

ENCA



Environmental Network *for* Central America

www.enca.org.uk

Issue 90 | April 2024

CENDAH

Shaping our own destiny –
thinking of tomorrow

Wet and Dry

Alternatives to the Panama
Canal

Corruption

Round-up from across the region



Visiting ENCA's Partners



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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Liz Richmond

ENCA member Liz Richmond visits projects recently funded by ENCA in Central America

As we write and prepare this edition of the ENCA Newsletter, ENCA member Liz Richmond is travelling around several Central American countries visiting a number of projects that ENCA has funded over the last few years. Liz was awarded a travel bursary which ENCA had received in 2023 specifically for the purpose of visiting and monitoring the projects that ENCA has funded. For Liz's career this came at a very appropriate time and she embarked on her two-month journey in February 2024.

Liz has been an ENCA member and supporter almost since the organisation's beginnings. She had lived in the community of Longo Maï in southern Costa Rica for a number of years and will return there during her two-month visit to the region.

Because this newsletter will be produced while Liz is still in Central America, we shall save her major reports on her visits to our partner organisations until the next and following newsletters. Here, however, we provide a listing of the organisations she has already visited and a sample of her immediate reports back to ENCA which are still in note form and a couple of the photographs accompanying the reports. Please bear in mind that as unedited notes and as only a small sample thereof, these are intended to give the reader only a taster of Liz's visits. For more background on each of these projects, please refer to the accompanying articles and information given with each visit. Please bear in mind that what we offer here are mere short snippets to give you a little taste of the experiences that Liz is undergoing on behalf of ENCA.

Gales Point, Belize

In mid-2022, ENCA made an award of \$1,900 (USD) to the Gales Point community's campaign against Vulcan Materials Company's plans to extract aggregate from limestone hills south of Belize City in the Stann Creek and Gales Point area. In ENCA 85 (July 2022), we

included an article by Ed Boles about the campaign.

The first visit made by Liz was to meet with Ed to find out more about the campaign. Ed had previously explained to Liz how their meeting and visit should go: "We can easily pull off a visit to Gales Point for a couple of days If you are providing gas, I can pick you up at the airport and go directly to Gales Point, possibly staying at the Manatee Lodge on the end of the peninsula. We can arrange a boat to get a good look at the lagoon, which is a national park, and get a ground perspective of the White Ridge Farm area by land, along with interviewing folks at Gales Point and other areas that will be impacted by the transformation of the landscape into an industrial area."

Liz's meeting with Ed did take place and from her notes it is clear that the campaign is currently on a positive course. Her notes will feature as the basis for an article in a future newsletter.

IMAP, Guatemala

After her Belizean sojourn, Liz moved on to Guatemala where in 2022 ENCA had awarded \$2,000 (USD) to the Mesoamerican Institute of Permaculture (IMAP by its Spanish initials) for the promotion of family gardens for local organic production using permaculture farming methods, the protection of biodiversity and the promotion of an ancestral knowledge programme.

A short section of her notes reads: "... from 20 Mayan farming households (producers), reforestation techniques (tree planting, compost making), production of organic fertilizers and natural repellents for orchard plantation. IMAP provided seeds or plants for peanuts, sweet potato, cassava, beans, maize and many more for family community gardens – each participant



CMO, Chinandega, Nicaragua

From El Salvador, Liz took the relatively new ferry service across the Gulf of Fonseca to the tiny port of Potosi in Nicaragua. From there she travelled south to the city of Chinandega, also in the Cosigüina Peninsula and which serves as the base for the Council of Women of the West (of Nicaragua), the CMO. Over the past 15 years, ENCA has funded various development programmes through the CMO involving more efficient cooking stoves, patio gardens, the building of patio garden water tanks and even office costs in Chinandega.

committed to sharing skills with 3 more households. Developed reforestation area - relaxation spots and ave tourism (birding). I saw several groups of twitchers some looking for a hummingbird - slender sheartail - particular to the area. More plants purchased to reforest in 2022."

MUFRAS-32, El Salvador

From Guatemala it was a short jump for Liz to get to El Salvador and to meet up with Hector Berríos and Zenayda Serrano who run the MUFRAS-32 organisation based in San Isidro in the department of Cabañas. ENCA has had an association with MUFRAS-32 for 15 years having supported (in a minor way) their very significant and successful campaign against metal mining in El Salvador. In 2023, MUFRAS-32 submitted to ENCA an application for the funding of a programme of seminars and workshops on the sustainable production of fruit and vegetables in the Río Viejo basin in Cabañas.

A snippet from Liz's notes received on 3rd March:

"ENCA funds allowed food sovereignty and have helped the families stay in the country. Without support they would have fled themselves to USA or to Spain where they have friends/family. Many lawyers have fled. Politics of expulsion of anyone who opposes the government. There is no employment so most live by income from those who have fled. (remesas/remittances).

Liz made copious notes about her meetings with several of the women a small snippet of which hints at some of the problems the organisation currently suffers: "One of the women advises that in general in recent years, things have not functioned well – the political situation is delicate. Another added that they can't publicise a meeting. But one success is that about 60 women continue to have good use of their pilas (water tanks) and some women have had good patio vegetable harvests. ... They added that in 2015 / 2016 ENCA helped to pay for their office which they shared with other organisations, but the office closed 2 years ago."

Liz was treated to visits with CMO personnel to a number of other programmes.

Women's cooperatives, San Carlos, Nicaragua

At the other end of Nicaragua, Liz visited the town of San Carlos on the southern tip of Lake Nicaragua where three

cooperatives are based. In 2022, ENCA funded a programme of inserting cacao production into a diversified agroforestry system.

Filimon Ríos serves as an advisor to the women and Liz joined a discussion between him and several women on cacao production as well as lemon growing. From her notes: "They are selling home-made chocolate locally although Hayling also takes it to market to sell. The group purchased a motorised mill as they previously ground cacao manually. Filimon also demonstrated which cacao trees needed pruning and has arranged to go back to support and show all the women. All women seem entrepreneurial and positive; they want to continue to grow and improve."

Thus far in her tour, Liz seems hardly to have drawn breath. As we write this, she is in Panama visiting the Guna Indians of San Blas, from where she will return to Costa Rica where she will discover more about the programmes run by the Longo Mai community and by the national organisation FECON (Costa Rican Federation for Environmental Conservation). More on these and all of Liz's reports in future newsletters.



Dry and Wet Alternatives to the Panama Canal

The Panama Canal is currently having a few problems thanks to a scarcity of fresh water to replenish the water lost every time a ship passes through the canal locks. But also the region is in the midst of a drought whose effects are worsened by the phenomenon of 'El Niño' which some scientists say may last for another three years. The waiting time and transhipment time for ships to go through the canal have now begun to increase thereby limiting the attraction of using the canal. Alternatives are being sought. The rest of Central America has started thinking about the possibilities offered by these Panamanian difficulties. Read on.

Compiled by ENCA member Martin Mowforth

Honduras invites investment in a transoceanic railway

February 2024

In January this year (2024), the Honduran Minister of Tourism, Yadira Gómez, attended the 27th Conference of Iberoamerican Tourism Ministers in Spain and invited Spanish investors to participate in the construction of a railway across Honduras to connect the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans.

Gómez described the rail project as an alternative route to the Panama Canal, offering an increase in internal connectivity within Honduras and tourism growth to communities in the interior of the country. The Panama Canal is suffering a restriction in the daily passage of boats due to the climate crisis and the drought, and this planned rail project across Honduras would be presented as another option. "We could ensure the transport of merchandise on a large scale," said the Minister. She suggested that various countries have

expressed an interest, among them the USA, Japan, Korea and Saudi Arabia.

More information on this Honduran scheme can be found on 'The Violence of Development' website at: <https://theviolenceofdevelopment.com/honduras-and-guatemala-vie-for-interoceanic-infrastructure-investment-honduras-invites-investment-in-a-transoceanic-railway/>

Not to be outdone, Guatemala plans to develop its own interoceanic corridor

February 2024

A Guatemalan interoceanic corridor is a relatively new plan, although the idea first seriously emerged in 1998 when the limitations of the Panama Canal became apparent. In February this year (2024), the Guatemalan Interoceanic Consortium (CIGSA), the Indian company Lakshmi Capital and the Office for Links and Businesses with Latin

of a multimodal transport system (road, rail and pipeline) covering a strip of land of 372 km in length and 140 meters in width to link the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

A communiqué issued by the Indian Embassy in Guatemala stated that "the port infrastructures will be connected by two independent systems for the transport of containers and hydrocarbons." It is intended that Lakshmi Capital will support the scheme with their technical experience and investment mechanisms and will facilitate the construction, implementation, management and maintenance of the Corridor.

Again, more information can be found at the link given above.

Nicaragua's stalled plans for 'El Gran Canal'

Many of our readers will probably recall the most recent attempts to build a transoceanic canal in Nicaragua from the Pacific to the Atlantic, but there has been a long history of such plans within Nicaragua, some of them being the dreams of US businessmen.

The most recent and most realistic plan to date was that of the Chinese HKND company owned and established by Chinese entrepreneur and billionaire Wang Jing who entered into a formal agreement regarding construction of the canal with the Nicaraguan government in 2012.

America (ODEPAL) jointly signed a letter of intent to promote the development of this megaproject.

Valued at \$10 billion (USD), the project would include the construction



Although the study phase was completed, work on the different parts of the canal hardly got started due to a number of factors, the most significant of which appears to have been the personal loss of 80 per cent of Wang Jing's wealth.

More details about Nicaragua's plans for 'El Gran Canal' have been reported in ENCA newsletters from 2012 through to 2019 in issues 62, 64, 67, 68, 70, 71, 72 and 76.

Does Costa Rica have a plan for a transoceanic canal?

In October 2022, Costa Rica invited the Indian company, the Adani Group, to explore the possibility of investing \$12 billion (USD) in a dry canal project linking the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans by a 315 km rail and highway route. The idea behind the project is to facilitate the

other in a much faster time than can be done via the Panama Canal which is currently highly congested with long wait times. This scheme would develop the port of Limón/Moín on the Atlantic coast.

In August 2023, news surfaced of Saudi Arabian interest in potentially investing in the building of a project to link the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans via a dry canal offering transshipment times of only 3 hours between the two ports of Limón and Guanacaste. Again, the major investments proposed by the project would be improvements of the two ports involved.

Costa Rica has been trying to diversify its potential sources of funding in recent years and has been developing much closer links with the Arabian countries and with India. Saudi Arabia opened a new embassy in San José in 2023. The status of these two possible projects is not currently known.

Sources:

- Yeshi Selji, 28 Jan 2023, 'Costa Rican President meets Gautam Adani in Davos, talks about Dry Canal project', *The New Indian Express*.

Bnamericas, 19 January 2023, 'Indian port developer mulls building Costa Rica dry canal', <https://www.bnamericas.com/en/news/indian-port-developer-mulls-building-costa-rica-dry-canal>

- Port Economics, Management and Policy, (undated), 'Dry Canal Projects in Central America', <https://porteconomicsmanagement.org/pemp/contents/part1/interoceanic-passages/dry-canal-projects-central-america/>



Location of proposed routes

SHAPING OUR OWN DESTINY – THINKING OF TOMORROW

In 2023, ENCA funded a project on the promotion of ancestral knowledge in Gunayala, the region of Panama inhabited by the Guna people. The project was conducted by CENDAHA, the Centre for Environmental and Human Development and the following is CENDAHA's report to the Guna General Congress, the highest authority of the Guna people of Panama. It was translated by ENCA member Jill Powis.

By Geodisio Castillo, Director of CENDAHA

We are indeed going to celebrate 100 years of the Dule Revolution, but this is not the time to talk about historical events of great significance. Instead, I briefly present here an initiative to assess the impacts of slash and burn as a case study and to hold seminar-workshops to raise awareness. We thank ENCA which, in 2023, supported the Centre for Environmental and Human Development (CENDAHA) in Gunayala, Panama, in our programme to promote ancestral knowledge.

The initiative took place over 12 months and aimed to identify the impacts of slash and burn following the COVID 19 pandemic and to raise

awareness of the value of native medicinal plants and conservation. It also aimed to introduce innovations in the management of *nainu* family systems [traditional agroforestry plots] and hold discussions and exchange experiences with *inadulemar* [traditional doctors using herbal medicine], taking into account climate change and biodiversity issues. CENDAHA's objective was to promote understanding among community members, mainly farmers, of how these environmental challenges were interlinked and how they could better manage nature's resources to secure healthier and more sustainable livelihoods.

The first activity, assessing the impact of slash and burn, was not carried out immediately – we waited for the season when *nainu* were made on the hillsides. Before that, we carried out a literature review of the subject. Normally *gunadule* farmers start their agricultural activities in summer (*yoleb*). The results of the study are currently being reviewed. Although we have ancestral knowledge of agroforestry work on hillsides, this is not widely shared at the moment, and so young people have little idea about environment-friendly agroforestry methods of making



family *nainu*. A sudden increase in slash and burn activity could cause serious ecological damage to soils, water courses and community health, as must have happened at the time of the pandemic, when many trees were slashed and burned to make *nainu*. The study's results on this are still pending.

The initiative's methodology was one of community engagement, allowing us to verify, in the first instance, through dialogue with individual farmers or the community in general, if slash and burn really did have a negative effect on the environment, and if the agroforestry production system of family *nainu* was sustainable, based on the ancestral knowledge of the Gunadule people, yielding vegetable, animal and medicinal products, and conserving nature in its biodiversity.

Three key farmers took part, who had more time to engage in dialogue: Mr. Aurelio Jimenez, 78 years old, from the Mandi Ubgigandub community, a very experienced farmer who carried out slash and burn every *yoleb*; Mr. Avelino Perez, from Gardi Sugdub who, when he was young, was a hunter and farmer, then becoming a forest ranger and coordinator of the Secretariat of Territorial Defence of the Onmaggeddummagan (General Congresses of the Guna people - Cultural and spiritual, and administrative and political), and Euclides Sánchez, leader of the Olonagdiginya young farmers' organisation

The participation of the Association of Rural Women of Digir (AMRD) and the cooperation of the Association of Women *Bundorgan* [sisters], as well as the *inadulemar*, were essential for the awareness-raising workshops. These workshops made it possible to reflect, with critical awareness, on the need to change the situation in relation to the environment and to take active measures to adopt medicine and food production methods which would pave the way for solutions to the problems currently jeopardising the future of life and the biodiversity of *Ologwadule* (Mother Earth). The workshops were held in the *nainugan* [plural of *nainu*] of the AMRD's community – *Digirneggwebur*.

In the participatory workshops, farmers gained theoretical and practical knowledge of the benefits and characteristics of agroforestry systems, and their potential in the transition to an economy based on *nainu* agroforestry family production. There was a lot of discussion of slash and burn as the first step in establishing *nainu* family agroforestry and mixed cropping.

In conclusion

We know that the slash and burn of trees has negative consequences for the environment and biodiversity, such as soil erosion, the death and displacement of wildlife, changes to water cycles and soil fertility, and environmental pollution. The tours to the communities and to the field at the time of brush clearing, and

slash and burn, showed that so far there had been no negative impacts from the smoke from the burning of trees and other vegetation. There have been a few accidents, but nothing serious - always just "little things", the farmers told us. In terms of the negative effects of slash and burn, there has been nothing serious that would damage the environment, although some biodiversity must have been lost.

The *nainu* family agroforestry production system is still sustainable. So far, we have been able to observe its coexistence with wildlife and the presence of *negsered* forest in succession or recovery, converting the landscape back into forest.

The knowledge of ancestral food or agroforestry systems of *nainu* are linked to family and social organisation, values, technology and environment, achieving ecological, cultural and socioeconomic diversity as strategies for the sustainable development of each community. An innovative element is the recognition of the value of ancestral and local knowledge systems for the environment and of the prevailing *nainu* family agroforestry systems of natural resource management.

Ancestral knowledge is a fundamental part of the response to the current crises. Recognising its enormous value is essential for a more equitable and sustainable world. However, there is still a long way to go until this knowledge is fully accepted by society.

This wisdom and/or ancestral knowledge is not only a way of life, but also represents a relationship with medicine, nature and cosmivision.

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What is Climate Justice?

Notes from a webinar with a Nicaraguan perspective

Organised by the Nicaragua Solidarity Coalition (NSC-Int), an international coalition of organisations and individuals in solidarity with Nicaragua, supporting its sovereignty and affirming its achievements, but not affiliated with any governmental entity of any nation. Please note that the Nicaragua Solidarity Coalition is not to be confused with the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign (NSC-UK), a UK-based organisation which works in solidarity with the people and various organisations of Nicaragua.

Helen Yuill is the coordinator of the NSC-UK and is also an ENCA member. She attended the webinar on behalf of the NSC-UK and wrote the following report for that organisation. We are grateful to Helen for her permission to use the report in the ENCA Newsletter.

The webinar is available on YouTube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oLRTVZ6u7qI>

Report by Helen Yuill
January 2024

Climate Justice = holistic transformation, not tinkering around edges

“The climate crisis has many dimensions: social, political, economic, environmental, moral, ethical, and ideological. The way out of the crisis must address the root cause: the endless, limitless, mindless accumulation and concentration of capital on a planet with finite resources.” Valdrak Jaentschke, head of the Nicaraguan delegation to COP28 in December 2023.

In turn, climate justice must be multi-dimensional recognising that climate justice is an integral part of social, political, environmental, and ethical justice.

In a blaze of triumphant celebrations, the Paris Agreement (COP21) was adopted on 12 December 2015. It entered into force on 4 November 2016.

The overarching goal was to hold “the

increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels” and pursue efforts “to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.” However, the Nicaraguan delegation to COP21, led by the late Dr Paul Oquist, refused to sign the Agreement let alone celebrate it given the gaping hole between the immensity of the crisis and the lack of ambition of developed countries.

According to the calculations of Dr Oquist, actual commitments would at best “take the world to more like three degrees over pre-industrial levels.” Dr Oquist went on to criticise the lack of transparency and narrowness of scope of a process that failed to acknowledge the facts.

The Paris Agreement was of such limited ambition that it merely tinkered around the edges rescuing the governments of the countries that have caused global warming, “passing the cost to those least responsible who will die in the largest numbers unable to make good their losses, much less adapt to a change in climate increasing in intensity as the century wears on.”

In short, rather than solve problems, the Agreement postponed them, at best “passing a three degree world onto our grandchildren, great grandchildren and great, great grandchildren.”

Fast forward eight years and the crisis has intensified to almost the point of no return. The statements of UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres and millions of others particularly in the Global South, echoed those of Dr Paul Oquist. “End the use of fossil fuels and stop kicking the can down the road,” urged UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres at COP28 in Dubai in December 2023.

In line with Dr Oquist’s predictions the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC: <https://www.ipcc.ch/>) has already stated that even 1.5 degrees above pre-industrialised level would be unsustainable.

“Small Island States of the Pacific and Caribbean and the lowland areas of Central America would disappear, it’s not

a question of if this would happen, it will happen and whole nations will disappear.” Valdrak Jaentschke, head of the Nicaraguan delegation to COP28.

“Every year of insufficient action to keep global warming below 1.5 degrees Celsius drives us closer to the brink, increasing systemic risks and reducing our resilience against climate catastrophe.” UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres at COP28 in Dubai in December 2023.

COP28 ‘typifying the real face of an unequal world’

A small Nicaraguan delegation led by Minister Valdrak Jaentschke were among the nearly 100,000 people who attended COP28 or joined online.

It is supposed to be a Conference of Parties, meaning countries. 197 countries registered to attend: corporate fossil fuel and agribusiness lobbyists were among those embedded in national delegations of countries of the North. Why? To use their clout to ensure that nothing emerged that had any significant impact on their interests.

In a webinar, co-ordinated by the Nicaragua Solidarity Coalition, Valdrak outlined the positions taken at COP28 arguing that the “predatory capitalist model of production and consumption is the main reason we are on the brink of catastrophe.”

Climate Justice = common but differentiated responsibility for cutting carbon emissions

After more than a decade of lobbying by countries of the Global South, COP28 established the principle that all countries are responsible for emissions but those with the highest level of emissions currently and historically have the greatest responsibilities.

COP28 signalled “a transition away from fossil fuels, the beginning of the end for the fossil fuels era”. This was a critical step forward but as the Nicaraguan delegation among other countries of the Global South pointed out, there must be some level of flexibility not for the major polluters but

for developing countries that face capacity questions in terms of the speed at which they are able to transition away from fossil fuels.

Valdrak also denounced 'false solutions': "Developed countries are constantly looking for ways of avoiding responsibility; some examples of this are carbon trading and carbon markets to achieve carbon neutrality: this is a big lie."

He went on to state: *"what we currently have is the dictatorship of capitalist imposition and bullying, greed and belief in their right to control the world."*



Mitigation and adaption: the UN Green Climate Fund (GCF)

In theory, developed countries have pledged US\$100bn per year to this Fund. Developing countries, in turn can present for projects to mitigate and/or adapt to the climate crisis.

However, information provided on the Fund website indicates how irresponsibly inadequate this Fund is in providing resources to enable vulnerable countries to confront *"humanity's greatest challenge"*.

As well as the chasm between the level of the crisis and GCF financing, Valdrak raised concerns about the complexity of the application process making it inaccessible for many countries.

According to the GCF website, to date 243 projects have been approved to the value of US\$13.5bn of which Nicaragua has received US\$91.2m
<https://www.greenclimate.fund/countries/nicaragua>.

Climate justice = climate finance for loss and damage

Progress has proceeded at a snail's pace on inclusion of the concept of loss and damage, something that vulnerable countries of the Global South have been pressuring for decades.

The concept refers to climate finance aimed at addressing the impact of irreversible economic and other losses resulting from global warming. It includes not only disasters linked to extreme weather, but also slow onset events such as sea level rise. It also includes loss of life and livelihoods, migration, biodiversity, and cultural heritage.

At COP28 the concept of loss and damage was approved, and measures put in place to set up a Fund. The estimated amount needed annually is US\$400bn. The amount actually pledged, however, came to only a small fraction of this sum, once again demonstrating the lack of will on the part of major polluters.

Climate justice = reparations

Additionally, many countries of the Global South including Nicaragua argued not just for financing for immediate loss and damage but also for reparations for climate related impacts of colonialist development, a concept that North America and Europe are at great pains to avoid.

How the climate crisis impacts Nicaragua

Valdrak explained that Nicaragua with a population of 6.2 million is responsible for 0.05% of global emissions. Yet it suffers multiple climate related crises such as climate extremes of temperature, hurricanes, floods, drought, and erratic seasonal shifts all of which take a heavy toll particularly in low lying areas.

The country has to invest US\$4bn annually to mitigate/adapt to climate change; this constitutes 8% of GDP. This calculation takes into account road infrastructure, production, environment, health, energy, water, sanitation, telecommunications, and agriculture. In addition, Nicaragua is situated on a criss-cross of earthquake fault lines and a chain of volcanoes.

All of this in a small country has an enormous impact in undermining development. But it isn't just a question of finance needed to rebuild but also the psycho-social impact.

What is Nicaragua doing to cut its own carbon emissions?

Valdrak highlighted that everything that the Sandinista government has achieved, including on climate justice, is within the framework of the principles of independence, self-determination and the eradication of poverty.

Nicaragua is playing its part in cutting emissions in line with its means. An example of this is the transition to renewable energy from 25% to 75% since 2007. This consists of a diverse matrix of solar, geothermal, wind, and biomass.

A message from Nicaragua to campaigners in countries of the North

The debate and pressure need to accelerate in countries of the North, focusing on transformation rather than tinkering around the edges. Climate justice is a moral, ideological and an ethical question that must take place in the wider context of social justice.

Building global networks, coalitions, and alliances is essential to raising awareness of what is happening, who is responsible, and what actions to take. Civil society organisations in developed countries are key. As the UN Secretary General has stated, rhetoric and actions must address the causes and must be about transformation – the age of tinkering and kicking the can down the road for future generations is over. In short, we have to end the myth of eternalism on a planet with limited resources.



Central American corruption cases

There is always some degree of corruption in Central American governments as there is elsewhere. Indeed, some commentators would consider that neoliberal economic development is a system based on neocolonial corruption. But recent cases have exposed the close association between corruption and the most elite and powerful sectors of society within the region. But not only within the region; they have also exposed the ways in which the neocolonial powers – specifically the United States – invest their interest and support for those same corrupt sectors. But why should a magazine, such as the ENCA newsletter, dedicated to issues of environment and development within Central America give so much space to the problem of corruption? Because corruption, both governmental and commercial, is so closely related to the extraction of wealth and resources from the region for the benefit of an elite and powerful few within that region and overseas in the centres of international power.

Compiled by ENCA member Martin Mowforth, March 2024

Ricardo Martinelli, ex-President of Panama, sentenced to 10 years in prison for corruption

In February this year (2024), Ricardo Martinelli, ex-President of Panama from 2009 to 2014, was sentenced to 10 years and six months in prison for corruption. The Supreme Court of Justice confirmed the sentence passed on Martinelli last July after his last legal appeal had been rejected. The ex-President has also been ordered to pay more than \$19 million in fines.

This makes Martinelli, 71 years old, the first ex-President to be sentenced for corruption in the democratic history of Panama. This prevents him from running as a presidential candidate in the elections next May. He had already declared his candidacy for his newly created party, RM or *Realizando Metas*.

Martinelli was charged with money laundering in a case known as 'New Business' which involved the purchase of public funds. New Business was the name of a front company which collected approximately \$43 million from firms that received lucrative government contracts.

He also faces charges of money laundering and bribery associated with the case of the Brazilian Odebrecht construction company. Additionally, he is under investigation in Spain in a case of corruption by bribery involving a Spanish Construction company and in a

case of spying in Mallorca. Two of Martinelli's sons previously served prison sentences in the United States for their involvement in money laundering schemes, and they also face trial in Panama.

Sources listed at:

<https://theviolenceofdevelopment.com/ricardo-martinelli-ex-president-of-panama-sentenced-to-10-years-in-prison-for-corruption/>

Juan Orlando Hernández, ex-President of Honduras, found guilty in drug trafficking case

Former Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández (usually referred to as JOH), has been found guilty in a New York federal court of charges relating to drug trafficking and weapons possession. He was convicted on all three criminal counts: conspiring to import cocaine into the United States; carrying "machine guns and destructive devices" to help in cocaine shipments; and conspiring to use those weapons. The latter two charges carry maximum sentences of life in prison.

Hernández received bribes to finance his election campaigns and to boost his public image of being tough on crime. For instance, he had accepted a bribe of \$1 million (USD) from Joaquín 'El Chapo' Guzmán, leader of Mexico's Sinaloa

Cartel, a major drug smuggling syndicate.

In 2021, Antonio Hernández, JOH's brother, was sentenced to life in prison in a US federal court for his role in distributing cocaine.

The Honduras Solidarity Network (HSN) is leading a campaign to hold to account the governments of the United States and Canada which supported Hernández throughout his period in office (2014 – 2022) in full knowledge of his links with organised crime. More details of the work of the HSN and of this case can be found at: www.hondurasnow.org.

María Consuelo Porras, Guatemala's Attorney General, Person of the Year in Organised Crime and Corruption

The Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) annually bestows the award 'Person of the Year in Organised Crime and Corruption' on those who have done most to bolster corruption and the political collusion that accompanies it.

In the past, this dubious honour has been given to colourful despots, but this year, the panel of judges voted for a dry bureaucrat who has eviscerated the rule of law in Guatemala.

Why Porras Won: Guatemala's attorney general made international headlines earlier this year when she oversaw efforts to prevent president elect Bernardo Arévalo from assuming office, including suspending his political party and raiding the election commission.

People tend to think of failed states as being solely run by authoritarian strongmen. But today's autocrats are often careful to not disavow democracy. Instead, they undermine its framework, including elections, the judiciary, and state institutions. Key to that strategy are people like Porras — bureaucrats who corrupt the democratic process while maintaining the illusion of normality.

Central American Development Bank's Role in Guatemala's Odebrecht Scandal

We are grateful to the OCCRP for their regular bulletins on crime and corruption around the world which give us a source of information normally hidden from public view in the Central American countries. Specific credit is given by the OCCRP to: James O'Brien/OCCRP, Jonny Wrate (OCCRP) and Bill Barreto (No Ficción).

15 December 2023

OCCRP website: <https://www.occrp.org>

An investigation by prosecutors — including testimony from a former minister at the centre of several corruption scandals — indicates a loan from the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI) may have

been a key part of the Brazilian construction company's bribery scheme.

The Odebrecht corruption case has been a fixture of headlines for years in Guatemala, where the scandal-plagued Brazilian construction company was forced to repay over \$17 million to the government after admitting that it bribed officials to gain a lucrative contract to renovate a major highway.

But another player in the case has largely escaped public scrutiny: the highway's major financier, the Central American Bank for Economic Integration, or CABEI. The bank provided the key loan to Odebrecht that allowed the project to move forward, agreeing in 2011 to lend almost \$120 million to finance the longest section of Central American Highway 2, which would link El Salvador to Mexico, on condition that the usual tendering procedures were waived.

Charges of nepotism in Nicaragua and Honduras

Both President Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua and President Xiomara Castro of Honduras have been accused of nepotism in their appointments of government posts.

As well as serving as Vice President, Nicaraguan President Ortega's wife Rosario Murillo has at various times been appointed to other government positions. His sons and daughters have also been appointed as special presidential advisors.

In Honduras, the director of the National Anti-Corruption Council (CNA), Gabriella Castellanos, has gone into exile after receiving threats following the CNA's publication of a report accusing the government of nepotism. The report states that President Castro has named her husband and close relatives to key governmental positions.



VICTOR JARA FESTIVAL
Y Plas, Machynlleth SY20 8ER
Weekend of 9/10/11 August 2024
Main Themes : Bolivia/The Amazon & Struggles for Climate Justice

elsuenoexiste.wordpress.com

Matt Miller: an appreciation

From 1987 Matt Miller served for two years as a Peace Corps Volunteer with the Belize Audubon Society, after which he began to pursue the idea of creating a wildlife and educational centre on an 1100-acre area of land that had failed as a cattle pasture. In 1992 the centre became the Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary (MBWS) and began to host student groups, mostly from the USA, in study abroad programmes based at the Sanctuary. Birder groups and wildlife groups followed and a busy calendar was created.

More and more schools and colleges learned about the study abroad opportunity offered by the MBWS that could help them develop field study programmes; and Monkey Bay was the obvious centre to base such programmes. The centre developed in 1992 with barely any facilities where the students and teachers were accommodated in tents to one which now has a range of accommodation types, bathroom blocks, a conference centre, classrooms, dining hall and kitchen and an administrative block. In 1992, there were no western style toilets whereas now the centre has a toilet block connected to a biogas converter which turns the sewage into methane gas (which is used in the kitchen) and nutrient rich compost.

This spectacular development has been assisted by many people, but undoubtedly its crucial inspiration and drive came from Matt. At the same time as working to realise the potential of the centre, he built contacts throughout Belize that were of great use to all the teaching staff who accompanied the student groups. In fact, it was Matt who made ENCA aware of the Gales Point struggle against the Vulcan Mining company's attempts to mine aggregate from Belize for roads in the eastern seaboard states of the USA. Only shortly before his untimely death in January 2023, Matt put us in touch with Ed Boles and others involved in the campaign against Vulcan as well as suggesting numerous other communities and people associated with issues of conservation, environment and development in Belize.

Matt has been awarded the James A. Waight Award from the Belize Audubon Society, probably the foremost conservation organisation in Belize. The award is a small measure of the impact and influence of Matt Miller on issues of conservation and development in Belize. He was an impressive and inspirational character; he made a difference; and he is sorely missed.

MM
February 2024

Latin America Conference 2024



The annual Latin America Conference organised by the Cuba Solidarity Campaign was held in London on 27th January this year. Although ENCA had no speakers at the conference this year, we had a presence in the form of a stall and several members in attendance. ENCA Secretary Sheila Amoo-Gottfried was one of these and submitted a short report of the conference for this newsletter.

By ENCA Secretary Sheila Amoo-Gottfried

The sold-out event was as popular as ever, with the chance to meet up annually with old friends from a wide range of solidarity groups from Latin America and the Caribbean, welcoming this year, in particular the Palestine Solidarity Campaign.

The conference is all about learning from and taking inspiration from other movements from across the region and showing solidarity in the struggle for sovereignty and against neoliberalism and US domination.

A full day of plenary sessions and workshops, with films from the region, it was the usual problem of 'What to choose?'

However, I should like to highlight particularly the conference 'book-ends'. The first speaker on the first plenary was Vijay Prashad, Executive Director of Tricontinental. He gave a really thought-provoking, insightful overview of global trends as they have impacted Latin America since early last century up to the present day, and maybe, what to expect in the future. He ably set the context for the whole conference.

Six hours later, after a multitude of ideas and much discussion, the closing speaker was Jeremy Corbyn. Enough said! His talent for rallying the troops is undeniable, injecting a final dose of hope and commitment before we all went our separate ways, and a final call to 'Free Palestine'.

enca.org.uk

 @ENCA_News

Meeting Dates 2024

June 30th | October 20th

ENCA meetings are usually held in London, with the location shared with members in the weeks before the meeting. 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.

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