

Report

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Bolivia's Popular Upeaval

By Tanya M. Kerssen and Roger Burbach, Center for Study of Americas CENSA, Berkeley, CA

Ed. Note: Investigative journalist Jeremy Bigwood obtained documents through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and Mandatory Declassification Review (MDR) that revealed US intervention in Bolivia. He stated that documents provide clear proof that the US government, through the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), National Democratic Institute (NDI) and USAID, has been and continues to conspire against the legal and democratically elected government of Bolivia.

A popular upheaval is sweeping Bolivia, threatening the departmental capital of Santa Cruz, the bastion of the right wing rebellion against the government of Evo Morales. Some twenty thousand miners, peasants and coca growers are moving on the city to reclaim state institutions occupied by autonomist forces. They are also demanding the resignation of the Santa Cruz prefect (governor), Rubén Costas, and the apprehension of Branko Marinkovich, an agro-industrial magnate who heads up the Santa Cruz Civic Committee comprised of large land owning and business interests.

Five hundred kilometers away in Cochabamba in central Bolivia negotiations are taking place between the Morales government and the opposition. Thousands of demonstrators occupy the city's streets, serving notice that the country's social movements will tolerate no concessions to the right wing. The "Dialogue," facilitated by Jose Miguel Insulza, the president of the Organization of American States, is to resolve the issues that have brought the country to the precipice of civil war. "I want to sign a document that will allow for the pacification of the country ... and guarantee a new political constitution for the state," proclaims Morales.



Members of the Task Force organized a demonstration in San Francisco protesting US intervention in Bolivia. Photo: Colleen Rose

But the opposition is raising procedural and substantive objections to the government's proposals, even to an autonomy accord that contains concessions for the rebellious departments. According to Fidel Surco, the head of the National Coordination for Change, the coalition of Bolivia's social movements allied with MAS, the Movement Towards Socialism: "We aren't going to wait any longer...we know that the prefects are simply stalling so that no accords are reached." Morales, in a warning to those in attendance at the Dialogue, said: "I have a letter from the mobilized social movements, they also want to participate. As far as I am concerned they are welcome, we await their participation."

Almost a month ago the National Democratic Council (Conalde)—the organization of the right wing prefects and politicians based in the rebellious departments in the "Media Luna" of eastern Bolivia—sparked

this crisis by launching an offensive to seize complete control of their departments. They set up road blockades and violently took over government facilities, including customs offices, airports, the agrarian reform offices and the national hydrocarbons company.

Their protests initially focused on revers-

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ing the government's decision last year to use a portion of the revenue from the hydrocarbon gas tax to create a universal pension for citizens over sixty. Now they have expanded to include complete departmental autonomy, the end of agrarian program and a gutting of the new constitution slated to be voted on in a referendum late this year. Control over the oil and gas resources, which for the most part are located in the Media Luna, is the fundamental objective of the autonomy movement.

The conflict came to a head on September 11 in the Media Luna department of Pando when peasants from the community of El Porvenir began marching to Cobija, the departmental capital, to protest the right-wing sacking of government offices. They were ambushed by a para-military force with machine guns, resulting in 15 dead, 37 injured and 106 disappeared. Morales responded by declaring a state of siege in the department, sending in the army to retake government offices, and throwing the Pando prefect, Leopoldo Fernandez, in jail after he admitted to giving orders to forcefully subdue protesters. A new prefect, Navy Admiral Landelino Rafael Banderia Arce, was appointed by Morales to impose order as many of the right wing leaders fled across the border to Brazil.

The events in El Porvenir precipitated a national mobilization of the indigenous peoples and social movements as well as a sense of outrage in neighboring countries. Chilean president Michelle Bachelet called an emergency meeting of South American countries (UNASUR) in Santiago to discuss the Bolivia crisis. The "Declaration of La

Moneda", signed by the twelve UNASUR governments, denounced the atrocities committed in Pando and any attempt to undermine the central government and Bolivia's territorial integrity.

Morales, thanking UNASUR for its support, declared: "For the first time in South America's history, the countries of our region are deciding how to resolve our problems, without the presence of the United States." On September 10, the day before the massacre, Morales had expelled US ambassador Phillip Goldberg from Bolivia for meddling in the country's internal affairs and meeting with Ruben Costas and the autonomous leaders.

For his part, Morales has thus far shown tremendous restraint in cracking down on the right wing violence, almost too much in fact. He has drawn criticism from the social movements, particularly in peasant and indigenous working-class communities, such as the "Plan 3,000" community adjacent to Santa Cruz, which has been living under constant threats from right wing racist groups like the Cruceño Youth Movement.

Although after the massacre, Conalce decided to lift the road blockades and relinquish some of the government offices (albeit with hundreds of thousands of dollars in damages), the political forces it represents retain effective control of the major urban areas of the Media Luna outside of Pando. This is why the peasant and indigenous movements are marching on Santa Cruz, to assert their rights and dignity throughout the Bolivian nation, with or without the support of Morales and the government.

Branko Marinkovich, for his part, is hitting the road in a "public relations campaign" to explain the autonomist cause. According to the newspaper La Razon, he is traveling to Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Paraguay to "denounce the acts of violence that were provoked by MAS in Pando and the government threats that loom over the negotiations underway in Cochabamba." Following Marinkovich's logic, the fifteen slain peasants are not only the authors of their own fate, but are to blame for all of the violence of the past month. Presumably, their very existence, let alone their demands for a share of the country's resources, is provocation enough. By launching his South American tour, Marinkovich is also conveniently leaving the country before he can be apprehended for the damage and

havoc of the past few weeks.

The marchers are isolating Santa Cruz as they set up fortified road blocks at strategic points while they continue to move on the city. Minister of Government Alfredo Rada expressed his support of the protesters, stating that they are merely reacting to the violence initiated by the Santa Cruz Civic Committee via the Cruceño Youth Movement. Likewise, Vice-President Alvaro Garcia Linera stated: "They have mobilized to defend the country and the integrity of our democracy."

President Morales, on the other hand, seemed to be experiencing a spell of cold feet as he expressed his frustration with the actions of the social movements at a press conference in Cochabamba: "It frightens me because they say they will march until the prefect [Costas] resigns. I don't agree with it, and it scares me."

Nonetheless, the marchers are proceeding with their plan to descend on Santa Cruz. According to Joel Guarachi, the head of the National Confederation of Peasant Workers, some 600,000 protesters are located throughout the fifteen Santa Cruz provinces. He declares the march and occupation of the city's plaza will be peaceful.

Throughout the crisis, Morales has been avoiding the appearance of government oppression in favor of appeals for peaceful negotiation and the rule of law. But the social movements are demanding more, a social revolution that over turns the political and economic order in the Media Luna. And Morales may be moving with the tide. The day after he said that Costas should not be forced to resign, he recalled the siege of La Paz in 1781 led by Tupac Katari, who demanded an end to Spanish oppression and the recognition of the basic rights of the Indian peoples and their communities. Now more than two centuries later the Indians and popular classes of Bolivia may finally be on the brink of realizing their aspirations.

Update: After weeks of negotiations and huge marches, the Bolivian congress approved and President Morales signed into law on October 23, a measure setting January 25 for the vote on the new Constitution to take place.

Sources: <http://globalalternatives.org/news/censa.org>, Sept. 23, 2008; "New Discoveries Reveal US Intervention in Bolivia" <http://boliviamatters.wordpress.com/>, Oct.11, 2008

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VENEZUELA: Hope Versus Paranoia

By James McEnteer, writer based in Bolivia.

Ed. Note: *The author participated, along with 22 others in a Task Force on the Americas delegation to Venezuela in August 2008.*

A US traveler in Venezuela may recall the Will Rogers observation: “God must love poor people; he made so many of them.” The poor are the natural constituents and enthusiastic boosters of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. The frequent target of bellicose US rhetoric and actions, Chavez has dared to chart a path of independence for his country, refusing a free-trade agreement with the US. Though Chavez has been elected to office several times by decisive majorities, the Bush administration persists in calling him a dictator.

Venezuela’s huge petroleum reserves and the rising price of oil have allowed Chavez not only to pay off his debts to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund but to help his neighbors become debt free as well. Chavez has made no secret of his desire to build a Latin American common market, independent of US control, which will eventually be strong enough to negotiate rational trade terms with the European Union, the North Americans and others.

The Venezuelan oil industry was nationalized in 1976, decades before Chavez took office. But for the first time, the Venezuelan government is investing most of the profits in projects that benefit the poor majority of Venezuelans, instead of the already wealthy few.

In community after community, urban and rural, the excitement is palpable. New homes and schools are being built, new clinics and infrastructure. Through government-funded community councils, ordinary citizens are being consulted about political and financial decisions. In the “new geometry of power,” as several Venezuelans described it, politicians are not dictating civic projects. The people themselves are prioritizing the needs of their communities and then helping to bring them about.

Real democratization – one that includes the traditionally disenfranchised majority — is struggling to become a reality in Venezuela. The only wars being fought here are against illiteracy, poverty and disease. Hope is in the air. Everyone is talking about “the process”

of converting their country from a near-feudal state to a more egalitarian society. “We’re making a new road,” said the mayor of the mid-sized city of Carora, “rather than the traditional mode of government by and for the few.”

Carora Mayor Julio Chavez, no relation to the president, said “One of my objectives from day one was to reduce the role of the mayor.” In Carora, which pioneered the community council concept, one hundred percent of government funds are allocated by community councils, not by the mayor’s office. He has to make his budget requests to the council.

Is the Venezuelan social experiment idealistic? Yes. Is “the process” proceeding without glitches? No one I met here made that claim. Is this radical social transformation now underway a threat to the United States? Not at all. In fact, as hard as it is for Americans to accept, we could learn from the Venezuelan example.

United States foreign policy has always been motivated by a missionary mentality. But it’s time to vary the missionary position. From the Manifest Destiny that drove the US to seize half of Mexico, to Woodrow Wilson to Henry Kissinger and up to the present moment, the United States has always inflicted its ideological will on others, however violently, in the name of the “greater good.” Our near-religious certainty about our own apparently unlimited “best interests” allows the US to justify, at least to itself, interference in the internal affairs of other countries, including many in Latin America. Unfortunately and not coincidentally, our government tends to replace the populist socialism it fears with the much greater evils of dictatorships, torture and genocide in places such as Guatemala, Nicaragua, Chile, Argentina and Brazil. The list is long and tragic.

In 1823 President James Monroe declared that Europe had no right to interfere in Latin America. Not long after the enunciation of the Monroe Doctrine, South American independence fighter Simon Bolivar presciently predicted that “... the United States is destined to plague the Americas with misery in the name of liberty.”

As many Latin American countries undertake a dramatic shift from US imposed neo-liberal economic and political structures to new, more independent forms of demo-

cratic socialism, the United States finds itself on the wrong side of history. The American experience – North and South – shows that capitalism only ever benefits a small minority, leaving many millions struggling to meet their basic needs. Bush and Cheney speak for that powerful minority. They view the attempt by Latin nations to re-invent themselves from corporate satellite feudal states to genuinely egalitarian democracies as a threat to their old hierarchical corporate model of governance.

These days the US tends to bypass diplomacy in favor of violence. Is this a cause or an effect of our overdeveloped military capabilities? We tend to declare “war” on things: communism, terrorism, drugs, or various villains du jour, like Manuel Noriega or Saddam Hussein. If it is true that a man who raises his fist is a man who has run out of ideas, then it is clear that the Bush-Cheney foreign policy has been mentally bankrupt from the start. They have spurned negotiation for saber rattling and invasions. “You are either with us or with the terrorists” is an unhelpful Manichean simplicity meant to intimidate countries, but instead merely alienates them. When Condoleezza Rice declared Chavez “a negative force in the region,” was she speaking as the US Secretary of State or as a once and future board member of Exxon-Mobil?

An American traveling in Venezuela is struck by the dramatic difference in the tone of public discourse. The powerful, prosperous United States is dominated by the language of fear and belligerence. Part of the problem is that we have moved back into Plato’s cave, except that the shadows we mistake for reality are the flickering figures on our television screens. We are literally out of touch with reality, in our own country and the rest of the world. Encouraged by political opportunists, we worry about terrorism, rising gas prices, foreign enemies and economic collapse.

Compared to average Americans, many Venezuelans have little, except this new, energizing hope. But that turns out to be a lot. We should not just respect and encourage the Venezuelan experiment, but perhaps find a way to adapt it for our own peace of mind. We must reclaim the rhetoric of hope. Idealism has been the traditional bedrock American strength.

Death by paranoia is a bad way to go.

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH: Tool of US Propaganda

By George Friemoth, Task Force on the Americas

The New York – based Human Rights Watch (HRW) claims it is an independent non-governmental human rights organization. In fact, it is neither an independent NGO nor a credible human rights organization. HRW is funded largely by government-linked quasi-private foundations and the US Congressional funded political propaganda organization, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).

Recently, HRW managed to destroy its reputation as a credible organization with the publication of a 230 page report entitled, “A Decade under Chavez: Political Intolerance and Lost Opportunities for Advancing Human rights in Venezuela.” This report was the latest in a series of hit pieces against the Chavez government echoing US government and main stream media propaganda. Written by HRW’s Americas Director, Jose Miguel Vivanco and his assistant David Wilkinson, its publication and widespread dissemination led to both being expelled from Venezuela for repeated partisan political intervention in the internal affairs of the country.

Key background facts about HRW’s Vivanco were pointed out by retired Emeritus Professor of Sociology, James Petras who wrote the following, “Jose Miguel Vivanco served as a diplomatic functionary under the bloody Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet between 1986 and 1989, serving no less as the butcher’s rabid apologist before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. His behavior was particularly egregious during the regime’s brutal repression of a mass popular uprising in the squatter settlements of Santiago in 1986-87. With the return of electoral politics (democracy) in Chile, Vivanco took off to Washington where he set up his own NGO, the Center for Justice and International Law, disguising his right-wing affinities and passing himself off as a ‘human rights’ advocate. In 1994 he was recruited by former US federal prosecutor, Kenneth Roth, to head the ‘Americas Division’ of Human Rights Watch. Roth is the executive director of HRW.

From 1994 to the present, HRW’s purpose has been to give human rights cover for illegal US operations and intervention abroad: Yugoslavia, Kosovo, Croatia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, Israel and most recently Haiti and Venezuela.

The report leading to Vivanco’s recent ex-

pulsion from Venezuela was analyzed by Petras who said, “the ‘Report’ reveals an astonishing number of blatant falsifications and outright fabrications, glaring deletions of essential fact, deliberate omissions of key contextual and comparative considerations and especially a cover-up of systematic long term, large-scale security threats to Venezuelan democracy posed by Washington.” Of note: in September, the Venezuelan government uncovered a detailed plan to assassinate Chavez and carry out a coup. Several persons were arrested in an ongoing investigation.

Journalist Joel Emersberger seriously questioned whether HRW was a credible human rights organization, as evidenced by not only the recent report on Venezuela but also by other HRW reports over the years. He pointed out that he personally wrote and telephoned HRW for years on these issues and never received a reply. He cited six other reputable reporters who highlighted flagrant bias in HRW statements involving the Balkans, Israel, Haiti and Venezuela. None received a reply.

Emersberger rhetorically asked HRW to finally answer some of his questions: When the coup deposed Chavez in 2002 why did HRW’s public statements fail to denounce it and call on other countries not to recognize the regime or urge an investigation? Similarly, when a coup deposed Haiti’s democratically elected government in 2004, why didn’t HRW condemn the coup, call on other countries not to recognize the coup government and call for the investigation into the overthrow of Aristide? Since 2004, why has HRW written about 20 times more about Venezuela than about Haiti despite the fact that Haiti’s coup created a human rights catastrophe in which thousands of political murders were perpetrated and jails filled with political prisoners? Why did HRW fail to condemn the imprisonment of Haiti’s former Prime Minister Yvon Neptune and subsequent incarceration of Father Gerard Jean-Juste, Haiti’s most prominent political prisoner after the coup?

Instead HRW has repeatedly objected to lawsuits brought against Venezuela’s opposition leaders and even defended the coup plotters from prosecution, claiming they were merely exercising their citizen rights, as if human rights include the right to overthrow a democratic government! Emersberger concludes: “The important thing is to spread awareness of the role they (HRW) have in-

creasingly come to play as a group that marshals support among liberals for very nasty imperial (US) projects. No one should be fooled, at this point, by the fact that it (sometimes) publishes some criticism of the US and its clients.”

Our Marin-based Task Force on the Americas (TFA) has closely studied the significant changes in Venezuelan society since 1999. It has organized at least seven delegations since early 2004 involving over 100 participants from diverse backgrounds, conducted educational events and published articles in our quarterly Report on the Americas as well as other publications. While in Venezuela, Task Force board members and other delegates met numerous times with members of opposition groups or individuals. In general, we found that many felt aggrieved and discriminated against simply because they had lost some of their former privileges.

Notwithstanding its claims to the contrary, HRW’s report is essentially based upon interviews with the opposition and anti-Chavez government forces and not the majority ‘Chavista’ poor and working classes. The report accuses Chavez of “discrimination,” without analyzing the new participatory democracy that is flourishing in Venezuela, with its new constitution in which the current government is focusing on the poor who, for decades, were discriminated against with impunity. The Task Force rejects HRW’s falsifications and affirms our commitment to tell the inspiring truth about the people’s struggle for sovereignty, social justice and “Socialism of the 21st Century.”

Benjamin Forcano, a priest and theologian from Spain read the HRW report in its entirety and wrote from Madrid, “I don’t know who the members of Human Rights Watch are, what their ideology is or who supports them. And perhaps it is better that way. But when you read their report, you will see that the document takes a partisan point of view and attempts to blame everything on Chavez. There is simply no rigorous, impartial or balanced analysis in the report. It clearly takes a position against the poor or those who were impoverished by the previous regimes.”

Sources: *Human Rights Watch*, Sept. 21, 2008, www.hrw.org; James Petras, Sept. 27, “*Human Rights Watch in Venezuela: Lies, Crimes and cover-ups*,” Joel Emersberger, *Narco-News*, Oct. 10, www.narconews.org

GUATEMALA: Americas Social Forum

By Marc Becker, Latin America historian, based in Madison, Wisconsin

Thousands of Maya farmers took over Guatemala City's main boulevard in a massive march on October 12. Men and women, some carrying months-old infants, were dressed in the colorful outfits of their local communities. They carried banners advertising the names of their Indigenous and peasant organizations, and denouncing the privatization of land and water. They shouted out slogans that popular movements are sweeping across Latin America, and that the people united will never be defeated.

This continental march on the Day of Resistance of Indigenous peoples and nationalities brought an end to the Americas Social Forum, a gathering of civil society and social movements. With the participation of more than 7,000 delegates from throughout the Americas and Europe, the 6-day event condemned corporate-led neoliberal economic policies, and pledged to build a better world.

Billed as the "forum of resistance," the gathering intentionally culminated on the anniversary of Christopher Columbus' arrival in the Americas. Elites previously celebrated October 12 as the Day of the Race, but now indigenous people commemorate it as a day of resistance to exploitation and oppression.

This was the third meeting of the Americas Social Forum, and the first one in Central America. Since the World Social Forum began in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2001, these gatherings have brought together social movements to create alternatives to corporate globalization and empire. Although somewhat smaller than previous gatherings, the participation of 350 organizations in a wide range of events resulted in a very rich meeting.

Forum organizer Joel Suárez from the Martin Luther King Center in Havana, Cuba, noted that "we tried to have a different kind of forum, one with a strong presence of women, Indigenous peoples, young people, and peasants." The forum, indeed, did have a large Maya and female face.

Indigenous peoples, not only from Gua-

temala but throughout the Americas, met to discuss issues of land and water. Blanca Chancoso, an Indigenous leader from Ecuador, proclaimed that "water is not a commodity; water is life. Land is our mother and our mother is not a commodity."

Tom Goldtooth from the Indigenous Environmental Network based in Minnesota said that "we are witnessing the collapse of capitalism." He came to Guatemala to join with other Indigenous peoples across that Americas in opposition to "a neoliberal system that is not working and continues to oppress our people."

The forum came on the aftermath of voters in Ecuador approving a new constitu-



Participants rally at Social Forum

tion that embraced that country's "plurinational" nature. Ecuadorian Indigenous leader Humberto Cholango contrasted plurinationalism with pluriculturalism that tends to reinforce neoliberalism and the folklorization of Indigenous peoples. Plurinationalism, Cholango argued, was a broad political, social, and economic concept. It means fighting for a new political process, not just for a small representation in government, but for a new concept of state structures.

In addition to plurinationalism, "sumak kawsay" or living well was a theme that ran throughout the Indigenous meetings and spread to the rest of the forum. Bolivia's foreign relations minister David Choquehuanca introduced this concept at the 2007 Indigenous summit in Guatemala. He noted that development plans look for a

better life, but this results in inequality. Indigenous peoples, instead, look to how to live well, or "sumak kawsay" in Quechua. Choquehuanca emphasized the need to look for a culture of life.

As Joel Suárez noted, the forum did have more of a female face than previous meetings. Women's groups used the forum to build their ongoing struggles. The Nobel Women's Initiative, a group of women who have won the Nobel Peace Prize, released a statement at the forum in support of Mesoamerican feminists. They urged government "protection and respect for the rights of women and feminist leaders." They expressed concern for the deteriorating situ-

ation of millions of women in Central America, particularly in regards to attacks on abortion rights and femicide.

The Nobel Women's Initiative stated that Another World Is Possible, "and that world must include gender equality and a life free of violence for all women." Women, they said, "are a central part of our dreams and actions to achieve a better world."

As a movement that emerged out of the global south, the United States has always played a relatively marginal role in the social forum process. Grassroots Global Justice has worked harder than any other

organization to bridge that gap. GGJ was formed in 2002 as a vehicle to build solidarity with social movements around the world, and to develop joint strategies to confront neoliberalism and the conditions people face. They brought an energetic delegation of several dozen activists from the US to the forum.

The forum helped connect broader issues to communities of struggle in the US. Maria Poblet, from Saint Peter's Housing Committee said that "as an organization that works with immigrant Latinos, we have come here to Guatemala to be face to face with the conditions that cause people to migrate." She was inspired by her experiences at the forum, and in particular the spirit of resistance in Guatemala in the face of extreme violence and repression. ●

HONDURAS: Development Plagues Garifuna

By Walt Sherwood, a retired California community college teacher and administrator.

Ed. Note: *The author participated in a Rights Action delegation last July. The focus was on two communities suffering the effects of so-called development. The following tells about one of them.*

A lot of people in the more developed countries of North America sometimes wonder why those other people, our neighbors to the south, just don't go ahead and develop. It sounds like a solution, doesn't it? If they were only developed, then they wouldn't need to come here any more, they could stay home where they really want to be anyway, where they "belong" and the immigration problem would be solved.

So it might just come as a shock to learn that some of those people down there don't actually want to be developed – at least not the way "development" is usually thrust upon them.

The first community is the Garifuna, descendants of escaped African slaves and native peoples from the Caribbean, who have lived on the northeastern coast of Honduras, on the shores of beautiful Tela Bay, for over two hundred years. Having their own culture, language, customs, music, and dance, they have been largely ignored by the mainstream Spanish-speaking Honduran society. Twenty or 30 years ago, the people from the capital, Tegucigalpa, and other large cities woke up to the fact that the Garifuna were living on some of the most spectacular real estate on the face of the planet – miles and miles of unspoiled beaches, pristine waters, waving palm trees – an ideal spot for vacation homes, condos and tourist hotels complete with tennis courts, swimming pools and, naturally, golf courses.

The only problem was that the land was already occupied by these pesky people who seemed to think that, just because they had lived there for generations, it was actually theirs. The problem also was that the land belonged to the community – or communities, since there were many of them – and the communities didn't want to give it up.

But there was an easy answer for that,

privatization, dividing the land up into individual parcels which could be bought and sold on the open market, then making enticing offers to the individual owners to induce them to sell. Of course national law had to be changed in order to make this happen – no problem! Some individuals began to sell out. If people didn't want to sell, well, the state or wealthy individuals had ways of "persuading" them. In any case, the control of the Garifuna over their coastal land had begun to erode.

Some communities have already begun to disappear. A place called Miami still appears on the map but is no longer an intact Garifuna community, its parcels sold off for hotel and condo development. But the nearby communities of El Triunfo de la Cruz, San Juan, and Barra Vieja, just down the coast from Miami, have decided to make a stand. They are part of an organization called OFRANEH, or Black Fraternal Organization of Honduras.

We were shown around El Triunfo by OFRANEH leader Alfredo Lopez, a wiry man with a friendly manner and easy smile in spite of the six and a half years he had served in Honduran jails on trumped-up drug charges as a way to discourage his opposition to the tourism development projects. The charges were dismissed for lack of evidence – the Inter-American Court of Human Rights ordered the Honduran State to pay Alfredo monetary compensation for the abuse of justice and his suffering and loss.

Attacks and intimidation were commonplace, we were told. Another leader, Gregoria, had been shot outside her church and was now living in exile in the Bronx, New York, fearing for her life. Wilfredo Guerrero, an anti-development organizer, was living under a protective order from the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights, after having been jailed, attacked, almost killed and his house burnt to the ground.

A not uncommon tactic for development interests and their friends in government is to try to pin the label of common criminals on those who oppose them, and so de-legitimize their protest. Thus it has been said of Alfredo, Wilfredo, and other leaders of OFRANEH that they are members of *maras*, or gangs, which is patently

untrue but hard to disprove.

For people with few financial resources, it is difficult to go head to head with the legal apparatus of the state. Lawyers cost money. Bail costs money. Court procedures can be made to drag on and on until witnesses grow weary or are bought off or disappear. The communities have to be creative in their resistance, launching protests and demonstrations complete with music, drumming, and dance, in front of the government buildings in the capital; sometimes these tactics work and gain sympathy from some lawmakers. But often they have to look outside the country to international bodies, like the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights, for protection.

Are the Garifuna really against all "development"? Up until about fifteen years ago, they pretty much were. They were opposed to mega-tourism because they feared it would ruin their beaches, siphon water from nearby rivers to keep golf courses green, and force poor people off land that had belonged to them for centuries. But then they began to reflect. They were living in a zone that was attractive to tourists, after all. Why not try to meet these new challenges in a way that would not destroy the very things that were bringing the tourists there in the first place? Why not share the beauty with others, but on their own terms?

The answer the Garifuna came up with is community-controlled development – development on a much smaller scale than that proposed by the tourist industry that would have a minimal impact on the environment and on their traditional way of life. They envision small clusters of cabanas instead of multi-storey hotels. They see cultural exchanges between people, mutual exchanges, instead of the separation and isolation that currently exist in large-scale enclave tourism. Typically, tourists are whisked from the airport straight to a gated, fenced condo or hotel compound with no chance or attempt to interact with the local populace.

The Garifuna see tourism as a way for different peoples to learn about, and from, each other. They see it as a mutually beneficial learning experience, controlled and administered by the local communities in such a way that the communities would remain intact and the tourists would still have a satisfying, relaxing and enriching vacation. ●

COLOMBIA: The Pain and Power of Memory

By James McEnteer, journalist based in Cochabamba, Bolivia. He is the author of "Shooting the Truth: the Rise of American Political Documentaries," Praeger 2006.

Ed. Note: *The author visited Colombia in early September. On October 14 a popular mobilization of 12,000 peaceful protestors from mostly indigenous communities but also other popular movements in the department of Cauca were violently attacked by Colombian security forces. The mobilization was coordinated in seven other regions of the country and was joined by peasants, miners and union workers. It was called to protest the militarization of their territories, the US-Colombian Free Trade Agreement, and the failure of the Colombian government to fulfill various accords with the Indigenous relating to land, education and healthcare. The violent repression of the march of 12,000 resulted in two deaths and more than 100 injuries. Throughout Colombia 11 indigenous activists were killed in less than three weeks. This is only the latest sign of a growing wave of violent acts and selective assassinations against Colombia's popular movements by all the armed actors in the country's internal conflict.*

President Alvaro Uribe has followed a strategy of outright defiance against the indigenous communities' demands, not only in Cauca but throughout the country. Uribe accuses indigenous leaders and members of Congress of being accessories to delinquency and criminality.

Cali—It looks like just another store front in this burgeoning city of two and a half million people, in southwestern Colombia. But the Memory Gallery retails raw remembrance. A sign at the entrance advises visitors: "A people's knowledge of the history of their oppression and their resistance forms a part of their patrimony."

Photographs of men, women and children search out your eyes from the gallery walls. They are all victims of the state, murdered by the Colombian armed forces or by "paramilitary" forces acting on behalf of the government or the trans-national corporations who call the tune in this troubled country. Each face represents many more victims of assassi-

nations or forced disappearances in recent years, whose names are lost to memory and whose bodies have never been recovered.

"It is better to die for something than to live for nothing," in the words of Eduardo Umana Mendoza, whose smiling face beams down from his memorial plaque. He was a human rights lawyer murdered in his forties. Most of the victims represented in the Memory Gallery died for expressing their opinions or for trying to organize against repression. Some were killed as a warning to others. Some were simply guilty of being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

After eight years of planning and research, the Memory Gallery opened in Cali in 2007. One of the organizers, Freddi Caicedo, said it is hard for human rights activists and families of victims to find spaces to remember them. Landlords and rental agents don't want to rent their buildings for such a purpose. They are afraid. Project organizers also travel to universities and street locations with photographs, encouraging others to share their own stories, to remember their own dead. "Without remembering, the crimes will continue," said Caicedo. But with or without remembering, the crimes continue.

Between 1982 and 2005 paramilitary forces perpetrated more than 3,500 massacres and stole more than six million hectares of land (a hectare equals two-and-a-half acres) in Colombia, according to Memory Gallery statistics. Colombia now contains more than four million displaced persons or internal exiles. Who was robbed? Mostly poor farmers and indigenous groups, growing food for their own use. Who took over the land? Large corporations, running high-profit mono-crop agribusiness.

Though supposedly demobilized in 2002, paramilitary forces are still blamed for about six hundred murders a year. About a third of the national legislature is estimated to be under their control. Also since 2002, the National Armed Forces have committed more than 950 executions. In January 2008 alone, paramilitaries committed two massacres, murdered eight people and "disappeared" nine others, while the Army executed sixteen people without benefit of any judicial process. At least 20 union leaders have been murdered so far this year.

The US government enables the violence, repression and dispossession that constitute

Colombia's "permanent crisis." In the name of fighting leftist guerillas and the war on drugs, the US government-funded Plan Colombia supplies the Colombian armed forces with sophisticated weaponry and military training.

US support funds few social programs or schools. Eighty percent of the Colombian gross national product goes to war. Paramilitary forces do not fight narcotics traffickers, but poor farmers. Coca eradication campaigns poison huge tracts of land on which small farmers grow subsistence crops. The pseudo drug war despoils the land, forcing small farmers to migrate to cities, freeing up that land for corporate control. Meanwhile illicit drug production and export continues unabated.

Colombian activists have condemned more than thirty prominent multi-national corporations for employing paramilitaries to harass and murder workers, farmers, union leaders and student protestors. The list of these human rights abusers contains some familiar names: Coca Cola, Chiquita Brands, Del Monte, Nestle, Occidental Petroleum and others. How can these companies — and the US government — literally get away with murder? US media parrot the Bush administration line that Colombia (and the trans-national corporations) is fighting for freedom.

Who will tell the people that the opposite is true? Your US tax dollars support kidnapping, torture and murder on a massive scale in Colombia. Eight years ago there were 70,000 soldiers in all the Colombian armed forces combined. Now the police and military number 450,000, made up partly of dispossessed impoverished job-seekers. As the US outsources war to Halliburton and Blackwater, Colombia does the same with paramilitaries. In many ways Colombia seems merely a less inhibited, because less scrutinized, version of Bush America.

On a quickie visit in July — miraculously coinciding with the high-profile release of Ingrid Betancourt, three US mercenaries and other FARC hostages — John McCain declared his support for Colombian President Alvaro Uribe, despite Uribe's scandalous human rights record, his phony, ineffectual "war" on drugs and his attempt to subvert the country's judicial branch. No reporter challenged McCain or Uribe about any of it.

With US backing, on behalf of the multinational corporations, including major narco-

Colombia, continued on page 9

ECUADOR: New Constitution Approved

By *Marc Becker, Latin America historian based in Madison, Wisconsin*

October 20, 2008

On September 28, 2008, by almost a two-thirds margin Ecuadorians approved the text of a new constitution. Led by the young and charismatic president Rafael Correa, the constitution promised to bring an end to neoliberal policies that had enriched the elite and impoverished the masses. "Today Ecuador has decided on a new nation," Correa declared. "The old structures are defeated. This confirms the citizens' revolution."

Supporters of this "citizens' revolution" hoped that the new constitution would lessen inequality, foster social justice, and bring political stability to Ecuador. When Correa assumed the presidency on January 15, 2007, he became the eighth president of this small South American country in ten years. Over the past decade, social movements removed three presidents through massive street protests after they campaigned on populist promises to help the poor but then ruled in favor of the oligarchy.

Many observers welcomed Correa's election as part of Latin America's turn to the left. Echoing Hugo Chavez's rhetoric in Venezuela, Correa spoke of introducing socialism for the twenty-first century. Some social movement activists, however, questioned whether Correa was ideologically committed to their leftist political agenda. Was he, they worried, once again a populist who would opportunistically exploit social movement rhetoric to gain election only to rule in favor of the oligarchy while in office?

Correa's positions sometimes placed him at odds with others on the left. He came out of a Catholic Socialist tradition, which meant, for example, that his positions on abortion were not the same as those of leftist feminists. Environmentalists opposed his state-centered development projects, leading to significant tensions over mining and petroleum concerns. His agrarian policies favored economic development and also minimized support for small farmers. Many of those who allied with Correa were from the academic and non-governmental organization (NGO) worlds. Social movements were largely excluded from the centers of power.

Following the leads of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and Evo Morales in Bolivia,

Correa campaigned on the promise of calling a constituent assembly. Chavez had leveraged his election into the drafting of a new constitution that so thoroughly altered governing structures that it required new elections for both congress and the presidency. Opponents feared that Correa would similarly use this mechanism to strengthen the executive and consolidate his political control. Supporters, on the other hand, contended that a weak executive had contributed to political instability in Ecuador.

Social movements had repeatedly called for a new constitution to create a more inclusive political system. When Correa made this a central tenet of his campaign, those leaders began to resent him for hijacking one of their principle demands. In addition, while some observers believed that Ecuador needed a stronger executive to solve continual problems of instability, many social movement activists saw this as a dangerous move. They feared that heightened state power handed to a sympathetic president could just as easily be used against them if conservatives regained power. Correa, they worried, may have unwittingly laid the groundwork for a new round of authoritarian governments that could lead to disastrous results.

Correa ran as an independent for the presidency, and created his own Alianza Pais (Country Alliance) party to compete for seats in the constituent assembly. He won 80 seats, well more than half of the 130 in the assembly necessary to pass legislation. Correa had the foresight to assure that decisions in the assembly would be made by a simple majority vote of 66, rather than a two-thirds margin that would grant more legitimacy to the constitutional process. This decision was based on lessons learned from experiences in Venezuela and Bolivia. In Venezuela, Chavez held a majority in the assembly and easily pushed through the reforms that he desired. In Bolivia, in contrast, Morales failed to gain a controlling majority which meant that he was increasingly squeezed between conservative opponents who opposed his reforms and his more radical supporters who demanded quicker change.

On many key issues, Correa's policies corresponded with those of social movement activists. For years, activists had campaigned against the United States presence at the Manta air base, complaining that it was a

violation of national sovereignty and needlessly pulled Ecuador into conflicts in neighboring Colombia. In office, Correa announced that he would not renew the ten-year lease when it expired in 2009. This provision was written directly into the constitution with the declaration that "Ecuador is a land of peace" and it would not permit the establishment of military bases.

On other points, Correa had a much more complicated relationship with social movements. Environmental and Indigenous rights activists had long struggled against mining and resource extraction, and in particular had launched successful campaigns against oil extraction in the Amazon. Correa favored responsible mining endeavors that benefitted the government as well as local communities, and increasingly favored large-scale mining operations, though with strong state control. Attempting to pursue such a policy, of course, could easily alienate both environmentalists and business interests. Correa criticized the tactics of radical environmentalists who he complained disrupted production that would benefit the government.

Other environmentalists warmly embraced a constitution that protected the rights of nature. In addition, the new constitution guaranteed the right to information, including public access to community-based media. It also represented gains in areas such as education and healthcare. It embraced a solidarity economy that placed the interests of people and their communities over those of capital. The new constitution supported food sovereignty, outlawed transgenic seeds, and prohibited the privatization of water and the concentration of land holdings. It lowered the voting age to 16, and provided for the recall of elected officials. The vote was also extended to legal residents, Ecuadorian immigrants who had left the country, and members of the armed forces.

Indigenous activists had long demanded that the first article of Ecuador's constitution be rewritten to declare the "plurinational" nature of the country. For the first time in Latin America, this constitution includes this text. Conservatives feared that the doctrine of plurinationality would create "quasi ministates in which the Ecuadorian state could not exercise its sovereignty." Correa, however, wished to leave the term vaguely defined; essentially assuring that it would remain on the level of rhetoric without any significant substance or concrete implications.

Ecuador, continued from page 8

Another struggle was whether Kichwa and other Indigenous languages would be granted official status. In the middle of a final marathon session on July 19 to approve the constitutional text, the Correa-controlled assembly voted against this proposal. That vote faced an immediate and visceral reaction from Indigenous organizations who labeled the action as racist. In response, the text was revised to read "Spanish is the official language of Ecuador; Spanish, Kichwa and Shuar are official languages for intercultural relationships."

It was this mixed bag that placed social movements' organizations in such a difficult position. The most vocal and steadfast opposition to the new constitution came from the conservative oligarchy. The most reactionary elements of the Catholic Church called for a vote against the document, largely because of its ambiguous stances on abortion laws, same-sex marriages, and religious education. If popular movements opposed the constitution because it did not have everything they wanted, they would play directly into the hands of their traditional enemies. If they supported it, they would strengthen the hand of a political force that did not necessarily embody their interests. They struggled to find a way to support the constitutional project without giving the appearance of allying with the government.

Despite their disagreements with Correa, many who were critical of the government joined together to campaign for passage of the constitution. Social movements argued it was important to defeat conservative economic forces at the polls, and then to maintain pressure on the government to implement the positive gains that the constitution embodied. Activists embraced the September 28 vote in favor of the constitution as their own triumph. They declared that "the new constitution is the result of decades of resistance and struggle of social movements, the Indigenous movement, and diverse sectors of the Ecuadorian people; it does not belong to any one person." The new constitution was a strike against neoliberalism, and represented a movement toward opening up democratic participation.

Plans are in place to hold new presidential and congressional elections under the new constitution in February 2009. Having won four elections in a row over the past two years (the presidency, a plebiscite to convoke

a constituent assembly, the majority of delegates in the assembly, and finally approval for the constitution itself), Correa now appears positioned to remain in power for two four-year terms until 2017. Organizations that had strongly thrown their support behind the constitution now face their most difficult and serious challenge—assuring that the gains

Colombia, continued from page 7

traffickers, the Colombian government continues the rapacious tradition of seizing lands and water sources which once benefitted many, in order to enrich its own patrons, the mighty few. Formerly a major sugar exporter, Colombia must now import sugar for its domestic use. The huge tracts of sugar cane here are grown now for use as bio-fuels, a more lucrative, if less nourishing enterprise.

A couple hours' drive outside the city of Cali, the picturesque town of Trujillo lies in a verdant valley, its church steeple pointing heavenward. But Trujillo's bucolic façade masks a hidden horror. Over the course of eight years, the twenty thousand residents of this town suffered a slow-motion massacre, the tortures, disappearances and murders of 342 people. Major drug traffickers in the region allied with the Army and Police to get rid of anyone they wished, with no fear of prosecution.

At the town's own memory gallery, a sign declares: "Trujillo, a drop of hope in a sea of impunity." Here too the faces of the murdered victims — many very young — beckon us and implicate us in their unfair destinies. Several widows, one of whom also lost two sons, fourteen and sixteen, came out to see the American visitors. Still emotional about their losses, they were eager — almost desperate — to share their stories.

The people of Trujillo have begun an ambitious memorial project. When the Colombian government offered to pay reparations to the town, the families of the victims bought a large tract of land, an entire hillside, to build a memorial. Our guide was a twenty-two year old woman whose father was disappeared when she was four. At the time her pregnant mother also had a three-year-old and an eleven-month-old. Her father was twenty-six when he was taken, along with his two brothers, partners in a carpentry business. Why were they tortured and killed? Perhaps they saw something they shouldn't have. Perhaps they complained too loudly.

The Trujillo memorial wall winds up a hill

of the new document will be implemented. It remains an open question whether or not a strong executive, as with Chavez in Venezuela, would rule on behalf of the masses, or whether Ecuador had entered a new round of populist governments that will be detrimental to popular movements. ●

beside a stone path, with names and dates of death or disappearances. Children were busy on the day of our visit, scraping and white-washing the walls. Many of the murdered were young: 17, 39, 26.... Villagers who marched to demand a better road and a health clinic were labeled agitators and murdered. One old man, the town character, was ordered killed by troops to prove their loyalty to their commanders. Nine people are included in the memorial who died of broken hearts, after the torture and murder of their children.

Trujillo's priest, Father Tiberio Fernandez Mafla, organized worker co-ops to help his parishioners make more money. When the disappearances began, Father Tiberio denounced the kidnappings from the pulpit and demanded the safe return of the victims. Returning from a funeral, he too was detained and disappeared, along with his niece. His decapitated body, missing hands and feet and genitals, was found in the river. Cali's Memory Gallery is named in his honor.

A fellow visitor to Trujillo, Tom Clements, said he hoped the next US president will tell Alvaro Uribe that Plan Colombia will not survive, nor will any Free Trade Agreement be signed, until genuine reparations are made to the victims of state-protected terror in Colombia, including the end of impunity for the known perpetrators, starting in Trujillo. Tom's idea is morally sound, but unlikely to happen.

The suffering, the courage and the determination of the Colombian people, in Trujillo and Cali and many other places, is inspirational and heartbreaking. A Memory Gallery sign says: "Neither forgiving nor forgetting, we seek truth, justice and fundamental healing." The United States government and leading US corporations, too long complicit in the spread of terror and injustice in Colombia, should spearhead the drive for that truth, justice and healing. They/you/we can't claim they don't know.

Source for Ed. Note: *Mario Murillo, Oct. 15, 2008, <http://nacla.org>*



Latin America Solidarity Coalition, 1525 Newton St. NW, Washington D.C. 20010

LASC Coordinating Committee groups
Alliance for Global Justice
INTERCONNECT
Taskforce on The Americas
Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES)
Venezuela Solidarity Network
SOA Watch
Mexico Solidarity Network
Nicaragua Network
U.S.-El Salvador Sister Cities
Haiti Action Committee
Campaign for Labor Rights
Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala (NISGUA)
No War On Cuba Movement
National Immigrant Solidarity Network

To: Obama for President Committee
From: Latin America Solidarity Coalition (LASC) Coordinating Committee
Re: US-Latin America Policy

We are writing as the Coordinating Committee for the US-based Latin America Solidarity Coalition. We represent over 2000 local and national groups of US residents working in solidarity with the people of many parts of Latin America and the Caribbean. These groups are in all 50 states. Thousands of our members have been exchanging visits with and working closely with different parts of the Region. We have combined their rich experiences at four national LASC conferences and developed analyses and plans for many crisis areas, past, present and potential future crises. *(You may visit our website at www.lasolidarity.org.)*

We have studied Senator Obama's wide-ranging speech to the Cuban American National Foundation, Miami, May 23, on US-Latin American relations. We were disappointed in many of the positions he expressed as well as the fact that he chose to make them before an extreme right-wing group whose influence on US policy toward that region is responsible for much of the deterioration in the US image in Latin America. We would like to request a meeting with Sen. Obama to provide him with our ideas for a more positive US policy toward our neighbors to the South. Our hope would be to (1) help him to keep his discussions as accurate as he would like, and (2) help him develop a moral and sustainable US foreign policy in the region as soon as he becomes President.

As you well know, the nations, their cultures, their political-economic situations are complex. As you also know, over the years the US has made mistakes, many of which have threatened our own goals of helping to develop good feelings about our country among the people themselves, helping true democracies to develop, eliminating human rights abuses by the militaries that the US supports and trains, and encouraging strong economies and trade.

The positions of the LASC are:

1. Close the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation also known as the School of the Americas.
2. Close the International Law Enforcement Academy in San Salvador.
3. Stop funding Plan Colombia and cut off all military aid to that country.
4. Stop funding the Merida Initiative and the militarization of the US/Mexico border.
5. Close the National Endowment for Democracy and return USAID to its original foreign aid mission.
6. Return President Aristide to Haiti, advocate freedom for all political prisoners and support the end of the UN occupation.
7. End belligerence toward Venezuela and other Latin American countries whose citizens have elected left leaning governments over the past decade.
8. End the embargo against Cuba and normalize relations with our island neighbor.
9. Stop initiating "Free Trade" agreements that benefit only corporations while destroying local agriculture and forcing Latin Americans to leave their homeland to work in the US.
10. Publically state support for the legitimate elected government of Bolivia, condemn the separatist violence and take no actions to further inflame the crisis there.
11. Extradite the terrorist Luis Posada Carriles to Venezuela, as required by extradition treaty, to stand trial for the fatal bombing of a Cubana Airlines flight that killed 73 people. Free the five Cuban anti-terrorist agents falsely convicted of espionage for infiltrating Cuban exile terrorist groups in Miami whose repeated attacks have killed over 3,000 Cubans and foreigners in Cuba.

We look forward to hearing from you about when a small delegation from the LASC can meet with Senator Obama or senior foreign policy advisor Susan Rice. Please respond to the LASC at (202) 521 2510 ext. 205 or info@lasolidarity.org.

Sincerely, Burke Stansbury, LASC Coordinating Committee

MEXICO: Zapatistas Under Attack in Chiapas

All of Mexico's oppressing powers want to stop Zapatista autonomy from surviving and propagating elsewhere in the country. The powers in the three main political parties (PAN, PRD and PRI), the power of the Army, the power of government-promoted paramilitary groups, state and local powers in Chiapas and the media have all joined forces in an offensive to wipe out the Zapatista autonomous communities. They calculate that this is the first strategic step necessary to crushing the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) and its liberating project. The anti-Zapatista offensive has turned more aggressive in 2008.

The scale of the recent military mobilization against the Zapatista autonomous communities hasn't been seen for years. Army, police and paramilitaries are surrounding and intimidating the communities, provoking them and fabricating incidents between indigenous people and peasants. These aren't isolated incidents; the increased armed pressure is alarming just as the lack of concern from the powers responsible for stopping them.

The alarm bell is sounding and calling for ever-vigilant solidarity. All of us who are interested in human rights and concerned with preventing violations of human dignity should raise our voices, exposing the oppressive powers to the whole world, imagining and implementing actions that guarantee the peaceful expression of Zapatista autonomy. And we have to hurry, because time is running out.

Source: *Jorge Alonso Mexico correspondent, Envio, August 2008 (Central America University).*

CUBA: Hurricane and Economic Crisis

Cuba is responding positively to devastation caused by two hurricanes that hit the country in August and September, representing its worst natural disaster in over 50 years. The hurricanes coincided with the current global financial crisis, although experts are not yet ready to predict what impact the global turmoil will have on the island nation.

After years of high growth in the economy, Cuba faces a lot of uncertainty in regards to its current economy, but given its past record for ingenuity when faced with the havoc caused by the previous hurricanes or

other disasters, Cuba has shown an uncanny ability to prevail.

The Cuban government estimates hurricane damage at \$5 billion, which is probably low as it is based on Cuban prices which understate costs in relative international terms. Property values are fixed in Cuba at relatively low prices.

In anticipation of food shortages, farmers are being supported in planting rapid-yield food crops and Cuba passed a law allowing existing farmers to receive up to 40 hectares of unused land. People who are not farmers are limited to a maximum of just over 13 hectares (32 acres).

Reconstruction of the destroyed infrastructure and housing will take longer. Other sectors most critical to the Cuban economy, such as pharmaceutical production, nickel, tourism and other services were not badly affected by the storms and will continue to function. Inflows of family remittances from Cuban living abroad may help to prop up foreign reserve holdings. External credits are also being sought and these are indications that there may be a widening of the opening to foreign direct investment.

The timing of the hurricane and the global meltdown has certainly challenged Cuba's official ingenuity over reconstruction and not even the experts can predict its outcome but, given its historical record of overcoming challenges, it should succeed

Source: *The Financial Times Limited, Oct. 20, 2008*

PANAMA: Posada to Stand Trial in US

Barely three days after Panama's Vice President Samuel Navarro confirmed that his country plans to apply for the extradition of terrorist Luis Posada Carriles, the US Court of appeals in New Orleans, which has broken records in its slowness in considering the case, suddenly ordered that Posada Carriles be tried in El Paso on immigration fraud charges. According to the El Paso Times, a three-judge panel of the 5th Circuit Court of appeals determined that Posada should be brought to trial on charges of lying to federal authorities in his attempt to gain US citizenship.

Panamanian authorities wanted Posada Carriles to stand trial for planning to assassinate Cuban leader Fidel Castro at a public meeting in 2000. Venezuela attempted with-

out success to extradite Posada for the 1976 bombing of a Cuban airline that killed more than 70 people.

Last years a US District Judge in El Paso dismissed criminal immigration charges against Posada and currently he is living with his family in Miami. It appears the Bush Administration has again managed to save its former CIA agent from extradition on very serious crimes.

Source: *El Paso Times, Aug. 15, 2008; Cuban News Agency, Aug. 14.*

HONDURAS: Joins Venezuela's ALBA

On August 26, Honduran President Manuel Zelaya joined the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), Venezuela's alternative model to US free trade agreements. Zelaya said ALBA would help his country tackle chronic poverty. His announcement was quite surprising because Honduras has been a longtime ally of the US and a member of CAFTA, the Central America and US trade pact.

"Our decades-long relationship of dominance by the United States has not benefited all Hondurans. The war between communists and right-wingers is over, and if what we have now is not giving results, we have to turn to alternatives like ALBA," which also includes Cuba, Bolivia, Nicaragua and Dominica, Zelaya said.

Source: *Reuters, Aug. 26, 2008*

HAITI: UN Extends Mandate

On October 11, the Security Council of the United Nations extended the stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), recognizing the impact that civil disturbances in April (food riots) and the recent devastating hurricane season have had on the country's stability and security. The UN Council decided to maintain the mission's troop strength at 7,060 along with a police component of 2,091. In its resolution the Security Council welcomed the recent formation of the government of Prime Minister Michele Pierre-Louis, while encouraging "all relevant Haitian political, social and economic actors to strengthen democratic dialogue and forge the widest and most inclusive possible consensus."

Source: *UN Daily News, Oct. 14, 2008*

Delegations for 2009

El Salvador January 12-20

Election Observer-Mayoral and Legislative Assembly. Spanish is not necessary. \$650-\$750 from San Salvador Contact Task Force's Sue 415/453-5810, sseverin@igc.org; www.cis-elsalvador.org

Cuba February 8-18

"Change, Challenge, Solidarity and all that Jazz," Unlicensed trip. \$1895 from Cancun. Contact Erno 415/457-9528, ersh2000@yahoo.com. Sponsored by - California Cuba Cultural Exchange.

Paraguay March 6-15

Explore Resistance to Multinational Agrobusiness and Human Rights Issues on our first delegation after 60 years of one party

rule. \$1000 from Asuncion Contact Dale 415/924-3227, geodale1@earthlink.net, Co-sponsored by Task Force on the Americas and SOA Watch.

El Salvador March 9-17

Election Observer - Presidential. Spanish is not necessary, \$650-\$750 from San Salvador. Contact Sue 415-453-5810, sseverin@igc.org. For more information check out www.cis-elsalvador.org

US/Mexico Border April 20-26

Immigration Realities. \$750 from Tucson Arizona. Contact Dale 415-924-3227, geodale1@earthlink.net. Co-sponsored by Borderlinks and Task Force on the Americas.

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