support ENCA's decision to award this funding. The article is from The Belize Ag Report, a monthly agricultural report. We are grateful to The Belize Ag Report and to Dr Ed Boles for their permission to reproduce the article in the ENCA Newsletter.*

Representatives of Vulcan Materials Company (VMC), headquartered in Birmingham, Alabama, visited Belize on a fact finding mission in December, 2019, and alerted many people of the Stann Creek District coastal area that the company intended to purchase the 6,000 hectare (15,000 acre) White Ridge Farm.

They sent down a company team to conduct test borings of the karst and granite rock in early 2020. Their goal is to establish a foothold in Belize with a working aggregate mine and ship the mined materials from the karst hills of White Ridge Farm to south-eastern United States. Their intention is to strip away the forest and soil, continually blast the limestone hills, breaking them apart, crushing rocks into graded sizes of aggregates required for roadbeds, fill, concrete and asphalt mixes, and other construction uses in the US where limestone deposits are now less available.

The material is to be transported over land and into the inner channel off the coast just south of Gales Point by a massive conveyer bridge suspended above the land and water. The conveyer bridge will be transporting crushed and sorted aggregates to Panamax self-loading ships waiting at anchor in the deeper waters of the inner channel. Dredging will be required to accommodate the 228 meters (748 ft., or longer) vessels with 13.5 to 14 m (44 to 46 ft.) draft, and the area will need

to be large and deep enough to turn these vessels.

The scale of the project and the removal of karst features and aquifers is not compatible with the sustainable use of this area that conservation NGOs and residents have been envisioning and striving toward for three decades. The VMC mission is "to provide quality products and services which consistently meet our customers' expectations; to be responsible stewards with respect to the safety and environmental impact of our operations and products; and to earn superior returns for our shareholders."

The first guiding principle listed on the VMC website is integrity, stating "We will work constantly to earn the respect and trust of all parties we interact with by acting fairly and honourably. We will observe high ethical standards and obey all laws and regulations." Areas within the Gulf Coast and Eastern Seaboard states have few locally available aggregate resources remaining. These areas are supplied from quarries in the Yucatán Peninsula of Mexico just south of Playa del Carmen, shipped to US ports by the VMC fleet of Panamax-class, self-unloading ships, and moved by barge and rail to market locations.

Public protests against the mine continue, as do protests and court cases in many areas of the US where VMC operates. Now this multi-billion-dollar company has set >>

sights on the limestone deposits in Belize right next to the largest Hawksbill sea turtle nesting beach and largest congregation of manatees in the western Caribbean. Scraping away the forest and soil from a karst deposit imposes many impacts, including increasing the rate of storm-water runoff and erosion of the disturbed landscape and heavy sediment loads entering streams and the river. Karst water supplies are vulnerable to unwise land use activities that change the vegetation and geology of an area and can impact water users located at large distances from the water source. Deforestation and soil removal reduces the infiltration of rainwater into the ground that ultimately recharges aquifers. Unfiltered water from mining sites that enters groundwater resources from the mining pit or sink holes can greatly reduce groundwater quality. Ground vibrations created by rock blasting and heavy equipment can loosen small particles within fractured rock and conduits, increasing turbidity within groundwater, which can show up in people's wells. Given the larger caverns and conduits within karst aquifers, groundwater moves much faster than occurs in other rock types, and any pollutants and pathogens in contaminated water are transported long distances compared to other aquifer forming rocks. Disruption of a groundwater conduit by mining activities can change the flow path of a large volume of groundwater, causing water to be redirected to discharge outlets in other locations, drying up damaged streams. Mine pit dewatering, the water being pumped out so mining can continue, can change local groundwater hydrology by lowering the water table, creating a cone of depression, similar to the effects of a large well on surrounding groundwater. Water bodies, springs,

and wells within the cone of depression

created by a mine pit penetrating the saturated zone can reduce inflow and may go dry due to the changed flow of groundwater. Many sinkholes often occur within the cone of depression caused by a limestone pit mine.

The continual blasting and drilling and the continual movement of materials over the conveyor bridge will create patterns of vibrations that may affect manatee, sea turtles, and other wildlife in the area. Besides the impact on wildlife, these sounds will become a continual set of noises within the landscape, particularly those areas within a few miles of the mine.

Ultimately, we are not sure just what the impact will be on the wildlife within the surrounding land and waters ... until it starts to happen. The United States does not produce enough limestone to satisfy its consumption rate, importing mainly from Canada, Mexico, and China. This explains the strong interest in setting up the first of what could become several mines in Belize. Many limestone sites in the US are off limits to mining, having been developed into housing complexes, parks, protected areas, important aquifers, and other uses. It is also now harder to establish mines in new places within the United States because people

do not want quarries near their residences.

VMC has been in litigation with many communities affected by their mining activities spread around the United States because of the impacts given above and more. Because of this increasing resistance to mining in the US, those impacts, including damage to groundwater resources, air quality reduction from dusts, noise pollution from blasting and heavy equipment, habitat loss, disruption of scenic vistas, and the overall degradation of the landscape are being exported to other countries, out of sight and out of mind to the many people who will be traveling over road beds made from the pulverized karst hills of Belize.

** Editor's Note: Dr. Boles, adjunct faculty member of Galen University, is known all over Belize for his expertise in conservation. He has spent over 30 years conducting rapid ecological assessments of watersheds and wetlands; promoting protection and restoration of steep slope, riparian, and wetland forests as critical components of watershed management; helping standardize water and watershed assessment methodologies and protocols; encouraging environmental research projects that inform conservation initiatives; and involving Belizean and international youth in these activities.*



Gales Point, Belize

More ENCA funding

Further to the previous article about the *Vulcan Mining Resistance Campaign*, ENCA members may wish to read about two other Central American development and environment programmes funded by ENCA this year. The first of these comes from the community of Longo Maï in southern Costa Rica, a community with which ENCA has had many links over the last 30 years. The second comes from the Mesoamerican Permaculture Association (IMAP) based in Sololá, Guatemala. Both projects are briefly described below, using mainly the summaries provided by ENCA member James Watson.

1) Longo Maï, Costa Rica: \$2000 (USD) – ‘Aula Verde’ programme

- Aim: To send two members of the community to ‘Greenfields’ nature reserve in Nicaragua for a week long course and to produce written materials in a teaching method called ‘Aula Verde’ (which may translate best as "forest schooling"). They then intend to take their newfound skills back to Costa Rica and set up environmental education for eleven local communities, teaching ‘Botany for Young People’, aiming to address many local environmental issues, "including conflict situations and environmental impacts related to

pineapple plantations, which relate to inadequate agricultural practices, as well as forest clearing activities, hunting of wild animals, extraction and trade of wildlife, inadequate disposal of waste and the deterioration of hydrographic basins".

- The \$2000 is for the travel, accommodation and training of the two facilitators, who will then deliver the teaching in Costa Rica. The next stage of the project is actually delivering the teaching, and they aim to self-fund this.

2) IMAP (Mesoamerican Permaculture Association), Guatemala: \$1,986.09 (USD) - Reforestation of Lake Atitlán and Sustainable Ecotourism.

- Aims: to promote family gardens for locals around Lake Atitlán, to train the families in organic / permaculture farming methods, and to train local youths as ecotourism guides.
- The project already exists, paid for by the American organisation Adventure Travel Conservation Fund. The ENCA contribution allows them to expand the project.

- The detailed budget breakdown includes an expansion of six extra months of ongoing training, and 20 garden toolkits (as well as training materials, organic compost material and new fruit trees, etc).
- ENCA member Stephanie Williamson is in regular communication with IMAP and will report back to ENCA at future meetings.

Towards or shortly after the end of the three projects funded by ENCA, we hope we shall be able to include progress reports on each of them in future newsletters.



IMAP
MESOAMERICAN
PERMACULTURE
INSTITUTE



LONGO MAI

Renewing your membership

The small membership we charge helps to cover the cost of this newsletter, but more importantly all the small fees add up quickly enabling us to support community and environmental work such as that carried out by CENDAH. We would be grateful if you could check your PayPal account and ensure it is updated so that we are able to take your membership fee. Alternatively you may like to pay your donation by standing order.

Option 1

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Pay your membership by standing order to the following account:

Name: ENCA, Number: 29849897 sort code: 05-02-00

Membership costs and more information is listed at enca.org.uk/join

Mayans call for international action to halt violations of their rights



By Last Real Indians. – Popular Resistance, May 25, 2022

The Mayan Council Chilam B'alam of the K'iches, the Mayan Council Komon Ajq'ijab', the National Coordinator of the Territories of Life Network (Coordinadora Nacional Red Territorios de Vida), the National Ajq'ijab' Council "Oxlajuj Ajpop," and the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC), inform the national and international communities that on May 4th, 2022 they presented a communication requesting urgent action by the United Nations Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) Early Warning and Urgent Action Procedure.

The urgent communication was submitted in response to the first reading of Bill No. 5923, "Rescue of the Pre-Hispanic Heritage", developed by the Congress of the Republic of Guatemala. Its provisions will cause the dispossession, privatization, and economic exploitation of two thousand seven hundred and fifty-four (2,754) ceremonial centres, sacred sites, and other elements of Mayan spiritual, religious, and cultural heritage. Ceremonial areas in 22 Guatemalan departments will be impacted, including those surrounding

Lake Atitlán in the department of Sololá which is sacred to the Maya Kaqchiles.

The submitting organisations are calling for urgent action by these UN human rights mandate holders to address the promotion of this Bill by the Guatemala Ministry of Culture and Sports, the Cultural Commission of the Congress, and the Congress itself, which in their view represents serious human rights violations and fails to comply with Guatemala's obligations under various international and regional instruments affirming the rights of Indigenous Peoples. Specifically, if adopted, the Bill would violate Guatemala's obligation to carry out effective consultations for the purpose of obtaining the Free, Prior and Informed Consent of the Mayan Peoples, and would maintain the pattern of racism and discrimination carried out against the Indigenous Peoples of Guatemala.

These Indigenous organisations call upon these thematic Rapporteurs and the CERD to take action in support of the Mayan Peoples' rights in accordance with their mandates and provide strong recommendations to address and remedy this urgent situation currently faced by the Mayan People.

For further information related to this note, please contact juanleon@treatycouncil.org or visit www.iitc.org.

Tela declares itself free of hydroelectric projects

On 28 June 2022, criterio.hn reported on a local campaign and decision in the north of Honduras regarding hydroelectric projects. Despite the good press that HEP projects receive in the mainstream western media, ENCA has long tried to point out the major environmental drawbacks and social problems associated such schemes. Below we give a very brief summary of the report.

With the aim of protecting its sources of water and of life, the communities which make up the municipality of Tela in the department of Atlántida on the northern coast of Honduras have ratified their decision to keep their rivers free of hydroelectric projects.

With the support of the Broad Movement for Dignity and Justice (MADJ by its Spanish initials), the town council organised an event in the centre of the coastal town of Tela to celebrate the decision. Albertina López, a MADJ coordinator, stated that businessmen should not get to this area in order to buy their rivers because they are not for sale.



More details (in Spanish) can be found at: <https://criterio.hn/tela-ratifica-decision-no-a-las-hidroelectricas/>

The ups and downs of Costa Rica's environment

Costa Rica has an environmental reputation that is the envy of many world leaders. There is no doubt that in some respects – its protected areas; its development of locally-based tourism; its zero-carbon aim – it is deserving of all the plaudits it receives. But as previous ENCA Newsletters have tried to point out, there is no shortage of other respects for which the country deserves a few brickbats – its high dependence on plantation export crops; its excessive use of toxic pesticides; in some cases its surrender to corporate international tourism developments.

News of several developments of environmental significance since the last ENCA Newsletter typify these contradictions. ENCA member Martin Mowforth provides here a round-up of several items of Costa Rican environmental news from the last few months.

Global Environment Facility (GEF) supports Costa Rica's transition to an urban green economy



In March 2022 the GEF invested in the project 'Transitioning to an urban green economy and delivering global environmental benefits', led by the Costa Rican Ministry of Environment and Energy and implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in partnership with the Organisation for Tropical Studies, an international organisation with a base in Costa Rica.

The project aims at decarbonising the Greater Metropolitan Area of Costa Rica's capital city, San José, by providing \$10.3 million (USD) to invest in the reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions generated by the city. The investment will go towards the improvement of public transport, the greening of approximately 2,000 hectares of land and the implementation of an integrated urban planning strategy.

Expanding the electric train network was one of former President Alvarado's stated aims and although he has now been replaced by Rodrigo Chaves (April 2022 election) it is likely that some of the GEF funds will be used to continue the work which had already been started on this programme.

Other transport improvements stemming from the initiative include the construction of 8 km of bicycle lanes, 3 km of shared paths and pedestrian walkways and 20 km of green sidewalks with improved access.

Visitors to and residents of Costa Rican cities will be aware of the urgent need to improve the transport systems in the country's cities most of which are known for their poor roads and traffic congestion.

Cocos Island National Park designated a Natural Shark Sanctuary

In April 2022, the Environment Ministry declared the Cocos Island National Park (PNIC) to be a Natural Shark Sanctuary and connected the protected area with the Sweet Gulf (Golfo Dulce) Hammerhead Shark Sanctuary. Along with numerous marine protected areas in the eastern Pacific (including the Galapagos Islands), the PNIC forms part of the Eastern Tropical Pacific Marine Corridor.

These measures extend Costa Rica's marine protected areas from 2.7 per cent to 30 per cent of the country's seas. Much of the country's seas suffer from illegal fishing which especially affects sharks.

The Vice-Minister of Water and Seas, Cynthia Barzuna, noted the "bays and islets in the protected waters of Cocos Island National Park, serve as habitat, nursery and transit for fifteen species of sharks."

Crocodile feeding in the Tarcoles River

The Tarcoles River is a favourite tourist location for watching crocodiles, but some tour guides have developed the habit of feeding the animals which can be a dangerous activity. Some tourists are even invited to take part in the feeding which is sometimes undertaken at close quarters.

The National System of Conservation Areas (SINAC) has received several complaints that the feeding continues even though it is known to be illegal. Rafael Gutiérrez, executive director of SINAC, said that "feeding crocodiles exposes the lives of many tourists [*to danger*], as well as the person who is feeding the animal."

Particularly where young crocodiles are concerned, the practice is likely to lead to the build-up of a dependence in the animals on food brought for this purpose. Some ecologists have also said that it is likely to lead to disruptions in the ecosystem.



Coco Island

Attacks against the Indigenous peoples of China Kichá



In May 2022, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, José Francisco Calí expressed his concern about recent denunciations of tear gas attacks on and arbitrary detentions of Cabécar Indigenous peoples by the Public Force, essentially the police service of the country.

More than 370 people from 150 organisations signed a petition to the authorities against the violence suffered by Indigenous peoples in their territories. The attacks have included many fires started over 800 hectares of the 1,100 hectare territory. There have even been attempted assassinations as a result of the conflicts between non-indigenous people and the Indigenous who are legally recovering their land.

In March the weekly Costa Rican newspaper, *Semanario Universidad*, conducted a study which showed that almost all the recovered land had been consumed by fire whereas land belonging to non-indigenous people was almost completely free of any kind of damage.

The police have shown systematic bias against the Indigenous people trying to defend their recovered land.

UNDP warns Costa Rica about its excessive use of pesticides

In May 2022, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO) produced a report on the diagnosis of health effects due to the use of pesticides in Costa Rica. The high use of pesticides affects the health and threatens the lives

of plantation workers who are regular victims of toxic poisonings.

According to the report:

- Over 65 per cent of poisonings occurred in the agricultural sector, particularly in banana, coffee and pineapple plantations, these three being the country's main crops.
- Health effects can include: different types of cancer; Parkinson's disease; male infertility; damage to the cardiovascular and immune systems; damage to the blood, digestive, dermal, respiratory and ophthalmic systems.
- Most of the intoxications were related to diazinon, paraquat, and glyphosate pesticides.
- Between 2010 and 2020, 58 deaths were due to poisoning in the country and these were mainly associated with the use of agrochemicals.

Costa Rica continues to use pesticides that have been eliminated or banned by international organisations and agreements signed by the country. This includes paraquat whose high toxicity is well documented and widely acknowledged.



Water supply and climate adaptation project (PAACUME)

In early May 2022, the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI / BCIE) loaned \$425 million (USD) to Costa Rica to fund the Water Supply Project for the Middle Basin of the Tempisque River and Coastal Communities (PAACUME).

The project is intended to provide the Guanacaste region with water for human consumption, agriculture and tourism for the next 50 years. By providing a new source of water, it is also aimed at re-activating the economic and social

development of numerous cantons in the region.

Additionally, it will help people, especially farmers, to adapt to the difficult conditions caused by climate change by providing a permanence of water.

Costa Rica generates more electronic waste than any other Latin American country

According to a report by the Regional Monitor of Electronic Wastes in Latin America, Costa Rica generates the greatest quantity of waste electrical and electronic equipment (known as WEEE in the UK, but as RAEE by its Spanish initials) of the 13 Latin American countries studied. Moreover of the total generated, only 8 per cent is collected for environmental treatment.

The report was published at the end of January 2022 by the United Nations University and the UN Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR).

Despite this poor record, Costa Rica is one of only three of the 13 countries studied which had specific legislation relating to the treatment and legal responsibility for RAEE.

And finally what the new Costa Rican President thinks of his own country

In Davos, Switzerland, in May this year, the new Costa Rican President, Rodrigo Chaves, expounded his views on what problems faced the country, and principal among his concerns were the dreadful state of the rivers and waterways, social inequality and the poor state of public services.

More details of his speech and interviews are given in the article on page 8, following this article.

The new Costa Rican President's assessment of the country's environment

Delfino.cr is a digital Costa Rican journal with a daily circulation. It is managed by the writer Diego Delfino Machín. We are grateful to Diego for permission to reproduce his article here. diego@delfino.cr

The president of the republic, Rodrigo Chaves Robles, is in Davos, Switzerland, where for the first time he is attending the World Economic Forum in his capacity as representative of the country. The summit, which gathers delegates from all over the planet with a view to discussions on social and economic challenges facing the international community, took place from 23rd to 26th May this year.

Our leader participated in the Latin American Presidential Panel (with Iván Duque of Colombia, Luis Abinader of Dominica and Dina Boluarte, Vice-President of Perú) in which in turn they discussed the region's recovery after the pandemic.

The moderator of the fórum, Marisol Argueta de Barillas, addressing Chaves, made a comment on the Costa Rican situation. She flattered us all when she said that Costa Rica is known as a stable and secure nation with social equity and added: "You freed yourself from this serious wave produced by the pandemic, but there are also some growing risks which will lead to a complex period in your presidency."

In his usual style, Chaves replied: "I haven't been freed of anything, quite the contrary. Unfortunately I'm inheriting a situation that needs to be put right, contrary to what my colleagues (alluding to the other panellists) have commented on; Costa Rica isn't doing so well, and we have even experienced a significant deterioration."

He went on to say that he (in contrast to his colleagues) could not report successes because he's only had 15 days in post, meaning that he's only able to determine "the challenges and what we are going to do about them". Among those that they have to address in Costa Rica are: the fiscal deficit, social inequality, poor quality of public services and dealing with contaminated waters.

Again he pointed out that he had received "a house in a mess" with "an inheritance of huge fiscal disorder". Explaining that he will address this scenario, he said he hopes to generate public policy which puts an end to the historical beneficiaries of private monopolies in favour of "the vast majority of Costa Rican people".

"We have to create more and better Jobs, and that might happen with a blow to the confidence of the private sector. In Costa Rica, for years we have been hearing about the false dichotomy between the private sector and the public sector. No, there hasn't been a country anywhere in the world which has achieved prosperity with only the private sector or only the state sector."

Later, Argueta tried again to flatter Costa Rica, this time referring to the country's environmental policies. Chaves again rejected the flattery and noted that the country had not invested sufficiently in its sewage system and as a result of this its rivers are contaminated. Later he stated that we had over-invested in electricity generation "above all with fossil fuels".

I don't know where this observation came from, considering that 99 per cent of the electricity that is consumed in the country comes from renewable sources¹; but I'm going to leave it at that; I'm not going to lay myself open to government accusations of being a member of the gutter press tied to political and economic interests.

Anyway, yes, it is certain that our rivers are suffering and our sewage system is even worse. In fact, our list of environmental grievances is not modest. Perhaps it isn't fashionable for a president to air the dirty clothes for all the neighbours to see and it parades for all to see the environmental discourse of Alvarado², receiving praise from the future king of England less than a

year ago. But at least Chaves, on assuming the presidency, has not modified his campaign tone.

Indeed so, and he made it clear that he does not want to go back on what has been put forward on this theme. He said, "Costa Rica is a country that is not going to take one step backwards in its commitments and its wishes to reach carbon neutrality."

As a part of his intervention, Chaves also said that he has been talking with investors and that he told them that 'Costa Rica is open for business' and that he intends to break all the bottlenecks to investment in the country and create a better environment *[for business]*. Effectively, Chaves himself had stated that the principal aim of his trip to the World Economic Forum is to seek jobs and investments for Costa Rica.

Let's hope, then, that on his return to Costa Rica he comes back with a little list of useful telephone numbers; that good foreign investment may arrive; that it will offer good jobs; that regulation will be attractive for investors and respectful of the rights of the labour force; and that will genuinely begin to give form to a more equitable Costa Rica that we miss so much.

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1. Editor's note: over 70 per cent of Costa Rica's electricity is generated as hydroelectricity, and as ENCA newsletters have made clear in the past, the environmental credentials of damming rivers are open to public debate.
 2. Carlos Alvarado was the outgoing President of Costa Rica who handed over to Rodrigo Chaves in April this year, 2022.

IDB withdraws financing for two HEP schemes in Guatemala



In June this year, El Economista reported on the withdrawal by the Inter-American Development Bank of funding for two Guatemalan hydroelectric projects (HEPs).

Translated and summarised by ENCA member Martin Mowforth

A number of Guatemalan non-governmental organisations (NGOs) expressed their pleasure that two HEP projects in the north of the country had lost their funding from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB).

The two schemes are the San Mateo and San Andrés HEP projects and both are run by the same private company, Energía y Renovación S.A.. They are both located in the municipality of San Mateo Ixtatán and both were begun in 2013.

The IDB's decision to withdraw funding followed a Bank internal report produced in September 2021 which was based on an investigation of the way in which the two schemes were being installed in the department of Huehuetenango.

In a press conference in Guatemala City, Rosa Peña, a representative of the Inter-American Association for the Defence of the Environment (AIDA), stated that the decision by the IDB "is a recognition of the denunciations made by communities surrounding the projects." Peña explained that AIDA and other Indigenous and environmental organisations had accompanied the communities and had officially submitted the denunciations to the IDB in 2018.

According to Peña, the IDB's internal report and its recommendations "must prompt the IDB to learn lessons and it must

not repeat the same errors from the past." The IDB's funding of the projects amounted to 13 million US dollars and will be cancelled due to the internal report's indication that the two projects violate the bank's economic norms.

"What we are seeing in this case is that it is the same bank that is recognising that it has broken its own norms", added Rigoberto Juárez during the press conference.

The denunciations of the Indigenous communities neighbouring the HEP schemes began before the installations were producing energy due to the lack of a consultation of the people. The abuse of natural resources continued, especially in the location of the two affected rivers, and the abuse was translated into violence against the local people, according to the local media.

Bukele's Bitcoin Gamble Faulters

By Doug Specht

As reported in last summer's ENCA newsletter, El Salvador's President, Nayib Bukele took an unprecedented step of buying up crypto currencies as part of a strategy to move the country away from the US dollar. At the time ENCA noted that Bukele had chosen a particularly volatile currency, bitcoin, which is not linked to any financial standards. Bukele's choice seemed to have been driven by a desire to be seen to be cutting edge, an important part of his identity, rather than sound financial planning.

Less than a year later, and the country's 2,300 bitcoins are now worth less than half what they paid for them. And as the value of bitcoin drops, Bukele seems keen to continue investing, suggesting the country is 'buying in the dip', a statement that suggests he is gambling on there being a significant rise in the value again.

El Salvador was the first country to make bitcoin legal tender, and has now invested \$425 million into the digital currency, along with \$200 million dollars invested into building infrastructure to allow people without bank accounts to use this currency. The country's credit rating has been consistently downgraded since it embraced bitcoin and its debt payments are being bought with a heavy price discount as investors and economists fear El Salvador is heading for a default. There are also concerns Bukele has alienated investors and lenders, removing sources of income from the country.

El Salvador's finance minister is not concerned suggesting that losses presently account for just 5 per cent of the national general budget. However, the crashing price and volatility of the currency means fewer El Salvadorans are likely to use bitcoin and Bukele's dream of building a circular economy based on the currency and removing the dollar standard seem further away than ever.

It is also important to note here that the

production of bitcoin – which is generated through computers undertaking hugely complex mathematical tasks – has heavy environmental costs. The carbon footprint of this currency is now roughly equivalent of the whole of New Zealand. El Salvador is of course vulnerable to climatic changes, and should the country see financial gains from any recovery in the value of the currency, this could well be wiped out by the need to spend it all on climate mitigation or responding to increased natural disasters. Not the kind of circular economy Bukele hoped for!

Bitcoin erases gains made in 2021
Exchange rate with US dollar



Central America moves forward in the fight against plastic but more legislation is needed

In February 2022, El Economista published an article on plastics in Central America. ENCA member Pamela Machado translated it for the ENCA Newsletter. New material from the United Nations Environment Assembly held in February has been added.

Central American countries have been among "the first ones" to make decisions to fight plastic pollution, said an environmentalist from MarViva, an organisation created in 2022 operating in Panama, Costa Rica and Colombia.

Central America has been among the first regions to adopt measures to combat plastic contamination but, much like the rest of the world, more legislation and coordination is needed to face this global problem, a coordinator from Fundación MarViva told EFE, the Spanish international news agency.

MarViva's regional coordinator for sea pollution, Alberto Quesada, said Central America has the "particularity" of being one of the few regions in the world where most countries have two coasts (Atlantic and Pacific), which means that the impact of plastic pollution "hits both sides".

"Our plastic footprint, even though it is considerable, does not compare" to the one from the developed world, "but the

contamination impact on our coasts is tremendous. In any current study about Central American coasts, about waste on the beach, about fisheries, we will find plastic pollution," he said.

A recent report from the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) warned that plastic pollution has reached "all corners of the oceans", and that 88 per cent of marine species have been affected by it, including those consumed by humans.

The actions

Quesada gives the example of Panama, which has "a couple of very modern laws, especially the most recently approved which mandates the gradual replacement of single-use plastic for more sustainable alternatives".

In the case of Costa Rica, Quesada said, some laws have also been approved, while other Central American countries have fewer policies and municipal ordinances that allow the problem to be addressed.

"We have been doing well, but in general, we need more regulation and more coordination. I can attest that there have been advances in both ways in the region", said Quesada.

Thus, Central America is in line with the action plan on sea waste for the Northeast Pacific, which also includes Mexico and Colombia.

"This is a 5-year plan that counts with actions to combat sea waste, and where the theme of plastic waste is one of the priorities", said the MarViva representative. MarViva contributed to the coordination of the initiative.

In terms of laws, Central America needs "better quality regulation" and "an integral, life-cycle approach", because the "problem of plastic pollution does not start when we have the residues in our hands but instead it is embedded within what we produce, distribute, and consume".

"This brings us to a much larger discussion, and one that is much more current: that is the urgency for a new international treaty on plastic pollution," he said.

In February this year (2022), the fifth session of the UN Environmental Assembly (UNEA 5) endorsed a resolution to end plastic pollution. The resolution paves the way for the establishment of a legally binding global treaty by 2024 to end plastic pollution.

Statistics from the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) indicate that plastic production soared from 2 million tons in 1950 to 348 million tons in 2017. An estimated 11 million tons of plastic waste flow into global oceans annually, threatening the survival of marine species, food security and livelihoods of coastal communities, according to UNEP.



Delegates to the UN Environment Assembly in Nairobi admire an art installation made of plastic bottles

Ostriches in Central America?



In February this year, *Breaking Belize News* reported on the possible beginnings of commercial ostrich farming in the country. Belizean ostrich breeder Nancy Marin is enthusiastic to get started and government approval was granted provided that all the necessary health and safety protocols and regulations were followed. At that time the Belize Agricultural Health Authority (BAHA) and the Department of the Environment (DOE) still needed to conduct safety checks in order to prevent the incursion of any kind of new virus.

In June this year, BAHA Director Hugh O'Brien said on national television ('7 News Belize') that "The Minister of Agriculture [José Abelardo Mai] has already made the decision that ostrich farming will be promoted."

O'Brien said that all ostriches already in Belize have to be reviewed by both BAHA and the Forestry Department as ostriches fall under the endangered species listed by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

In effect, Marin had already received clearance from BAHA some time ago, but her certification was put on hold because of the Forestry Department's CITES concerns. Belize is a signatory to CITES, so the country has to abide by its regulations and requirements.

O'Brien explained that the Ministry of Agriculture's approval is required because the ostriches are going to be farm animals; but the Forestry Department's approval is also required because it is they who issue the CITES certification of origin of the products. Without these approvals and certification the sale and export of the product would not be permitted.

BAHA is aware of two or three other Belizean farmers (apart from Nancy Marin) who already have a very few ostriches on their farms and who wish to develop ostrich farming further. The BAHA wants to help and advise these farmers regarding the standards and conditions necessary for the safe and hygienic rearing of the animals.

O'Brien said that once Marin gets her full approval in June or July, "ostrich farming will be officially starting in Belize."

More details on this early report are given in:

<https://www.breakingbelizenews.com/2022/02/24/prime-minister-supports-ostrich-farming-in-belize-sees-economic-opportunity>

Honduras repeals ZEDE law

ZEDE is the Spanish acronym for Zones for Employment and Economic Development in Honduras. They were first set up in 2013 as political, economic, judicial and administrative zones run independently of the national government. Consortia of businessmen would have the right to establish their own laws and own employment conditions for their workers. A major criticism of ZEDEs refers to their undermining of national sovereignty as national bodies would not be able to impose their regulations and laws on the zones. ZEDEs represent the ultimate in business friendly conditions.

In May this year [2022], the newly elected Honduran government of Xiomara Castro repealed a law that authorised these self-governing zones known as ZEDEs. President Castro declared the repeal to be "historic" and said the country "was recovering its sovereignty."



ZEDEs were intended as a means of attracting foreign investors and free market thinkers into the country to set up self-governing zones. The repeal has now given investors cause to pause their plans to develop in these areas. In Prospera, a 58-acre project on the Honduran Caribbean island of Roatan, however, its US backers [intend to proceed](#) with their development.



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Meeting Dates 2022

Feb 27th | July 17th | October 16th

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 or in a hybrid format