

# ENCA



Environmental Network *for* Central America

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**Ferro-nickel and iron ore  
mines result in persecution  
and assassinations in  
Guatemala and Honduras**



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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Cover Photo:  
Fenix Project, El Estor, Guatemala -  
Photo from 'Forbidden Stories'

# Ferro-nickel and iron ore mines result in persecution and assassinations in Guatemala and Honduras

By Rita Drobner, January 2023

*In November 2022, ENCA was invited to attend a roundtable meeting organised by Peace Brigades International (PBI) at which two rights defenders from Central America presented reports on the dangers that they face every day. ENCA member Rita Drobner attended the meeting on our behalf and wrote this report for the ENCA newsletter.*

It is hard for me to write this up: sitting 'comfortably' at a computer with a cup of tea; nobody is trying to take my life; I have not been threatened or arrested.

In contrast, these are daily hazards facing Community Journalist Carlos Choc Chub from Guatemala (*second from right, photo page 4*) and Environmental Rights Defender Reynaldo (Rey) Dominguez (*on the right*) from Honduras, *pictured at a roundtable in London organised in November 2022 by Peace Brigades International (PBI)*. It has since been revealed that Reynaldo's brother Aly was assassinated on 7<sup>th</sup> January 2023, along with Jairo Bonilla, as they both attempted to defend Honduras's Guapinol River – read more details of the killings in Honduras in the following article (on page 5).

"These two young men were founders of the struggle to protect our natural resources from an illegal mine that is destroying rivers in the national park," said Rey. "For five years we've been threatened, criminalised and falsely imprisoned, the only thing left was murder."

PBI fears that the second visitor, Carlos, may also be in danger. He had to rush back to a court hearing on 24<sup>th</sup> November, where he feared that he could be jailed. He has not filed any

reports since his return for 'Prensa Comunitaria' the local Maya Q'eqchi' news outlet.

## GUATEMALA

"The right to inform and to be informed cannot be infringed. We are living through difficult times in my country, for investigating and reporting on environmental violations, corruption, and human rights violations. Despite this, I am convinced that being an indigenous journalist is not a crime," wrote Carlos last year.



Carlos (pictured) has faced threats to his life and the lives of his family. Homes in his community regularly get raided and at times he can't stay at home. For Carlos this started in 2017 after photographing and reporting on violent repression by Guatemalan security forces of a demonstration during which an unarmed protester, Carlos Maaz, was killed. The protest was organised by local fishermen against the contamination of Lake Izabal, the largest freshwater lake in Guatemala, by the Fenix ferro-nickel mine.





*Fenix Project, El Estor, Guatemala - Photo from 'Forbidden Stories'*

The journalism network 'Forbidden Stories' took up investigations into the Fenix mine after a warrant was issued for Carlos' arrest and reported that the Guatemalan authorities lied about what happened to Maaz, as well as the environmental contamination caused by the mine.

Further criminal charges of "threats," "incitement to commit crimes" and "illicit association" were brought against Carlos, calling him a green terrorist. A colleague of Carlos quit journalism, whilst Carlos increased collaborations through the journalistic projects of 'Forbidden Stories', 'Mining Secrets', and 'Green Blood', which resulted in coverage by international outlets such as Le Monde, El País, The Guardian and Toronto Star.

Following coverage of further protests, police agents claimed to have been physically attacked and filed charges against Carlos. During 2022, he was forced to stop reporting while fighting drawn out and regularly postponed criminal proceedings. In September 2022, he was declared innocent with the court having found no evidence substantiating the accusations. Despite this, a further court hearing was scheduled for two months later.

**Carlos called on the UK government to raise his case with their Guatemalan counterparts and draw attention to**

### **the criminalisation against him and other journalists.**

The US Treasury Department has since sanctioned the Solway Investment Group, whose subsidiaries operate the Fenix Mine, due to "multiple bribery schemes over several years involving politicians, judges, and government officials". There were also concerns about Russian ownership of the Swiss-based Solway Investment Group.

The company's website claims that the Fenix Project is a socially and environmentally responsible "fully integrated ferro-nickel production facility in eastern Guatemala first developed in 1960. In 2011 Solway Investment Group purchased 98.2% of the project from the Canadian company, HudBay Minerals, and gave a new start to the project." The project has mining rights to 36.2 million tons of nickel ore reserves with 1.86% nickel, as well as the rights to an additional 70.0 million tons of resources. In 2014, the ProNiCo plant began operating, and is currently moving towards operating at its annual production capacity of over 20,000 tons of nickel.

Potential expansion options include the construction of a high-pressure acid leach (HPAL) plant at the Fenix site to treat low-grade laterite reserves with nickel below the current cut-off grade of 1.6%. The website states that the

facility's two boilers have been upgraded to expand production and "increase the stability of the entire energy system, while at the same time reducing costs."

However, the Maya community news agency, Prensa Comunitaria, reports that the previous boiler exploded, killing five workers. It also says the workforce fears for their health and safety, and the operation's Russian leadership under Dmitry Kudryakov are not interested in accidents and welfare concerns.

The Toronto Star, quoting Prensa Comunitaria, records that fishermen complain about red slick in Lake Izabal being caused by the mining operations. Villagers observed red smoke emitted from the mine at night. Manuel Ramos Ochoa, a former employee, "At night, they remove the filters, when they are processing their products. They think that people don't see it, and in the end, nobody says anything about it."

A mine spokesperson denied their processing plant ever emitted red fumes, despite photographic evidence to the contrary. Extremely high concentrations of particulate air pollution are dismissed by Solway as "unrelated to the plant" and caused by "road dust, waste incineration in fields and wood used for cooking."

## **HONDURAS**

ENCA has covered the Guapinol land and water defenders regularly over the years: the lows of arrests, disappearances and displacements as well as the highs when political prisoners were released, including freedom for the Guapinol Eight in March 2022 (ENCA 84). However, Rey explained at the Roundtable that the men's names have not been cleared and they have not received any official notification regarding their release.

**Rey urged the UK government to take all necessary action to ensure that**

**minerals extracted by companies that violate human and environmental rights don't end up in UK markets.**

He told us: "I live in Guapinol, Honduras. Water is Life. Defending two rivers in my community against drying up and contamination is a fair and legitimate fight. Yet, I have been imprisoned for it and the 15 days in a high security facility have been particularly hard."

Rey said that others, including solicitors, protestors' families and whole communities, are at risk. Activists are not sleeping at home.

The new Honduran government of Xiomara Castro raised hopes a year ago when it announced: "The entire Honduran territory is declared free of open-pit mining (...) and will proceed to the review, suspension and cancellation of environmental licences, permits and concessions." Castro promised to reinstate rule of law and to protect human rights and environmental defenders.

Environmentalists praised the government's decision because, despite massive environmental damage, mining produces less than 1% of Honduras's Gross Domestic Product and provides less than 0.1% of employment in Honduras.

However, the new government has not lived up to its promises. According to Rey, civil servants of the previous coup government are still in place and the new government fears a further coup. Business associates of the corrupt ex-president Juan Orlando Hernandez, now under arrest for drug trafficking, are well connected in the USA, in Panama and Europe.

Inversiones Los Pinares (previously Emco Mining) holds the controversial mining concession inside the Carlos Escaleras National Park. The concession has not been revoked, despite 34 water sources in the park being at risk of drying up and of contamination.

In 2018, the company began building an access road to the planned mine inside the park, which it will use to transport iron oxide to a pelletizing plant in the nearby city of Tocoa. The plant, which melts iron with carbon or coke to form compound pellets — part of the steelmaking process — is 99.6% owned by Inversiones Ecotek S.A.

Ecotek is associated with Nucor corporation, the biggest steel producer in the USA, which has built the new Palmerola Airport in Honduras and Munich Airport in Germany.

These powerful business interests have left a wake of people dead, injured and imprisoned. International solidarity is required to support the Municipal Committee for the defence of Common and Public Good (CMDBCP), the only organisation defending the environment in the Bajo Aguán region of northern Honduras.



*Photo: Rey and Carlos with PBI representatives met with the All Parliamentary Human Rights Group (APPG), MPs and at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.*



# In Honduras, the killings continue

Compiled by ENCA member Martin Mowforth

**On 7 January** this year, two environmental defenders, Aly Dominguez and Jairo Bonilla (pictured), were shot dead in broad daylight. Both men were co-founders of the Guapinol resistance group to an iron ore mine owned by one of the country's most powerful couples, Lenir Pérez and Ana Facussé. For nearly a decade, the Guapinol environmental defenders have denounced the contamination caused by the mining megaproject and the crimes that have been committed against the defenders in the Carlos Escaleras Botaderos Mountain National Park. The case of the Guapinol defenders was featured on the front cover of ENCA 84 in March 2022. They were released last year after 2½ years of illegal detention, but now they are suffering a new wave of persecution by the Public Prosecutor's Office of Tocoa.

**On 15 January**, three Garífuna women were assassinated on the Travesía beach near Puerto Cortés. According to the National Human Rights Commission of Honduras (CONADEH by its Spanish initials), "the three women were sat on the beach close to the sea when heavily armed men approached them and shot them with issuing a word." These three assassinations brought the total number of women assassinated within the Honduran territory to 17 women in 2023.

A total of 300 women were assassinated in Honduras during 2022. Also in 2022, official figures registered 35.8 homicides per 100,000 population. That was the highest rate in Central America, despite the fact that it had fallen from 41.2 per 100,000 in 2021.

**On 25 January**, human rights defender Abelino Sánchez, regional secretary of the National Union of Rural Workers (CNTC) and president of a peasant

cooperative in the department of Cortés, was seriously injured after being shot twice by two men who came to his house at 7 pm. He had recently received death threats related to a land conflict. The CNTC has frequently been involved in land conflicts with large landowners during which many rural workers have been detained, criminalized, tortured and subjected to violence and intimidation by private security forces and by police. Report of the attack reached us from COFADEH, the Committee of Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared in Honduras.

**On 12 February**, Karen Spring of Honduras Now reported on her @HondurasNow twitter feed: "Another campesino leader and his son have been killed in the Aguan Valley. According to Diario Colón, Hipólito Rivas and his 15-year old son were murdered in the community of Ilanga. Rivas was part of the Gregorio Chavez campesino cooperative from the La Panama. #Honduras."

In November 2021, Jared Olson in the Intercept explained that in Honduran land battles, paramilitaries infiltrate local groups and then kill their leaders, usually at the behest of a giant transnational corporation such as the Dinant group and its huge palm oil plantations. Amongst other issues addressed in Jared's report in The Intercept, is the role of the U.S. government and military training Honduran 'special forces' in the region; and links between these 'special forces' and para-military groups and Dinant private security guards. The Intercept reports also on the central role of the World Bank as a major investor in and



defender of its business partner, the Dinant Corporation.

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# Three port developments in Central America

By ENCA member Martin Mowforth

## Belize: Port of Belize Cruise Tourism and Cargo Expansion

In November 2022, the Department of the Environment of Belize rescheduled the public consultation for the Port of Belize Cruise Tourism and Cargo Expansion Environmental Investigation Analysis (EIA) report. This fourth consultation took place at one of Belize City's plush hotels (the Best Western Belize Biltmore Plaza). The reason for the rescheduling given by the government of Belize (GOB) was due to the impact of Hurricane Lisa.

The project involves the intention of the Port of Belize and Waterloo Investment Holdings Ltd to construct a mega cruise port and cargo facility whose berthing facilities would cater for the world's biggest cruise ships. The private sector interest part of the venture is under the control of the Ashcroft Alliance, involving the British millionaire Lord Ashcroft.

The non-governmental organisation (NGO) Belize Marine Life condemned the decision and claimed that the GOB was determined to push forward with the project despite strong public opposition. It also alleged that the GOB was keen to push the project through because of its connections to the British billionaire Lord Ashcroft.

The port project has been repeatedly rejected by the public. The first public consultation in July 2020 was rescheduled as a Zoom conference in November 2020 due to public opposition. Despite the rescheduling and the changed nature of the hearing, the meeting heard over 2,000 comments in opposition to the project.

The second consultation was also held as a Zoom conference in September 2021, and Belize Marine Life again claimed that there was united public opposition to the project. In fact, this time even the National Environmental Appraisal Committee (NEAC) voted against the project in December 2021. A third consultation was held in September 2022, again with strong opposition to the project.

The November 2022 consultation was the fourth such public consultation. Lord Ashcroft has reportedly indicated his intentions to bring a treaty claim against the GOB over Waterloo's proposed port expansion project. Early in 2022, Ashcroft wrote to Belizean Prime Minister John Briceño threatening arbitration over a breach of the 1982 UK-Northern Ireland – Belize treaty for the promotion and protection of investments.

Readers are invited to write their own concluding sentences about the arrogance and neocolonialist attitudes of the British elite and their disdain for local people elsewhere in the world.

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## Marina and Cruise Terminal in Puerto Limón, Costa Rica



In Costa Rica in 2022, plans were made public for the construction of a new cruise ship terminal and marina in the Atlantic coast port of Limón. The development includes a building for cruise passengers, local businesses, restaurants, handicraft markets, hotels, parking lots, open spaces and routes linking the new area with the existing facilities in Limón. The development requires an investment of \$854 million (USD).

In February this year, it was announced that the pre-feasibility study had been cleared and that a full feasibility study and environmental viability study were expected to be ready by August this year. The Port Administration and Economic Development Board for the Atlantic Coast (JAPDEVA by its Spanish initials) expected that the development project would generate positive economic and social impacts for the Caribbean coast area that suffers high rates of unemployment and a lack of opportunities.

It is predicted that the port development will enhance what is known as the 'orange economy' in that it will promote the cultural industry and the knowledge-based economy. The pre-feasibility study simply noted that the project will be environmentally viable. Following this cursory assessment, the National Environmental

Technical Secretariat (SETENA) granted it potential environmental viability and established the terms of reference for an environmental impact study to be conducted by Moffatt and Nichol, a US-based company that specialises in port developments in many locations around the world.

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## A deep water port in Bluefields, Nicaragua?

In November 2022, the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI) signed a collaboration agreement with the Nicaraguan government's Transport and Infrastructure Ministry (MTI) to provide funding for a deep-water port project in Bluefields on the country's Caribbean coast.

Plans for the port were first put forward in 2015 but were followed by several years of delay whilst the search for funding went ahead. CABEI considers that the project will not only integrate well with Nicaragua's other infrastructure improvements but will also aid the process of Central American economic integration.

for Nicaraguan exporters. In fact, finance minister Iván Acosta says that the port should help the country to double the value of its exports in five or six years, should attract considerable future investment, and should improve living conditions in the whole southern region. (But it is always worth remembering that politicians' promises and predictions are seldom realised.)

It hardly needs to be pointed out that at present these statements are predictions rather than reality, but there is no doubt that over the last decade Nicaragua's efforts to improve the country's infrastructure have borne fruit and have proved popular with a majority of the populace. It is also worth noting that while CABEI, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have good relations with the Nicaraguan government, regularly praising its financial management and transparency, the government of the United States of America imposes stranglehold economic sanctions on the government of Nicaragua largely because of the latter's supposedly fraudulent elections. The allegations of electoral fraud originate mainly from the USA which busies itself interfering in other countries' elections in its attempts to fill the world with governments that will slavishly follow US dictates.

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The Nicaraguan Atlantic coast near Bluefields

Bluefields is the capital of Nicaragua's South Caribbean Autonomous Region and is located at the mouth of the Bluefields River. English is the most commonly spoken language of the town. It is the country's main Caribbean port and through it are exported hardwood, seafood, shrimp and lobster. In 1984 its harbour was illegally mined by the United States and in 1988 much of the local infrastructure was destroyed by Hurricane Joan.

The proposed port will reduce Nicaragua's dependence on ports in Honduras and Costa Rica and should lower costs



# El Salvador builds Latin America's largest prison

By ENCA member Martin Mowforth

On 3 February 2023, the Salvadoran government opened the largest prison in Latin America. The compound has a capacity for up to 40,000 inmates, is called the Centre for Terrorism Confinement and is located in a rural area 47 miles from San Salvador.

It covers 165 hectares of land and the structure itself covers 23 hectares. The compound has eight electric sub-stations, two water wells, a sewage treatment plant, three miles of access roads and 19 watchtowers with many thermal surveillance cameras. As the cells have toilets and large water basins for washing, inmates will be allowed out only for hearings and to go to the prison infirmary. "No yards have been built, nor recreation area for the inmates, nor conjugal spaces," Public Works Minister Romero Rodriguez said.

Everyone who enters the facility – including the guards and other staff – must pass through a body scanner to verify that he or she is not carrying a weapon or other contraband. "Normally, telephones, televisions and

even prostitutes entered the prisons," Rodriguez said. "We have tried to guarantee that orders to murder Salvadorans are no longer given from inside the prisons."

President Nayib Bukele declared a state of exception in March 2022 because of the high levels of violence perpetrated by the Salvadoran gangs and since then, his allies in congress have voted every month to renew the state of exception. The state of emergency entails the suspension of constitutional guarantees and allows police to detain people without warrants and in the absence of grounds that would stand up to judicial scrutiny.

Nearly 63,000 people with gang connections have been arrested, according to the government, but families of many detainees say that their loved ones were law-abiding citizens. Many organisations and human rights advocates have described the arrests as a massive human rights violation.

Despite the violations, the policy is widely popular among the Salvadoran citizenry; many people have expressed a new sense of security on the streets and murders have been drastically reduced in number. In Britain on the other hand, the NGO Ekö (formerly SumOfUs) has initiated a petition to the Organisation of American States (OAS) to force the Salvadoran government to close down the new prison.

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# Illegal mining poisons water supply in northern Costa Rica

By ENCA member Martin Mowforth



maximum admissible level of mercury in water is 0.001 milligrams per litre. In one school in Crucitas, a sample registered 0.053 mg/L. The regional director of the Ministry of Health, Luis Diego Ugalde Jiménez, described the situation as “very worrying. The water

should not be consumed; nor should it be used for cooking or bathing. ... We have a genuine environmental emergency here.” Mercury can severely affect the human nervous system.

After significant protests, in 2010 the Costa Rican courts overturned Infinito Gold’s permit on environmental grounds. Infinito Gold turned to the World Bank’s International Centre for the Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) seeking \$400 million in damages and lost profits. It took ten years for the ICSID to give a mixed judgement in 2021 which gave both parties to the dispute some gains but decided that the legal costs incurred in the case should be equally shared.

The other effect of the 2010 permit cancellation was the creation of a modern-day gold rush to the Crucitas area, especially after Infinito Gold’s estimation of the quantity of gold in the Crucitas area (1.2 million ounces) became public knowledge. Thus small-scale, illegal mining in the area has persisted since the cancellation of Infinito Gold’s permit and the Environment Ministry (Ministerio de Ambiente y Energía) estimated that in 2018, \$197 million worth of gold was exported from this area.

The illegal miners make widespread use of mercury and cyanide in the process of separating the gold from the ore. In their attempts to counter this illegal mining, the Costa Rican police have now established a permanent patrol at Crucitas, and this has had some success in combatting the illegal practices. But the emergencies just declared clearly demonstrate that the problem is far from solved.

At the government’s press conference announcing the state of emergency, President Rodrigo Chaves said that they also had reports of water contamination with cyanide in the area. Chaves also said that despite the presence of 155 police personnel in the area, it is not sufficient to prevent the illegal mining.

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At the beginning of March this year, the government of Costa Rica declared a state of emergency in numerous districts in the north of the country due to the contamination of the drinking water supply with mercury used in the illegal extraction of gold in Crucitas. Two weeks earlier the Municipal Council of San Carlos had also declared an emergency in several northern border communities. The ban on water usage affects four aqueducts and all artisanal wells in the area. Since September (2022), the national Institute of Aqueducts and Sewers has provided potable water by tanks and trucks in the affected area.

Crucitas is located close to the border with Nicaragua and the Río San Juan which divides the two countries. At the start of this century, the Canadian company Infinito Gold created an open pit mine to extract the considerable gold reserves there. The company did so despite Costa Rica’s moratorium on open pit mining, although then President Oscar Arias controversially reversed the ban citing ‘national interest’ reasons for doing so.

In November last year (2022), samples of water for human consumption collected by the Ministry of Health showed levels of mercury above internationally accepted standards. The

# ‘Aula Verde’ programme supported by ENCA

In 2022, ENCA provided funding (\$2,000 – USD) for the operation of a programme entitled ‘Aula Verde’ (Green Classroom) run by the community of Longo Maï in Costa Rica, the Network of Nicaraguan Private Wildlife Reserves (Red de Reservas Silvestres Privadas de Nicaragua) and the Nicaraguan Ecological Conservation Chamber (Cámara de Conservación Ecológica de Nicaragua).

The Green Classroom Programme is an educational initiative created by the Greenfields Wildlife Reserve, who in turn took it to the Network of Wildlife Reserves of Nicaragua for its promotion and implementation at a country wide level.

The aim and essence of the Aula Verde Programme is environmental education. The programme applies environmental values through the notions of ‘learning

together’, games and social commitment in the training of the participants. In the case of Longo Maï, the aim was to raise awareness among the collaborators with the Longo Maï Wildlife Refuge of the care and conservation of the environment and the promotion of the best ecological practices that can influence specific elements of the conservation projects.

Greenfields is the name of the location where facilitators from Longo Mai were to be trained in Nicaragua. The teacher from Greenfields was Luis Cortes, who has been an instructor of the Aula Verde Programme in Nicaragua for years, for groups in communities and schools. In Nicaragua he works as a tour operator, naturalist guide and bird watcher.

The original intention of two people from Longo Maï travelling to Nicaragua to receive the training was changed so

that Luis Cortes from Greenfields would travel to Costa Rica to give the training in Longo Maï. One advantage of this alteration was that ten people from the Longo Maï area could now be trained instead of just the original two.

Thus in February this year, a total of 15 participants received training from Luis over the course of three days. Luis wrote a 20 page report about the event which is mostly composed of fascinating photographs from the three days. ENCA has posted this on our website at: [enca.org.uk/aula-verde/](https://enca.org.uk/aula-verde/)

It is hoped that in the future Longo Maï may be able to set up an interchange where people also come from Nicaragua to Costa Rica under the project. This was a genuine South-South interchange enabled by ENCA’s funding.



*Participants at the Longo Mai Aula Verde in February 2023*



# Honduras declares 'State of Emergency'

## Copying Bukele in El Salvador, Honduras declares its own 'state of exception'

Because of the popularity of Nayib Bukele's 'state of exception' in El Salvador, President Xiomara Castro has implemented a copy of the policy in Honduras.

El Salvador's state of exception began in March 2022 when civil rights were suspended and the police and armed forces carried out mass sweeps and detentions of alleged gang members, most of whom were tattooed and young. Estimates vary, but up to 70,000 people have been arbitrarily detained with their civil rights suspended. Despite the human rights implications, however, the move has proved popular with the public, many people have reported that they feel safer on the streets, and the rate of homicides has fallen considerably.

In Honduras, a massacre on the 6<sup>th</sup> March by heavily armed gangsters was the ninth massacre of the year and prompted President Castro to extend a state of exception that had already been established in half of the Honduran territory since December 2022. This was seen as the 'Bukele effect' or 'Bukele model', but has been a major cause for concern by human rights groups and civil society groups, as the following article by Meghan Krausch illustrates.

Quite apart from the suspension of civil rights and the right to due process for the detained, in El Salvador there have been several collateral effects of the policy. These include an increase in the rate of migration of gang members to other countries in the region, and a 'mutation' of the criminal structures involving moving their focus of

attention from urban areas to rural areas. Human rights groups also call attention to the need to attack the roots of the problem rather than the symptoms.

## Honduran Activists Are Protesting 'State of Emergency' That Suspends Civil Rights

*ENCA is grateful to TruthOut and to Meghan Krausch for permission to reproduce her article in this edition of the ENCA Newsletter.*

In Tegucigalpa, Honduras, a group of activists has been gathering regularly on Saturday mornings to oppose one of President Xiomara Castro's popular new policies: a state of emergency that partially suspends several fundamental constitutional rights. The measure, also known as a state of exception, is meant to be a key part of Castro's "war on extortion," a major and systemic problem in Honduras. Anti-militarist activists, however, say that there can be no path forward with more militarization and that the state of exception amounts to the criminalization of poverty.

Like their abolitionist counterparts in the United States, these anti-militarist activists often find themselves attacked online when they invite people out to their activities. Commenters accuse them of supporting extortion or even of being gang members themselves. Criticizing the new government carries the risk of being branded as right-wing, said one member of the group, Sofia (a pseudonym), who requested anonymity due to fears of retaliation from the police. The measures are popular, said Sofia, despite "what

human rights are being trampled on," because "people just want revenge."

"And it's understandable too," she added. In Honduras as in the United States, violence is a popular response to violence.

## Following in El Salvador's Footsteps

In January 2022, Honduras elected a new president, Xiomara Castro. Castro, whose campaign was supported by many of the nation's social movements, is the country's first female president and first ever to be elected from a third party (LIBRE). Castro's election signalled the end of the narco-dictatorship that was imposed after her husband, Mel Zelaya, was forcibly removed from office in 2009, and that came to be symbolized particularly by two-term President Juan Orlando Hernández.



The 12-year period after the 2009 coup was characterized by increased militarization, weakening of most if not all civil institutions, high levels of violence against activists, collusion with narco-traffickers at the highest levels of government and police, and the looting of public funds. Amid all of this, rates of violence have been extraordinarily high in Honduras and everyday people, especially those who live in areas controlled by powerful gangs or organised crime syndicates, have been profoundly affected.



## Costa Rica's fishing practices make it "an international pariah"

At the start of this year, Costa Rica was accused of violating at least two fisheries conventions. The complaint was presented to the Office of International Affairs, Trade and Commerce (IATC) of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) by 18 Marine Conservation Organisations (MCOs).

The organisations requested that the NMFS should "present a negative finding against Costa Rica in its next biannual report to the US Congress and maintain its status as a nation that repeatedly practices Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing." In 2021 the country was reported as an IUU nation, and the problems and issues still hold.

Randall Arauz, a Costa Rican biologist, explained that "Costa Rica has long turned over the management of fishery policy to the sole interest of commercial fisheries, disregarding science and ignoring the public interest, with the result that Costa Rica is now an international pariah when it comes to fisheries management." He further explained that sharks and billfish are now more endangered in Costa Rican waters than they have ever been.

Also in early 2023, representatives of the School of Biology of the National University and the Marine Sciences Research Centre of the University of Costa Rica questioned the studies used by the government to support its position and refuted the idea that there existed a space for debate around the issues.

The liberal deputy Kattia Cambronero Aguiluz described the government's attempts to claim that these issues were debatable as a return to "the old practices of the past, repeating a pseudo-study with fake criteria which enable them to validate practices that are damaging to marine ecosystems."

### Sources:

- Daniela Muñoz Solano, 09.02.23, 'Diputada Cambronero: Tratando de revivir la pesca de arrastre, el gobierno pone en entredicho la imagen conservacionista del país', *Semanario Universidad*
- Ileano Fernandez, 06.02.23, 'Costa Rica faces accusation over International and US fishing violations', *Tico Times*

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### Meeting Dates 2023

**Weekend of June 24/25<sup>th</sup> | Sunday October 22<sup>nd</sup>**

The June 2023 meeting will be held in Tavistock, Devon – venue TBC. The October 2023 meeting will be back in London, venue TBC.

*A Hybrid option will be provided at some meetings should this be requested.*