

ENCA



Environmental Network *for* Central America

www.enca.org.uk

Issue 93 | March 2025

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in Panama

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**TRUMP SIGNS DEPORTATION
DEALS ACROSS CENTRAL
AMERICA**



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.

Contact Details

Email: enca.info@gmail.com
Website: www.enca.org.uk

Chair: Doug Specht
doug.specht@outlook.com

Secretary: Sheila Amoo-Gottfried
amooosheila@gmail.com

Treasurer: Stephanie Williamson
finance@enca.org.uk

Postal Address
ENCA, c/o Doug Specht
University of Westminster
Harrow Campus
Watford Road, Harrow, HA1 3TP

Editors:
Martin Mowforth
Doug Specht

Cover Photo:
Government of El Salvador, via Flickr

US deportees arriving in Panama and Costa Rica

By ENCA member Martin Mowforth

On 12 February, three US military planes arrived in Panama carrying 299 shackled deportees from Africa, Asia and the Middle East. A few days later a plane carrying 135 US deportees arrived in Costa Rica.

Along with Guatemala, Panama and Costa Rica had agreed with the US Trump Administration, following a visit by the US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, to receive deported migrants who are not citizens of their own country. These recipient countries have agreed to 'repatriate' deported migrants. All three countries, however, are reportedly ill-equipped to cope with such an influx of vulnerable people. A half of those arriving in Costa Rica were children and included babies in arms and two of the women are pregnant.

After five hours in the flight to Costa Rica, they were immediately transferred to buses for an eight-hour journey to reach the Temporary Attention Centre of Migrants (CATEM by its Spanish initials) located in the Puntarenas region in the south of the country. The ombudsman who was present at the arrival and transfer claimed that many of the deportees cried out for help, especially in trying to let their families know their whereabouts, and others were clearly in some form of distress.

In Panama they were stripped of their passports and cellphones and forbidden to speak with lawyers or journalists. They were guarded by police and locked in a hotel in Panama City before being transferred to a temporary camp in the jungle. Almost 100 of the deportees who had not consented to their deportation were driven to a camp described in a *Guardian* article as like "a concentration camp".

Panamanian political scientist Rodrigo Noriega from the University of Panama called this process of deportation "a legal catastrophe" and declared that it "violates international human rights treaties". Costa Rican social researcher Carlos Sandoval explained that the United States is transferring the slow repatriation process to third countries. The US should administer deportation but has sought Central American countries to manage the process. Panama and Costa Rica say that the US assumes the total cost of the operation and that the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) will participate in the process.

Costa Rican president Chaves said that "the United States is treating us very well." Two Costa Rican deputies, however, were sanctioned by Washington for opposing the president's decision to reject Chinese technology. President Chaves also explained that "We're helping our powerful economic brother in the north, because if (the US) imposes a tax on our export zones, we're screwed." – ENCA Newsletter editors suggest that on the Trump instruction to jump, instead of objecting, the Central America governments asked 'how high?'

Sources:

- Mat Youkee, 19.02.25, 'Police search for woman who escaped Panama hotel where US deportees are being held', London, *The Guardian*.
- NACLA Update, February 2025.
- Daniela Muñoz Solano, 21.02.25, 'Derechos humanos de migrantes deportados por Estados Unidos se violaron en Costa Rica, señala Defensoría', San José, *Semanario Universidad*.
- Tico Times, 21.02.25, 'How Central America Turned Into US Deportation Centers', *AFP via Tico Times*.
- Reuters, 19.02.25, 'Costa Rica could hold US deportees for up to six weeks, president says', *Reuters*.

Bukele Signs Prisoner deal with Trump

By ENCA Chair, Doug Specht.



El Salvador's President Nayib Bukele has proposed an unprecedented agreement with the United States, offering to house American criminals and deportees in its notorious mega-prison, Centro de Confinamiento del Terrorismo (CECOT). This deal aims to accommodate U.S. deportees regardless of their nationality, including violent American offenders and gang members.

The agreement extends beyond typical deportation arrangements, as it includes accommodation of violent American offenders, including U.S. citizens and legal residents currently in U.S. custody. It also accepts any illegal immigrant in the United States who is a criminal of any nationality, specifically mentioning gang members. El Salvador will charge the United States a fee for housing these prisoners, which Bukele describes as "relatively low for the U.S. but significant for us, making our entire prison system sustainable".

The proposed agreement faces substantial legal challenges. These include the constitutional impossibility of deporting U.S. citizens, potential violations of the Eighth Amendment's prohibition on cruel and unusual punishment, and possible contraventions of international laws regarding migrant rights and prisoner treatment.

CECOT, opened in 2023 with a capacity of 40,000 inmates, has become a focal point of international scrutiny. The facility's conditions raise significant human rights concerns. Cells are windowless with bare metal bunks and inadequate sanitary facilities. Prisoners are confined to their cells for 23.5 hours daily. The prison's conditions fall short of the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners. Human rights organizations have condemned CECOT, with Amnesty International characterising the situation in El Salvador as a "human rights crisis".

This agreement could have far-reaching effects. It could set a precedent for outsourcing incarceration by transferring U.S. prisoners to foreign countries. The deal might potentially reshape future agreements on asylum and deportation, alter regional power dynamics in Central America, and increase scrutiny of U.S. immigration policies and deportation procedures.

As this unprecedented deal unfolds, its success or failure will likely influence future policy decisions and diplomatic negotiations far beyond El Salvador and the United States. The international community will be closely watching the implementation and consequences of this agreement, as it may set the stage for a new paradigm in global governance of migration and criminal justice.

This is an abridged version of this article which was originally published by The SAIS Review of International Affairs at The Johns Hopkins University. A full version of the article and its sources can be found at saisreview.sais.jhu.edu

The Panama Canal: From Teddy Roosevelt to Donald Trump

By [Workers World](https://www.workers.org/), Editorial, vol 67, no. 1, [workers.org/](https://www.workers.org/) January 2, 2025

The following is an editorial from Workers World, a US organisation. We are grateful to Workers World for their generalised permission for others to reproduce their articles and editorials verbatim.

Just what is motivating President-elect Donald Trump's threats to take over the Panama Canal, buy Greenland and make Canada the 51st U.S. state? Does he think he can impose a new historic era of U.S. domination, or is he simply following in the footsteps of his imperialist predecessors — Republicans and Democrats alike?

During his first term, Trump's "America First" policy was purportedly based on U.S. isolationism. Is his recent demand that the Panama Canal "be returned to us, in full, quickly and without question," an indication his second term has emboldened him to assert U.S. interests abroad more aggressively? And what motivates his false claim that Chinese soldiers occupy the canal?

Panama's President José Raúl Mulino's response to Trump that "every square meter of the Panama Canal and its adjacent area belongs to Panama," indicates he is taking Trump seriously. And so should we.

In Panama, dozens of protesters gathered outside the U.S. Embassy chanting "Trump, animal, leave the canal alone," carrying banners reading "Donald Trump, public enemy of Panama." Saul Mendez, leader of a Panamanian construction union that helped organise the protest is quoted by France's AFP news agency as saying: "Panama is a sovereign territory and the canal here is Panamanian. ... Donald Trump and his imperial delusion cannot claim even a >>

single centimeter of land in Panama.” ([dw.com](https://www.dw.com), Dec. 25)

To dismiss Trump’s demands as frivolous ignores U.S. history and how Washington first came to control the canal. In 1903, U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt financed a revolt to seize territory controlled by the Republic of Colombia in order to create the Republic of Panama. The newly formed “republic” and the U.S. then signed a treaty giving the U.S. control over a 10-mile-wide strip of land to build and operate the canal in exchange for money.

The U.S. ruled the Canal Zone as a settler-colony for more than 60 years, but uprisings by Panamanians in the 1960s and 1970s combined with U.S. military losses in Vietnam led then-President Jimmy Carter to sign a 1977 agreement to return control to Panama.

That legislation, ceding full control over the canal to Panama by 1999, has been unsuccessfully opposed by subsequent U.S. administrations. In December 1989, however, under President George H.W. Bush, the U.S. bombed and invaded Panama and overthrew President Manuel Noriega. Washington claimed this invasion ensured “the integrity of the Panama Canal treaties.”

Competition from planned Nicaragua canal

With the canal under Panama’s full control since 2000, a massive project from 2007 to 2017 greatly expanded the canal’s capacity. Recently, however, severe drought around the canal that lowered water levels has hindered its function. These problems led Panama to set restrictions on traffic and impose higher fees.

The number of ships able to use the canal dropped from 14,080 in 2023 to 9,944 in 2024, a drop of 29%, according to the Panama Canal Authority.

The U.S. is the Panama Canal’s number one user. China is number two. In November, China announced that its government has been negotiating with

Nicaragua’s President Daniel Ortega to construct an alternate waterway to connect the Caribbean Sea to the Pacific Ocean. This challenge from China may well be the motivation behind Trump’s threatened takeover and false claims about Chinese soldiers controlling the Panama Canal.

During his first term, Trump repeatedly promoted the idea of the U.S. buying Greenland from Denmark. The Indigenous population of Greenland would clearly challenge any sale. Greenland’s prime minister, Múte Egede, has said, yet again, that the island “is not for sale.”

But Trump hasn’t stopped. While announcing his pick for ambassador to Denmark, Trump arrogantly tweeted: “For purposes of National Security and Freedom throughout the World, the United States of America feels that the ownership and control of Greenland is an absolute necessity.” (CNN, Dec. 22)

Trump’s new “America First” pronouncements also included a jab at Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. While threatening to increase tariffs on Canadian imports to the U.S., Trump said it would be a “great idea” for Canada to become the 51st U.S. state.

‘America First’ – same old U.S. imperialism

It may be tempting to dismiss Trump’s comments on social media, but in fact he is following in his predecessor’s footsteps. President Joe Biden laid the groundwork for major U.S. military expansion during his presidency through increased war threats against both Russia and China and total support for Israeli aggression and territorial expansion in West Asia, which includes the recent overthrow of the Bashar al-Assad government in Syria. The field is wide open for Trump.

It is critical for the anti-imperialist movement to understand that Trump makes these threats not as an individual but as the head of the world’s major capitalist and military power — made all the more dangerous because its economic system is in serious decline.

Panama: Protest against social security privatisation

The following short piece is taken from the People’s Dispatch, 14th February this year. We are grateful to Peoples Dispatch for their permission for us to reproduce their article here.

Over 480 people were arrested in Panama on February 12 [2025] during a national demonstration called for by trade unions and social movements against the privatization of Social Security.

The law in question, which is being debated by the National Assembly, has been baptized as Law 163, which seeks to reform the current legislation on social security. SUNTRACS, along with other trade unions and social movements call the bill a clear attack on workers from the business and neoliberal groups.

“We will not allow this. We are in our legitimate right to have a promising future, and not the future they want to give us. We are going to resist.” said a SUNTRACS representative.



Families, relatives, and the legal teams of the detainees demand information from police and justice for the arrested workers. Photo: SUNTRACS/X

peoplesdispatch.org

Is Toledo (Belize) becoming a focus for coca as well as cocoa?

Compiled by ENCA member Martin Mowforth

In the last few months of 2024, a number of drug plane landings were reported to have occurred in the district of Toledo in southern Belize. At least three have been noted and more are rumoured to have taken place. Just before Christmas, the remains of a burnt-out jet (a suspected drug plane) were discovered by authorities near the village of Dolores in Toledo District.

The aircraft is believed to have landed on a makeshift air strip in an area of pasture and is likely to have been burnt out by those who landed it in an attempt to destroy evidence. Its location is close to the border with Guatemala and was probably chosen due to the ease of escape. No cargo was recovered from the scene of the burnt craft, but there are few who doubt that the cargo was drugs and that, because of its remoteness, the area is becoming a significant transit point for the traffickers.

In November last year, the Belize Defence Force (BDF) increased its patrols in the Toledo District after the discovery of both a Cessna airplane and an illegal air strip in a remote area near Graham Creek village. The origin of the plane was not known, although it was marked with a Mexican flag. The aircraft entered the country's airspace undetected leading to concerns about whether the air detection systems need to be upgraded.

Interestingly, the *Love Fm* report which recounted the discovery of the plane and the airstrip and which interviewed the BDF Commander in charge of the search and investigation into the finding also reported that "Soldiers had previously found cocoa plantations in the area." With reference to the district of Toledo, this could either be a typographical error which should have read 'coca' or could in fact be a genuine reference to small-scale cocoa farms but which would in this case be an irrelevance to the point of the story.

The district of Toledo is already well known for its small-scale cacao farms most of whose product is grown organically and is prized by numerous chocolate and cocoa producers such as Green & Black's.

Sources

- *Love FM, News Flash & Headlines, 1 November 2024, 'BDF Increases Patrols After Drug Plane Discovery in Toledo.'*
- *Horace Palacio, 22 December 2024, 'Drug plane torched after landing in remote Toledo pasture near Guatemalan border', Breaking Belize News.*
- *Aaron Humes, 24 December 2024, Untitled, Breaking Belize News.*

Mangrove conservation award to MarAlliance in Belize

A grant of over \$100,000 has been made to MarAlliance, an international organisation that promotes the conservation and effective management of marine fisheries in tropical seas. The award, made by the UK government, is for MarAlliance's project entitled 'Mangrove Habitat for Juvenile Fish Recruitment: Building Local Knowledge and Capacity'.

The project aims to bridge scientific gaps and empower local communities with the knowledge and tools needed to protect and restore Belize's mangroves. The project is part of a broader effort to enhance climate resilience and economic sustainability of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) through better ocean management, poverty reduction, improved livelihoods and greater use of nature-based solutions.

MarAlliance runs practical and research programmes of coastal conservation in Mexico, Belize, Honduras, Panama, Cabo Verde and Micronesia.

As well as sequestering carbon and protecting shorelines from erosion, mangroves provide essential nursery habitats for fish and other marine species. Many of the fish that grow to adulthood in the mangroves are of commercial significance, not least to coastal

communities, and the replenishment of these fish stocks are vital to the livelihoods of thousands of Belizeans.

Over the last two decades, the loss of mangroves in Belize and elsewhere has made the economic life of many vulnerable coastal communities more precarious. One of the crucial aspects of the work involved in this project is its participatory approach: through targeted training sessions and hands-on fieldwork, participants will gain skills in monitoring mangrove health and fish recruitment patterns.

UK High Commissioner Christine Rowlands stated, *"By funding this project, we are supporting work that enables local communities and fishers to contribute data needed for the sustainable management of Belize's beautiful mangrove forests and juvenile fishes. This in turn contributes to improved livelihoods of fishers, sustainable fisheries, and builds climate resilience of coastal communities."*

MarAlliance sees the project as strengthening Belize's coastal resilience. In its own words:

"This project doesn't just aim to study mangroves – it aims to drive meaningful change. By equipping fishers and local biologists with the tools to assess and advocate for these habitats, MarAlliance is fostering a new generation of ocean stewards. The initiative's findings will be compiled into a publicly accessible scientific report, offering crucial insights into how mangroves support biodiversity and fisheries productivity."

Ultimately, this work supports a broader vision: a Belize where coastal ecosystems are valued, fisheries are sustainable, and communities are resilient in the face of climate change. With the support of the UK Government's Sustainable Blue Economies Programme Blue Social Challenge Fund (BSCF), this initiative is a step forward in ensuring that Belize's mangroves – and the marine life they support – continue to thrive for generations to come."

- maralliance.org/mangroves-the-secret-guardians-of-belize-fisheries/

Costa Rican coral regeneration project

In December we received details of a coral regeneration project in the Guanacaste region of Costa Rica from an article in the Costa Rican weekly newspaper, Semanario Universidad. The article was written by Adrián Z. Rivero who kindly gave us permission to reproduce the article in English in the ENCA Newsletter. We are grateful to both Adrián and Semanario Universidad for their authorisation and to ENCA member Lucy Goodman for her translation.

By Adrián Z. Rivero, Semanario Universidad, semanariouniversidad.com
20th December 2024

In five years, the project has enabled between 15 and 20 per cent recovery of coral cover.

The Centre for Marine Research and Limnology (CIMAR), part of the University of Costa Rica (UCR), is collaborating on a project called Culebra Reef Garden. It commenced in 2019 and is led by a tourism and real estate organisation situated in Peninsula Papagayo. The initiative aims to restore and conserve marine biodiversity in Guanacaste. In the last 5 years, 110 coral nurseries have been created, housing more than 10,000 fragments of growing coral. This has permitted a 15-20 per cent increase in overall coral coverage and 50 per cent increase in species diversity.

“Coral Reefs are essential for maintaining

sinks and protecting against coastal erosion. This project is key to strengthening our ecosystems and ensuring long-term benefits,” explains Juan José Alvarado, a CIMAR Researcher.

The German Cooperation Agency (GIZ) and the Costa Rican National System of Conservation Areas (SINAC) also partner the initiative and supply over 125 volunteers.

“The project emerged as a response to the worldwide issue of coral death, which has been particularly problematic in Culebra Bay, one of Coast Rica’s most iconic reefs. In the 1990s, reef coverage was 70 per cent in the bay, but by 2019 just 4 per cent remained. Predictions indicated a possible extinction of coral by 2050 and this threat was the impetus for the Culebra Reef Garden project. The objectives are to reverse the trend and ensure a sustainable future,” says a spokesperson from Peninsula Papagayo.

The role of CIMAR in this project is to provide technical support, validate the methods and actions, and provide a critical write-up. The project began with planning meetings and training workshops in restoration techniques, followed by the first installation of coral nurseries at Playa Jícaro. Coral gardening then also took place at Playa Viradores and Playa Blanca. Nurseries have since also been integrated into the Pelonas Islands.

“The coral restoration in Culebra Bay reflects our commitment to the environment and sustainability. Thanks to our volunteers whose efforts are fundamental to the health of our marine ecosystems, and to the wellbeing of the communities who depend on them,” said Susana Vicente, Director of Sustainability at Peninsula Papagayo.

Corals grow approximately 4 cm per year; the project, however, has optimized the development of these organisms in nurseries, eliminating sources of stress and creating more favorable conditions, which has tripled the annual growth rate and facilitated the transplantation of corals, with a survival rate of 83 per cent.

In 2020, this project was recognized by the Costa Rican Chamber for American Commerce (Amcham) and won an award in the environmental category. In 2024, it was highlighted as a replicable initiative during the international summit on Oceans Immersed in Change, held in Costa Rica.

<https://culebrareefgardens.org/>



e A coral frame in place.

Mesoamerican Meeting of Social Movements for Resistance and Alternatives

Jiri Spendingwimmer from the Living Rivers Movement of Costa Rica and the Costa Rican Federation for the Conservation of the Environment (FECON) reports back on his recent participation in this regional gathering.

Jiri's report was written specifically for ENCA and has been translated and edited for the newsletter by ENCA treasurer Stephanie Williamson.

The 2nd Mesoamerican Meeting of Social Movements was hosted from 6-8th November 2024 by civil society organisation the Bees of Acteal in Chenalhó municipality, Chiapas, Mexico, with the participation of more than 40 organisations and 140 people from Panama to Mexico. Costa Rica was represented by the Living Rivers Movement and FECON.

The Acteal community was chosen symbolically, being a victim of violence in 1997, when 45 Tzotzil campesinos were murdered; despite this, the community continues to fight for peace and justice in the Mesoamerican context in which so many human and land rights defenders have been killed recently, including Acteal community leader Simón Pedro (in 2021) and radical priest Father Marcelo Pérez (in 2024).

Mexico's southeast is suffering a wave of organised crime and land-grabbing by exploitative global capitalism in the guise of 'development' with hydroelectric projects, mining, and oil palm production on the coast, which end up keeping local communities poor and marginalised.

During the gathering, popular education methodology was used for workshops on women and land, ancestral knowledge, defence of Mother Earth and community self-determination. Among the goals was finding common interests among individuals, peoples and

organisations, including the continuation of the work of the Mayan Rivers Alliance, a binational organisation on both sides of the Guatemalan-Mexican border for the protection and care of the sister catchments of the Girijalva and Usumacinta rivers. The Alliance works to: prevent further top-down projects such as dams; internationally declare the Usumacinta River in Mexico and Guatemala as a subject of law; allow free and safe transit between the border communities; and stop the use of pesticides.

For the Costa Rican organisations present, it was a valuable experience to learn about the complex current reality in Chiapas, strengthen networking between Mesoamerican organisations in defence of the natural commons, and continue to support the struggle of Indigenous peoples in building their autonomy and self-determination. Participants also called for an end to genocide in Palestine. The Meeting Declaration can be read at: <https://tinyurl.com/4rvcvhc>

In 2025 we will meet again at the IV International Meeting of those Affected by Dams and the Climate Crisis, in the Brazilian Amazon. The 3rd Mesoamerican Meeting of Social Movements in Resistance and Alternatives will take place in the Lenca territory in Honduras.



El Salvador's Bitcoin U-Turn

By ENCA Chair Doug Specht

El Salvador has recently dialled back its ambitious Bitcoin policies. The Central American nation, which made headlines in 2021 by adopting Bitcoin as legal tender, has now implemented significant changes to its cryptocurrency law.

Shopkeepers will no longer be obliged to accept Bitcoin alongside the US dollar, instead, businesses can now choose whether to accept the digital currency. This voluntary approach marks a stark departure from the government's initial enthusiasm for Bitcoin adoption. Bitcoin's status being downgraded, it has lost its designation as a "currency", although retaining its position as legal tender. Moreover, the digital asset can no longer be used to settle tax bills or government debts, further limiting its practical applications.

The reason for this change would appear to be the influence of the IMF. With El Salvador seeking a £1.1 billion loan, the IMF's weight has proven pivotal. The lending giant had long expressed concerns about the fiscal risks associated with El Salvador's crypto-friendly stance and has taken the opportunity to curtail its use. This intervention is unlikely though to have a direct impact on the majority of the population as adoption of bitcoin remains low. A recent survey revealed that 92% of Salvadorans didn't use Bitcoin for transactions in 2024, highlighting the gap between governmental ambition and public uptake.

Despite these changes and challenges President Nayib Bukele's government continues to stockpile the cryptocurrency, recently adding 52 Bitcoin to the national coffers. With a total of 6,055 Bitcoin in reserve, El Salvador hasn't given up on its digital asset strategy entirely.

A full version of this article by ENCA Chair, Doug Specht, can be read in Geographical Magazine: tinyurl.com/3tamdxv6

Bukele's rhetoric returns metal mining to El Salvador

In ENCA 92, we included ENCA member Liz Richmond's account of her March 2024 visit to El Salvador and the organisation MUFRAS-32. Liz's account was effectively a report on a MUFRAS-32 project which the Unicorn Grocery (in Manchester) had funded the year earlier through ENCA. The project that Liz went to review was one of sustainable vegetable production in the Río Viejo basin in the department of Cabañas, where the mining company Pacific Rim / Oceana Gold still maintained an interest in mineral resources despite the 2014 national ban on such activity.

Liz's specific contacts in the group were and are Zenayda Serrano and Hector Berrios who have featured in ENCA Newsletters occasionally since 2010 when they were essential members of the successful campaign against metal mining in El Salvador. For their trouble as being essential members of the campaign against metal mining, they also suffered personally through the threats that they received to their lives. Now that there is talk of President Bukele reviving metal mining in the country, they have once again started to receive threats because of their activism against such mining. Mary Lawlor, the UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights Defenders has taken to social media to share her concern about the situation they currently face (see page 9).

Below that we include a recent relevant article by Jessica García from the online version of the Salvadoran daily *El Diario de Hoy*, to whom we are grateful for their permission to use their article. The article was translated for ENCA by ENCA member Jill Powis.

Bukele regurgitates mining company propaganda

By Jessica García | Jan 13, 2025

Luis Parada, a member of the legal team that successfully defended the Salvadoran state against a mining company's million-dollar lawsuit, argued that there were no large concentrations of gold in the country, a claim the government is making to justify the revival of metal mining.

Parada explained on the radio programme 'La Tribu' that studies by mining companies in El Salvador had established

that gold was present at only low levels. "In the areas where there is gold - because El Salvador doesn't have the largest gold deposits in the world, that's a big lie - Pacific Rim documents themselves show that the highest concentration they could find was nine grams of gold for each tonne of rock."

The lawyer defended the Salvadoran state in litigation with the Canadian mining company Oceana Gold, the now owner of Pacific Rim, which sued the country for denying it mining permits in the mid-2000s. The company said that in 2002 it received exploration permits to search for gold, but these were later revoked by the state.

Parada complained that the Salvadoran government's statement has led many people to believe that gold would be found even in river courses, but in fact, according to expert witnesses and documents used in the defense cases, it consists of a

few 'microscopic specks' within the rocks.

The lawyer said the current government's arguments about green mining and non-polluting mining was 'a carbon copy' of the arguments that Pacific Rim repeatedly made to officials at the time.

'I witnessed how the communities of El Salvador in Chalatenango and Cabañas had dedicated 12 years to getting mining banned and now this man [President Nayib Bukele] has come to tear it all down and condemn El Salvador to decades of environmental pollution'.

Before his involvement in the arbitration case, Luis Parada did not have an opinion on whether or not there should be mining in El Salvador - he just knew that he had to defend the Salvadoran state. However, he came to understand the great risk it presented for health and the environment.

"After hearing all the company's lies and seeing the studies, the specific case of El Salvador was examined and it was concluded that metal mining should not take place, given the specific conditions of El Salvador, such as its limited land area, its population density, its dependence on the Lempa River and the failure to identify areas where gold was present," Parada said.



San Isidro is one of the municipalities where mining exploration was authorised a few years ago, and it was also one of those that put up most resistance to the arrival of the mining companies. Despite their fear, its inhabitants still hope to organise in defence of their natural resources. [Photo EDH / Miguel Lemus].

The arbitration case

Parada said that after the armed conflict ended [1992] and El Salvador needed to encourage foreign investment, mining was one of the sectors it sought to promote. In 1995, a mining law was passed by the Legislative Assembly, which came into force in 1996. Based on that, Commerce Group applied for the concession 'without undergoing any scrutiny'. "You see the orange colour of that river, that's the result of decades of mining," Parada declared.

The companies also left products lying around leaking toxic chemicals. After an inspection, the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources withdrew their environmental permit. Without a permit they could not have the concession which was therefore revoked by the Ministry of Economy.

It was then that two lawsuits were filed against El Salvador in domestic courts and, at the same time, the country was reported to the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID).

"It was a big case from the start, through until we had a favourable ruling for the Salvadoran state. There were teams of 12 lawyers from major firms on both sides. There were also about ten experts because it was a very complex case due to all the lies and erroneous arguments. It was long, complicated and costly and the two sides spent almost \$13 million on lawyers and experts," Parada recalled.

He explained that there were experts on the environmental and engineering aspects of mining, as well as on mining laws all over the world, and on damages.

"They [the damages experts] alone charged a million dollars for their services, but they were the best in the world and we were up against high calibre experts," said Parada.

The former mining law, repealed when mining was banned in 2017, stipulated that the company had a maximum of eight years to explore for minerals, after which it could apply for a concession if it met the

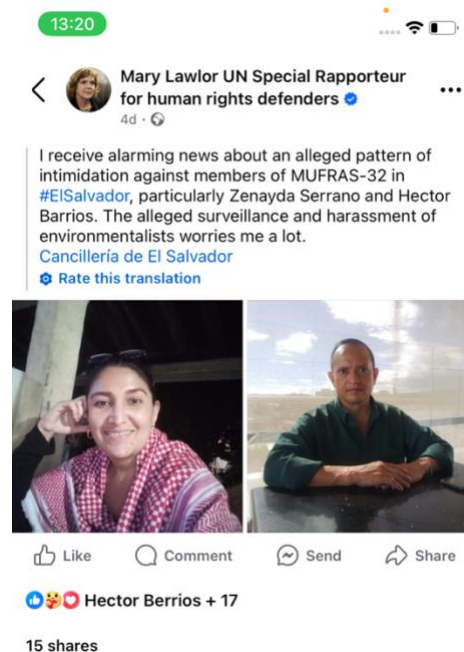
requirements and demonstrated that it had found minerals in large quantities.

"Pacific Rim applied for the concession at the end of 2004, even though it had failed to meet three of the five requirements and was not going to be able to meet them. It spent 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008 trying to convince the Ministry of Economy to interpret these requirements differently so they could meet them", Parada told the radio programme.

He also said that representatives from Pacific Rim tried, through certain members of parliament, to introduce a new mining law that would do away with or change the requirements so that the company could comply with them.

"Everything Bukele is saying now is almost a carbon copy of Pacific Rim's propaganda back then; terms such as 'green mining', 'responsible mining'. They also wanted the country to approve a law written by themselves; it was a company that played dirty", he said.

In addition, the General Mining Law passed on 23 December 2024 only prohibits the use of mercury and not other lethal chemicals used in gold mining, such as cyanide.



ENCA Emergency Appeal to Support Hector Berrios and Family

In late February 2025, Hector Berrios, a well-known human rights defender and environmental activist in El Salvador, reached out to ENCA with a desperate plea. Berrios and his family were seeking to flee the country due to escalating threats and persecution. The political climate in El Salvador had become increasingly hostile towards those who speak out against environmental degradation and human rights abuses.

The situation for activists in El Salvador has deteriorated rapidly; human rights organisations like CRISTOSAL and the Center for Exchange and Solidarity (CIS) have been forced to reduce operations due to funding cuts. The Human Rights Ombudsman's office has reduced its support for cases like Berrios'. Recent arrests and illegal raids targeting leaders of human rights organisations have heightened fears among activists.

Upon receiving Berrios' request, ENCA launched an urgent appeal to their network of supporters. In a remarkable display of solidarity, our supporters responded swiftly to the appeal. Within just three days, we managed to raise £1,700 to assist Hector Berrios and his family in their urgent relocation to another country.

The Berrios case highlights a wider issue facing environmental and human rights defenders across Central America. As governments in the region increasingly crack down on dissent, activists find themselves at greater risk, often forced to make the difficult decision to flee their homes and continue their work from exile.

The Berrios family are now in transit out of El Salvador. As the situation continues to evolve, we will provide updates. ENCA remains committed to standing with activists like Hector Berrios, ensuring that their voices are not silenced, and their crucial work can continue in the face of adversity.

Canadian businessmen threaten OFRANEH and Garífuna communities

At the end of December, ENCA was alerted by the US/Canadian NGO Rights Action to threats of eviction to the Garífuna community in northern Honduras. ENCA was too late to join the sign-on letter sent by Rights Action and numerous other mostly North American organisations; but we sent the following letter (based on the Rights Action letter) to the Canadian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Canadian Consulate in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, and the Canadian Ambassador for Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Honduras.

Ms. Mélanie Joly
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Global Affairs Canada

10th January 2025

Dear Minister Mélanie Joly,

I write on behalf of ENCA, the Environmental Network for Central America, a small UK-based organisation that has linked with a number of Garífuna communities and the Black Fraternal Organisation of Honduras (OFRANEH) over the previous three decades. Our links have involved support for communities involved in land conflicts, human rights and Indigenous issues and suffering violations of their rights. We write to your office to express our extreme concern that Canadian Randy Jorgensen is preparing an imminent and violent confrontation in Campo del Mar in Trujillo Bay in order to evict the Garífuna community from its ancestral lands.

Since at least 2008, the disgraced Canadian businessman, Randy Jorgensen, alias the Canadian Porn King¹, and other foreigners, have been occupying and irregularly obtaining land belonging to the Garífuna communities in the region. This includes tracts of land in both the municipalities of Trujillo and Santa Fe for alleged gated community projects such as Coroz Alta sold in lots to Canadians and US citizens, and also for Jorgensen's personal residence known as Campo del Mar.

In April 2024, the Court of First Instance for the Deprivation of Ownership of Assets of Illicit Origin with National Jurisdiction (Juzgado de Letras de Privación de Dominio de Bienes de Origen Ilícito con Jurisdicción Nacional) ordered the seizure of five projects in the possession of three

Canadians, Randy Jorgensen, Darren Wade Weeks, and Malik Zachariah including Campo del Mar. The legal file makes reference to money laundering and fraud, including an organised criminal structure that Randy Jorgensen and his associates formed, yet no legal charges have been presented against them. Also, OFRANEH recently denounced the recovery of 3,511 archaeological heritage pieces found inside Jorgensen's house without the authorization of the State, a finding that requires at a minimum, a criminal investigation.

We ask, particularly in light of the concerning news that Jorgensen is planning a violent eviction: Why has the Public Prosecutor's Office not criminally prosecuted against and arrested Jorgensen and his associates? Why has the land seized by OABI in Trujillo Bay not been returned to the Garífuna people, its rightful owners? The lack of action by the state against Jorgensen is putting the Garífuna communities at heightened risk of violence.

OFRANEH and the Garífuna communities have made clear that the Honduran state response to the land conflict in Trujillo Bay has to date targeted the Garífuna communities instead of the real criminals provoking conflict in the region. In 2012, Jorgensen was accused of usurpation of land inside the Campa Vista gated community project. Despite overwhelming evidence of his land theft and a warrant for his arrest, he was never arrested by police and judicial proceedings failed to hold him accountable and the stolen land never returned to the Garífuna communities. On the contrary, Garífuna community members in Trujillo Bay have faced arrest warrants, defamation campaigns, legal charges, and have been

detained by the police on several occasions for illegal land possession. Given the imminent threat of violence against the Garífuna communities in Trujillo Bay and OFRANEH, we ask the state to:

1. Protect the physical integrity and lives of the Garífuna community members protecting the Campo del Mar property in Trujillo Bay, which was declared by the Garífuna people as the Centre of Ancestral Knowledge, Hachari Wayunagu. This should be implemented by contacting OFRANEH and requesting how best to provide this protection.
2. Take action based on the evidence the state has in its possession since at least 2012, to criminally charge Jorgensen for irregularly obtaining Garífuna ancestral land.
3. Communicate to the Canadian Embassy the serious charges and investigation underway against Jorgensen and his two Canadian associates, Darren Wade Weeks and Malik Zachariah and request that the Canadian government proceed against these Canadians and their criminal structure operating in Canada.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Martin Mowforth

On behalf of the Environmental Network for Central America

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1. Jorgensen has gained the title 'the Canadian Porn King' as he made his fortune in the adult pornography business. He is now building a booming tourism industry aimed at Canadian retirees in Honduras on land that Garífuna people say is rightfully theirs.

The violence suffered by OFRANEH, as described in the letter above, occurs in the northern coastal region of Honduras in which is also found the Bajo Aguán valley, another area where extreme violence endured by campesino and Indigenous communities has been a regular feature of life and death. Over the last three decades, if not longer, many agricultural communities and cooperatives have been remarkably steadfast in their efforts to withstand the violent pressure tactics used by agribusiness and other transnationals to take over their land for plantation monocultures of particularly African palm oil.

In February this year, ENCA received a detailed update from a collection of organisations and communities who make up the Calan Institute in the Bajo Aguán. We are only able to print here the first short section of their update, but it serves to illustrate the extremes of violence that communities face when the powerful try to take over the land of others and when impunity reigns.

Criminal Groups Attack and Displace Campesino Cooperatives in the Bajo Aguán, Honduras

The campesino cooperatives that make up the Agrarian Platform and the Coordinator of Popular Organisations of the Aguán (COPA in Spanish) have suffered extreme violence over the last few months. These attacks intensified during the month of January, taking the lives of three campesino leaders.

The violence has been concentrated in the Camarones, Tranvío, and El Chile Cooperatives, which have experienced multiple attacks, defamation campaigns, and forced displacements by criminal groups. The Brisas del Aguan and Gregorio

CITIES IN THE BAJO AGUÁN REGION, HONDURAS



Chávez Cooperative also suffered three assassinations this month. The Camarones Cooperative has been completely displaced, while the El Chile Cooperative was displaced from part of their farm. Despite this high level of violence, these campesino families remain steadfast in their struggle for land and life. Under heavy gunfire from AK-47s and AR-15s, the campesinos defended their lands, screaming “¡NO RETROCEDAN!” (DON’T BACK DOWN!)

The Honduran government has not taken sufficient measures to prevent, investigate, and sanction the violence against campesino cooperatives. Numerous Honduran social movements, international organisations, and human rights bodies, like the [Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) (OHCHR), have denounced the attacks and the lack of response by authorities. On February 1st, over 70 Honduran organisations declared a [State of Emergency](#) in the Bajo Aguán, after a month full of violence.

We stand in solidarity with the campesino families of the Bajo Aguán. We strongly condemn the extreme violence against cooperatives, the lack of a forceful government response, and the misinformation spread through social media and certain news outlets.

Guatemala: Over 50 dead in bus crash

On 10th February this year, a bus plunged off a bridge on the outskirts of Guatemala City killing over 50 people and injuring many others. A vehicle collision on the bridge caused the bus to swerve off the bridge in one of Guatemala’s worst road disasters in recent times.

The bus was densely packed and was travelling from San Agustín Acasaguastlán in the department of El Progreso to the capital Guatemala City. El Progreso is a department of the country to the north-east of the capital. The bus landed upside down and finished up half submerged in a river that is heavily contaminated with sewage.

Guatemalan President Bernardo Arévalo declared a day of national mourning and his government initiated an investigation into the causes of the crash.

Belize also has its transport disasters

In December 2024, a triple vehicle accident in Guatemala’s neighbour Belize claimed the lives of ten people and injured others.

2024 saw over 100 road accident fatalities in Belize at a rate of over 22 per 100,000 population. At a global level, this is very high and compares, for instance, with a rate of 3.2 per 100,000 people in the UK. Also worrying was the very high rate of motorcyclist deaths (over 50 in 2024) in these figures for Belize.

A wide range of factors have been identified as responsible for such a high accident rate including alcohol consumption, low usage of protective gear such as helmets, poor road conditions (such as the multiplicity of potholes), low enforcement of road traffic laws and poor equipment for the police.

Hunger haunts Honduras

In February this year, a Proceso Digital Special Report by Lilian Bonilla warned of increasing hunger in Honduras.

Recent reports estimate that over 225,000 people currently face serious (Phase 4) food insecurity. Phase 4 food insecurity is defined as having gaps in the supply of basic foodstuffs reflecting high levels of under-nutrition and even death. People may eat only once or twice a day with small portions.

Although food insecurity is a global feature, in countries like Honduras the situation is critical due to a range of economic, social and environmental factors. Additionally, the return of a large number of Hondurans deported from the United States will only aggravate this situation.

Interviewed by Proceso Digital, the Coordinator of Food Security and Nutrition Observatory (OBSAN), María Luisa García, stated that currently up to 1.9 million Hondurans suffer a degree of food insecurity at Phase 4 and below, but García warned that this could increase to 2.2 million by the month of June.

Of the 1.9 million Hondurans facing food insecurity, 1.6 million are in Phase 3 (crisis), 174,000 are in Phase 4 (emergency) which

forces them to reduce the number of meals they consume each day. (Figures come from the most recent OBSAN report on the Integrated Classification of Food Security in Phases for Honduras in 2024.)

The statistics represent an urgent call to politicians, both Honduran and international, and public authorities to take effective measures to prevent the deterioration of food insecurity in Honduras.

A range of factors are responsible for the deterioration. For instance, Storm Sara in 2024 affected the production of basic grains, vegetables, fruit and milk and meat products. Emigration has also been a major problem as the loss of family members reduces the household income and purchasing power. Climate change is also considered an important factor as the most affected region of the country is known as the Dry Corridor – see photo.

A crucial factor, however, is the state of the economy in which levels of unemployment, under-employment and casual employment are very high. A monthly income of 10,000 – 12,000 lempiras (around \$400 [USD]) is required to cover what is known as the ‘Basic Basket’ of goods for family feed and survival, but the majority of Hondurans receive less than this in their pay packets.



The food crisis impacts the Dry Corridor of Honduras most strongly. Source: Lilian Bonilla, Proceso Digital, 23 February 2025, ‘El hambre amenaza a 2.2 millones de Hondureños para junio de 2025’, Tegucigalpa, <https://proceso.hn>

enca.org.uk

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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.