

# ENCA



Environmental Network *for* Central America

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

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## OFRANEH


The struggle for Indigenous rights in Honduras continues

## No more zoos

Costa Rica closes all state zoos, and other animal news

## Wildfires

Huge fires grip the region



**Gales Point and the struggle against aggregate mining**



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*

## An update on Gales Point and the struggle against aggregate mining

*As part of her two-month trip visiting ENCA funded projects in Central America, ENCA member Liz Richmond visited Gales Point in Belize during February this year. This is her report to ENCA.*

*By Liz Richmond, June 2024*

Two years ago, Dr Ed Boles informed ENCA about Vulcan Materials Company's (VMC's) proposals to purchase and mine White Ridge Farm, a 6,000 hectare/15,000 acre area of land. VMC is a multi-billion dollar company, acting as [Caracol Holdings Ltd](#), from Alabama, USA. (See ENCA 85 for details based on Ed's report.) At the time, ENCA contributed \$1,900 (USD) to support the Vulcan Mining Resistance campaign.

VMC intends to take limestone from countries outside the USA due to the tighter enforcement of environmental protection there, and resistance in the USA to mining due to the detrimental impact, including damage to groundwater resources, air quality from dust, noise pollution and blasting, and heavy equipment, habitat loss, disruption of scenic vistas and the overall degradation of the landscape.

VMC is in litigation with many communities, due to devastating environmental breaches and impact. There is currently a mine shutdown in Mexico due to environmental breaches. In response, Vulcan has two lawsuits against the Mexican Government for \$US1.1 billion and \$US1.5 billion and the International Centre for Investment Disputes (ICSID) will issue a decision in due course.<sup>1</sup>

VMC's plans in Belize would cause irreversible damage and convert the area to an industrial site; they will blast and pulverise the jungled karst hill after stripping away the forest and soil, crushing rocks to mine aggregates for shipment to the USA for use as road fill or construction, where limestone deposits are now less available.<sup>2</sup>

The land in question at White Ridge Farm stretches from the Caribbean Shore to

canopied jungle and is located between Gales Point Wildlife Sanctuary and the Manatee Forest Reserve. If permitted, VMC's mining will threaten many endangered and critically endangered species, including the largest concentration of Caribbean manatees, the Central American River Turtles, known locally as 'hickatees', American Crocodiles, Baird's Tapir, wild cats, well over 100 species of birds including the Keel Billed Toucan, Mahogany trees and Black Orchid flowers, amongst other fauna.<sup>3</sup>

VMC's proposals will completely disrupt the hydrologic system in the Southern Lagoon area, as crushed material will be carried by a conveyor bridge that passes over the largest, critically endangered Hawksbill Sea Turtle nesting beach in the region, to waiting cargo ships in the dredged-out centre of the Inner Channel behind the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef. This devastation would not only impact the site of one of the most complex ecologies of the land, but Gales Point is also one of the oldest Kriol villages in Belize.

Ed and Liz met with residents Nancy Hines Bailey at Gales Point Manatee Lodge which is also part of the Southern Lagoon Wildlife Sanctuary and Jason "Jay" Altschaft, chairman of Gales Point Manatee Council.

Photographs show the vast hills of White Ridge Farm from the village of Gales Point Manatee located across from the lagoon. The area would be completely devastated, and a six mile shipping channel dredged in the Inner Channel, the marine waters lying between the mainland and the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef, by VMC's plans. Hurricane winds causing devastation are common in the area, and

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the mountain ridges provide critical protection to the communities.

Ed states that the aquifer is public domain; however, blasting will collapse the water conduit which will damage the community's water supply and likely the water supply for neighbouring communities. Mining will impact geothermal up balance critical for the largest manatee population in the western Caribbean, and crucial to water temperature.

Nancy reports that the area in the photographs is known as a natural 'jacuzzi' for manatees who can be seen frolicking in the waters. And with the attraction of manatees, and around 15 other endangered species in the area, the community understands the potential for tourism. She has a vision to promote local employment by, for example, ensuring locals are hired to assist research students from overseas at Manatee Lodge, thereby utilising local knowledge which promotes employment and environmental protection and stewardship. Nancy fears that VMC's proposals would totally convert the

landscape to be unsuitable for any environmentally sustainable tourism.<sup>4</sup>

Jay says he initially considered VMC's proposals as positive due to the promise of economic improvement and jobs. However, after involvement in VMC's public consultations, he firmly opposes the plans as the consultations were heavily manipulated; for instance, people were divided into 6 different tents which prevented them from gaining collective answers and denying them any transparency.

Jay commented that drummers set up to play at the event, as per Kriol tradition, but were not welcomed and were removed by VMC. The drummers continued to play on the periphery, and therefore could be heard and enjoyed by the residents, many of whom made clear their opposition to VMC.<sup>5</sup>

Jay reports that VMC had recently hired locals for a few days casual but extremely heavy labour, and paid them above the usual rate, i.e. \$100 (BZE dollars) per day, to carry heavy equipment used to carry out geological tests in the hills. This is believed to have been another tactic to

gain local support. Ed comments that this saved VMC the cost of using heavy/powerful machinery, but there was no contract or insurance in place, and he added that the cost of a hernia repair (\$1,000, BZE dollars) would not be covered by a little casual labour.

Whilst VMC claim they will bring economic benefit to the area, the sale involves two US-based companies, and they repeatedly prioritize profit before anything else. During one village "scam" consultation, a representative of VMC was heard to say that no-one in the community is "employable". VMC will bring in a workforce of foreign company trained employees, and published on their website that Belizeans would be offered jobs by year 7 of operations.<sup>6</sup>

Ed reports that the Southern Lagoon area, known as Manatee Gales Point, is legally protected; no buildings can be erected within 10 metres of the shoreline and the lagoon itself. Although it is a wildlife sanctuary, traditional fishing is allowed which sustains many locals.

Belize signed a Blue Bond Agreement, developed by The Nature Conservancy;



Belize agreed to a financial transaction enabling a US\$364 million (USD) reduction in debt burden and in doing so generated a potential US\$180 million (USD) for marine conservation, including protection of 30 per cent of Belize’s coastal waters. If violated - should VMC’s mining proceed - the agreement would be cancelled.

Ed has confirmed that VMC has now purchased White Ridge Farms Ltd, and they are attempting to work with neighbouring Mennonite landowners; and possibly attempting to gain mining permits for smaller areas, i.e. 300 acres or less.<sup>7</sup>

Elections took place in March 2024 and the People's United Party (Partido Unido del Pueblo or PUP) remain in power. PUP have firmly stated that no license for strip mining will be granted to VMC. However, the opposition party, the conservative United Democratic Party (UDP), promote VMC as a “salvation” for Belize financially.

Ed reminds us that the International Court of Justice (ICJ) will decide on Belizean territory and waters disputes. If

Guatemala gains territorial control, then the currently disputed land includes White Ridge Farm and will be in Guatemalan control. It is feared that due to VMC’s financial power and US relations, including the aggregate-hungry US Military-Industrial Complex, then it may be more likely that VMC’s mining plans would be approved.

There is no shortage of evidence of concern about VMC’s plans and many social media campaigns can be found – for example, Facebook “Stop Vulcan Caracol Strip-mining at Gales Point” - as well as media which highlight Kriol culture and customs.

Cordel Hyde, Minister for Natural Resources is on record as vehemently opposing VMC’s plans not only due to the environmental impact, but he goes on to say, *“So that we can get a few jobs here and a few pennies there ... a wealthy multinational will just exploit our raw resources and just export that, and I've said this before, it smacks a bit of colonialism, it smacks a bit of slavery and in particular, the people of Gales Point Manatee, the ancestors of the people there now risked life and limb to escape from slavery hundreds of years ago”*.<sup>8</sup>

Ed writes, now that Vulcan has its claws in the hills they intend to take, our only hope is to make sure they never get Government permission to "cut and polish the Jewel", as one representative of VMC has been heard to say of Belize.

**References:**

- (1) <https://www.change.org/p/belize-house-of-representatives-strip-mine-no>

[save-village-belize-natural-resources-fb8e439a-bbb3-49da-82db-3e4c87fa088d?original\\_footer\\_petition\\_id=37644&algorithm=promoted&source\\_location=petition\\_footer&qrid\\_position=15&pt=AVBldGI0aW9uAHcf0AEAAAAAYujJf acH5wxYTq4MDImYq%3D%3D](https://www.mindat.org/feature-8695153.html)  
(2) map of the area: <https://www.mindat.org/feature-8695153.html>

**Endnotes**

- 1 <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/mexico-seeks-settle-11-blm-vulcan-suit-over-limestone-mine-closure-2022-02-03/>
- 2 See The Violence of Development website: <https://theviolenceofdevelopment.com/vulcan-materials-company-and-gales-point-an-editorial-from-belize/>
- 3 <http://www.earthsendangered.com/search-regions3.asp?mp=&search=1&sgroup=allgroups&ID=38>
- 4 See previous endnote.
- 5 <https://www.7newsbelize.com/sstory.php?nid=63239>
- 6 <https://www.whiteridgeproject.com/project-details#page-section-62684d37ab001e780e623f85>
- 7 A higher bid than VMC’s had been placed by a group of what are thought to be retired medical professionals, who had a conservation-minded programme to create a 30 acre health care centre and conserve the rest, with no intention of mining/extracting materials. Mysteriously, the offer was not communicated by the Board to White Ridge Farm’s shareholders, who may have considered a better and environmentally safer deal had they known about it. Ed states that real jobs, which Belizeans are trained to do, would have been available, and tourist facilities would eventually occur around the area. The economy would have moved forward without sacrificing the future of Belize and Belizeans.
- 8 See endnote 4



# Animal news from Central America

## World Turtle Day



World Turtle Day is held on 23<sup>rd</sup> May each year. You may have missed it this year, but you might like to pay a visit to the World Turtle Day website - <https://www.worldturtleday.org/> - to see how it is celebrated by others.

From snorkelling to voluntourism, spotting a sea turtle is often the highlight of coastal vacations. But today, human-turtle interactions are more complicated than ever as humans overload nesting beaches, chase turtles in the water, and use an increasing amount of single-use plastics, a major and recent cause of reptile dysfunction.

In honour of World Turtle Day, [worldturtleday.org](http://worldturtleday.org) has written [a blog post](#) that explores why sea turtles are important and provides tips on how to protect them during your travels. By learning how to be a responsible turtle tourist, you can help ensure these animals are around for years to come.

Go to the SustainableTravel blog at: <https://sustainabletravel.org/why-sea-turtles-are-important-responsible-tourism/>

The SustainableTravel website also has a section on Facts about sea turtles at: <https://sustainabletravel.org/sea-turtle-facts/>

*Of course, also be cautious about the definitions of sustainability and of sustainable tourism.*

## Costa Rica closes state zoos

Costa Rica has two state zoos run by the Fundazoo Foundation, one in the centre of the capital San José (the Simón Bolívar Zoo) and one on the city periphery. In

2013, a Costa Rican law banned the keeping of wild animals in cages, and the law should have been enforced a year later but has been held up for a decade by judicial appeals. Together the two zoos held 400 animals of over 50 different species.

José Vázquez, a conservation officer at the Ministry of Environment and Energy (MINAIE), explained that the animals recovered from the zoos would be transferred to an animal rescue centre known as ZOO AVE - <https://rescatewildlife.org/>. The transfer would involve appropriate veterinary examinations and care. In May, however, seven animals died during the transfer. Vázquez stated that “The animals have already begun the quarantine process, which can last 40 or more days depending on the species and the condition of each individual.” He added that veterinary and behavioural tests continue to be performed on the animals to check their health and that, according to the latest reports from the Rescue Centre, they are gradually adapting well.

## Rising wildlife conflicts in Costa Rican urban areas

In June this year the Costa Rican National System of Conservation Areas (SINAC) reported 38 incidents in which wild cats preyed on domestic animals. Pumas, jaguars, ocelots, coyotes and other felines are the main predators.

Pumas and jaguars appear to be the major culprits, although placing the blame on them may be mis-directing the responsibility as their territories are being reduced in size by human activity and urban expansion. Urban spread leads to deforestation, loss of habitat and smaller areas for free movement of wildlife.

SINAC offers advice to farmers about their management of livestock and to residents about anti-predatory measures that can be taken. Basically, when the presence of a wild predator is known, stay indoors and keep your animals and pets indoors. Other non-lethal deterrence measures such as rubber bullets can be used.

## Global shark conservation meeting held in Belize

In February this year, more than 50 marine conservation experts from Central America and elsewhere in the world met in Placencia, Stann Creek District and at Glover’s Reef marine research station to discuss shark conservation. (Much Jaw – Jaw.) Some species of shark are being endangered through overfishing.

The World Conservation Society (WCS) reports that recent research shows that coastal mortality of sharks is increasing in many places. This is probably due to fishing which takes no account of the slowness of shark growth and the overfishing of young and juvenile sharks as well as the generally Asian demand for shark fins.

The long-term strategy for their conservation, established two years ago, has so far had little effect; and this latest meeting addressed the issues of wildlife trafficking and enforcement of the ban on shark fin trading under the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

## Bravo River poisoning of wildlife, El Salvador

On 15 April this year, near Tecoluca in the department of San Vicente, the Bravo River turned an unusual coffee colour. Later that same day, animals living in the river began to wash up dead on its banks and livestock and pets that drank from the river also began to fall ill and die. A preliminary investigation by the Tecoluca municipality revealed a dumping of liquid by Jiboa Sugar Mill which the affected communities allege is poisoning the river. The Land, Water and Natural Resource Defence Movement believe that the liquid dumped contained chemicals used to clean the machinery at the sugar mill. The Movement denounced the contamination to the Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of Public Health which they accused of complacency.

# Guatemalan Minister of Environment Reveals Authorization of Cerro Blanco Mine

From GHRC Update , 8 April 2024

Once again we thank the Guatemala Human Rights Commission (GHRC) for their work and research on Guatemala and for their generalised authorisation for others to use and promote their work. <https://www.ghrc-usa.org>

The Guatemalan Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MARN) recently confirmed that the Cerro Blanco mine in Asunción Mita, Jutiapa, has been authorised to operate. The MARN revealed the news in a public statement made by Minister María José Iturbide.

The controversial gold mine was given authorisation to operate by the former MARN under the Giammattei administration, five days before former president Giammattei's departure from

office. The period in which the authorisation could have been revoked expired one day before the Minister Iturbide's March 25th announcement.

The mine is owned by a Canadian company, Bluestone Resources. The mine has triggered widespread protests from both Guatemalan and Salvadoran communities concerned about profound environmental impacts. Of particular concern is the potential impact on the El Tempisque stream, a tributary to Lake Güija, which in turn connects with the

Lempa River, traversing the border with El Salvador.

The Extractive Industries Observatory (OIE) has warned of the imminent risk of contamination to these vital water bodies, which millions of people depend on as their primary source of water.

On September 18, 2022, the population of Asunción Mita carried out a municipal consultation of residents based on the Municipal Code, in which the inhabitants of the municipality were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the mining project. A total of 7,481 people voted no to mining, while 904 voted in favour. The result of the Municipal Consultation of neighbours is directly binding.

Nonetheless, in March 2023, the US embassy in Guatemala advocated with the Giammattei administration in favour of the reactivation of the Cerro Blanco mining project, according to an article in Prensa Comunitaria. Through two letters addressed to Gersón Barrios Garrido, then Minister of Environment and Natural Resources (MARN), the US diplomatic mission requested "support to know the progress of the approval process of the modification of the environmental plan in order to continue assisting US investors interested in investing and contributing to the economic development of Guatemala." The first letter, dated March 30, 2023 and signed by John Howell, commercial counsellor of the US embassy, informs Minister Barrios Garrido that "Elevar Resources, S.A. is a subsidiary of Bluestone Resources Inc., a company that has substantial capital from investors of United States of America (USA) . . . ."

## Goldcorp | Marlin

Open pit & underground gold mine  
~1.6 mtpa throughput  
Operated 12 years  
Employed ~1,500 people  
Status - Reclamation

## Solway | Fenix

Open pit nickel mine  
Purchased for US\$140 M in 2011  
Invested US\$600 M  
~5.0 mtpa throughput  
Employees ~ 1,750 people

## Cunico | Guaxilan

Open pit nickel mine  
~1.2 mtpa throughput

## Pan American | Escobal

Underground silver mine  
~1.5 mtpa throughput  
Status - Care & Maintenance

## Cemex | Arizona

Cement plant  
~545,000 tpa throughput



# OFRANEH and the Garífuna rights struggles in Honduras

In ENCA 89 we included an article by Jill Powis outlining the struggles for territorial rights of the Garífuna community in Honduras. That was prompted by a visit to the UK of Melissa Martínez of OFRANEH (Black Fraternal Organisation of Honduras). She had been invited to London by Peace Brigades International. International support for the Garífuna has also reached the US Congress as the following statement by the Honduras Solidarity Network (HSN) attests. ENCA has signed up to the statement below by the HSN.

From the HSN, received 12<sup>th</sup> June 2024

The HSN is organising around this campaign in solidarity with OFRANEH and the Garífuna communities to support and promote the OFRANEH resolution introduced in the US Congress by Representative Cori Bush last week. Below is the text in English of the new public statement in support of OFRANEH and the Garífuna communities. For more information and to participate in the congressional action go [Here](#).

Victoria Cervantes for: **The Honduran Solidarity Network in North America (HSN)**

## Public Statement

### International Organisations & Individuals Stand in Solidarity with the Garífuna people of Honduras

For more than a decade, the Black Fraternal Organisation of Honduras (OFRANEH) has denounced that there is a genocidal plan against Garífuna communities in Honduras. This plan has become critical in recent months, as Garífuna leaders have been directly attacked, harassed, and threatened by third-party settlers, including owners of extractivist and palm-oil projects, tourism investors, and drug-traffickers.

On March 9, 2024, the owner of the tourist complex “Rosa Negra” publicly harassed and threatened Garífuna leaders with racist, demeaning comments. Two months later, third-party settlers aligned with “Rosa Negra” barred the entrance of the Garífuna community of Triunfo de la Cruz and launched a media campaign aimed at generating divisions among the community.

On May 28, 2024, these third-party settlers, with support from the Tela mayor, Ricardo Calix, held a general assembly to elect a parallel community board, or *patronato* and, through this board, block efforts by the State of Honduras to comply with the 2015 Inter-American Court sentences which order the State to give back the land stolen from Garífuna communities. Similar tactics have been taken against other Garífuna communities, such as Travesia, where the municipal government is actively destroying the social fabric of the Garífuna community by also electing and imposing a parallel *patronato*. These acts of systematic violence seek to eradicate the Garífuna way of life and being.

While the State of Honduras is responsible for violating the land rights of the Garífuna people, the United States government, international finance institutions, and multilateral development banks are directly complicit in this violence, which emanates from bankrolling these projects and imposing a neoliberal economic model based on tourism, extractivism and exports. As organisations and individuals who stand in solidarity with the Garífuna

people, we join OFRANEH in their demands by:

1. Publicly denouncing the violence enacted by global tourist companies, the U.S.-bound narcotics industry, and foreign-funded palm oil companies against Garífuna defenders and communities.
2. Calling on U.S. Congressional Representatives to support the OFRANEH Resolution ([H.Res. 1278](#)), which was reintroduced on June 5, 2024 by Rep. Cori Bush along with Reps. Ilhan Omar, Jesus “Chuy” Garcia, Jamaal Bowman, and Jan Schakowsky, which condemns the violence against the Garífuna people, mandates the return of their land, and calls on the US to take responsibility for stopping the financing of projects it is backing.
3. Calling on the State of Honduras to comply with the Inter-American Human Rights Court rulings, which orders the restitution of Garífuna land and guarantees of non-repetition.
4. Calling on the Honduran government to protect the lives and integrity of the Garífuna people.



Photo: PBI

# Investor-State Dispute Settlements

*ENCA and other development and environment non-governmental organisations (NGOs) slowly began to grasp the purpose and significance of the International Court for the Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) from around the turn of the century. In 2010, for ENCA at least, the effects of the findings and judgements of the World Bank court upon local communities and environments became particularly clear with our involvement in the case of Pacific Rim (now Oceana Gold) against the state of El Salvador and specifically the department of Cabañas and the area around the town of San Isidro. In that particular case, several years later, the state of El Salvador won one of the few victories against a transnational mining corporation that ICSID has awarded, although the threat of land takeover and pollution from mining remains present in the country.*

*As time moved on, the significant threats to environments and communities of these unelected World Bank tribunals that in essence represent transnational corporations in their pursuit of profit became even clearer. They frequently make judgements that allow the corporations to pursue financial gain regardless of the communities and environments that they wish to exploit. It has been a classic case of poor people providing profits for rich transnational corporations, as a report by Martin Mowforth in the January 2012 Central America Report suggested with the headline: 'The Perpetrator Who Sues The Victim: Pacific Rim Mining Company v El Salvador'. And as the organisation Trade Justice has made clear:*

Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) is a mechanism written into many older trade and investment agreements that allows individual corporations to challenge laws, regulations, permitting decisions and even court decisions that they view as a violation of their supposed trade agreement rights.

*Very recently in interview with Ed Boles in Belize, ENCA member Liz Richmond*

*recorded his words about their battle with Vulcan Materials:*

*... there is the 1.5 billion dollar lawsuit Vulcan won against Mexico because that Government refused to renew their mining permit due to the incredible environmental damage they have done just south of Playa del Carmen, and that is just one of three lawsuits they have filed against Mexico. The Belize Government is well aware of this and can look down the road, realizing that eventually Vulcan would operate very similarly in Belize, challenging our environmental laws and suing Belize if we took action against them, and even leveraging US Congress to take action against Belize, as they have done with Mexico. We cannot even afford to fight the case in international court, let alone pay billions should we come out on the bottom*

*And even more recently, Hélonor de Anzizu of the Centre for International Environmental Law (CIEL) produced a guide to ISDS cases. We are grateful to Hélonor and to CIEL for their permission for ENCA to reproduce their guide to Investor-State Dispute Settlements below. (<https://www.ciel.org>)*

As the impacts of the climate crisis worsen and the world moves away from fossil fuels, oil and gas companies are turning to little-known trade and investment agreements to extort governments into maintaining their reliance on fossil fuels. These court proceedings, called Investor-State Dispute Settlement cases, or ISDS cases, are a mechanism through which fossil fuel companies can sue countries that take measures to phase out fossil fuels, claiming that such measures damage their ability to make profits.

The cases are undertaken in closed-door proceedings, and companies seek extreme settlement costs—often in the billions of dollars— even for projects that have yet to break ground. The prospect of an ISDS case has a chilling effect on government officials who may want to act in the public interest to phase out fossil fuels but are

scared of expensive judgements.

That's why CIEL seeks to end ISDS in trade and investment agreements. To accelerate the end of ISDS, CIEL just released a [toolkit](#) that helps government officials consider ways to exit investor agreements with fossil fuel companies without litigation or settlement payments. Here's a quick overview on our new [ISDS toolkit](#):

## Q: What is ISDS?

- Fossil fuel companies invest in countries that promise to protect their foreign investments.
- When a State enacts measures that a company perceives will affect its profits, the company may use a mechanism to settle and negotiate the dispute, called ISDS.
- ISDS claims often involve huge costs and can award companies millions or billions of taxpayer dollars from the country.
- Most ISDS cases related to environmental, climate change, or human rights measures often fail to properly consider or uphold the responsibilities and obligations of the State involved

## Q: How does ISDS work?

- The cases happen behind closed doors and most of the time do not allow the public to listen or participate.
- CIEL has long fought for the right of affected third parties to submit expert opinions, called amicus curiae submissions, or send additional documents to the court, but they are rarely accepted.

## Q: Why are so many States willingly entering into investor agreements?

- For many States with lower GDPs, investor agreements are considered a way to attract capital investment in their economy, especially for countries with political instability.



- There has not been enough work to shift States away from making foreign investment deals, nor enough viable alternatives for countries to avoid making these deals.

#### Q: What is the ISDS toolkit?

- A recent IPCC report stated ISDS is a legal barrier to States pursuing real climate action.
- Some State leaders who want to take progressive climate action but are concerned about getting hit with an ISDS suit, have appealed to CIEL for guidance.
- CIEL's toolkit is designed to help State officials and UN representatives navigate the different options that can eliminate ISDS risks or mitigate ISDS risks or respond to an ISDS if it arises.
- This toolkit is not intended to be comprehensive or exhaustive, but instead offers a sample of possible approaches States may pursue in the face of ISDS threats, though the unique circumstances and the timeline of ISDS-related risks will vary.
- What is clear and uniformly applicable, however, is that investment law must not impede urgently needed climate action.

#### Q: How does CIEL interact with the ISDS system?

- We educate State representatives, partner organisations, and frontline community members to use the toolkit to inform their advocacy for phasing out fossil fuels in their countries.
- Our ISDS toolkit is being rolled out to lawyers and environmental advocates to clarify the scale of the problem, provide solutions or alternatives to ISDS, and expose how ISDS is a barrier to real climate action.
- We have also worked with frontline communities and local partner organisations who have successfully stopped extractive projects, but then run into an ISDS case that undermines their

progress. CIEL helps to change their challenges into legal terms that can be used in court.

#### Q: How does ISDS impact me?

- Many environmental activists encounter ISDS only after years of organising and finally achieving a monumental win. Or, they encounter it when pushing their country to stop a pipeline, offshore drilling, petrochemical plant, or extractive project, and the country fears ISDS to such a degree that it is unwilling to stop the project.
- This kit provides information you can share with your government officials to stop fossil fuel expansion and investments while avoiding or neutralizing ISDS risks.

#### ISDS should not slow down States' rapid phase out of fossil fuels.

Our new toolkit sheds light on foreign

fossil fuel investments and provides a clear path for States to take action and disentangle from these investment agreements. CIEL's new toolkit gives hope for a greener future for countries whose economies are currently deeply entrenched with fossil fuels— *it is possible* for countries to get out of ISDS, phase out fossil fuels, and move towards renewable energy sources.

With hope for the future,

Hélonor De Anzizu  
Staff Attorney  
Environmental Health Program  
Centre for International Environmental Law (CIEL)

Further Reading:

<https://www.ciel.org/reports/overcoming-international-investment-agreements-as-a-barrier-to-climate-action/>



[elsuenoexiste.wordpress.com](https://elsuenoexiste.wordpress.com)

# Emergency food plan for Maya Achi communities in Rabinal, Guatemala, located in Dry Corridor crossing Central America

This report comes from Rights Action, a US and Canadian organisation that funds and supports human rights and justice, land and environment defence struggles in Guatemala and Honduras. As always we are grateful to Rights Action for their reports and their generalised permission for other organisations to use their material.

<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/emergency-food-plan-for-maya-achi-communities-in-rabinal-guatemala>

More generally, learn more about Rights Action at: [www.rightsaction.org](http://www.rightsaction.org)

## Agroecology project

In recent years, Rights Action has been funding the exemplary agroecology work of the ACPC (Association of Community Production Committees), an organisation run by children, family members and some direct survivors of the Maya Achi genocide.

### ACPC: Re-building sustainable communities in aftermath of genocide against Maya Achi people, in the age of increasing environmental harms and climate heating

Rights Action, August 2, 2021

<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/acpc-re-building-sustainable-communities-in-aftermath-of-genocide>

In the 1980s, Rabinal, the geographical centre of the Maya Achi region, was one of four areas where, as determined by the United Nations Truth Commission final report in 1999, the U.S.-backed regimes carried out genocidal massacres and full-scale destruction of Mayan villages and property. The World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank participated in the Achi genocide by funding and partnering with the military regimes in the construction of the genocidal Chixoy hydro-electric dam project.

### Rabinal Prolonged Drought Emergency Plan

This year, due to one of the longest and hottest dry seasons in recent history, drought-like conditions are particularly extreme in Central America's dry corridor, including Rabinal. The ACPC sent Rights Action a request for emergency food funding to support 18 Maya Achi communities in the southern and northern parts of Rabinal that all

participate in ACPC's agroecology programmes.

- Acquire basic grains - corn and beans - in wholesale centres.
- Provide these basic grains to more than 100 families who have difficulty producing the minimum amount of food due to lack of water while we overcome the prolonged drought crisis.

The immediate goal is to help families survive through to the rainy season.

### Generalised Food Insecurity Crisis

The problems that have led to this generalised crisis of food insecurity for the thousands of vulnerable families in the Rabinal Valley are historical and current.

Due the historical dispossession of the best lands of Guatemala, over the course of centuries of imperialism, colonialism and the creation of the settler colonialist States, the Indigenous peoples were forcibly pushed into the highlands and unfertile lands of the Dry Corridor. Food insecurity is also due to the global human climate crisis that worsens the living conditions in regions such as the dry corridor of Central America, including the Rabinal Valley in Guatemala.

Due to the extreme heat and prolonged drought this year, rivers and springs in the recharge zone of the Xesiguan River basin in southern Rabinal have dried up. This river is the main source that supplies the Achi population of this region in their production of corn, beans, herbs, fruit trees, vegetative pasture, and animals that provide part of the basic food basket.



The Dry Corridor of Central America

# An intense wildfire season in Central America

Compiled by ENCA member Martin Mowforth

Regular visitors to and travellers in Central American countries will be aware of 'El Humo' that affects numerous areas of Central America towards the end of the dry season especially in March, April and May. In many cases, the fires arise from the traditional burning of fields at the end of the dry season as farmers prepare for the coming rains at the start of the wet season. But this year the effect has been exacerbated by the El Niño phenomenon and by climate warming. Indeed, climate warming has made the effects of El Niño more intense and more frequent.

This year's wildfire season has been particularly intense. According to data from the Global Wildfire Information System (GWIS), between January 1<sup>st</sup> and April 9<sup>th</sup>, thousands of fires have burned around:

- 295,140 hectares in Honduras
- 17,573 hectares in El Salvador
- 289,218 hectares in Nicaragua
- and 84,122 hectares in Costa Rica.

In Belize, fires have ravaged forests and farms in southern and western areas of the country and the government had to approve extra funds for the National Emergency Management Organisation (NEMO) in order to bolster support for affected communities. Over 8,000 hectares of the Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve have been affected by fires and many thousands of hectares of farmland. NEMO has allocated half a million dollars from its Contingency Fund to help fight the fires and support has also come from the Belize Red Cross, the US government and other agencies.

Up to late April, Guatemala had seen a wave of over 1,600 wildfires break out, whereas in the previous wildfire season the Guatemalan National Coordination for Disaster Reduction (CONRED) registered 980 wildfires during the season. This year, it is also believed that many of the Guatemalan fires have been deliberately set to make the new administration of

President Bernardo Arévalo seem to be incapable of addressing the crisis.

In Costa Rica, the wildfire season was the most devastating over the last ten years. The Fire Department reported that they attended 141 emergencies and that "the climax of the fire season occurred in the month of March; we recorded a fire emergency every 8 minutes, whereas on average, one is reported every 20 minutes."

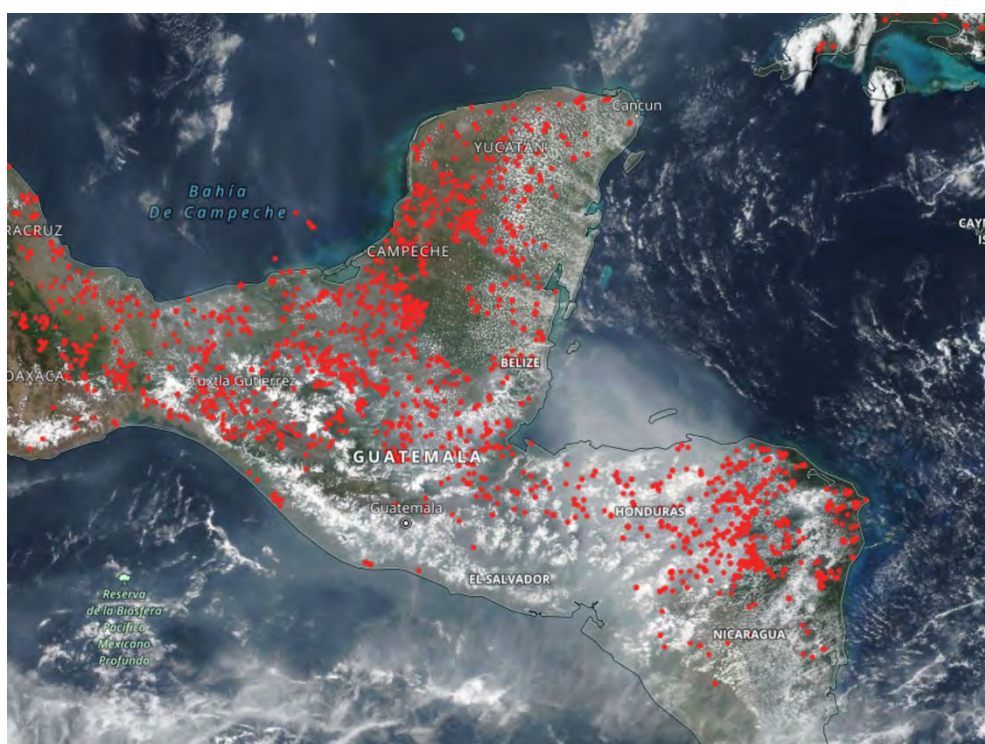
Guanacaste was the most affected Costa Rican department and experienced 92 fires in the season, which is more than the previous nine years combined. Again, El Niño and the extremely high temperatures and dry winds associated with the phenomenon and with climate warming were blamed by the Fire Department and the Ministry of Environment and Energy.

In Nicaragua, most of the 888 wildfires experienced up to 16<sup>th</sup> April occurred in protected areas such as the Bosawás Reserve, the Wawashang Natural Reserve and the Cosigüina Volcano Natural

Reserve. Amaru Ruiz, a biologist who works with the Fundación Del Río, explained that the wildfires this season represent "a considerable increase with respect to what was reported in 2023."

## Sources:

- Redacción Confidencial, 16<sup>th</sup> April 2024, 'Nicaragua Records 888 Forest Fires So Far in 2024', <https://confidencial.digital/english/nicaragua-records-888-forest-fires-so-far-in-2024/>
- Jeff Abbott, 20 April 2024, 'Central America Faces Intense Wildfires Season', <https://progressive.org/latest/central-america-faces-intense-wildfire-season-abbott-20240420/>
- EarthData, 23 May 2024, 'Fires and Smoke over Honduras and Surrounding Countries', <https://www.earthdata.nasa.gov/worldview/worlview-image-archive/fires-smoke-central-america-21-may-2024>
- Zoila Palma Gonzalez, 30 May 2024, 'Cabinet approves funds for NEMO's operational support battling fires', *Breaking Belize News*.
- Aaron Humes, 30 May 2024, 'Fires in Toledo, Cayo have affected 250 families, caused \$8 million in damage', *Breaking Belize News*.
- Zoila Palma Gonzalez, 30 May 2024, 'National Emergency Management organisation, BDF respond to fires in Western and Southern Belize', *Breaking Belize News*.
- Ileana Fernandez, 10 June 2024, 'Costa Rica Experiences Most Devastation Wildfire Season in a Decade', *Tico Times*, San José.



Location of fires, source NASA

# Event and Auction



In the autumn of this year – date yet to be confirmed – ENCA is planning to hold a public event at which Liz Richmond will speak about her recent visit to projects in Central America funded or part-funded by ENCA. The event will also include music from the Pengenista Drummers and well as an auction to win a two-person Nicaraguan hammock, donated by an ENCA member.

Further details of this event, including date, tickets and venue will be made available in the next newsletter and via ENCA email list. Do keep an eye out for information and the opportunity to join us for an exciting evening of music and discussion.

# News from Honduras

## Stealing Garífuna land

In Honduras, three Canadian citizens (Randy “porn king” Jorgensen, Malik Zoharan and Darren Wade) have been charged with money laundering and fraud related to sales to other Canadian tourist investors of lands violently and corruptly taken from the Garífuna people over many years. As it turns out, the “porn king” and associates were allegedly frauding other foreign investors who had been all too happy to buy a “piece of paradise” in Honduras during the 13 years of the US and Canadian-backed drug-trafficking regime in power.

## Former Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández sentenced to 45 years in jail

On June 26, former President Juan Orlando Hernández was sentenced by a New York City court to 45 years in jail on charges of operating a drug-trafficking cartel during the entire time he was in office, propped up as a “democratic ally” by the US and Canada. It is impossible to overstate the complicity of the US and Canada in supporting and legitimizing the repressive, “open for global business”, drug-trafficking regime for 13 years. It is hard to overstate how much damage and violence this regime did to the institutions of the State, people and environment of Honduras.



**Both items taken from Rights Action (16<sup>th</sup> July 2024). Rights Action is a US- and Canada-based organisation that supports human rights and justice, land and environment defense struggles in Guatemala and Honduras.**

**enca.org.uk**

 @ENCA\_News

## Meeting Dates 2024

**October 20<sup>th</sup>**

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 meetings should this be requested.**