

ENCA



Environmental Network *for* Central America

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Road Building

Can the benefits outweigh the environmental risks?

Gold Mining

Costa Rica faces growing problems with mining

NGOs

El Salvador's NGOs come under increasing political pressure



**Indigenous people
bear the brunt of
repression in Panama**



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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Protests and Repression in Panamá: *Indigenous people bear the brunt of repression against popular protests*

By freelance journalist Richard
Constantine Arghiris

On November 19, Indigenous human rights activists will present critical evidence to the Interamerican Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) concerning the closure of civic space in Panamá, which they describe as “selective, aggressive, and directed toward Indigenous territories”. As reported in ENCA 93 (March 2025) and ENCA 94 (July 2025), the right-wing populist government of José Raúl Mulino earlier this year resorted to violent and authoritarian tactics to try to silence widespread civil protests. Military-style police operations in Indigenous communities reportedly resulted in injuries and deaths.

Strikes and demonstrations had erupted in most parts of the country since February, intensifying as an alliance of trade unions and civil society groups coalesced around their common opposition to several controversial government policies. These included the privatisation of Social Security (Law 462), the reactivation of open cast copper mining on Panamá’s Caribbean coast, and an enhanced US military presence on Panamanian soil.

From May to July, Mulino attempted to end the crisis by ordering a crackdown on dissent. In the largely Indigenous province of Bocas del Toro, which had been affected by intermittent road closures for more than 40 days, a full-blown siege, so-called Operation Omega, was conducted under the cover of a 10-day telecommunications blackout. During that time, the government suspended several constitutional guarantees, including the right to assembly, freedom of expression, inviolability of the home, and protection against arbitrary detention.

According to witnesses, Operation Omega involved hundreds of armed riot police

and border agents (SENAFRONT), helicopters, heavy machinery, naval vessels, and drones. Communities were aggressively assaulted with tear gas. Homes were raided. Hundreds were detained.

Feliciano Santos, who represents the Movement for the Defense of the Territories and Ecosystems of Bocas del Toro (MODETEAB), a grassroots human rights network with Ngäbe leadership, told ENCA:

“Far from establishing security, these forces created an atmosphere of violence, breaking into communities, abusing women, and spraying residents in the face with pepper spray.”

Numerous acts of violence were subsequently reported by the communities, including the use of lethal firearms, the looting of private property, and physical, psychological and sexual abuse at the hands of the police. The National Mechanism for the Prevention of Torture, which is part of the Ombudsman’s Office, interviewed 180 people in the aftermath of Operation Omega and documented 92 cases of arbitrary detentions and 99 cases of cruel and inhuman treatment.

Furthermore, according to public reports and information obtained by MODETEAB, two bystanders died in Mulino’s assault on the province. On June 17, a 24-year-old Ngäbe man was killed during a police offensive in the community of Rabala. On June 24, a one-year-old Ngäbe girl reportedly died from tear gas asphyxiation.

On the other side of the country, in and around the Ngäbe-Buglé Comarca in western Panamá, security forces suppressed protests in the Indigenous communities of San Félix, San Lorenzo, Tolé, Trinidad, El Prado, Horconcito, and



Ojo de Agua, among others. On May 14, a Ngäbe student, Caleb Bejerano, was reportedly admitted to hospital with a shotgun wound to his stomach. In eastern Panamá, a 12-year-old Emberá boy, Roben Donisabe, allegedly died from a shotgun wound. The Panamanian government has denied the use of live ammunition.

Evidence of these incidents will be presented to the IACHR by a coalition of grassroots groups including MODETEAB, the Ngobe Development and Technical Assistance Centre (CEDETENG), and the Local Congress of Piriati Emberá. Their application is supported by the Alliance for Conservation and Development (ACD) in Panamá City and the Centre for International Environmental Law (CIEL) in Washington DC.

The groups will argue that recent events are not mere isolated human rights violations. Rather, they reflect historical processes of exclusion, violence, and discrimination, and a disturbing trend toward militarism and authoritarianism.

Although Panamá successfully transitioned from a military dictatorship to a liberal democracy in the 1990s, substantial reforms to security laws during the presidency of

Ricardo Martinelli (2009-2014) have enabled a regression. Significantly, Law 15 of 2010 created the Ministry of Public Security, a body which merges security, defence, and intelligence apparatuses, and places them under the command of a single appointed minister. In fact, Martinelli's first minister of public security was none other than José Raúl Mulino.

Critics of Law 15 point out that the reforms have politicised Panamá's police forces and empowered them to pursue vague security mandates with weak oversight and no accountability. Moreover, their intelligence provisions enabled successive presidents to engage in brazen domestic spying against political opponents, including civil society actors.

Santos and his colleagues hope their upcoming IAHCR hearing will bring new visibility to these issues and create space for dialogue. Above all, they have no intention of quietly accepting the loss of civic space.

"I mean, how far has this government gone?" Said Santos. "The way it mocks, the way it sneers, the way it considers the Indigenous people – we, just because we're Indigenous, perhaps because of that – are inferior people with no right to complain, no right to

demand, no right to challenge. What we should be doing is accepting the plunder, the death, and accepting again that what happened in 1492 was right, and what's happening is right."

He added: "So far, the only thing the government has said in its arrogant attitude is that nothing has happened, nothing has happened. And now, the same police that abused us, that repressed us, that did everything to us, they're bringing bags of candy and giving them to the communities' children."

MODETEAB are currently fundraising for their trip to the IAHCR. If you wish to assist them in any way, please go to:

www.modeteab.org

Richard Constantine Arghiris is a British freelance journalist and writer who has reported on Indigenous issues in Panama since 2009. He is a supporter of ENCA.

Costa Rica's gold mining dilemma

*The following four short items are all related and relevant to the problems caused by gold mining in Costa Rica – briefly introduced in ENCA Newsletters 92 and 94. Most of the material that follows has been translated and summarised by ENCA member **Rita Drobner**, with some assistance – others might call it interference – from ENCA editor Martin Mowforth, and we are grateful to Rita for this work. Numerous sources have been used and these are acknowledged.*

Open cast mining has been illegal for many decades in Costa Rica. The mining ban was reversed under President Oscar Arias' second presidency (2006 – 2010) and the Canadian mining company Infinito Gold was granted a license. When Costa Rican courts voided the license in 2010 amidst environmental concerns, Infinito Gold filed a lawsuit before the World Bank, claiming \$400 million (USD) in damages and lost profits.

In 2021 the World Bank found in favour of Costa Rica with no money owed to Infinito.

Infinito Gold Corporation had estimated gold deposits in Northern Costa Rica at 1.2 million ounces of gold. The suggestion of large deposits fuelled a gold rush in illegal mining, bringing with it organised crime and pollution with cyanide and mercury. The Environment Ministry estimated in 2018 that \$200 million (USD) of gold were exported illegally in just one year. Smuggling and fatalities through killings and accidents necessitated a permanent post and patrols by the Civil Guard in the Crucitas area.

Independent deputy Luis Diego Vargas likened Crucitas to “an area where an atomic bomb fell that destroyed the environment and every day it is affected more. There are security issues where Costa Ricans live in fear.”

Leslye Ruben Bojorges, deputy of the Christian centre right PUSC party aired his frustration on social media: “we have been in this story for decades and twenty years of pollution. They steal the gold and there is prostitution.”

Parts of the Costa Rican government favour regulated and legal mining and the Executive Branch of the Assembly proposed legislation 24.717, which was passed by the Alajuela Commission on 11 September 2025. The draft outlines that the Ministry of Environment and Energy (MINAE) would be responsible for granting exploration permits exclusively to companies “demonstrating robust technical, environmental and financial capabilities.”

Concessions would be available only to closed-cycle gold mining, thus avoiding the discharge of cyanide and mercury used in open-pit mining. Additionally, the concession for mining would require a percentage of the gross gold sales to be paid to local and national government.

The Tico Times (an English language weekly online newspaper) reported that the supporters in the Alajuela Commission hope that regulated mining would bring order, generate jobs, and fund some of the clean-up. Critics state that legal mining will not stop the illegal mining, and question whether any clean-up would compensate against the renewed environmental risks through regulated closed-cycle mining.

Opponents propose a sustainable regeneration programme without mining instead.

Costa Rica's Crucitas Faces Environmental Disaster from Illegal Gold Mining

Abridged from the [Tico Times](#), August 27, 2025

Environmental crime in Costa Rica has escalated dramatically, with the illegal gold mining crisis in the Crucitas region now bearing all the hallmarks of organised crime, according to Environmental Prosecutor Luis Diego Hernández.



Speaking on the growing threat, Hernández warned that criminal networks have seized control of gold mining operations not just in Crucitas, but also in other critical ecosystems like [Corcovado National Park](#) in the South Pacific.

“The Public Prosecutor’s Office has identified figures like sponsors, resource providers, infrastructure coordinators – this mirrors the structure of drug trafficking organisations,” Hernández explained. “These are not isolated miners. These are tightly controlled operations run by specific individuals or groups.”

The operations, according to Hernández, involve the systematic provision of industrial-grade tools, makeshift infrastructure, and hazardous substances like mercury and cyanide – chemicals used to extract gold from rock, but which pose grave environmental and health threats. “We are dealing with trafficking in dangerous substances. The phenomenon has reached a point where we can confidently say this is organised crime,” he added.

Hernández also confirmed that [illegal gold mining](#) operations are directly linked to money laundering schemes, further embedding environmental exploitation into Costa Rica’s broader criminal underworld.

A cross-border investigation titled *Mined Countries* – conducted by *La Voz de Guanacaste*, *Interferencia de Radios UCR* (Costa Rica), *Revista Concolón* (Panama), and the Latin American Centre for Investigative Journalism ([CLIP](#)) – exposed a staggering

623 per cent rise in cyanide imports over the past decade. The chemicals are often transported without oversight and used indiscriminately, contributing to toxic pollution in mining zones such as Crucitas and Abangares.

Local ecosystems and nearby communities pay the price. Runoff from illegal mining has contaminated rivers, degraded biodiversity, and exposed residents to toxic substances.

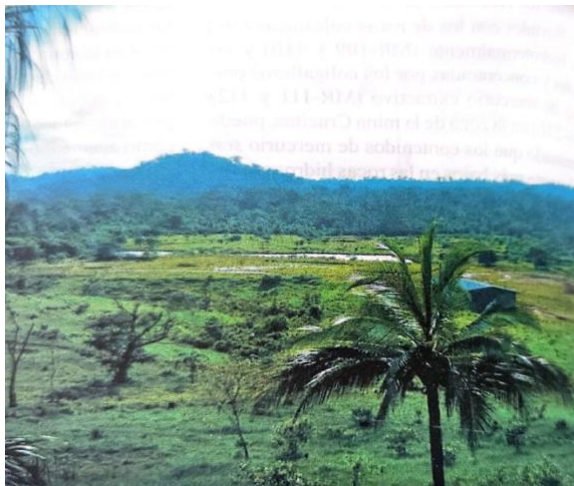
“No one is offering a real solution,” Hernández lamented. “And the problem keeps growing.” Environmental advocates warn that if the current trajectory continues, not only will Costa Rica’s rich biodiversity face irreversible damage, but communities in the path of illegal mining operations will also remain vulnerable to violence, economic exploitation, and severe health consequences.

Highest levels of mercury found in the El Pantano wetland and in streams running from Crucitas into the Río San Juan.

Information from “Geochemical Atlas of Costa Rica. Volume 2 - River sediments, waters and rocks: Environment and Mineralisation”, EdiNexo, San José, 2024.

The extreme mercury pollution in freshwater sediments of the streams Descubrimiento and Crucitas and their flood plains reflect the illegal gold mining in this area.

Values of mercury above 0.08 mg/kg were obtained in three samples of freshwater



View of El Pantano from a civil guard post in Crucitas (Source: Atlas Geoquímico de Costa Rica, volumen 2)

sediment in El Pantano. According to the Atlas this is the wetland where the overall highest mercury concentration of 0.25 mg/kg was found.

Other elevated mercury concentrations were found in the channel of the Río Infiernito or Infiernillo that flows 4 km to the Northwest of El Pantano, in the mining area of Crucitas, with concentrations measuring 0.11, 0.17 and 0.13 mg/kg. The samples were collected on 2nd September 2021.

Other contaminants such as cadmium, were found within legal limits set by the Health Ministry.

Fabiola Pomareda Garcia (of the Costa Rican weekly online newspaper *Semanario Universidad*) highlighted the mercury pollution at Crucitas amidst the renewed debate on licensing gold mining.

A Geochemical Atlas of Costa Rica

On 1st August 2025, Fabiola Pomareda Garcia introduced readers to a sample of data provided by the ‘Geochemical Atlas of Costa Rica. Volume 2 - River sediments, waters and rocks: Environment and Mineralisation’, (2024), EdiNexo, San José. A tiny example of this data is given in the piece above.

The project of the geochemical atlas in Costa Rica was initiated in 2012 by Rolando Castillo Muñoz, who carried out and financed the undertaking. According to Castillo, this work is unique in Central America and can help inform research and decisions on agricultural production, industry, public health and environment.

Castillo Muñoz thanks the state of Costa Rica which supported the academic development through the University of Costa Rica (UCR) and the Imperial College of London (United Kingdom) where he came across the first geochemical atlas of England and Wales in 1973 during his undergraduate studies. On return to Costa Rica, he



Channel of the Crucitas stream, located on a private estate (Source: Atlas Geoquímico de Costa Rica, volumen 2)

realised the potential of such an atlas for his country.

The first volume of the Atlas was published in 2019 under the title ‘Geochemical Atlas of Costa Rica. Soils: Fertility and Environment’.

Volume 2 of ‘Geochemical Atlas of Costa Rica. River sediments, waters and rocks: Environment and Mineralisation’ was published in October 2024 and informs Garcia’s article on mercury pollution in the areas of gold mining in northern Costa Rica.

In addition to physio-geographical information and geological and mineral characteristics of Costa Rica, this volume includes the mapping of chemical flows in sediments (solid materials transported and deposited by river water). The maps are based on 419 samples taken from all major river basins of the country and each site was analysed for 34 chemical elements.

Volume 3 of the Geochemical Atlas is in draft and will deal with the freshwater bodies and rivers on the Costa Rican mainland.

The Atlas is published by EdiNexo and can be found in the university library of the University of Costa Rica (Librería UCR).

By Rita Drobner

Sources: Ticosland (<https://ticosland.com/>), corporate news outlet, 12 September 2025, and Tico Times 29 September 2025.

The Challenge for NGOs in El Salvador

Most of ENCA's partners in the region of Central America are non-governmental organisations (NGOs). In the past in El Salvador, one of our main partner organisations has been the Centro de Intercambio y Solidaridad (CIS, the Centre for Exchange and Solidarity). Obviously, as regular readers of ENCA Newsletters will be aware, we have been acutely conscious of the problems in Salvadoran society, especially with President Nayib Bukele's 'State of Exception', and ENCA 94 covered the exiling of the Berrios Serrano family from El Salvador to Spain. But it was especially depressing to read the CIS Mid-Year Newsletter. We reproduce here a particularly relevant section under the above heading.

This is followed by a short summary of the closure of operations by Cristosal, a leading Salvadoran human rights organisation. The summary is taken from an online NACLA Update from 18th July 2025. (NACLA is the North American Congress on Latin America.)

The Challenge for NGOs in El Salvador

For the past three years, in the government war on gangs which we have been reporting on, the government has arbitrarily arrested more than 85,000 people – some gang members, but also thousands of innocents criminalized simply for being poor, for having a mental illness, or being victim of someone calling in an anonymous tip line, often called in by criminals and their families to detract attention from themselves. The victims of this policy do not have the right to due process, the right to communicate with their lawyer, the right to communicate with their family, and have been victims of torture and abuses for over three years. The State of Exception is a constitutional provision that permits the suspension of constitutional rights for 30 days in cases of war or extreme emergency. But it has become permanent, renewed for 40 months consecutively.

In May of this year, the government's Regime of Exception shifted from

arresting alleged gang members to arresting human rights defenders, lawyers and journalists who are outspoken critics of government policy. That is, anyone daring to expose the truth. Up until now the president has effectively controlled the narrative by not allowing almost anyone out of prison or any family members, lawyers, press, or independent verification teams into the prisons. The 8,000 innocents the government released in the first year represents roughly 10% of those arrested, when President Bukele stated there was only a 1% margin of error. He stopped freeing innocents when those released began to tell of the horrors inside the prison and it would mar his image admitting thousands of more innocents are still being held. The only prison that allows outsiders in with guided tours is the new Terrorist Confinement Centre (CECOT) - showing multiple images of tattooed condemned gang members. Most people inside and outside of the country are unaware that the gang members in these images were arrested and condemned before the Regime of Exception and most even before President Bukele came to power. These images are President Bukele's presentation card, and the main reason for his popularity in and outside of the country for being tough on crime. However, popularity for these policies began to plummet when Bukele offered President Trump space for U.S. criminals. When President Trump sent 268 Venezuelans – most of whom are migrants, many with legal status in the U.S., and only 12 criminals the belief that only criminals were being held and the horrific images of conditions in the prisons, opinions began to change.

Visit of RFK Human Rights to El Salvador in April, shortly before the arrest of Ruth López, human rights and anti-corruption lawyer for NGO Cristosal, and Ingrid Escobar, Director of the Humanitarian Legal Aid office (SJH).

Later in May, 300 families who were being forcibly displaced organised a peaceful protest near President Bukele's residence and where the government has purchased

four additional lots and the road to build a new presidential palace. The young lawyer from the Forum for Water and Community Pastor who accompanied them were arrested. In revenge and blaming the protest on NGOs, the following day Bukele announced the Foreign Agents Law, which could tax non-profit Non-Governmental Organisations 30% on all international donations received. Organisations that receive funds from outside of El Salvador are required to register as foreign agents. NGOs can apply for an exclusion to paying the 30%, which may be given to organisations who are not critical of government policies, who do not defend human rights or democracy, or who do not publish investigations of educational, health, poverty, or other social conditions. But such exceptions are discretionary; no one knows how the law will be applied. The law gives the government sweeping powers to take away the legal status of organisations and confiscate their assets.

The CIS will be taking measures to protect our solidarity work. This will include reprioritizing our solidarity work for empowerment and development of communities and deprioritizing an organisational presence defending human rights or observing elections. We have taken measures to protect funds for scholarships and leadership development, which is CIS's most transformative program and largest part of our annual budget. We will be registering as a Foreign Agent this month, and if we pass that filter, we will apply for an exclusion from the 30% tax on international donations to community programs. Since this is happening quickly, and the application of the law is not clear, presumably we will be making adjustments to continue our solidarity mission.

As if we needed any further illustration of the difficulties faced by NGOs in El Salvador, in July NACLA (North American Congress on Latin America) gave the following short report on its online bulletin (page 7).

Cristosal Closes up Shop

Cristosal, a leading Salvadoran human rights organisation, has suspended its operations in the country in the face of escalating state repression. Founded 25 years ago by Anglican bishops, Cristosal gained prominence in recent years for investigating corruption, torture and prison deaths under President Nayib Bukele. Since Bukele declared a state of emergency in March 2022 to combat gangs – resulting in more than 85,000 arrests – due process has been suspended and arbitrary detentions have surged. While the crackdown has brought down the homicide rate and made Bukele the region's most popular leader, it has been achieved by a complete erosion of civil liberties and scores of corruption scandals. Cristosal's reporting on these developments made it a key government target.



In May, authorities arrested Ruth López, Cristosal's anti-corruption and justice director, who remains jailed on questionable charges. According to Cristosal's director, Noah Bullock, who spoke to Reuters from Guatemala, López is the only remaining Cristosal employee in the country. The organisation plans to continue working from its offices in Honduras and Guatemala. At least four other human rights groups have pulled their staff from El Salvador, as Bukele's crackdown intensifies with backing from the Trump administration.

Differing assessments of the advantages of new roads

Two articles about new roads show how roads can be seen as both beneficial and disadvantageous in development terms. The first of these refers to a new highway linking the south Caribbean coast of Nicaragua with the rest of the country for the first time. The new road is celebrated as a boost to development of the area with nothing but benefits for all affected. The second refers to the illegal building of roads in protected areas in Honduras and the illegal deforestation that such road building leads to.

We are grateful to the Xinhua News Agency for the first report published in the Costa Rican weekly newspaper Semanario Universidad. We are also grateful to Semanario Universidad. The second article is based on an article in Proceso Digital to whom we are very grateful.

Our particular thanks go to ENCA member Jill Powis who translated both articles for the ENCA Newsletter

New road to the Caribbean coast in Nicaragua

The development of transport infrastructure on the southern Caribbean coast is being driven by a loan from the BCIE (Central American Bank for Economic Integration), which also covers other projects in Nicaragua's central and Pacific regions.

On Wednesday, 30 July, the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure (MTI) formally opened the final section of a 96-kilometre road linking the municipality of El Tortuguero in the southern Caribbean region of Nicaragua with the rest of the country, connecting it directly with the Pacific region, reports Noelia Aráuz for the Xinhua news agency.

El Tortuguero, a municipality in Nicaragua's South Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region, is now part of the national road network, a milestone in the country's development.

Surrounded by the Kurinwás River, dense tropical rainforest and inhabited by descendants of the Ulwa indigenous group, this territory is celebrating the completion of a long-awaited connection.

On Wednesday, 30 July, the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure (MTI) formally opened the final section of a 96-kilometre road linking El Tortuguero with the rest of the country, connecting it directly to the Pacific region. The road will benefit more than 116,000 inhabitants of this town, 530 kilometres from Managua, Nicaragua's capital.

The project is part of a sustained effort by the government to integrate the Caribbean into national development, improving access, productivity and public services. Other strategic routes have been built in this same area: El Rama-Laguna de Perlas (86 kilometres) and Nueva Guinea-Naciones Unidas-Bluefields (88 kilometres).

"We are emerging from exclusion and poverty by promoting the National Plan to Combat Poverty for Human Development. It's through these projects that the plan is taking shape. In addition to providing security, peace of mind and comfort when travelling, it saves us resources and allows us to save time," said Óscar Mojica, Minister of Transport and Infrastructure, during the inauguration.

The new road includes 33 drainage works and crosses various landscapes, rivers and rural communities. A notable feature is the 177-metre-long bridge over the Kukarawala River. The local population, mainly engaged in farming, including African palm production, will benefit directly.

According to Mojica, there are four African palm factories in the area processing over 673,000 tonnes of fresh fruit a year, producing 150,000 tonnes of oil and directly creating over 5,000 jobs.

‘With this road, we are putting an end to 500 years of isolation and El Tortuguero is now fully part of national development,’ said the official.

The minister also announced major new road schemes, such as the construction of a 64-kilometre road between Wanawana and San Pedro del Norte, in the southern Caribbean region. Three major strategic projects are under way nationally: Punta Huete international airport, modernisation of Corinto’s port, and a future port in Bluefields.

“The pace of development and economic growth will be much more dynamic because we are moving forward with a government that cares about its people and provides them with large-scale, high-quality projects to secure their prosperity,” Mojica said.

Raúl López, coordinator of the Autonomous Regional Government of the Southern Caribbean stated that the road brings development and joy to the 57 communities in the municipality. In addition, an electrical substation is being built, which will bring power to areas not currently connected to the grid.

“The aim of these roads and electrification is to increase production four-, five-, ten-fold in this municipality, because we’ll have better conditions. Cattle farmers will be able to modernise their systems for producing milk, meat and their products, and arable farmers to increase their yields of staple cereals,” explained López.

The opening ceremony brought together delegations from other municipalities on the south Caribbean coast who celebrated the historic advance in infrastructure for their region.

For many residents, the transformation is tangible. Teresa Vanegas from the Belén community recounted the difficulties they faced in getting around before the road was built.

She said that previously there was only a dirt road and getting to the nearest community, Wapi, took 12 hours by truck and then she had to find more transport to

get to El Rama to buy groceries or run errands.

Meanwhile, in the Pacific region, the government is moving forward with the construction of the Costanera road, which will connect the country’s coastal departments with an initial 119-kilometre stretch and access to more than 60 beaches, as part of a strategy to boost economic, tourist and social development in the region. (Xinhua)

Illegal road building on the rise in protected areas

*By: Proceso Digital (PD), 21 August 2025
Translated by ENCA member Jill Powis and
abridged and summarised by ENCA editor
Martin Mowforth.*

Tegucigalpa – Illegal road building in protected areas of Honduras is on the rise and the Public Prosecutor’s Office is failing in its duty to conduct investigations into the serious environmental damage caused, despite being aware of the situation.

- Environmentalist warns that proposed Express Environmental Licences bill will cause serious damage to the environment in Honduras.
- The proliferation of illegal roads leads to deforestation, illegal logging and environmental damage.

Luis Soliz, Director of the Forest Conservation Institute (ICF), recently confirmed that a road had been built illegally in the Celaque mountain range in Lempira department. “The road was built despite rulings against it, and that’s an environmental crime,” he said. He stated that, since June 2022, he had been aware of plans to build a road in the Celaque mountain range to connect several communities in San Manuel de Colohete municipality.

Proceso Digital (PD) reported that the ICF therefore issued a ruling stating that building the road could not go ahead because it would cut through a protected area. Despite the rulings against it, construction of the road began in 2023.

Staff from the Public Prosecutor’s Office visited the area in 2023 and confirmed that a road was being built illegally and proceeded to seize the machinery. Regardless, the company carried on building the road in the Celaque mountain range.

The ICF’s director reported that there is deforestation in the area and that there is a two-kilometre stretch of road that cuts through the core zone of the forest reserve. He is awaiting a judge’s ruling to put a halt to the road.

The Public Prosecutor’s investigation, however, ended with the confiscation of the machinery; but now the road has been built and the investigation has not been reopened. The same is true of roads that have been built illegally in the department of La Mosquitia.

PD also reported that another illegal road 3.2 kilometres long had been found in the core zone of the Río Plátano Reserve, considered a natural heritage site. The road is in the municipality of Dulce Nombre de Culmí, in the department of Olancho.

Physical, cultural, food and water security at risk

In recent years, there have been reports that a road is being built connecting the departments of Olancho and Gracias a Dios, better known as the ‘narco-highway’. People from outside the region are becoming millionaires by selling tree species, wildlife and archaeological finds from the core area of the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve.

The jungles of Olancho and La Mosquitia are home to the country’s main forest reserves, especially the Río Plátano, a World Heritage Site, which, together with 75 national reserve areas, constitutes the second largest expanse of wilderness in Central America and one of the five great forests of Mesoamerica.

Organised crime involved in drug trafficking in the Honduran jungles is destroying forests and destabilising the

region, putting physical, cultural, food and water security at risk.

When the current administration first came to power, Environment Minister Lucky Medina committed to closing the road at the request of affected indigenous communities and environmental leaders. However, presidential adviser Manuel Zelaya said it was useful and would not be destroyed.

PD consulted members of the Environmental Coalition of Honduras (*Coalición Ambiental de Honduras*) about illegal building in the core area of Celaque. The Coalition said that there were economic interests at play, with the Mayor of San Manuel de Colohete and the Governor both implicated. There is a road-building contract involved, awarded to the Governor's son, and the machinery belongs to the Mayor.

They added that there is no benefit for the community, nor has the project been discussed with them. The mayor is the president of the association that approved the road.

"We've always said that, if the parents set a bad example, the children will follow it. The state, with its institutions that are called upon to protect the environment, commits offences, which is why its children, in this case the municipalities, also do so, and this undermines institutions and the rule of law."

Ana Velásquez, an environmental expert with the Association for a More Just Society (ASJ), told *PD* that express environmental licences are an initiative that would be extremely damaging.

"If we can't even monitor protected areas and the damage done to them now, what are we going to be in for with this?" asked Velásquez. She said, "It is the mayors who first and foremost have responsibility for protected areas, but we've seen how they just turn a blind eye to what's going on."

"That's the problem with express environmental licences – they'll cause damage and that will be irreversible once the processes begin and there's no supervision," she pointed out.

Chemical fertilisers FAIL the world



On 13th October, the fertiliser industry celebrated Global Fertiliser Day, claiming that "fertilisers feed the world".

The Centre for International Environmental Law (CIEL), which defends the right to a healthy planet, however, suggests that "fertilisers poison our food system, deplete our soil and put food prices in the hands of a few corporations."

With others, CIEL is working to expose the truth about fertilisers. These include:

- More than half of today's fertilisers are made of fossil fuels.
- Fertilisers are linked to cancer, birth defects, and respiratory issues.
- Controlled by a few corporate giants, fertilisers drive up food prices.
- Solutions and alternatives already exist – agroecology and local food systems regenerate soil and feed people rather than corporate profits.

You can find out a little more about CIEL's programme on fertilisers by watching their short Youtube video at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vnvN4kPifw>

More about CIEL can be found at: <https://www.ciel.org>

Permaculture in action for food sovereignty and youth leadership for ecological resilience

ENCA members may like to know that ENCA has once again submitted a funding application to the Unicorn Grocery in Manchester on behalf of the Mesoamerican Permaculture Institute (IMAP) in Guatemala.

ENCA 92 (December 2024) gave details of IMAP's aims and programmes and of a visit to its permaculture centre in the Lake Atitlán basin by ENCA member Liz Richmond. Liz went to see and experience the organisation's work and in particular to see how the funding obtained for IMAP by an earlier funding application to the Unicorn Grocery was being used.

On that occasion, the funding was used to promote biodiversity with family gardens and the restoration of Lake Atitlán. Our most recent application has three major activities which describe its major purposes. They are:

- Support for Casa Aq'ab'al women's group linking healthy eating and the production of vegetables and medicinal plants.
- Permaculture training for students and teachers.
- Permaculture scholarship and mentorship for a young person.

The funding application for £3,500 was written by María Inés C'uj of IMAP and Stephanie Williamson of ENCA with input from ENCA member Liz Richmond. The application was submitted in October this year and we hope to hear of its success (?) in November or December.



The Sinister Side of Solar Energy in Honduras

A corrupt government gutted the public electricity utility and doled out shady contracts. Now the state faces multibillion-dollar lawsuits for attempting to reclaim control.



rural village in the southern department of Choluteca, Honduras. While the resistance managed to halt the project's advance, at least two of the five concessions that are part of the Los Prados megaproject now operate in another nearby community.

The Los Prados megaproject is owned and run by the Norwegian company Scatec, ASA, and the investment company KLP Nor-fund Investment AS. The companies are now suing the Honduran government in a pair of international arbitration claims for a total of \$400 million (USD) under the terms of the 2011 National Investment Law.

There is always a danger that environmentalists perceive energy based on sources other than fossil fuels as clean energy. Thus, occasionally we might see uncritical support for such relatively clean energies as wind power, solar power, hydro-electric power (HEP), geothermal power and wave power. Even nuclear power is perceived by some as clean despite its potential for leaking extreme radiation contamination.

Over the years of its existence, ENCA has seen many HEP and dam-building schemes around Central America that have displaced people and in some cases whole communities. At times, displacement has been a less gentle description of the results of HEP projects. The building of the Chixoy Dam in the 1980s, for instance, led to a number of massacres from which around 400 villagers became victims. Clearly, that example is now somewhat dated although the battle for reparations continues. Moreover, case studies of the effects of HEP schemes on

rivers, fish populations, human populations, irrigation systems and human rights are rife throughout the region.

Much less common in the literature are critical case studies of solar, wind, wave and geothermal power. So it is interesting to read a report entitled 'The Sinister Side of Solar Energy in Honduras' by Karen Spring, Aldo Orellana, Luciana Ghiotto and Jen Moore. It is published by the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA) in a NACLA Special Issue on 'Green Capitalism in the Americas'.

Ideally, we should like to include the report here in ENCA 95, but it is too long for the newsletter. Instead, we shall include it in the ENCA website (enca.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Solar_Honduras.pdf).

The report tells of the local resistance to the installation of a large-scale solar energy project in Los Prados I, a small

As Denia Castillo, a lawyer from the Network of Women Human Rights Defense Lawyers (RADDH), who accompanies the affected communities, explains, "The strategy of criminalizing and paralysing community members who are defending their territories is similarly being used against the government." While the suit's specific accusations and related documentation are not public, these claims and five others like them make use of a neocolonial tool designed to give corporations power over governments, especially in the Global South, to push back on the Honduran government's reforms to the energy sector in 2022. Those reforms sought to rescue the national energy company and to renegotiate the price the state pays to private energy providers, which is one of the highest rates in Latin America.

Our readers are encouraged to read the full report at:
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10714839.2025.2542089>

OHCHR condemns more murders in the Bajo Aguán

The following is taken from the Honduran digital newspaper Proceso Digital and was translated for ENCA by ENCA member Liz Richmond. We are grateful to Liz and to Proceso Digital for their content.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Honduras (OHCHR or OACNUDH in Spanish, Oficina del Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Derechos Humanos en Honduras) condemns the murder of *campesinos* and farm workers in the Bajo Aguán region of Honduras and demands urgent action from the Honduran State.

By: Proceso Digital, 18 July 2025

Tegucigalpa – OHCHR/OACNUDH issued an official statement strongly condemning the violent deaths of *campesinos* Ramón Rivas Baquedano and his son Carlos Antonio Rivas Canales, which occurred on 17 July 2025 in the community of La Confianza, municipality of Tocoa, department of Colón.

Both victims were members of the Gregorio Chávez and La Aurora *campesino* companies, respectively, and according to reports, both were ambushed by armed men while on their way to work in the context of the ongoing agrarian struggle in Bajo Aguán.

In its statement, OHCHR expressed deep concern,

noting that Ramón and Carlos Rivas were relatives of Santos Hipólito Rivas and Javier Rivas, also land defenders who were killed in similar circumstances on 12 February 2023, crimes that remain unpunished.

Since January of this year, the United Nations office has recorded at least nine violent deaths of members of *campesino* and farmer cooperatives and their relatives in this conflict-ridden region of the Honduran Caribbean. According to the statement, these individuals continue to be the target of smear campaigns, threats and constant harassment, without any effective response from the Honduran State.

"More than three years after the agreement was signed between representatives of the Honduran State

and the cooperatives and associated enterprises of Bajo Aguán, violence continues to claim victims due to the lack of a structural approach to the conflict," emphasises the OHCHR.

In this regard, the Office urged the Honduran State to comply with the commitments made in the agreement, in particular the establishment of the Bajo Aguán Truth Commission as a key mechanism for guaranteeing victims their rights to truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-repetition. In addition, the statement made an urgent call to guarantee the lives and integrity of human rights defenders and *campesinos*, and to adopt preventive measures in the face of new acts of violence.

Finally, OHCHR urged the authorities to conduct a diligent, prompt and exhaustive investigation, focused on dismantling the armed groups operating in the area, considered one of the main risk factors for environmentalists and human rights defenders.

The UN agencies reiterated their willingness to continue supporting the Honduran State in complying with its international human rights obligations, especially in the context of high social conflict such as that which persists in the Bajo Aguán.

CITIES IN THE BAJO AGUÁN REGION, HONDURAS



What a COP Out

The thirtieth Conference of the Parties concluded in Belém as this issue of the ENCA newsletter headed to print. While not exclusively about Central America, the summit's outcomes have left many questioning whether international climate diplomacy has lost its way entirely, and this could have dire consequences for the region. Whilst there were marginal advances on adaptation finance and some promising initiatives on the periphery, COP30 has fundamentally failed to deliver on the existential crisis that brought nearly all the world's nations to Brazil in the first place.

The most glaring failure was the summit's complete inability to secure a roadmap for transitioning away from fossil fuels. Despite more than 80 countries pushing for concrete language on phasing out oil, gas and coal, the primary drivers of climate chaos, the final text makes no direct mention of fossil fuels whatsoever. This represents an extraordinary retreat from even the tepid commitments made at COP28 in Dubai, where nations at least agreed to "transitioning away from fossil fuels". Saudi Arabia, Russia, China and India successfully blocked all attempts to include such language, exposing the cynical reality that petrostates continue to wield disproportionate power over global climate negotiations.

The influence of fossil fuel interests at COP30 cannot be overstated. More than 1,600 fossil fuel lobbyists descended upon Belém, outnumbering every national delegation except the host country. That's one in every 25 attendees representing the very industries driving planetary destruction. This army of lobbyists, which has grown from 503 at Glasgow in 2021 to its current record levels, succeeded in their mission to obstruct meaningful progress. As Panama's Special Representative for Climate Change Juan Carlos Monterrey Gómez observed, "A climate decision that cannot even say 'fossil fuels' is not neutrality, it is complicity".

The venue itself became an inadvertent metaphor for the proceedings when fire broke out at the COP30 site on Thursday. "The venue bursting into flames couldn't be a more apt metaphor for COP30's catastrophic failure to take concrete action," noted Jean Su from the Centre for Biological Diversity. The summit was meant to be Brazil's "forest COP", yet it delivered no binding roadmap to halt deforestation, despite taking place at the gateway to the Amazon. Whilst President Lula pledged to create voluntary roadmaps on both deforestation and fossil fuels, these carry no legal weight and represent little more than consolation prizes.



Perhaps most damning is the gap between scientific reality and political will. UN Secretary-General António Guterres confirmed ahead of COP30 that overshooting the 1.5°C warming threshold is now inevitable, potentially beginning in the early 2030s. Brazilian scientist Carlos Nobre warned that fossil fuel use must fall to zero by 2040–2045 to avoid catastrophic temperature rises of up to 2.5°C. Yet current nationally determined contributions would deliver only a 12 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, woefully short of the 60 per cent cut needed by 2035. Analysis by Greenpeace found that G20 countries' 2035 targets would achieve only 23–29 per cent reductions compared to 2019 levels, with many major emitters failing to submit plans altogether.

Whilst COP30 did agree to triple adaptation finance by 2035 and mobilise \$1.3 trillion annually for climate action by that date, these financial commitments ring hollow without binding mechanisms to phase out the very activities causing climate breakdown. The summit's modest achievements—the establishment of a just transition mechanism, recognition of Indigenous territories, and \$6 billion pledged to Brazil's Tropical Forests Forever Facility, are genuine progress. Yet they pale against the summit's fundamental failure to confront fossil fuel expansion.

After thirty years and thirty COPs, the uncomfortable truth is that global greenhouse gas concentrations have risen by 17 per cent since the first summit in 1995, and the world continues hurtling towards catastrophic warming. It is predicted that more than 700,000 lives have been lost to climate-related extreme weather over those three decades. COP30 has exposed the brutal reality that as long as fossil fuel interests dominate these negotiations and consensus rules allow petrostates to veto progress, the COP process remains fatally compromised. What transpired in Belém wasn't climate leadership, it was a masterclass in organised irresponsibility dressed up as diplomacy.

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Meeting Dates 2026

February 19th (4pm) | June 28th | October 18th

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.