

ENCA



Environmental Network *for* Central America

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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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Costa Rican contradictions

ENCA member **Martin Mowforth** summarises below a few of the reports we have received about Costa Rican development policies since the last ENCA Newsletter.

UN Ocean Conference and oil exploration

The third United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC3) was held in Nice, France, from 9th June to 13th June this year and was co-hosted by France and Costa Rica. Its aim was to accelerate action and mobilize all actors to conserve and sustainably use the ocean in line with Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.

It is perhaps more than ironic that a little before the global conference, President Chaves had expressed a keenness to re-start oil exploration in Costa Rican waters. He argues that: “we’re not exploiting reserves but assessing them with non-invasive methods like electromagnetism. Let’s know what’s behind the door before locking it.”

Chaves insists that his approach links development and conservation. On the

other hand, Laura Méndez of the Costa Rican Federation for the Conservation of Nature (FECON) says that “Costa Rica cannot afford to flirt with oil.” Other environmental and activist organisations such as Fundación MarViva also oppose the move, aware that exploitation leads into exploitation.

Elsewhere Chaves has championed environmental causes such as the High Seas Treaty (adopted by the UN in 2023). His government has developed a significant collaborative effort with the French Development Agency and the international NGO Conservation International in launching the Blue Carbon Initiative whose purpose is to protect coastal ecosystems.

At the same time, however, fishermen in the Gulf of Nicoya are concerned about a growing crisis caused by illegal fishing, over-exploitation of fish stocks and institutional indifference, all of which are reported to be pushing fish stocks to



UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres with Costa Rican President Rodrigo Chaves and French President Emmanuel Macron. (Photo: courtesy of the United Nations/Evan Schneider)

the limit. The Gulf of Nicoya directly supports about 1,400 fishers and their families. There is currently a three-month ban on fishing from May to July in order to let fish stocks recover, but local fishers say that the ban is widely ignored and “there’s no enforcement from the authorities, so the exploitation continues,” said one licensed fisherman. During the ban, the licensed fishers receive a subsidy of about \$230 (USD), but delays in payment of the subsidy have increased frustration and anger.

Open-cast mining

In 2010 Costa Rica implemented a ban on open cast metal mining and the ban has held for the last 15 years. Now the government is pushing a bill that could open up the whole of the Cutris district of San Carlos in the north of the country to open-pit gold mining. As introduced by President Chaves, the bill would allow mining concessions through auctions with no cap on the number of permits.

The risks involved in open cast mining include river pollution, landscape destruction, forests destroyed and leakage from the large tailings ponds required for the processing of the metal. The tailings ponds are the biggest headache for environmentalists and neighbouring citizens as these are laced with cyanide and other heavy metals used in the separation of gold from the ore. As has been shown by so many other examples around the region, if any leakage occurs, however small, it will likely affect principally water supplies (rivers and aquifers) but also the surrounding soil and air.

Biologist Jorge Lobo suggests that the bill would threaten the country’s biodiversity, sovereignty and environmental legacy. “It could unleash a flood of mining requests, undoing decades of protections,” he said. In March, a regular contact of ENCA, Jiri Spendlingwimmer of FECON (The Costa Rican Federation for the Conservation of Nature) allayed some of our fears in suggesting that the bill has little chance of progress in Congress. In June, however, environmentalists are having to hone their arguments against such a potentially devastating proposal.

Escazú Agreement

The Escazú Agreement is a regional treaty on access to environmental data, public participation in environmental decision-making, and access to justice in environmental matters in Latin America and the Caribbean. It has two other significant provisions: the protection of environmental defenders and a general right to a healthy environment for everyone.

It is significant for four particular reasons:

- It is the first environmental treaty in Latin America and the Caribbean to address access rights and to promote the protection of environmental defenders.
- It is based in a human rights framework.
- It promotes collaboration and capacity building among countries of the region.
- It provides a tool for addressing climate change.

The Agreement came into force in April 2021. It was adopted in Escazú, Costa Rica in March 2018, but shortly before the UN Ocean Conference this year, President Chaves rejected the treaty as redundant, claiming that Costa Rica’s laws already cover its provisions and that it was more like demagoguery rather than action.

Proponents of the Agreement, however, argued that Escazú would strengthen protections for environmental defenders who face increasing threats in the region. It would be a mistake to believe that these threats do not exist in Costa Rica, a country with an international reputation for peace-making due to the 1949 abolition of its armed forces. First, that reputation should by now have disappeared thanks to the militarising influence of the USA during the 1980s and 1990s. And second, in 2020, one of ENCA’s partner organisations in Costa Rica – the Costa Rican Federation for the Conservation of Nature (FECON) – published a lengthy report on the criminalisation of the ecologist movement in Costa Rica – see references. And finally, in 2022, the Legislative Assembly blocked the government’s signing of the Escazú

Agreement and Chaves’ recent comments are in line with the Assembly’s decision. It will remain, then, as one of the countries which has failed to ratify the treaty.

Foreign ownership of tourism and properties in southern Costa Rica

As all our readers will already know, of all the countries in Central America, Costa Rica is globally renowned for its tourism offerings, and especially for its so-called ecotourism, its nature-based tourism. Despite the incursion of numerous large-scale, transnational resort condominiums, its tourism reputation has been built on its provision of small-scale, high quality, personalised tourism experiences.

One of the supposed benefits of this kind of tourism development is that it involves local people in different aspects of the industry and in reaping the benefits of the activity. In such circumstances, it is not intended that ownership of the activity, the industry, its infrastructure and its property should be turned over to wealthy individuals or companies from the globalised North. Various places in the Osa Peninsula of Costa Rica, however, are slipping into foreign ownership.

In the June 12th radio programme ‘Voices and Politics’ of Radio University of Costa Rica, Óscar Leiva Alpizar presented his research into the touristification of Ojochal de Osa. Ojochal is located on the Pacific coast of Costa Rica close to the Paso la Danta Biological Corridor. Historically Ojochal was a rural and agricultural town, but since the 1990s it has been transformed into a high value tourism and luxury residential area through foreign investment, large-scale sale of land and the development of real estate projects.

The old livestock farms have been replaced by exclusive residences overlooking the sea. Many local families have been displaced or have been forced to integrate as labour into the new economic model.

Between 1990 and 2024, over 3,000 real estate transactions were recorded; 68 per cent of these relate to properties over \$250,000 (USD) which has increased land values and made access to land and housing difficult for traditional inhabitants.

Alpizar's research also points to the ambivalence of the State which is often absent in regulation and planning. "Costa Rica now needs specific legislation to manage the tourism boom in a fair and sustainable way, safeguarding both biodiversity and the rights of local communities," said Alpizar.

It is interesting to note that on 8th July this year, the weekly newspaper ran a headline ('UNED expert warns: insecurity is already compromising tourism and may affect foreign investment') that was clear in its assumption that foreign investment is a good thing. Not necessarily always so.

Costa Rica and Pesticides

In 2019 Costa Rica was the most intensive user of pesticides in Latin America (Alvarado, 2019). Moreover, statistics from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) placed Costa Rica in the top four countries in the world for pesticide use per area of cropland in 2018 (Mowforth, 2025). Of the ten most widely used pesticides in the country, eight are Highly Hazardous Pesticides (HHPs) according to a technical report by the Research Institute of Toxic Substances of the National University (UNA).

A recent item by the uncritical Tico Times (a weekly English language online newssheet in Costa Rica) suggests that the government is moving to ban HHPs which have already been banned in 70 per cent of OECD member countries. The new law would mandate: a biannual update of the national list of banned pesticides; biannual risk assessments; consideration of proven evidence of harm to health or the environment; and promotion of viable alternatives that are less harmful. Training, technical assistance and extension programmes would also be strengthened.

Currently these toxic pesticides are in widespread use throughout Costa Rica, although their prevalence goes largely unnoticed by the more than two million foreign visitors every year. Whether the proposed bill ever becomes law and whether and how it would become effective even if it does become law is still uncertain. The contrast between the country's oh-so-clean image and its intensive use of highly toxic pesticides is likely to remain one of Costa Rica's contradictions.

The above are just a few of the contradictions between Costa Rica's remarkably positive international public image and the reality of its sometimes damaging social and environmental policies.

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Costa Rica commemorates Earth Day amidst an unpunished ecocide

Letter to ENCA

Cristoph Burkard has been a longtime resident of Longo Maï in southern Costa Rica and a longtime friend of ENCA. On Earth Day this year, he wrote to ENCA to draw attention to the international image of Costa Rica as a paragon of environmental virtue and the reality of its high levels of pollution and anti-environment policies affecting the country's land, water and atmosphere. As he suggests elsewhere, it is important "to correct so many illusions about our wonderful little country".

22nd April 2025

While internationally the country sells a false face, within the territory it promotes a reform to legalise water contaminated with pesticides. Yes, you read it correctly: the government seeks to allow agrochemicals in the water that we drink.

To this, we can add the destruction of mangroves, wetlands, forests and coastal zones by projects which violate environmental laws with total impunity. Illegal deforestation, urban spread and ghost fishing are devastating marine ecosystems.

Costa Rica is the fifth highest exporting country of shark fins. Tons of sharks are brutally de-finned each year with the full knowledge and permission of the State. What type of environmental leadership allows that?

And to complete the picture, the government has eliminated the Act that facilitated the [United Nations] Sustainable Development Goals, just one month before jointly organising the 2025 Ocean Summit. What legitimacy is left?

Because without clean water, without wildlife, without healthy oceans, there is no future.

Today, in commemoration of Earth Day, we pay homage to those brave people who, day after day, defend nature and their land.

The Latin American Biblical University
Embassy of the Plurinational State of Bolivia in Costa Rica
FECON (Costa Rican Federation for the Conservation of Nature)
The Green Bloc
CoecoCeiba Friends of the Earth Costa Rica
University of Costa Rica

Through the Socio-Environmental Kiosks Programme, all the above have united to draw attention to environmental defenders, activists, community organisations and Indigenous communities in resistance and to pay homage to environmental defenders on Earth Day, 22 April, 2025.

Cristoph Burkard

Court Ruling Restores Protections in Costa Rica's Gandoca-Manzanillo Wildlife Refuge

This week, Costa Rica's Constitutional Court issued a landmark decision protecting the Gandoca-Manzanillo Mixed Wildlife Refuge on the Caribbean coast. The ruling annuls a 2023 management plan that had permitted new building, logging, and agricultural expansion in areas previously designated as strictly protected forest and wetlands.

The 2023 plan, designed to clarify land use policies, drew immediate concern from environmentalists and local residents. Critics argued it threatened vital habitats, violated Costa Rica's own conservation laws, and disregarded international treaties such as the Ramsar Convention, which shields crucial wetland ecosystems.

The Court's verdict found the plan unconstitutional on several grounds:

- It failed to uphold Costa Ricans' constitutional right to a healthy environment.
- It disregarded global commitments protecting wetlands and forests.

- It lacked proper public consultation, especially with local and Indigenous communities.

As a result, more than 20 hectares of forest and 165 hectares of wetlands are now once again under strict protection, halting new construction and development permits in these areas. Authorities must draft a new management plan within a year, one that meets both domestic legal requirements and international conservation standards.

The Gandoca-Manzanillo refuge is recognized internationally for its biodiversity and vital wetland habitats. Conservationists heralded the ruling as a decisive step in protecting Costa Rica's natural heritage and reinforcing its status as a global environmental leader.

Looking ahead, the challenge will be to draft a management plan that fairly balances conservation, local livelihoods, and responsible development, using science-based policies and inclusive public participation to ensure lasting stewardship of one of Costa Rica's environmental jewels.

Olancho: three thousand dead in a decade of violence without end

For: **Proceso Digital Especial**

(<https://proceso.hn>)

28th February 2025

In the first fifteen years of this century, ENCA included numerous articles and reports about illegal logging within Olancho and the violence that this activity had caused for many people in the region, and especially for the Movimiento Ambiental de Olancho (MAO, Olancho Environmental Movement) and its leader Padre Andrés Tamayo. In February this year, the Honduran online newsheet Proceso Digital, spurred by the most recent and distressing homicide figures for the department of Olancho, produced an alarming summary of violence within the department over the previous ten years.

We are grateful to Jorja Oliver for her translation of the report. For this newsletter, her translation has been summarised by ENCA member Martin Mowforth, but the full translation will soon be found on The Violence of Development website (www.theviolenceofdevelopment.com) along with the Spanish original

Tegucigalpa- Things aren't going well for the Olanchanos; a maelstrom of violence marked the biggest department of Honduras from the first day of 2025, with the first femicide of the year; an instance that occurred in Catacamas, the bastion of the presidential family, the Zelaya Castro.

- In 2024, there wasn't a single Olanchano municipality that didn't register any homicides.
- The official figures register 965 violent deaths in the Olancho department in the 3 years and 54 days of the administration of President Xiomara Castro.



Angie Nicolle Rivera Galeano, a young mother of barely 20 years old, lost her life at the hands of the person whom she thought she'd spend the rest of her life with, her partner. The man attacked her during the night and fled the scene of the crime with her baby.

The young woman became the first violent death to be registered in Olancho in 2025, generating repudiation from the Catacamenses. But this is not the only municipality where blood has been spilt by the Olanchanos. By the 23rd of February, there were 37 registered homicides in Olancho, only surpassed by the 42 registered in the department of Francisco Morazán, although the population of the latter is bigger.

These figures remain lower than those registered in 2024, when on the same date, according to the public registers of the national police published through the Police Online Statistical System (SEPOL), 38 people died of violent causes, just one more than this year.

In 2025, four of the twenty most violent municipalities in the country are in Olancho: Catacamas, 14 deaths, the third most violent municipality in Honduras, surpassed only by Tegucigalpa DC with 36, and San Pedro Sula with 18, according to data from SEPOL. The violence in the municipality of Catacamas led the Argentine newspaper INFOBAE to dedicate a report titled 'What's going on in Catacamas? The new kilometre zero for narcotics trafficking and death in Honduras.'

A decade of blood

In 2024, the department of Olancho reported 264 violent deaths ... In 2013, the figures showed 54 homicides. Ten years ago in 2015, there were 39.

In the 3 years and 54 days (to 23rd February 2025) of the LIBRE party's administration, the cradle of the presidential couple, things aren't going well for the Olanchanos, who have cried for 965 dead during that time. 2022, the first year of Xiomara Castro's >>

governance was the deadliest in Olancho in the last 11 years and 54 days – SEPOL registered 355 violent deaths that year. In comparison to the first 3 years and 54 days of the administration of the first period of Juan Orlando Hernández, the Olanchanos cried for 644 loved ones, that is to say 321 people less than the administration of Xiomara Castro, in the same period. *[ENCA Ed. This is NOT a plea to return to the days of Juan Orlando Hernández's presidency which was fuelled by drug trafficking, violence and organised crime.]*

Violent February

The chain of attacks that occurred on the 14th and 15th of February, that left at least seven dead and at least a dozen throughout Honduras, reminded the Catacamenses of the time of the peak of drug trafficking, in 2007 and 2013, when the planes circulated daily, the massacres had become daily events and the crossfire didn't respect time or place.

On the night of the 14th of February, a gunman entered a bar and started shooting, killing 4 people there. This *modus operandi* was repeated in three other canteens and a barbers, all in less than 24 hours.

The mayor Marco Ramiro Lobo said that in Catacamas “we are already accustomed to just picking up bodies, taking them to the morgue and delivering them to their families.” The police deployment continues in the city after the recent incidents, where five

attacks occurring in less than 24 hours scared the population; locking them in their houses and leaving the streets totally deserted.

Generalised violence in the department

The liberal deputy Samuel García García said that the violence that shakes the municipality of Catacamas also exists in the whole department of Olancho and pointed out that it is linked to the movement of drugs. “There's lots of crime; people turn up dead in any place, on paths, on roads, machine-gunned in a bullet-riddled car. What is going on is lamentable, the violence is growing more each day in the department,” he said, stressing that the police effort has remained limited. García said that in Olancho there had never been a wave of crime this strong in less than 24 hours, and “really the origin of all these situations - we all know that Olancho has become a place for drug trafficking, as well as organised crime”.

Deaths yes, drug decommissioning no

Despite the fact that, as deputy García points out, “whatever it says in the vox populi, what we are hearing are territorial fights associated with drugs.” According to Proceso Digital in 2024, a record year for the decommissioning of drugs, no strong operations happened in Olancho.

The minister of security, Gustavo Sánchez, is a loyal defender of the state of exception which he judges to have led to the decommissioning of some 15 thousand firearms and the confiscation of more than 26 tonnes of cocaine. The official data confirms that 2024 was a record year for the confiscation of cocaine; even in the times when the most prolific drug cartels flourished, no more than 25 tonnes of cocaine had ever been confiscated.

In 2012, the country became the most violent in the world with a rate of 86 homicides per every 100 thousand inhabitants. According to the National Observatory of Violence from January to December of 2012, only the department of Olancho exceeded this rate, reaching a rate of 92.5 pccmh¹ with 491 homicides.

Although the figures of current homicides differ from those registered in the strongest time of drug trafficking in the department with 37 deaths this year, more than 950 in what is the administration of Xiomara Castro and close to three thousand in the last decade, the truth is that things aren't going well for the Olanchanos.

Stop Press: 11th July report from Proceso Digital documents the third massacre in Honduras in only eight days, the last one in Juticalpa, Olancho department.

¹ Pccmh – personas por cada cien mil habitantes; persons for every 100,000 inhabitants.



Honduran Police ‘Disappear’ Max Gil Castillo

In May, the Honduras Solidarity Network (HSN) posted news from the Calan Institute for Transterritorial Justice (CATRA) about the disappearance of Max Gil Castillo in Honduras.

Max is a Garífuna youth from the Punta Piedra community in northern Honduras. He is the brother of Tomás Castillo, president of the Punta Piedra Community Council, and a well-known leader in the struggle for the restitution of the ancestral land title of Punta Piedra.

One month ago, on Saturday, April 12, 2025, Max Gil Castillo, a Garífuna youth from the Punta Piedra Community, was disappeared by people who identified themselves as police officers.

Formal complaints and a habeas corpus were filed before Honduran courts to begin the search process. Yet, to date, Max’s whereabouts remain unknown. Rather than investigate his forced disappearance, the Investigative Police Unit (DPI, in Spanish) have used racist discourse to criminalize Max.

The following gives excerpts from the HSN and CATRA missives about the kidnapping by police and the campaign to find Max.

From the Honduras Solidarity Network:

HSN is supporting OFRANEH and the Garífuna communities, in the face of continuing violence and threats, by participating in this action from HSN member the Calan Institute for Transterritorial Justice Organizations (CATRA). Individuals can support the action.

See below for links to more information and to actions to take.

Victoria Cervantes



From CATRA:

One Month Elapses Since Max Castillo’s Disappearance

Defending ancestral land is not a crime! On April 12, Max Castillo, Garífuna youth and brother of the president of the Punta Piedra Community Council, was illegally taken from his home by armed men who identified themselves as Honduran Police. It is urgent to investigate his whereabouts!

His disappearance is reminiscent of the 2020 disappearances of Garífuna leaders of the Triunfo de la Cruz community. Both cases were perpetrated by people who identified as police and occurred in the context of the Garífuna struggle for land restitution.

Thank you for your solidarity

Read our full article regarding Max’s disappearance and threats to Garífuna land defenders: tinyurl.com/sh7mtacn

Take action by posting key social media messages: tinyurl.com/3pjs4mwb

Roads Blocked, Voices Raised: Inside the Brisas de Tramade Uprising

In May 2025, the usually quiet roads near Brisas de Tramade were brought to a standstill, not by gridlock, but by an uprising. Frustration had been building for years in this small community near Puerto Cortés, Honduras, where residents claim that their once-peaceful lives have been upended by a limestone mine. Clouds of dust, ground-shaking explosions, and crumbling homes became part of the daily routine. For many, the final blow came when the mine’s environmental license quietly expired—yet the trucks kept rolling.

Fed up, villagers took to the highway, laying down stones and banners to demand immediate closure of the mine. Their grievances were not new: water sources polluted, health complaints rising, and promises of jobs and development never materializing. Initial exchanges with police were tense but restrained. Then, in a sudden escalation, security forces moved in, leaving several protesters injured. The incident drew national attention, highlighting the precarious situation facing environmental defenders in Honduras.



The blockade forced a temporary halt to mining operations and a government investigation. Still, trust is fragile. Locals warn they will not move until genuine action is taken. Their message is clear: communities know the real cost of extraction, and this time, they intend to be heard.

Protest and repression in Panama

Compiled by ENCA member Martin Mowforth
June 2025

In May this year, workers in Panama began a national strike. Social, environmental and labour trouble had been brewing for some time under the rule of President José Raúl Mulino.

As reported in ENCA 93 (March 2025), in February a national demonstration was called by trade unions and social movements against the privatisation of Social Security. The labour movement and social movements saw a proposed law as a clear attack on workers by business and neoliberal groups. The social security law annulled workers' health benefits and reduced pensions. The police over-reaction to the demonstration saw almost 500 people arrested.

Then in April, a series of protests and partial strikes began, and at the beginning of May these gained much more support as healthcare professionals and other groups joined the demonstrations. The protests now include student groups, unionised workers, Indigenous people, agricultural workers, teachers, and other sympathisers who wanted to protest against the government.

As the protests grew, so did the demands of the protestors. Demands included:

- the restitution of workers' benefits
- abandonment of the attempt to re-open the Petaquilla open-pit copper mine by Canadian company First Quantum Minerals (FQM)
- a ban on the deployment of US troops in areas adjacent to the Panama Canal
- an end to the social security reforms which put pensions at risk
- the re-hiring of banana plantation workers by Chiquita in the Bocas del Toro province.

At the end of April, banana workers employed by the US company Chiquita Brands declared themselves on strike and began to block major highways – a favourite tactic of protestors in Panama. Chiquita immediately ceased its operations and fired more than 6,500 workers. The company said that the protests and blockages had caused losses of 75 million dollars. After two days of negotiations in early June, however, the unions agreed to lift the roadblocks in the Bocas del Toro province in return for the approval of both leaders of the National Assembly for a law to restore workers' benefits. They vowed, however, to continue their actions (minus the roadblocks), especially those that pressured Chiquita to re-hire the dismissed workers.

Banana worker's union leader Francisco Smith said "We will continue fighting because Chiquita Panama is still missing," referring to the company's unwillingness to re-hire the workers dismissed. Aris Pimental, president of the Bocas del Toro Chamber of Commerce, said that, "almost the entire economy of the province revolves around banana farming, and Chiquita has been the only major employer for years."

Although negotiations with the government have taken place, repression of the protests have increased. More than 1,300 police have participated in President Mulino's 'Operation Omega' which seeks to regain control of the roads that protestors have blocked. In Bocas del Toro province 48 protestors were detained after confrontations with the police. The government has declared a 'state of exception' in Bocas del Toro where freedom of assembly and freedom of movement have now been restricted.

WiFi communications have also been suspended in the province as the

government alleges that the strikers were looting in the city of Changuinola and elsewhere. Striking workers, however, state that the looting is simply an excuse used by the government to increase repression.

Jorge Guzmán, coordinator of the National Front for the Defence of Economic and Social Rights of Panama (FRENADESO) strongly denied that any acts of looting or vandalism were associated with workers' protests. "For us, and any rational person, it is clear that [these actions] are a ruse by the security agencies for what would come next People from outside the protests have infiltrated, who whip up the demonstrators and who themselves conduct vandalism and robbery activities, and thus justify a State of Emergency," said Guzmán in an interview.

Unionised workers and farmworkers have defended their right to protest, especially after the beginning of Mulino's 'Operation Omega', a series of measures through which the government has imprisoned dozens of protestors, many of whom are student leaders and union leaders.

At the time of writing, the protests, road blocks and the repression were continuing – one of the many battles in the age old struggle against neoliberalism and an unequal distribution of resources and wealth in an unfair society.

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Nicaragua's National Traceability System

The following piece is taken from the Alliance for Global Justice's weekly Nicanotes which provides news of developments in Nicaragua. The Nicanotes Briefs are compiled by Nan McCurdy who works for the United Methodist Church in the state of Puebla, Mexico with Give Ye Them to Eat (GYTTE), a ministry with impoverished rural people that works in community-based health, sustainable agriculture, and community development specializing in appropriate technologies. Nan is also the editor of NicaNotes, the weekly briefing on Nicaragua. Nan can be reached at nanmigtl@yahoo.com.

By Nan McCurdy
22 May 2025

Agricultural Exports Transformed by National Traceability System

The implementation of the national traceability system in Nicaragua has transformed agricultural health and productivity, strengthening the country's capacity to export meat, dairy and other products with international quality and food safety standards.

The process began with the willingness of producers to purchase identification ear tags for cattle. Over time, the Institute for Protection and Agricultural Health (IPSA) developed a platform that made it possible to establish controls, identify products and animals, and ensure that prohibited substances do not enter the market.

Ricardo Somarriba, IPSA executive director recalled that in 2016 Nicaragua managed to avoid a ban on exports to the United States because it was able to trace a batch contaminated with SPIONS, potentially toxic nanoparticles. "Without the system, we would have lost years of trade," Somarriba said.

Currently more than seven million head of cattle are registered on the platform, which has also expanded to products such as milk, honey, coffee, cocoa, peanuts, fish and bananas. The system allows tracking from the community where a batch originated to the moment the product is processed and/or exported. "We know which producer delivered the milk, what milk can it travelled in, what time it arrived at the plant and what analysis was done on it. No more cheese can appear than was processed, because everything is recorded," he explained.

The system also includes tamper-proof electronic seals for containers, especially in exports to markets such as El Salvador. "We have had attempts to counterfeit products, as in a recent case of sesame exported to Mexico with altered documents. The system made it possible to show that it was not an authorized or legitimate shipment," he said.

Somarriba noted that countries such as China and Chile have praised the Nicaraguan system, even comparing it to that of the Netherlands. Mexico is also about to formally recognize the certification system, after rigorous analysis and audits. "The most important thing is that the data is protected. No one from outside can access the system. That is sovereignty," he said.

He also stressed that the benefits are shared, since 189,000 producers depend on the proper functioning of this platform to maintain their markets. "With this technological infrastructure, Nicaragua is moving towards a modern, secure and competitive agribusiness, guaranteeing the quality of its products at every stage of the process."

(Source: *La Primerisima*, 16 May 2025)

Nicaragua Announces Landmark 100 MW Solar Energy Project

In July 2025, Nicaragua launched one of its most ambitious renewable energy efforts to date with the announcement of a 100 MW solar power plant proposed for development near Managua. Backed by \$83 million in international investment, the facility will feature approximately 176,000 solar panels, marking it as the country's largest single solar installation and one of the largest in Central America.

The project is scheduled to begin construction in February 2025 and is expected to be fully operational by year's end. This investment is central to Nicaragua's strategic goal of ramping up renewable energy's share of the national grid, which already stands at nearly 60%. By expanding solar capacity on this scale, Nicaragua aims to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions, bolster energy security, and provide a sustainable boost to the local economy.



The initiative has been lauded by environmental advocates and energy sector observers for its potential to create green jobs and catalyze further clean energy investments in the region. Authorities emphasize that the new solar plant is an essential component of the nation's climate action strategy, reflecting both global and domestic commitments to sustainable development in a period marked by mounting environmental challenges and the search for resilient, low-carbon energy alternatives.

ENCA Emergency Appeal to support Hector Berrios and family

ENCA 93 gave details of an emergency appeal that we ran to assist Hector Berrios, Zenayda Serrano and their family to seek asylum elsewhere due to the escalating threats and persecution that they were receiving and suffering in El Salvador as a result of their human rights work. The appeal raised over £2,000 which we were able to send to the family when they needed to arrange and pay for their travel to Spain which received them as asylum seekers. More specifically, they were received by a Basque human rights organisation which found them temporary accommodation whilst they sought a more permanent home in the Basque country and began to establish a new life for the family. It didn't take them long to draw the attention of the Basque Parliament to the position of human rights defenders in El Salvador. (For more information on the work of Zenayda and Hector and the organisation they set up, see ENCA member Liz Richmond's article in ENCA 92, pp.5-7)

Hector sent the following message to ENCA by WhatsApp.

"Arbitrariedad e Impunidad" / "Arbitrariness and Impunity"

This is the definition by consensus of the entire Basque Parliament against the Government of Nayib Bukele, who this morning have focused their gaze on El Salvador; so they have denounced the serious violations of human rights by the regime of exception.

"There is a setback in democracy and the breaking of the Peace Agreements" they expressed. Bukele promotes authoritarian measures and for that he has co-opted the judicial system, dismissing the magistrates of the Constitutional Chamber of the CSJ and the Attorney General, assigned to people related to him.

The regime of exception promoted by Bukele has to date led to 84,000 people being detained without any procedural guarantees. Bukele promotes kidnapping, forced disappearance, and



Zenayda (in green and yellow) next to Hector and their two daughters, Kiara and Maya (on the right) with two representatives of the Basque Parliament.

the prison business promoted by the United States.

Different international organisations, the InterAmerican Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), Amnesty International, UN, have questioned the Government of El Salvador without any response.

Terror for Justice in El Salvador

In June, we received a WhatsApp message from Hector sharing a short version of their latest Facebook opinion piece. ENCA member and treasurer Stephanie Williamson translated the message and made a few minor edits for the newsletter. Shared by Hector on WhatsApp, 10th Jun 2025 on their opinion on threats to the justice system and specifically to Judge Juan Antonio Durán.

From MUFRA-32 FB post of same date <https://www.facebook.com/share/1Cb6XsUGWx/>

Nayib Bukele and his brothers have initiated a selective and visceral hunt against anyone who documents the denunciations and evidence of their

crimes or offences against the Salvadoran population – their main objective is to deepen the collective fear and force people to remain silent. A few months ago, we commented to several people from different Human Rights NGOs that since December 2024 there has been a state intelligence operation, directed from the Presidency of the Republic and involving various state agencies and prisons, whose objective is to capture anyone who questions or denounces the state terrorism promoted by Nayib Bukele.

There are approximately 100 files of false cases of different people such as community leaders, representatives of human rights NGOs, judges, environmentalists, journalists, feminists, university students, trade unionists, etc. that have been prepared for more than a year by intelligence agents. who have been following up on marches, rallies, interviews, social media posts, analysis and denunciations. These agents take photographs, pose as press, use drones and for each protest activity there are teams assigned to gather information, which is subsequently processed and put into folders that have now been concentrated and are in CAPRES (Casa Presidencial, the office of the Presidency) and are only waiting for the order to proceed to capture, but the cases have already been pre-prepared.

Today the threats are directed at Judge Juan Antonio Durán who on different occasions has demanded respect for the rule of law and respect for the Constitution. The judicial system has been one of Nayib Bukele's main tools to establish a dictatorship in El Salvador. He currently maintains total control over the judiciary, which he has filled with officials loyal and submissive to his regime.

Grahame Russell addresses ENCA meeting



At the meeting of ENCA members held on Sunday 29th June this year, we were fortunate to play host to Grahame Russell, Director of Rights Action, who has done so much for human and environmental rights in Guatemala and Honduras for so many years. He joined our meeting by video link from Toronto, Canada.

Grahame Russell has been, since 1995, director of Rights Action. Grahame is a non-practicing lawyer and part-time adjunct professor at University of Northern British Columbia. For over 10 years, Grahame lived in Mexico and various Central America countries, working on human rights, environment and development issues. In Mexico from 1984-1985, he worked as a supervisor in a rural orphanage. During the summers of 1985, 1986, and 1987, he worked as a human rights educator and solidarity activist in Nicaragua. From 1989-1993, he worked as a lawyer and activist with CODEHUCA (Commission for the Defence of Human Rights in Central America). From 1993-1995, he continued his human rights work with EPICA (Ecumenical Program for Central America) in Guatemala and Chiapas, Mexico. In 1995, he was a legal officer with MINUGUA (the United Nation Human Rights Mission in Guatemala), before reviving Guatemala Partners in 1995 and creating Rights Action.

During his presentation Grahame outlined the origins of Rights Action, set up as a tax-charitable organisation in 1995. He is the only fulltime organiser with the help of 4 part-time colleagues.

Although the work of Rights Action is largely concerned with particular issues in Guatemala and Honduras, Grahame emphasised that this was always set in the context of the wealth and power model of global capitalism, and the unjust relationship between the Global North and Global South.

Three perspectives are always at play...local, national and global. The source of abuses, injustices and exploitation of local people in Central America can be laid at the feet of various sectors (national and international, especially the US and Canada) of the unjust global economy.

Rights Action works in three interconnected areas

- 1) **Community defence struggles.** RA directly provides grassroots funding for communities fighting human rights abuses, land evictions and environmental threats, often against mining companies. Also funding for grassroots agro-ecology projects and emergency relief.
- 2) **Education and activism.** Addresses how US & Canadian companies and investors contribute directly to and benefit from human rights violations, repression, corruption, environmental degradation and impunity (e.g., support in the recent Hubyay Minerals lawsuits).
- 3) **Truth, Memory, Justice.** To help communities who suffered from genocide, massacres and violence, particularly in the '70s and '80s, in Central America to reveal the truth of their history and seek justice.

More information can be found on Rights Action website – especially re. the Hubyay Minerals lawsuit. www.rightsaction.org

Grahame very generously discussed many aspects of his work, which we realised overlapped ENCA's in several ways, particularly when he was referring to the struggles against tourism and ZEDES by OFRANEH and COPINH in Honduras. He was always emphasising the broader political and economic context for all these struggles and campaigns, which we appreciated as we believe ENCA strives to do the same.

We would like to thank him for the time he spent with us. It gave us much food for thought.

Hopefully, a summary/transcript/recording will be available on the ENCA website in due course.

One last point of similarity: like ENCA, Rights Action feel immediately uncomfortable if any funds in their bank a/c are not disbursed as quickly as possible.

enca.org.uk
@ENCA_News

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.