

# ENCA



Environmental Network *for* Central America

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

Issue 88 | July 2023

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Guapinol activist killed in Honduras

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ENCA members take a virtual scuba dive in Belize

## Environmental Crimes

Costa Rican prosecutor lays out the challenges ahead



# THE WORLD BANK, SUSTAINABILITY AND PANAMA



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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*Luis Gonzalez on Unsplash*

## World Bank approves \$150 million to Panamá for ‘green growth’

*We include this item in order to illustrate the use of language and jargon in the parallel worlds of sustainability, green growth, climate change and climate resilience as these concepts are employed by and adapted by global institutions like the World Bank. Further ENCA commentary is given in italics, especially at the end of the article.*

In April this year, the World Bank made the first loan to Panamá in a scheduled series of development policy operations which aim to support green growth, climate resilience and an inclusive model of development in the country. In particular, the \$150 million (USD) is designed to promote sustainable, low-carbon emissions growth.

*ENCA members will no doubt be questioning how the promotion of growth can be sustainable and might also ask how the making of large loans can aid resilience, as opposed to indebtedness. Hold those questions and thoughts.*

The policy operations have two pillars. The first is to support reforms to ensure that the energy transition and the socially inclusive growth are made with low carbon emissions. The second is the establishment of baselines to sustain the natural capital for the sake of resilient growth.

The first pillar will seek to monitor or tag the climate change elements of public expenditure in order “to improve the efficiency of public expenditure and enhance institutional capacity to mainstream climate mitigation and adaptation criteria into governance, budgeting and spending.”

“The project aims to increase the country’s resilience to climate change and protect natural capital by supporting improved forest management and watershed protection policies. It will also encourage the adoption of higher standards of energy efficiency. Finally, the operation supports gender-sensitive policies in rural electrification, renewable energy and digital connectivity, which will establish Panama as a model for other

countries in Central America and the region.”



Héctor Alexander, Panamá’s Minister of Economy and Finance (MEF), said “this financial operation will enhance Panama’s efforts in establishing the policy foundations to foster the country’s sustainable economic growth, low emissions, and resilience to climate change. It also positions Panama as one of the countries which promotes a transition to clean energy, socially inclusive, low-carbon growth, and technological innovation to better respond to climate emergencies. Similarly, Panama supports the efforts to sustain natural capital for resilient growth by strengthening climate governance and improving institutional capacity to advance the country’s climate change mitigation and adaptation agendas,” concluded Alexander.

The World Bank press release declared that the policy reforms stemming from this programme are expected to achieve results in 2025.

*Whilst acknowledging with both relief and pleasure that the World Bank is now building into its programmes the notions of sustainability, climate resilience and social inclusivity, the ENCA editors are concerned that the use of environment-friendly language may often be used as a*



cover for real action and intention – a kind of ‘greenwashing’ of the ideas of ‘development’ and environmentalism. Of particular concern is the conflicting notions of sustainability and growth. Many of us consider that it is precisely the Bank’s addiction to capitalist growth which has caused the planet’s crises of unsustainability.

The following article relating to the World Bank’s funding of an electricity transmission line in Panama illustrates another aspect of the Bank’s willingness to use language such as ‘free, prior and informed consent’ whilst not actually granting such consent to groups affected by ‘development’ projects it is funding.

Sources:

- World Bank Press Release, April 28, 2023, ‘World Bank approves US\$150 million to foster green and sustainable growth and enhance climate resilience in Panama’, Washington D.C.
- El Economista, 28 de abril 2023, ‘Banco Mundial aprueba crédito de \$150 millones a Panamá para crecimiento verde’.

## Indigenous communities in Panama succeed in holding World Bank to account

*We are grateful to the Centre for International Environmental Law (CIEL) for making their relevant press release available to us. We have used CIEL’s material before and are pleased to be able to do so again on account of their reliability. CIEL uses the power of law to protect the environment, promote human rights, and ensure a just and sustainable society.*

[www.ciel.org](http://www.ciel.org)

In a historic investigation published on 16 June [2023], the independent accountability mechanism of the World Bank’s International Finance Corporation (IFC), the Compliance Advisor Ombudsman (CAO), found that the IFC failed to act in accordance with its own sustainability policy when helping to structure and tender a public-private partnership for the financing, construction, and operation of Panama’s Fourth Electrical Transmission Line project.

The investigation concluded that, as a consequence, free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC)<sup>1</sup> processes have not been carried out properly with the Indigenous Peoples in the region who could be affected. The CAO’s findings also recognise that Indigenous communities located outside of the officially recognized territory of the Ngäbe-Buglé Comarca have been excluded from FPIC processes altogether.

The IFC has been advising Panama’s state-owned electrical transmission company, ETESA, during the initial phases of the Fourth Line project before

construction begins. According to the CAO, the IFC failed to provide adequate guidance regarding the need to engage with stakeholders before ETESA began a preliminary FPIC process, despite known contextual risks that could make it difficult to carry out proper consultations with Indigenous communities in the region. Similarly, the IFC’s guidance about designing the primary FPIC process left significant gaps regarding how to ensure an inclusive and culturally appropriate FPIC process. The investigation found that the IFC’s reliance on ETESA’s assurances regarding the adequacy of its FPIC processes was a key factor that led to these shortcomings.

In response to the CAO’s findings and recommendations, the IFC Board of Directors approved the IFC’s Management Action Plan to address these shortcomings. The plan was approved after the IFC added commitments to advise ETESA on an ongoing basis about the measures required to ensure that all Indigenous communities that could be affected by the project are identified and properly included in mandatory FPIC processes.

The case will now enter a monitoring phase, during which the IFC will report every six months to the CAO and the IFC Board of Directors regarding the actions it has taken to fulfill the commitments made to address the shortcomings identified in the CAO’s investigation report.

Feliciano Santos, a representative of Indigenous Ngäbe, Buglé, and Campesino

communities and coordinator of the Movement for the Defence of the Territories and Ecosystems of Bocas del Toro (MODETEAB), stated:

*When we submitted our complaint about the Fourth Line project to the CAO in 2018, we hoped that the CAO would recognize the legitimacy of our concerns and emphasize the need for the IFC to take action to ensure that our rights as Indigenous Peoples are respected in this project. Now, four years later, the CAO has done just that.*

*We welcome the CAO’s findings and the actions that the IFC has committed to take in response. We reiterate that the IFC’s role is particularly important in light of ETESA’s previous failures to carry out adequate consultations — let alone proper FPIC processes — with communities affected by its projects, including the Third Electrical Transmission Line.*

*While the hard work of ensuring full respect for our rights in practice still lies ahead, the outcome of this investigation reinforces the centrality of FPIC for development actors and paves the way for the IFC to play a constructive role in assisting ETESA in carrying out robust FPIC processes with our Indigenous communities. This is essential not only to meet the IFC’s own standards, but also to safeguard our Indigenous communities, our cultural heritage, our lands, and our resources in the face of the Fourth Line project.*

Continued >>

Sarah Dorman, an attorney with the Centre for International Environmental Law (CIEL), stated:

*This is just the second case to be completed under the CAO's new policy, which provides new guarantees for consulting with complainants about the commitments and actions that should be taken in response to CAO findings. This case shows that these accountability processes can work, especially when the concerns and insights of affected community members are taken seriously and incorporated in action plans at early, pre-construction stages of development projects — before irreparable harm might be done.*

*Just as importantly, the findings in this case represent a milestone for ensuring that Indigenous Peoples' rights are respected in the context of projects supported by the IFC — not just in policy, but in practice. Through this investigation, the CAO confirmed that respect for Indigenous Peoples' right to free, prior, and informed consent is a prerequisite for sustainable development. And it sets the critical precedent that development finance actors cannot shirk their responsibilities to Indigenous Peoples with impunity.*

**1. Note regarding FPIC:** The right of Indigenous Peoples to free, prior, and informed consent allows Indigenous Peoples to give or withhold their consent for projects that would affect them or their territories. FPIC is now a well-established right: Not only is it enshrined in numerous regional and international instruments related to Indigenous Peoples, but it has also been incorporated into the environmental and social policies of development banks such as the IFC.



Oqueli Dominguez

## Oqueli Dominguez, a Guapinol land and water defender, killed in Honduras

ENCA Newsletters have reported on the struggles of the Guapinol water and environment defenders on numerous occasions in the past, especially in ENCA 84 (March 2022). Now, further to our reports in ENCA 87 about mining-related assassinations in Guatemala and Honduras and specifically in the article entitled 'In Honduras, the killings continue', in this newsletter we tragically have to report on the assassination of Oqueli Dominguez, one of the Guapinol human rights defenders. We reproduce here extracts from the notification of Oqueli's murder by Rights Action, a US/Canadian human rights organisation that focuses especially on abuses of communities and environments by US and Canadian transnational mining corporations. We are grateful to Rights Action for their generalised permission to use their material. <https://rightsaction.org>

Below the Rights Action material we have included the related letter written by ENCA to the Honduran Attorney General, Mr Óscar Fernando Chinchilla. It was written by ENCA member Jon Heal on behalf of ENCA.

On June 15, 2023, yet another Guapinol human rights defender was killed, deadly repression that is linked to the mining interests in Honduras of Nucor Corporation (the largest U.S. steel producer).

With many indications it was a planned assassination, the attack and killing occurred at 10:30am at the family's house, carried out by two armed subjects riding a motorcycle. Honduras Now (@HondurasNow) tweeted that Catalina Ramos, Oqueli Domínguez's mother, was also injured in the attack. The hitman opened fired on their house. Ramos is currently receiving medical attention for her injuries. Oqueli (shown here) was 42 years old.

The Municipal Committee in Defence of Commons and Public Goods of Tocoa decries the murder of Oqueli Domínguez, older brother of Aly Domínguez (murdered on January 7), younger brother of Reynaldo Domínguez, a land defender recognized internationally in the Guapinol

struggle for territory, water, and environment.

Oqueli is a member of the *Comité Municipal de Defensa de los Bienes Comunes y Públicos de Tocoa* (The Municipal Defence Committee of Communal and Public Goods of

Tocoa), and his family is one of the most prominent in the struggle of the community of Guapinol for the defence of the Guapinol and San Pedro Rivers. His older brother, Aly Dominguez, was murdered on January 7th, 2023 and his younger brother, Reynaldo Dominguez, was criminalized, deprived of liberty and has suffered threats and assaults for years."

Now, two brothers from the same Guapinol family have been murdered. The third brother—Reynaldo—was one of close to 30 Guapinol land defenders jailed—some for over 900 days—under trumped up criminal charges.

When will mining-linked crimes and repression against the residents of Guapinol and the municipality end?

Rights Action cite the following references as giving the necessary background to understanding the case of the Guapinol defenders.

- <https://www.hondurasnow.org/episode-14-the-struggle-to-defend-water-in-guapinol/>
- <https://www.univision.com/univision-news/latin-america/the-hidden-connection-between-a-us-steel-company-and-the-controversial-los-pinares-mine-in-honduras>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/oct/06/how-honduras-became-one-of-the-most-dangerous-countries-to-defend-natural-resources>
- <https://www.hondurasnow.org/>
- <https://twitter.com/HondurasNow>

## ENCA's letter to the Honduran Attorney General follows.

Dear Attorney General,

### Murders of 3 human rights campaigners, River Guapinol

We are ENCA (Environmental Network for Central America) who are a British group supporting environmental projects in several countries, including Honduras.

We have received information from the human rights group Amnesty UK about the murders of men who were peacefully campaigning against pollution of the Guapinol River in the Department of Colón.

Some ENCA members met with other Guapinol defenders who came to London last year to tell us what has happened in Honduras. We published a report of their visit in our newsletter (ENCA 87).

Now we write to express deep concern about the serious risk faced by defenders of the Guapinol River in Tocoa, department of Colón.

We have heard from Amnesty UK that Oqueli Domínguez was killed in the community of Guapinol on 15 June 2023. This was five months after the killing of human rights defenders Aly Magdaleno Domínguez Ramos and Jairo Bonilla Ayala on 7 January 2023. The authorities have yet to identify all those responsible for these murders.

Oqueli Domínguez is the brother of Aly Magdaleno Domínguez. A further brother, Reynaldo Domínguez, is one of the Guapinol defenders who was notified on 7 February 2023 that the prosecutor's office in Tocoa had appealed a favourable resolution of the Supreme Court of Justice, which had annulled unfounded criminal proceedings. The authorities responsible for the investigation into the killings of Oqueli and Aly Domínguez, as well as that of Jairo Bonilla, must respect the right of the human rights defenders families to justice, truth and reparation.

Therefore, I urge you to conduct a prompt, independent, impartial and exhaustive investigation to identify all those responsible for the murders of all three defenders. Also, authorities must provide full and appropriate protection to human rights defenders.

I look forward to hearing from you on this important matter.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Heal  
on behalf of the Environmental Network for  
Central America

## Costa Rica's Environmental Prosecutor outlines the challenges posed by environmental crimes

By ENCA member Jill Powis

To mark World Environment Day on June 5, Luis Diego Hernández Araya, coordinator of the Deputy Prosecutor's Office for the Environment (*Fiscalía Adjunta Ambiental*), gave a radio interview on the current state of the environment in Costa Rica and the threats posed by environmental crime. The topics included the situation for the country's forests and coastal waters, and the trafficking of land, animals and plants.

On the seas, the prosecutor said that they were seriously polluted, with declining biodiversity and die-off of coral reefs, despite the fact that large parts of Costa Rica's coastal waters were marine reserves. A major contribution to the degradation of these marine eco-systems was illegal fishing. When this was mentioned, people tended to think of individual artisanal fisherman straying into protected areas, whereas most of the damage was literally on an industrial scale, through the highly destructive practices of fleets of unlicensed factory ships. It was estimated that between 2010 and 2015, \$84 million of yellowfin tuna was caught in this way. He stressed that there were complex structures and a high level of organisation around this – a theme that would recur throughout the interview.

The state of the nation's freshwater also gave the prosecutor cause for concern. Between 1997 and 2015, 3,000 people were admitted to hospital due to poisoning by agrochemicals – fungicides and pesticides contaminating drinking water.

Moving on to Costa Rica's forests, Hernández claimed that they would be deserts by 2050 according to current projections. Costa Rica is hailed as an environmental success story for doubling its forest cover over the past 30 years through government policies to reverse rampant deforestation<sup>1</sup>. However, Hernández had grave concerns about continued deforestation both within and

outside protected areas, driven by illegal changes in land use as well as "land trafficking" - the usurpation of land through fraudulent means, and its resale or rent for profit. "Behind this there are structures, organisations whose aim is to identify large tracts of land for pineapple or banana monocultures, or for real estate, and turn them into a business," said the prosecutor. Land-trafficking is not currently a specific offence under Costa Rican law, although it is in other countries such as Ecuador.<sup>2</sup>

Currently, 60,000 hectares of Costa Rica's land area is planted with pineapples, of which 4,000 are in protected nature areas, with a further 16,000 in environmentally important wetlands.<sup>3</sup> The prosecutor added that, between 2007 and 2018, 25 per cent of the marijuana grown in Costa Rica was in protected wilderness areas, including national parks and wildlife refuges. In that period, marijuana cultivation reached 400,000 square meters; that is, about 87 soccer fields.

The disappearance of forest areas was resulting in fragmentation, desertification and loss of biological corridors, with a consequent loss of biodiversity. Costa Rica represents only 0.03 per cent of the world's landmass, but Hernández said that it held 6 per cent of the world's biodiversity, an estimated 500,000 species, of which only 18 per cent, or 90,000, had been discovered. He was concerned that this deforestation and other types of environmental degradation over the next few decades could result in the extinction of species that had not yet even been studied.

Costa Rica's status as a global biodiversity hotspot also unfortunately attracted international traffickers who could trade species for thousands of dollars. It also meant that there were many people within Costa Rica who had the scientific expertise to be able to identify species with value to this trade. Rare animals were



regularly found at airports in luggage, ready to be smuggled out of the country, and there was a lucrative trade in cocobolo wood, which the prosecutor said was hugely valuable – a container full could be worth \$40,000. International trade in this wood – highly prized in Asia – is banned but continues through organised crime.

The smuggling of resources out of the country extended to precious metals – 33 raids had recently uncovered gold worth \$60 million for illegal export (which would also have been mined illegally, with consequential environmental impacts).

Costa Rica currently had 12 laws related to the environment with 80 associated offences. However, Hernández believed more needed to be done to combat environmental crimes, including:

- An increase in the penalties for environmental crimes. Some were already high – for example, violations of the Mining Code could carry a prison sentence of 4 years; and failure to respect the law on the disposal of toxic waste 10 years. However, some

sentences were still far too lenient and there were a number of loopholes. This was an issue that was already being looked into by the authorities.

- Declaring certain offences as organised crime, which is behind most environmental crimes in Costa Rica. Classifying them as such would allow for investigation techniques such as phone-tapping and access to bank accounts.
- Combatting corruption, because organised crime could not flourish without the acquiescence and/or collusion of state officials responsible for managing natural resources – for example, those issuing operating licences.
- Training more prosecutors and judges to have specialist knowledge of environmental crimes.
- Reporting by ordinary citizens of any suspected environmental crimes to the authorities.

The prosecutor concluded by saying that the environment belongs to all of us, and

so it is the responsibility of all citizens to protect it.

**Sources**

- Fabiola Pomareda García, 12 Junio 2023, 'Fiscal Ambiental: "La proyección es que en el 2050 nuestros bosques serán desiertos"', Semanario Universidad.
- Website of Frecuencia MP, the radio programme of the Costa Rica Public Ministry 05.06.2023 [Sitio Web del Ministerio Público - Día Mundial del Medio Ambiente: la realidad de Costa Rica \(poder-judicial.go.cr\)](https://www.mpr.gob.cr/Sitio-Web-del-Ministerio-Publico-Dia-Mundial-del-Medio-Ambiente-la-realidad-de-Costa-Rica-poder-judicial-go-cr)

1. The claim about forest cover needs to be set against doubts from some quarters that the government exaggerates its forest cover by including numerous areas of plantation trees (such as palm oil). See for instance the discussion of deforestation and reforestation rates in Costa Rica in Mowforth (2014) *The Violence of Development*, Pluto Press, pp. 121-2.

2. For more information on the role land-trafficking plays in environmental degradation in Latin America see <https://qcostarica.com/how-corruption-feeds-land-trafficking-in-latin-america/>

3. For more information on the land used for pineapple production see <https://slothconservation.org/real-cost-of-pineapples-from-costa-rica/> as well as numerous previous issues of the ENCA Newsletter.



# El Sueno Existe!

Mini Festival 2023 : Chile 50 –  
Weekend of 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> September

Y Plas, Machynlleth, SY20 8ER

To commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fascist Military coup in Chile, which destroyed the achievements of the socialist Popular Unity Government (1970 – '73) of Salvador Allende, murdered Victor Jara, and imprisoned, tortured and murdered thousands of others, sending further thousands into forced exile, many to Britain.

[www.elsuenoexiste.com](http://www.elsuenoexiste.com)

## Costa Rica's most popular park drastically reduces visitor numbers despite Presidential discomfort with the decision

*For this edition of the ENCA newsletter, ENCA member Lucy Goodman has translated and summarised several articles from the Costa Rican press highlighting the issue of environmental damage resulting from over-tourism along with the differences in motives and purposes between the scientific community and the political community.*

The Manuel Antonio National Park (PNMA), located in Quepos, is the most visited in Costa Rica. Hosting 400,000 visitors per year, it is a "hyper-frequented attraction". The Park is managed by a co-administration between SINAC (Sistema Nacional de Áreas de Conservación / National System of Conservation Areas) and a Board of Directors. As of May 15th 2023, Costa Rica's Constitutional Court (Sala IV) has limited visitor capacity from 3,000 to 1,120 per day following ecologists' concerns of environmental over-exploitation.

Changes in species behaviour, due to the disturbance from touristic activity in the park, have been repeatedly documented in the white-faced monkey (*Cebus imitator*), marmoset monkey (*Saimiri oerstedii*), raccoons (*Procyon lotor* and *Procyon cancrivorus*), howler monkey (*Alouatta palliata*) and sloth (*Bradypus variegatus*) populations. Tourist saturation has also damaged flora, eroded soil, reduced vegetation cover and has

generated waste and wastewater management issues.

For these reasons the Constitutional Court ordered the reduction of visitor capacity to a third of its former intake. However, President Rodrigo Chaves and Environment Minister Franz Tattenbach expressed "discomfort" with this ruling and have since intervened. According to Chaves, the conservation efforts sought by reducing tourist numbers will be detrimental to local economic gain. The Environment Minister announced that an investigation will be launched into three SINAC officials who submitted technical opinions to the Constitution, allegedly breaching the protocol. "There has to be discipline, and the response must be coordinated," he said.

The Universidad de Costa Rica (UCR) School of Biology wrote a public letter, addressed to Chaves and Tattenbach, reiterating that the judicial decision "aims to protect the biological integrity of the

PNMA, and is compliant with current legislation." The letter warns that allowing 3,000 visitors per day ignores the pertinent studies and would amplify the negative environmental effects already occurring in the protected area.

The letter from the academics adds that "instead of seeking a momentary economic benefit, it is essential to strengthen the protection of wild areas by providing the necessary resources and managing public access in a sustainable way".

The National University explained that all restrictive decisions regarding management, specifically in terms of the days and hours visitors are allowed to enter the park, are based on empirical research. The decision to reduce visitor numbers in PNMA has so far endured, despite the quibble from central government.

### Sources:

- Álvaro Murillo, 24 mayo, 2023, 'MINAE interviene Parque Manuel Antonio e investiga a tres del SINAC por no obedecer a Ministro' *Semanario Universidad*
- Vinicio Chacón, 25 Mayo 2023, 'Escuela de Biología de la UCR expresó "profunda preocupación" por cuestionamientos a personal de SINAC hechos por Chaves', *Semanario Universidad*
- Tico Times, 'Costa Rica Court Protects Manuel Antonio National Park: Increase Visitor Flow Annulled : (ticotimes.net)

### Acronyms:

*MINAE: Ministerio de Ambiente y Energía de Costa Rica*

*SINAC: Sistema Nacional de Áreas de Conservación*

*PNMA: Parque Nacional Manuel Antonio*

*UCR: Universidad de Costa Rica*



*Photo of visitors at an entrance to Manuel Antonio National Park. Photo: Semanario Universidad*



# More fishy news and debates from Costa Rica

In ENCA 87 we included an article citing Randall Arauz's description of Costa Rica's fishing practices as making the country "an international pariah". Moreover, 18 Marine Conservation Organisations (MCOs) accused the country of violating at least two fisheries conventions. In 2021, Costa Rica was reported as a nation that practices Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing. In this issue, we highlight two items of news which present the country in a more favourable light with regard to its fishing practices. We would urge readers to re-read the article on page 12 of ENCA 87 and then to consider the following two articles.

## Illegal Shark Fin Seizure Highlights Global Concerns and Costa Rica's Role

*Tico Times* June 20, 2023 (Extracts)



(Courtesy of the Public Security Ministry) Illustration Purposes Only

In a significant operation, Brazilian authorities have intercepted a staggering 29 tonnes of illegal shark fins en route to Asia, potentially marking the largest seizure of its kind to date. The Brazilian environmental protection agency, Ibama, estimated that approximately 10,000 shortfin mako and blue sharks had been ruthlessly killed to obtain these fins, highly sought after as a delicacy in Asian markets. The confiscation of these fins sheds light on the illicit shark fin trade, its detrimental impact on shark populations worldwide, and its connections to countries like Costa Rica.

The demand for shark fin soup, particularly in China and Japan, has fuelled the illegal trade. Certain beliefs associate this dish with medicinal properties and aphrodisiac effects, although scientific studies have not substantiated these claims. As a result, the market price for shark fins can reach astonishing figures of up to \$1,000 per kilogram in Asia, contributing to an estimated \$500 million

annual value for the black-market shark fin trade.

Highlighting the devastating consequences of indiscriminate fishing, the Brazilian agency expressed concern over the drastic decline in global shark populations. Sharks play a crucial role in maintaining marine ecosystems, and their rapid depletion can disrupt the delicate balance of marine life.

Fortunately, efforts to protect shark species gained momentum in November, when 183 countries, including Costa Rica, collectively agreed to safeguard 54 shark species, including those from the hammerhead and requiem families, under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).

Costa Rica's involvement in this international initiative demonstrates its commitment to marine conservation and sustainable practices. As a country known for its rich biodiversity and vast marine resources, Costa Rica recognizes the need to protect and preserve vulnerable shark species from exploitation and overfishing. By joining forces with other nations, Costa Rica aims to curb the demand for shark fins, promote responsible fishing practices, and ensure the long-term survival of these magnificent creatures.

The recent seizure of illegal shark fins serves as a stark reminder of the ongoing challenges faced in combatting the illicit shark fin trade. It emphasizes the need for continued international cooperation, stricter regulations, and greater awareness to protect sharks and their vital role in maintaining healthy marine ecosystems.

## Costa Rica Declares Hammerhead Shark Species Endangered

*AFP*, June 27, 2023 (Extracts)

In June [2023], Costa Rica declared three species of hammerhead sharks as endangered through a ruling stating that these animals are "one step away from extinction."

"The Sphyrna species is declared as wildlife in danger of extinction according to technical and scientific criteria, and legally in the public domain. The National System of Conservation Areas is ordered to include the hammerhead shark species *Sphyrna lewini*, *Sphyrna mokarran*, and *Sphyrna zygaena* on the list of endangered species," stated the ruling of the Constitutional Court I.

Two out of the three species of hammerhead sharks are classified as being at "critical risk" of extinction and having a "declining" population in the Red List of Threatened Species of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

The Costa Rican justice system also warned public entities to "adopt all necessary and appropriate measures" to put an end to the capture, retention, commercialization, and unloading of these three species.

In February, the Costa Rican government banned the fishing of hammerhead sharks, a species highly demanded for its fin soup. Requiem and hammerhead sharks represent more than half of the global fin trade, which is centred in Hong Kong and generates around \$500 million annually. One kilogram of fins can cost up to \$1,000 in East Asian markets. >>





According to popular belief, shark fin soup is believed to delay aging, improve appetite, aid memory and enhance sexual desire.

In southern Costa Rica, on the Pacific Ocean side of the country, the Golfo Dulce sanctuary, with Cocos Island as a World Heritage site boasts the largest congregations of hammerhead sharks, according to the Presidency of Costa Rica.

At the end of 2022, at the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) summit in Panama, with reservations from Japan, regulations were decided upon for 54 species from the families of requiem sharks (Carcharhinidae) and hammerhead sharks (Sphynidae), the most trafficked for their fin soup ingredients.

## Tobacco Caye, Belize - Coral Research and Lionfish Control

*On 24<sup>th</sup> June ENCA members held their second meeting of the year. The highlight of the meeting was a virtual scuba dive run by Tobacco Caye Marine Station in Belize. ENCA member James Watson presents a summary of our virtual link with Belize.*

At the ENCA meeting in June we were given a Virtual Tour of Tobacco Caye Marine Station by its Station Manager, marine biologist James Troughton. Tobacco Caye is a sand island on the Belizean Coral Reef which, James told us, hosts over 100 species of coral and 5,000 species of fish.

We reported on Tobacco Caye's Lionfish project in ENCA 82 (July 2021). Lionfish are an invasive species that has exploded from individuals released by humans. They have no predators on the reef to control their numbers, and they eat many of the reef's fish contributing to a loss of biodiversity. Tobacco Caye works to reduce their numbers by encouraging Lionfish spear fishing - including by helping fishers learn to de-spine and cook them to grow a local market. The reef has several native species such as Moray eels that in other parts of the world eat Lionfish, so the long-term hope is that the local populations will learn to predate them. Fishing aims to mitigate the ecological damage until this happens. James told us the last Lionfish fishing tournament caught over 393 fish, and they are stepping up international

outreach ahead of their next one in August.

This international outreach includes hosting students on the island, but they are also experimenting with virtual dive tours online to interest more people in the reef environment without the flights out. James took us on a virtual video dive on the reef to show us several of the beautiful species the project is trying to protect, including fishes threatened by Lionfish and corals threatened by disease.

James told us that there are also new threats from spear fishing - the Belize Fisheries Department has recently downgraded the area's protection status, removing a prohibition on general 'sport fishing'. Tobacco Caye's researchers are finding discarded bodies of protected fish species that they believe are being fished by tourists - whether knowingly or not - who then discard them when they see they are not allowed to take them. Sadly, the reef now has two unregulated and indiscriminate apex predators taking their toll on fish biodiversity.



## Tobacco Caye Marine Station

*The best location for marine education on the Belize Barrier Reef*

Study Abroad | Virtual learning | Conservation  
Research | Internships | Expeditions

[tcmsbelize.org](http://tcmsbelize.org)

## Belize – Guatemala border disputes

On 20<sup>th</sup> May, the online newspaper 'Breaking Belize News' carried an item by Aaron Humes entitled 'European Union provides further support for activity in the Belize-Guatemala border area'. We are grateful to Aaron Humes and Breaking Belize News for their report which is summarised below.

A new European Union funded project aims to support the political and diplomatic processes in the Adjacency Zone between Belize and Guatemala – see ENCA 73 (June 2018). The Organisation of American States (OAS) is charged with implementing the conflict prevention and preventive diplomacy activities that are funded as part of this project.

The project funding covers activities ahead of the International Court of Justice ruling on the border dispute case between the two countries. Ambassador Marianne Van Steen (EU Ambassador in Belize) said, "we recognise that peace and security are essential for sustainable development and regional stability. This is why we remain committed to continuing our support for the implementation of Confidence Building Measures in the Adjacency Zone between Belize and Guatemala."

The EU says it upholds a peaceful resolution of the Belize-Guatemala

Territorial Differendum to help the economies, trade and cooperation in both countries and as a way to enhance security and development in the region.

## Central American Environment and Development News Bits

### El Salvador

The Centre for Exchange and Solidarity / Centro de Intercambio y Solidaridad (CIS) turns 30 years old in August this year. The CIS was born out of the need to accompany the Salvadoran people in the reconstruction of their country and implementation of the Peace Accords that brought the Salvadoran War to an end. The CIS now organises election monitoring delegations, accompaniment of communities under threat from land takeovers, promotes local craftspeople and the sale of their products, runs concurrent Spanish and English courses, and arranges educational scholarships for young Salvadorans. It now finds itself facing one of the most serious crises the country has faced during the organisation's existence: namely, the dismantling of the democratic system and the violation of human rights that were rooted in and promised by the 1992 Peace Accords. CIS describes President's Nayib Bukele's crackdown on gang membership as follows: "Many people applaud the dismantling of gang structures through

massive arrests of over 70,000 people but, as usual, the poor are paying a very heavy price as an estimated 20,000 innocent people have been arrested, just for living in poor neighbourhoods."

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Fernando López, El Salvador's Environment Minister, forecast that a serious climatic drought would probably hit various parts of the east of El Salvador in the months of August and September this year. The forecast also included higher temperatures than in previous years. The Minister explained that the major cause of the drought would be the effect of El Niño which has led to a variation in temperatures of the Pacific Ocean waters. He further explained that these changes are cyclical and may last three or four years.

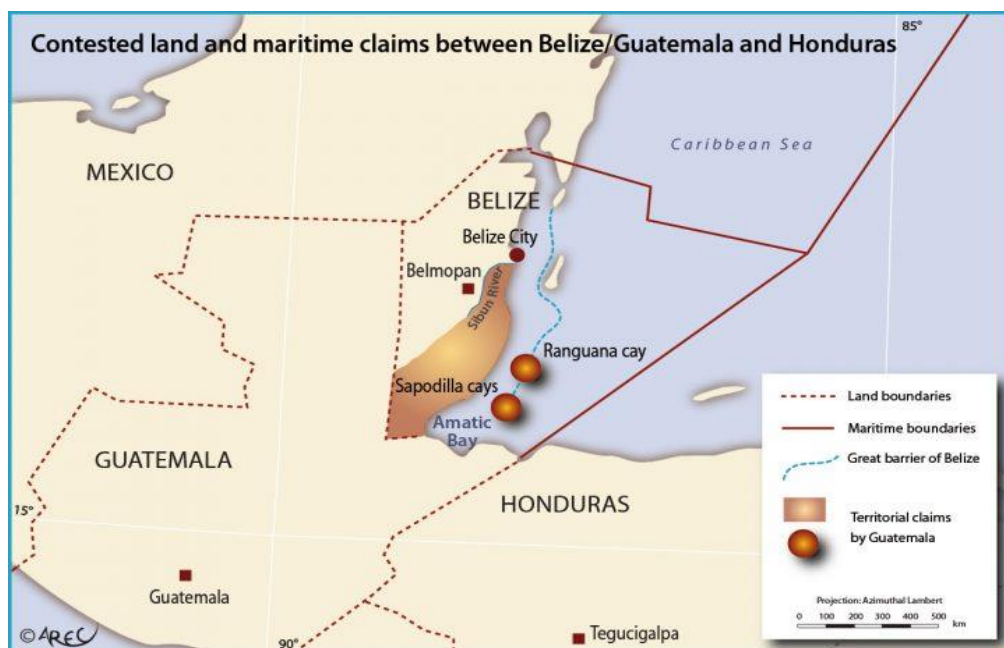
As temperatures increase, it is predicted that rainfall will decline, as is happening right now. Such conditions could affect the number of hurricanes and tropical storms experienced by the region of Central America, although it was pointed out that this does not necessarily mean that El Salvador will experience more of these.

### Costa Rica

The Guanacaste Conservation Area (ACG by its Spanish initials) reports that hunting is a major cause of forest fires in Costa Rica. In 2023, out of 36 recorded fires, sixteen were directly attributed to hunting. Once a prime hunting area has been identified, the hunters set fire to it and return to it in two or more weeks when new shoots appear. The new growth attracts deer and other animals. This is clearly a criminal activity and threatens human as well as animal populations. Moreover, micro-organisms in the soil also suffer and soil health degrades as a result of constant fires.

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A proposed new airport in the Osa Peninsula of Costa Rica is meeting strong opposition from environmentalists, local affected communities and academics. The site for the airport is close to the Terraba Sierpe National Wetland and to various >>





significant archeological and cultural sites of interest. The President, Rodrigo Chaves, and Minister of Tourism have both spoken strongly in favour of the scheme on the grounds that it would stimulate tourism and economic opportunities. A range of environmental organisations – especially Preserve Planet – has strongly criticised the plan and local communities have voiced concerns about the economic implications for local trade compared with the mega-hotels that are likely to be attracted to the region by the scheme.

### Honduras

The government of Honduras has formally asked to join the New Development Bank (NDB) of the BRICS group of nations: Brazil; Russia; India; China; and South Africa. The NDB was established by the BRICS nations in 2014 and has its headquarters in Shanghai. The bank was set up with the aim of financing infrastructure and sustainable development in member states and in other emerging economies. One of its aims was also to reduce dependence on the US dollar.

During her official visit to China in June, Honduran President Xiomara Castro met with the bank's president, former Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff. Clearly, the move would open up numerous project financing possibilities, but may also cause some concern in Washington as the ties to US finance and control loosen just a little.

### Belize

The Belizean organisation Oceana has collected 22,000 signatures in a petition to call for a referendum on the potential lifting of a 2017 moratorium on offshore oil exploration and operation. In November 2022, Oceana revealed the government's plans to allow seismic testing and the petition is intended to warn the government that it should not go ahead with lifting the moratorium without first holding a referendum on the policy.

### Nicaragua

*Ometepe Island Launches Aquatic Ambulance* - The Ministry of Health delivered the first aquatic ambulance in the country to the families of Ometepe Island. This boat will become a valuable resource for the transfer of patients to the Gaspar García Laviana Departmental Hospital, located in Rivas. The director of the Moyogalpa hospital, Dr. Tania Calero, said that the water ambulance has all the necessary conditions to guarantee a safe and efficient transfer of patients. This

represents a great advance in the health system of Ometepe Island. Now, in just 15 minutes, patients can reach the port of San Jorge safely and quickly.

See photos:

<https://radiolaprimerisima.com/isla-de-ometepe-estrena-ambulancia-acuatica/> (Radio La Primerisima, 21 July 2023) Item taken from *Nicanotes*, produced by the Alliance for Global Justice.



*Ometepe Island, Nicaragua*

## Center for Exchange and Solidarity (CIS) invites you to participate in the 15<sup>TH</sup> CIS International Election Observer Mission Human Rights and Democracy in El Salvador 2024



CIS invites you to participate in our 15<sup>th</sup> International Election Observer Mission to cover two elections: **February 4<sup>th</sup> Presidential and Legislative Elections and March 3<sup>rd</sup> Municipal and Central American Parliament Election.** The CIS has 30 years of Election Observer experience, and without a doubt this year's elections will bring new challenges. For example, a new law has been passed that will allow Salvadorans abroad to vote with expired identity documents or passports, leaving the doors open for fraud. And in another step backward, electoral laws can now be changed up until the last minute. A previous law that CIS observers recommended prohibiting changes in electoral laws and rules the year prior to the elections has been overturned, allowing for rules to be changed including up to the day of the elections. We invite you to be part of this mission to observe and make recommendations to strengthen the democratic process that was opened with the Peace Accords in 1992.

The CIS program will include meetings and trainings for observers as well as opportunities to visit communities and learn more about Salvadoran reality. Observers will meet with the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, the official electoral body in charge of elections, Political Parties competing in the elections, the Human Rights Procurators Office, and other institutions. CIS observers will be well trained and play an important role sharing objective observations and recommendations for reforms.

CIS program will also focus on human rights issues facing the country, and the impact of the suspension of constitutional and human rights for over a year. On the one hand, we will visit communities that now feel free from gang violence. On the other hand, we will hear testimonies of families of the innocent people caught up in a police state - all from poor communities - who have been arbitrarily arrested and do not have due process - putting further economic burden as well as emotional stress as testimonies come out of deaths, torture, and human rights violations inside El Salvador's prisons.

To request an application form, more info and to send application: [electionmission@cis-elsalvador.org](mailto:electionmission@cis-elsalvador.org)

### Criteria for participation:

- Commitment to free and fair elections.
- Independent and objective (no political party affiliation in El Salvador permitted)
- Spanish is only a requirement for long term volunteers, it is not a requirement for week-long observers.
- Spanish and/or previous election observer experience a plus.

**For more information, please visit [www.cis-elsalvador.org](http://www.cis-elsalvador.org), Write [electionmission@cis-elsalvador.org](mailto:electionmission@cis-elsalvador.org) Like us on Facebook, [www.facebook.com/cis.elsalvador.org](http://www.facebook.com/cis.elsalvador.org)**

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### Meeting Dates 2023

**Sunday October 22<sup>nd</sup>**

The October meeting will be held in London (Venue TBC). Meetings start with a shared lunch from 12:30.

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