

ENCA



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Honduras

Xiomara Castro works to reduce government corruption

MUFRAS-32

ENCA and Unicorn Grocery funding at work

IMAP

We report on the work of the Mesoamerican Permaculture Institute



ENCA VISITS IMAP AND MUFRAS-32



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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Visit to IMAP's Centre in Guatemala: Report to ENCA

Here we include the second report from ENCA member Liz Richmond who earlier this year travelled around Central America visiting projects and organisations that had been funded by ENCA during the previous three years. IMAP is the Mesoamerican Institute of Permaculture, based in San Lucás Tolimán in the department of Sololá, Guatemala. www.imapermaculture.org/

By ENCA member Liz Richmond

The Mesoamerican Permaculture Institute (IMAP) is a non-profit community organisation that contributes to the biodiversity and development of self-sustaining communities in the Lake Atitlán basin. In 2022 ENCA funded IMAP with \$2,000 (USD) to promote biodiversity with family gardens and the restoration of Lake Atitlán.

The funding covered the provision of 20 garden toolkits, delivery of training and associated materials, organic compost materials, various native trees and an ancestral knowledge programme for local people in organic farming methods. This funding enhanced a project funded by Adventure Travel Conservation Fund. Despite challenges, including drought conditions, these aims were achieved, and included the building of a viewing platform, production of organic compost, and planting of fruit, timber and forest trees with secondary school students; instilling in a new generation a strong sense of caring for nature and practical skills to enhance biodiversity. (See ENCA 86).

I was made most welcome by María Ines Cuj and team, who were generous with their time and expertise during my stay on the idyllic IMAP site, which hosts 230 species of birds and 798 species of plants. The lake basin has more than a thousand aquatic species and is a world example of diversity.

<https://www.facebook.com/imapermacultura>.

María explained that IMAP's focus is on food sovereignty, protection of the environment, agro-ecological education and empowerment of small agricultural producers, or members, known as

'asocios', to promote self-sufficiency and a healthy community. This is achieved through popular education and permaculture methods using ancestral knowledge and traditions. Their motto is "sembrando la semilla, haciendola crecer" which translates to "planting the seed, making it grow" in English.

IMAP currently works in partnership with 41 indigenous members of [Kaqchikeles](#) and Tz'utujil households (just two of the 22 Maya groups in Guatemala).

Each asocio is an individual and includes their family, so there are around 200 people involved. However, if a member is inactive, and does not attend the meetings (roughly 3 per year) they are asked to leave, to allow for new members to join. Members mostly own their homes but are landless. Some live around the IMAP site, others live nearby; 19 families live in San Lucas and 8 are from Sierra de Oro. Some have stalls where they independently sell produce and artesanía to passersby and tourists close to the IMAP entrance. IMAP members pay a symbolic rent, i.e. 50 quetzales per year in seeds, this contrasts with renting from regular landowners which is around 200 quetzales for 6 months.

IMAP has a seed bank, where they classify and reserve native and creole seeds to combat the negative impact of hybrid / transgenic seeds. They encourage members to grow seeds, including amaranth (amaranto), which is sold to IMAP's seedbank, thereby promoting the family sustainability. The ground was extremely parched during my visit which was in the dry season; however, when rains arrive, amaranth will be planted in May and September.



Signposts at the IMAP Centre with Maria Ines Cuj.

During the dry season, water from the lake is pumped for irrigation. Cristian, one of the well-informed IMAP employees, explained that when the amaranth is mature, a special technique is used – he described it as “tickling” the plant to gently release and harvest the seeds by hand.

Seeds and other locally grown or resourced goods, such as honey and cacao, are used to produce organic cereals, flour, drinks, biscuits, and snacks, and organic coffee and artesanía are sold on site. They use no artificial preservatives, and there is always a focus on sustainability, through the ethos of integrated systems and working in harmony with nature.

Amaranth is an acknowledged ‘super food’, rich in protein, folic acid, fibre, calcium, iron, magnesium, and vitamins, especially from groups B and E. IMAP produces and sells a ‘super atol’ – a traditional drink base made with their amaranth. This is sold to hospitals at half price, and the remaining cost is fund-raised. It promotes nutrition to mothers, premature babies and those with other health needs. IMAP also produces amaranth flour, which is gluten-free, suitable for people with celiac disease, and is valued for antioxidant properties.

IMAP members grow other seeds including chan/chia; I met with several women who brought seeds to be weighed. For example, Cristina brought colix/colis, which she says is known as

‘hierba blanca’. Cristina grows this in her small garden, and she is pleased with the arrangement with IMAP.

I was able to see IMAP’s diverse and mixed planting around the site. Permaculture techniques are used for tree planting, compost making, production of fertilizers and repellents, all organic. I was also able to enjoy many relaxation spots, and their viewing platform, where I came across groups of bird watchers, some hoping to observe the slender sheartail humming bird, particular to the area.

IMAP provides educational courses for visiting groups, who may stay in their rustic accommodation with ample eco-toilets and showers on site. Groups learn about traditions, ceremonies, and ancestral knowledge and its relationship with permaculture, aligned with the philosophy of ‘Buen Vivir’ or ‘Good living’ in harmony with nature.

Maria taught me about the 20 ‘nawales/nahuales’ of the Mayan cosmovision. These are spirits or energetic archetypes which are reflected upon daily. Each day has a nawal, and everyone has a nawal according to their birth date, similar to a horoscope. (www.mcd.gov.gt/calcular-nawal/)

Nawal glyphs can be seen around the outdoor seating area used for training and ceremonies. These symbols, and other information, for example about planting, harvesting times, moon cycles,

and different methods of compost production can be seen around the site. A candle is also constantly alight on site in a quiet area, where people can reflect or pray.

Visiting groups participate in permaculture related gardening and activities, such as traditional cooking, chocolate making, learning about medicinal and healing plants, and volunteer to litter-pick in the surrounding hills, to prevent pollution of the lake, contributing to a cleaner environment and a sharing of holistic values. This teaching and interchange are important to IMAP’s ethos as well as generating income.

Specific issues and challenges with project activities?

Maria reported that due to lack of rain in 2023 some plants did not germinate, and some forest species and fruit trees died off. This also impacts the lake’s water level. IMAP originally designed the project around 20 years ago, with buildings on higher ground to avoid rising lake levels, as previously this came to the edge of the IMAP site, however this is no longer an issue.

Other challenges include loss of members. Initially, 100 people joined the amaranth programme and only 28 remain. Some cited that financial gain was not achieved quickly enough.

Another serious problem is the neighbouring extensive avocado monoculture plantation and related lack of biodiversity. Chemicals, pesticides and fertilizers used for production degrade the soil year upon year, harm pollinators, contaminate the subsoil, and run off into Lake Atitlán, polluting the water supply and the aquatic species. Maria says these products are mainly for export, so it is not good for the carbon footprint. Intense watering is required for avocado production, around 70 litres of water per avocado. This is three times the amount needed for one orange, or 14 times the amount of water to grow a tomato. In monocultures like these, worker’s health may be impacted

by exposure to agro-chemicals, and despite providing short term gains for some, production is not sustainable.

<https://foodispower.org/our-food-choices/the-problem-with-avocados/#:~:text=As%20if%20all%20that%20weren,degrading%20it%20year%20after%20year.>

To combat challenges, IMAP is focusing on implementing permaculture methods to mitigate the effect of climate change and continue to raise awareness through their educational community programmes. They keep seeds for reforestation and to conserve the biodiversity of the IMAP site and family community gardens. They maintain plants and seeds including peanuts, sweet potato, cassava, beans, maize as well as maintaining the home of migratory birds. Following each community training event, participants are encouraged to share their skills with 3 other households, further developing community resilience.

Social/economic issues

Maria tells me she hears of at least one group of people leaving per week from the vicinity. People leave due to poverty and to seek employment in the USA or other countries. Many go and work ‘illegally’, at great cost to their lives, and this causes separation or breakdown of families.

A young IMAP employee advises me that often young people are tempted or drawn into involvement with the illegal drugs trade. They may get “hooked in” with high remuneration initially, for transportation of drugs locally. Once involved, however, it is difficult to leave, and they and their family can be at risk of physical danger for life.

How has the organisation helped to improve government policies or lobby for changes?

IMAP has used ENCA funds to support lobbying for a new law to protect ancestral knowledge, seed diversity and traditional agriculture, as part of the National Network for Defence of Food Sovereignty in Guatemala.



IMAP compost toilets.

Maria states that she is pleased with the newly elected government in this respect.

Future plans

IMAP plans to:

- continue to use sustainable materials grown locally, or on site, as aforementioned, e.g. composting and bamboo for fencing;
- attract new members strengthening community cohesion with a focus on health and food sovereignty;
- continue to work with 5 local schools, on their land, to encourage learning and responsibility with the next generation;
- to continue to support a women’s group, including those experiencing or affected by domestic abuse, and a mother and baby group, within the community to provide support and education using a member’s plot of land;
- purchase and supply clay eco-filters for 30 households locally. This is especially to promote the health of those who live next to the lake and/or the monoculture avocado plantation;
- prioritise protection of the water supply. This is viewed as a good way to attract and maintain members, and develop the irrigation system on site, crucial in the dry season.

Links and funding sources. Which other national and external organisations do they work with?

IMAP enjoys relations with REDSAG (National Network for the Defence of Food Sovereignty in Guatemala) and Atitlán Organic, EcoSol, Breaking the Silence, The International Partnership for Service Learning, and Adventure Travel Conservation Fund. These links allow IMAP initiatives to be shared at the national, regional and global levels.

Maria reports that they are currently working mainly with Breaking the Silence and REDSAG.

Your judgement of the organisation and its activities and plans

IMAP is a very well organised group with realistic aims dedicated to promoting the care of the land, the people and equitable distribution (the ethics of permaculture). They are proactive with volunteer and educational groups, which generates income.

There are 9 full time workers including a maintenance team, administration and accounts, education, and seed inventory responsibility. Others and specialists are employed when needed.

I met with both permanent and occasional employees who say they enjoy their work and appeared content. Staff eat lunch together every day, and take leave at the same time in December.

MUFRAS-32 in El Salvador

By Liz Richmond (ENCA member), September 2024

Following her visit to IMAP in Guatemala, Liz Richmond moved on to El Salvador to visit the organisation MUFRAS-32 (Movimiento Unificado Francisco Sánchez-1932). ENCA has supported MUFRAS-32 on numerous occasions in the past, notably in its successful struggle (with other organisations) to declare El Salvador free of metal mining. On this occasion, Liz went to see how their project funded by the Unicorn Grocery in Manchester (via ENCA) was progressing.

Main contacts: Hector Berríos and Zenayda Serrano, Email: hectorgarciaberrios@gmail.com

Liz has written a separate summary report of the Salvadoran political and social context within which MUFRAS-32 and other NGOs have to function. That report has been uploaded onto the ENCA website (www.enca.org.uk) and will also appear in The Violence of Development website (www.theviolenceofdevelopment.com). For the sake of this report on the MUFRAS-32 project, just the following two paragraphs give a little background to the formation and purpose of the organisation. These are then followed by Liz's report on the specific project.

MUFRAS-32 is a community minded environmental political lobbying group formed in 2001 based in the San Isidro Municipality in the Department of Cabañas, El Salvador. They support local efforts in rural areas to improve the quality of life of residents, promote and defend human and environmental rights and campaign to prevent harmful 'developments'.

They seek social and environmental justice via political activism and community organisation, training, and raising awareness, along with organically grown vegetable production to promote the protection and defence of strategic resources, such as water and soil, whilst caring for the consumer's health in local communities.

Project: Sustainable vegetable production in the Río Viejo basin in the Department of Cabañas

Purpose of Unicorn Grocery funding (US \$4,000, September 2023 - sent via ENCA)



Liz with Zenayda Serrano and Hector Berríos and family, daughters Maya and Kiria.

In September 2023 the Unicorn Grocery Cooperative in Manchester granted MUFRAS-32 the sum of \$4,000 US dollars for the execution of the above project. ENCA had submitted the project proposal to the Unicorn Grocery on behalf of MUFRAS-32, and the funds were transferred to El Salvador from ENCA. The project aimed to promote the protection and conservation of the river basin of the Río Viejo, which feeds the San Francisco El Dorado canton and the urbanised area of the municipality of San Isidro. The area is seriously degraded due to the almost total elimination of the forest cover and the consumption of wood for fuel, a situation that has accelerated soil erosion and the deterioration of water resources.

To address this MUFRAS-32 is attempting to protect, conserve and rehabilitate soils

by means of a productive educational process. This implies a sustainable dialogue between local and national institutions, private businesses, educational centres and community organisations in seeking solutions to the conflicts brought about by river pollution and the lack of access to water.

MUFRAS-32 promotes an inter-institutional dialogue for the protection and conservation of soil and water, which in its first stage involves organic production. In the second stage, it attempts afforestation with bamboo in places where water recharges itself. They believe that it is appropriate to foster sustainable management of the Río Viejo basin in the short and medium term. Their programme has three separate but related foci, as follows.

- a) An area focus on the Río Viejo basin is proposed, linked to the water sources that supply the population. This implies the need to organise from the high, middle, and low river basins a network of people and institutions with the aim of identifying the problems affecting the rivers.
- b) To establish the need for the restoration of degraded lands or lands in the process of being degraded, to make them sustainable through intensive reforestation with bamboo. The Ministry of Agriculture and Cattle Ranching (MAG) has approved the project's bamboo cuttings for the sake of producing oxygen and sequestering carbon in the reforestation of 10 manzanas of land. (*1 manzana = approximately 7,000 square meters or 1.7 acres*).
- c) To cultivate 5 plots of 800 square meters organically with vegetables and fruits to be sold in local markets. To promote healthy foods produced without chemicals, increasing input into the local economy and improve the quality of life of the project participants / consumers.

Due to the ever-worsening decrease in water resources, the recently approved Emergency Declaration of Water Scarcity issued by the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MARN), and different studies which have uncovered the alarming situation of water stress faced as a country, MUFRAS-32 sought to promote the production of vegetables sustainably.

Justification of the project: a problem that affects human development.

The Minister of the Environment and Natural Resources (MARN) in El Salvador warned that in the 2023-2024 season the phenomenon of 'El Niño' will lead to a lack of rainfall for crops. This will serve as one of the major challenges that will worsen the national food crisis in the short term, as well as representing an important threat to productive development and to the country's competitiveness, in the medium term.

Although it is in a tropical zone, El Salvador does not have available abundant water resources, but the problem of water

availability is not primarily one of physical scarcity but one of deficient management. The absence of appropriate legislation worsens the water conflicts. This lack of a constitutional basis and the human rights which would guarantee access to water is one of the principal obstacles to resolving the constant protests (which took place prior to the state of emergency) against the lack of water in the communities. It will also be a crucial factor behind overcoming the challenges associated with the Sustainable Development Goals.

One of the main causes of water pollution in most rivers is domestic residual waters without treatment and a lack of basic sanitary norms, as witnessed by high concentrations of faecal coliform bacteria in the water. Additionally, industrial, agro-industrial and agricultural wastes also contaminate the rivers.

El Salvador has experienced growing incidences of illnesses of hydrological origins, such as diarrhoea and internal parasites, affecting mainly child populations. The few existing initiatives and proposals to tackle water contamination are often limited by the lack of public policy and institutional commitment.

The workshops run by MUFRAS-32 as part of their project covered the following themes:

- The importance of community organisation
- The difference between food security and food sovereignty
- Soil and water protection and conservation
- The production of organic soils – bokashi and compost
- Sowing and care of plants.

Direct beneficiaries of the programme included 21 representatives of 7 communities in the San Isidro Municipality, and their families. Indirect beneficiaries included local people who consume products free from chemicals made in San Isidro which promotes a trade which is both fair and healthy/organic – 400 persons.

Successes

MUFRAS-32 has met objectives with food security and sovereignty and the other aims described in their proposal. Maya and Chiara tell me they actively join their parents and MUFRAS-32 members in the organic food production, including tomatoes, green chilli, cucumbers, onions, jalapeño chiles, ayote and pipian (pumpkin/squash), papayas and corn. They also make organic compost and have an irrigation system.

The programme has gone well, it is providing income and self-sufficiency, which is important in the current economic climate. Hector says that in the supermarket onions have increased outrageously in cost, to as much as \$2 US dollars for 3, however the project is able to sell their produce economically and therefore contributes to an improved quality of life for the local people.

Zenayda is working positively with women's groups and women's rights. There are 9 core women, and around 25 women who meet regularly. They focus on the impact of climate change regarding food, water and sanitation. Zenayda has travelled to Brazil to talk about the situation of Human Rights in El Salvador, and support social movements, and to New York to speak about issues impacting on rural women. These visits were supported by the International Network for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR), a global human rights network which connects 280 NGOs, social movements and advocates across more than 75 countries.

Specific issues with project activities?

MUFRAS-32 have met their objectives. At the time of the visit, however, they await some of the harvest, due to seasonal timings.

They often work at night against bugs/insects, such as giant ants (*zompopos*), which are repelled using a mixture of vinegar and chilli.

There are difficulties for all involved. Due to political tensions, heightened military presence and 'security' around the time of

the elections around the time of Liz’s visit, it felt safer for the meeting to be held in the capital, San Salvador.

(Elections were held on 4 February 2024 for the presidential/vice presidential and deputies of the legislative assembly, and then on 3 March 2024 for the mayors and municipal councils’ deputies).

Women are more vulnerable, under the circumstances, and human rights for all are complicated, due to corruption and deception within the regime. For example, several government ministers have dubious past connections, with cartels and drug trafficking widely published elsewhere, and a generally high level of impunity.

There is a disintegration of family support for women and children, as many women become the ‘widows’ of migration, which is attributed to the difficult political situation and economic hardship. (See background paper.)

Impact of project

ENCA/Unicorn Grocery funds have permitted food sovereignty which supports families to remain together in their country. There is high

unemployment, and many families rely on income/remittances (remesas) sent from those who have already fled. This amounted to 789.96 million US dollars in December 2023 and 704.29 million US dollars in July 2024. <https://tradingeconomics.com/el-salvador/remittances#:~:text=Remittances%20in%20El%20Salvador%20increased,Million%20in%20September%20of%201991>.

Without the focus of MUFRAS-32, Hector and Zenayda say they may have left the country. Many lawyers, journalists, and others have fled, due to the ‘politics of expulsion’ of anyone who opposes the government.

Hector and Zenayda explained that there is political opposition in all areas, and challenge against the government is strong; however, it is difficult as the government’s continuing state of emergency has eradicated all legal due process and people are fearful and cannot protest. They believe things will worsen.

Maya spoke of her school friends having a general lack of hope or ambition other than possibly finding a job in a call centre. University no longer seems to be an option, as this is unaffordable for most, and young people are not educated to have a critical analysis of the situation.

Zenayda adds her concern of young people becoming “victims of social media”; for example watching unattainable consumerism including goods and lifestyle online, which she feels exacerbates their feeling of hopelessness and urge to migrate for the chance of improved prospects, which of course is not guaranteed as many travel illegally and are vulnerable to exploitation. In addition, Zenayda says there is a lack of effective state services and structural systems.

Plans for 2024 Activities

Future hopes are to continue to establish solidarity regionally and internationally, regarding the state of emergency. Hector and Zenayda say despite their fear and distress they really want to survive, achieve their goals around human rights and food production, and are grateful to the support received from ENCA, the Unicorn Grocery and other networks.

Your judgement of the organisation.

A sincere and dedicated group who are working and living under extreme pressure. The importance of ENCA’s solidarity with MUFRAS-32 cannot be underestimated.

See photos including of pipianes, making organic compost, preparing the ground for planting chillis, tomatoes.

NEW FUNDING FOR IMAP

We are delighted to announce that as of November 2024, the Unicorn Grocery has committed to a further round of funding to support the work of IMAP. We will bring you a fuller report in our next newsletter.

Thank you to the Unicorn Grocery for their ongoing support of ENCA and our partners in Central America.

www.unicorn-grocery.coop



Clearing the land for cultivation, near San Isidro.

Highway Robbery: How Bad Trade Policies Make Life Unaffordable

A lawsuit over toll booths in Honduras shows how corporate trade policies make life unlivable in poor countries — and send people fleeing north.

By: Jen Moore & Karen Spring

October 3, 2024

<https://otherwords.org/highway-robbery-how-bad-trade-policies-make-life-unaffordable/>

Jen Moore is an associate fellow of the Institute for Policy Studies. Karen Spring is the Tegucigalpa-based coordinator for the Honduras Solidarity Network. They are co-authors of the new report 'The Corporate Assault on Honduras'. This op-ed was distributed by otherwords.org . Other Words is a free editorial service published by the Institute for Policy Studies. We are grateful to Karen, Jen and the Institute for Policy Studies for their permission to reproduce this op-ed here.

Many of us know the pain of paying steep tolls, especially when a turnpike is taken over by a private company.

Now imagine you live in one of our hemisphere's most impoverished countries. Do that and you'll get a glimpse into how unfair trade deals help make life unlivable in many countries — and force countless people to seek a living in countries like the United States.

When a private company suddenly put up toll booths in the middle of a taxpayer-funded highway, local residents in El Progreso, Honduras were furious.

They knew the new fees would also hike the price of food, bus fares, and their daily commutes — and that making it in their country, where roughly half of the population lives below the poverty line, was going to become unbearable.

So local businesses and residents joined forces to stop the company from charging fees. For 421 days, starting in 2016, the

Angry Citizens Movement stood night and day — even on weekends and holidays — at the “Camp for Dignity” along the highway. With handwritten signs and chants, they urged their neighbours not to pay. Even after facing tear gas, police repression, and threats, the movement persisted and expanded.

Eventually, they won — but not without consequences.

At the end of 2017, with the 24-hour camp still in place, the U.S.-backed President Juan Orlando Hernández managed to get reelected, even though presidential reelection is illegal in Honduras and there was widespread evidence of fraud. Mass protests lasted for weeks and the toll booths were burned. The company's contract was finally canceled in 2018 amid accusations of corruption.

Now, the private toll booth operator — backed by big U.S. banks, including JP Morgan Chase Bank and two Goldman Sachs funds — is suing Honduras through a process called international arbitration. They're claiming \$180 million, more than four times what the company reportedly invested.

It doesn't matter that the project lacked public support, that the government institution that negotiated the contract was shut down under a cloud of corruption, or that now former President Hernández, who struck the highway deal, was convicted in the U.S. for drug trafficking earlier this year. What matters is the profit.

Lawsuits like these are only possible because of exclusive privileges for foreign investors found in many international trade agreements, investment laws, and contracts like this one. Under this 'Investor State Dispute Settlement' (ISDS) system, foreign investors can sue



governments for losses and future claimed profits over decisions they believe affect them.

Currently, Honduras faces at least \$14 billion in claims from foreign and domestic corporations. That's equivalent to roughly 40 percent of the country's GDP in 2023 and nearly four times its public investment budget for 2024.

In our new study into this avalanche of claims, we found that the majority of investors are revolting against Honduran efforts to reverse or renegotiate corrupt deals struck under Hernández, which were often damaging to the public interest and local communities.

And if these investors succeed, the economic burden on the country will only deepen the displacement crisis driving Hondurans to migrate north.

The blatant injustice of these corporate claims is increasingly recognized at the international level. The former UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights and Environment, David Boyd, has called them “a catastrophe for development.” Notably, the U.S. recently removed these corporate privileges in its trade relations with Canada.

Now it's time for the U.S. to end these privileges in its other trade agreements including with Central America — and not sign any more that include them. That would be a good first step toward respecting the efforts of Hondurans and all people to live and prosper in their own countries.



Xiomara Castro's battle to roll back the years of Honduran gangsterism

By ENCA member Martin Mowforth
November 2024

In September this year, the Honduran Supreme Court declared unconstitutional the legality of special economic zones known as ZEDEs (Zonas de Empleo y Desarrollo Económico). Specifically, these zones should not be exempt from complying with local laws and paying local taxes. ZEDEs were granted 50-year concessions over the territory they administer, a legality that was designed to ensure that they could not be reversed by future governments.

The laws which gave the ZEDEs the license to create their own regulations within these semi-autonomous areas were initiated and approved by a government run by a drug-running mafia, that is, the government of Juan Orlando Hernández (or JOH as he was known). JOH and his brother Tony are now serving hefty prison sentences in the USA. Whilst they held power in Honduras, they created and approved laws that benefitted their cronies and acolytes and ran a government that opened the country up to foreign investors, who, in the title of James Phillips' book, were able to 'extract Honduras'.¹

Current President Xiomara Castro has referred to the ZEDEs as "selling off our territory piecemeal or privatizing our sovereignty." Others refer to the zones as lacking any public accountability and even as safe havens for criminal activities.²

This new ruling prohibits the creation of new ZEDEs; it also implies that existing ZEDEs will be declared illegal. A spokesman for the court, however, explained that the court still needs to publish an "explanatory addendum" on how to deal with the ZEDEs which already operate in Honduras, leaving their ultimate fate uncertain. There is very considerable enmity among the business elite to President Castro's efforts to roll back the legislation that enabled the ZEDEs to come into existence.

US investors in the existing ZEDEs have expressed concern about the security of their investments. It's a shame that they rarely express concern about the effects of their investments on the people and environments of Honduras.

1. James J. Phillips (2022) *Extracting Honduras: Resource Exploitation, Displacement, and Forced Migration*, Lexington Books, New York and London.
2. Ana Pereyra Baron, Latin America Working Group, <https://www.lawg.org/the-zedes-law-in-honduras-sanctuary-for-exploitation-corruption-and-organized-crime/>

New report and recording on the effects of ISDS on Honduras

On October 22nd, the Honduras Solidarity Network co-sponsored a webinar with the Institute for Policy Studies, Terra Justa and the International Institute to present a report that these organisations worked on about the corporate squeeze of Honduras by various 'investor protection' mechanisms. The webinar featured the report authors and Hondurans from some of the communities affected by the corporate projects.

Here is the [YouTube video](#) of the webinar. They had technical problems recording the interpretation so this video has some panelists speaking English and some speaking Spanish. They hope to put together a completely bilingual version soon and will share that.



A round-up of environmental news from Central America

Compiled by ENCA member Martin Mowforth

Costa Rican government plans a law to re-activate opencast mining at Crucitas

In October this year, the Costa Rican government announced that it will present a law to allow the re-activation of opencast gold mining in Crucitas in the north of the country. The government's stated aim is to open the exploration and exploitation of gold to tenders from interested companies. It also states that it aims to halt the illegal exploitation of gold by individuals who pollute the area through their use of mercury in gold extraction and who essentially steal what belongs to the country. Illegal mining practices have been a regular feature of gold mining in Crucitas. Franz Tattembach, the Minister of the Environment and Energy, said that they sought a regulated exploitation that protects the environment by applying good practice.

The country had recently won a lawsuit against the Canadian mining company Infinito Gold which had sought almost \$400 million (USD) in compensation after their mining operations had been closed in 2010 due to its environmental impacts. After the closure, however, small scale miners began to illegally exploit the gold using cyanide and mercury, causing severe environmental damage.

<https://semanariouniversidad.com/pais/mineria-a-cielo-abierto-en-crucitas-chaves-entreabre-la-posibilidad-para-extraer-oro/>

Costa Rica's Corcovado National Park under threat from illegal gold mining

Corcovado National Park is a biodiversity hotspot that faces severe threats from illegal gold mining which leads to mercury poisoning of soil and water, eventually affecting humans through its journey up the food chain. High profits can be made from the illegally mined gold and criminal

groups are attracted to set up operations in the remote and dense forests of the area. Organised crime can recruit workers from poor communities who can work for days, extracting substantial amounts of gold before being moved on by their bosses to new spots in the Park. The remoteness and density of the forest make it difficult if not impossible for the authorities to detect and catch them.

<https://expat-tations.com/law/rampant-illegal-gold-mining-risks-corcovado-national-park-in-costa-rica/#:~:text=Corcovado%20National%20Park%2C%20a%20biodiversity,profits%20from%20illegally%20mined%20gold.>

Guapinol rights defender killed, Honduras



Guapinol land defender Juan López was killed in Tocoa, Honduras on 14th September 2024. (The case of the Guapinol defenders has been covered in numerous previous ENCA Newsletters.) This is not the first killing of defenders of the Guapinol River. In January 2023, Aly Magdaleno Domínguez Ramos and Jairo Bonilla Ayala were also killed and Oqueli Domínguez was murdered in July 2023.

A September 2023 appeal by the Public Prosecutor's Office against the Guapinol 8's final dismissal of their prosecution for peacefully protesting against the legality of an opencast mining project in the Carlos Escaleras National Park was admitted by a local court meaning that they could still face criminal prosecution.

Ismael Moreno, a Jesuit priest in Honduras, declared the killing to be a political crime aimed at paralysing the people with fear so that they would not

oppose the mining project. In 2021, Juan López had commented that environmentalists in Honduras run risks when they try to defend the 'commons' and pit themselves against the big interests. "When you leave your house, you always bear in mind that you don't know if you'll get through the day and be able to return home and see your family again."

<https://www.ohchr.org/es/press-releases/2024/09/honduras-murder-environmentalist-juan-lopez-criminalisation>

New President of Panamá promises to close the Darién Gap to immigrants

On 1st July this year, José Raúl Mulino was inaugurated as Panamá's new President. He has promised that, with the help of the United States, he will plug the immigration flow through the Darién Gap (See ENCA 89).

At his inauguration, Mulino met with the US Interior Secretary, Alejandro Mayorkas, with whom he signed an accord to repatriate migrants who cross the Darién Gap. He also met with the Colombian President Gustavo Petro who believes that plugging the Gap is unfeasible because it is too porous. Petro also pointed out that repatriations would necessitate multilateral collaborations with numerous other countries from which the migrants originated.

Mulino has also stated that he will urgently seek a project to guarantee the supply of water to the Panamá Canal which is a crucial motor of the Panamanian economy. Some Panamanian analysts believe that the most dangerous threat to the country's economy is the lack of fresh water entering the Canal – rather

than the passage and treatment of immigrants. It is worth pointing out that previous Presidents have sought the same.

It is also worth pointing out that in the last financial year to 30th September, income from the Panama Canal reached record levels despite a 20 per cent reduction in the number of boats passing through it due to the drought and consequent lowered levels of water – see previous ENCA Newsletters.

<https://apnews.com/article/panama-mulino-immigration-darien-gap-31f214b8c9885c6e9f943c5ed9cc9ac1>
<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/a-p-panama-panama-city-alejandro-mayorkas-colombia-b2572152.html>

Belize and Guatemala talk trade and border management

The judgement of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on the border dispute between Belize and Guatemala is currently pending. An oral judgement may be given before the end of this year although a full judgement is expected in 2025. In August this year, however, Belize and Guatemala began talks that should strengthen ties and ease tensions between the two countries.

Belizean Prime Minister John Briceño met with Guatemalan President Bernardo Arévalo regarding trade, economic cooperation, security, joint border management, energy, tourism, migration, the ICJ process and Taiwan. A trade delegation from Belize met with their Guatemalan counterparts and discussed their access to each other's markets. Regarding the border dispute, discussions concerned measures to ease tensions in the Sarstoon River area and commitments to abide by the ICJ judgements.

<https://www.breakingbelizenews.com/2024/08/30/belize-and-guatemala-talk-trade-and-border-situation-in-successful-engagement/>

International human rights and environmental NGOs condemn violence against Garifuna communities in Honduras

In October this year, a number of US-based and international organisations joined Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective in condemning the persistent violence committed against the Garifuna people of Honduras. ENCA sent the same statement separately to the Honduran government. Selected extracts from the public statement are given below.

- We, the undersigned organisations, condemn the recent attacks against Garifuna land defenders across Honduras, where Honduran National Police, private security forces, and individuals linked to organised crime harass, intimidate and profile members of multiple Garifuna communities with the goal of displacing them out of their ancestral territories for the benefit of extractivist and colonial settler projects.
- This violence reached a new climax on October 6th 2024 when Honduran National Police shot at unarmed Garifuna leaders in the Nueva Armenia community, who were peacefully reclaiming their ancestral territory usurped by the Palmas de Atlantida Company, leaving two leaders hospitalized and in critical condition.
- This violence is not new, contained, or an anomaly. It is part of an established history of human rights violations from the state of Honduras against Garifuna self-determination.
- As organisations dedicated to the protection and promotion of human rights and the environment, we raise our concerns about the violations occurring in Nueva Armenia and we remain firm in elevating the struggles of the Garifuna people. From different parts of the world, we reiterate our solidarity with members of OFRANEH, who are not and will not be alone in this fight for their ancestral rights.

For the full text of the letter and a list of the signatory organisations, please see:

<https://www.solidaritycollective.org/post/public-statement-organizations-condemn-violence-against-garifuna-communities-in-honduras>

Costa Rican plans to resume trawling?

As if the resumption of opencast gold mining (see above) didn't raise enough doubts about the authenticity of Costa Rica's claim to be an environmental champion, it was also reported in October this year that President Rodrigo Chaves plans to resume studies to reinstate trawling.

Trawling involves dragging a net behind one or more boats and is non-selective in its target fish. It is as likely to catch sharks, turtles, molluscs, sea urchins and starfish, most of which are of no or little commercial interest. Trawl fishing has been banned in Costa Rica since 2013 by order of the Constitutional Chamber which determined that the practice harms the environment. In 2020, former President Carlos Alvarado vetoed a law to reintroduce trawling.

The Constitutional Court has stipulated that any reinstatement of trawling must reduce bycatch significantly and consider factors such as ecosystem knock-on effects.

Studies have already taken place this year and last, but are now stalled due to a lawsuit by MarViva filed against INCOPECA (Costa Rican Institute of Fishing and Aquaculture) which has failed to release the information collected and methodology used in the studies. (MarViva is an organisation that aims to strengthen institutional and local capacities to optimize the sustainable management of the sea.)

<https://marviva.net/en/by-order-of-the-constitutional-court-incopesca-must-provide-marviva-with-the-requested-information-on-the-trawl-study/>
<https://ticotimes.net/2023/06/14/marviva-takes-legal-action-to-stop-trawl-fishing-in-costa-rica#:~:text=The%20lawsuit%20aims%20to%20p ut,impact%20on%20small%2Dscale%20fisherme n.>



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What will the new US presidency mean for Latin America? More than 200 years since the Monroe Doctrine of the US imposing its power over its ‘backyard’, the people of the region are still engaged in an epic struggle to break free from these chains. The prize is control over their own future and resources, determined by their own efforts, free from external interventions and aggression. It is more important than ever that people across Britain and Europe understand and support this struggle. Join us at Latin America 2025 – and help shape the future work of the solidarity movement here.

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Meeting Dates 2025

February 9th | June 29th | October 19th

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.