

Report

SUMMER 2009

PUBLISHED BY MARIN INTERFAITH TASK FORCE ON THE AMERICAS

HONDURAS: Democracy at Stake

By Lisa Sullivan, Latin America
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July 10, 2009

My plane has just lifted off from the airport in Tegucigalpa, and I look down on the runway that five days ago was blocked by army tanks and soldiers, prohibiting the return of Honduran president Manuel Zelaya, ousted 12 days ago in a coup. Hundreds of thousands of people had swollen the roads leading to the airport to receive “Mel,” as the president is affectionately known. One 19-year old who came from the interior of the country, Isis Obed Murillo, was shot in the head by soldiers trying to disperse the crowd, his brains literally blown apart.

One of those present on Sunday was our taxi driver, who -- on our half-hour winding ride to the airport -- gave us a colorful report of what he thought of the new president, punctuated by sweeping arm gestures that frequently took his hands from the wheel. “Goriletti! Pinochetti! For 36 years he’s been robbing the poor as a member of Congress. He’s always wanted to be president. Now, he’s stolen the position! Our president is Mel! The soldiers are against us. They have the guns. But we are together, we are with Mel. If he can’t come back by plane, he should return on horseback. We will join him!” Like a made-to-order Hollywood backdrop to the driver’s passionate soliloquy, we passed street after street covered with graffiti: “fuera golpistas!” “Queremos al,” “Pinocheletti fuera!”

As I boarded the plane, my mind swam with images of faces of Hondurans in their cars passing by our vigil outside the US embassy yesterday. The slow traffic of the busy road gave people pause to read our signs, calling on our country to match their words with actions: to insist upon the immediate and unconditional return of Zelaya, to recall the ambassador and US troops at Palmerola. Many honked in support, flashed a peace/



President Zelaya returns to Nicaragua on July 24 after briefly crossing the border at Los Manos into Honduras and finding conditions were not safe for him to remain

victory sign, and many smiled broadly calling out “gracias!” Even the Honduras guards at the embassy shook each of our hands when we left. What they couldn’t say was silently passed on in the firmness of their grasp.

If ever there was a time for a solidarity moment, this was it. Just one month earlier, I had gone to Honduras with a small School of the Americas Watch (SOAW) delegation, and had asked our partners there to help us organize around this issue. How could we not go at this moment, when their very democracy was at stake? When we learned that two of the key coup leaders were SOA graduates, the need for the visit was sealed.

Six other activists made the snap decision to come down as well, and a SOAW delegation was formed overnight. We came from the US, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. All of us were trying to get to Honduras on Sunday, and all were blocked due to the

closing of the airport in anticipation of Zelaya’s attempted return. No one gave up, however, and we each found alternative ways to get there, arriving, miraculously, within hours of one another on Tuesday.

I rerouted through San Salvador and arrived to a sea of enthusiastic Salvadorans,

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awaiting Zelaya whose plane was diverted there after landing rights were denied in Honduras. The mood was electric as planes landed on the runway, shortly after my plane, carrying the presidents of Ecuador, Argentina, Paraguay and later a car bringing Salvador's president Funes to meet Zelaya; a powerful and extraordinary display of Latin American solidarity.

After finding our way to Tegucigalpa by land, we were welcomed in Honduras by Bertha Oliva, director of a noted human rights non-profit (COFADEH). It was Bertha who had brought us some weeks previously to a meeting with President Zelaya. It was not just an ordinary meeting, but one in a series of gatherings between the president, some of his ministers, and leaders of most of Honduras' social movements. It was a six-hour, heart-to-heart, head-to-head real dialogue on deep issues such as whether to continue with CAFTA, to keep Palmerola open to US soldiers, how to create a sustainable water system, whether to pull Honduran troops from the SOA. I have been in Latin America for 32 years, but this kind of president-to-the-people consultation was a first. And it made me realize that something very interesting was happening in Honduras.

Task Force on the Americas Report is published quarterly by the Marin Interfaith Task Force on the Americas.

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WHY HONDURANS SUPPORT PRESIDENT ZELAYA

By Medea Benjamin, cofounder of Global Exchange and CODEPINK

The day, July 6 started out full of joy, as thousands of Hondurans converged, intent on marching to the airport to greet the plane that was supposed to bring deposed President Zelaya back to Honduras.

Several young girls came with their church group determined to greet Zelaya. "The Cardinal is against our president, but he doesn't represent many of us in the religious community. Our pastor is against the coup and so are we," said Alejandra Fernandez, a 23-year-old university student.

I asked why she supported Manuel Zelaya, or "Mel," as his supporters call him. "The government said he broke the law and is guilty of 18 crimes," she said. "Do you know what they are?" She pulled out her cell phone and started to read from a list: He raised the minimum wage, gave out free school lunches, provided milk for the babies and pensions for the elderly, distributed energy-saving light bulbs, decreased the price of public transportation, made more scholarships available for students."

Suddenly a crowd gathered around us and started chiming in. "He fixed the roads," said one. "He put schools in remote rural areas, like my little village, that never had them before," added another. "He let anyone go into the Presidential Palace and converted it from an elite residence to the people's house," said another.

"You see?" Alejandra smiled. "He is guilty of even more than 18 crimes. That's why the elite classes can't stand him and why we want him back. This is really a class struggle."

Since the issue of the SOA had been raised by the social movements, I approached the president as he was leaving, and told him that the purpose of our visit was to request that he withdraw troops from the SOA, a school we hoped would soon close. He looked at me squarely and said "That's Obama's problem." I was a bit put off by the terse reply and said, "Actually, if you care about the sovereignty of your country, it's your problem too." He paused and looked deeply at me and said, "Get me the information." That night he called a friend and said, "Tell them that I agree, but at this moment I can't do this. I need the military on my side."

I wonder if Zelaya remembered any of this conversation when a few weeks' later soldiers, sent by their SOA-graduated commanders, roused him at gunpoint and forced him on a plane to Costa Rica in his pajamas. While US media flashed that the ouster was provoked by an illegal push from Zelaya to

get another term of office, I knew differently because I was in Honduras recently. Living in Venezuela, and seeing how US media portrays that country, I've learned that it's impossible to really know what is happening in another country from the US mainstream media, unless you actually go there.

Like the rest of the continent, Honduras had lived the failed experiments of the US-neoliberal model over the past decade or more. Violence, poverty, unemployment, migration and despair were the result. But winds from the south were blowing, and Honduras began to open its windows, wide. The concept that change could come via a move towards participative democracy and via constitutional reform, like several South American countries, was beginning to take shape. On June 28th a non-binding consultative vote was to take place, known as the "cuarta urna." Urna in Spanish refers to

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HONDURAS: Coup Tries to Halt Advance of the Left

By Roger Burbach, author of *"The Pinochet Affair"* and Director of the Center for the Study of the Americas

The coup against Manuel Zelaya of Honduras represents a last ditch effort by Honduras' entrenched economic and political interests to stave off the advance of the new left governments that have taken hold in Latin America over the past decade. As Zelaya proclaimed after being forcibly dumped in Costa Rica, "This is a vicious plot planned by elites. The elites only want to keep the country isolated and in extreme poverty."

Zelaya should know, since his roots are in the country's large, land-owning class, having devoted most of his life to agriculture and forestry enterprises that he inherited. He ran for president as the head of the center-right Liberal Party on a fairly conservative platform, promising to be tough on crime and to cut the budget. Inaugurated in January, 2006, he supported the US-backed Central American Free Trade Agreement, which had been signed two years earlier, and continued the economic policies of neo-liberalism, privatizing state held enterprises.

But about half way into his four-year term, the winds of change blowing from the south caught his imagination, particularly those coming from Hugo Chavez's Venezuela, the largest regional power fronting on the Caribbean. With no petroleum resources, Honduras signed a generous oil subsidy deal with Venezuela, and then last year joined the emergent regional trade bloc, ALBA, the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas. Inspired by Venezuela it now has Bolivia, Cuba, Nicaragua, Dominica and Ecuador as members. Simultaneously, Zelaya implemented domestic reform policies, significantly increasing the minimum wage of workers and teachers' salaries, while stepping up spending in health care and education.

The upshot is that a reform-minded president supported by labor unions and social organizations is now pitted against mafia-like, drug-ridden, corrupt political elite that is accustomed to controlling the Supreme Court, as well as congress and the presidency. It is a story often repeated elsewhere in Latin America, with the United States almost always weighing in on the side of the established, entrenched interests.

The Honduran elites were outraged that a

member of their class would carry out even modest reforms. They began to portray Zelaya as a demagogue, and demonized Hugo Chavez as trying to take over the country. When Zelaya announced that he would hold a plebiscite on June 28 to see if the country wanted to have the option in the upcoming November presidential elections to vote for the convening of a constituent assembly that would draft a new constitution, the political establishment would have none of it. They incorrectly claimed that Zelaya was trying to stand for re-election. In fact the possibility that a president might serve a second term could only emerge in a new constitution that would not be drafted until well after Zelaya left office in January, 2010. The elites did however have reason to fear a new magna carta, since this is the path that Chavez in Venezuela, Evo Morales in Bolivia and Rafael Correa in Ecuador have used to draft new constitutions to begin transforming their countries political, social and economic structures.

The political establishment decided to nip this process in the bud by quashing the plebiscite scheduled for Sunday, June 28. The Supreme Court declared it unconstitutional and the military refused to help distribute the ballots. Then Zelaya fired the head of the army, General Romeo Vasquez, and led workers and social movement activists to seize ballots stored at an air force base for distribution. On Sunday at 6AM, the day of the plebiscite, the military sent a special army unit to seize Zelaya in his pajamas and to deport him to Costa Rica. The next day the Supreme Court levied charges of treason against Zelaya, and the Congress elevated its president, Roberto Micheletti, to be the interim president of the country.

The rest of the Americas, and most of the world, reacted with outrage against the coup. The Organization of the American States (OAS) convened an emergency session and voted unanimously to call upon the coup makers to restore Zelaya to power. Regional organizations like the Group of Rio also denounced the coup, while the European Economic Union and the World Bank announced that they were suspending economic assistance to Honduras. Even the governments of Alvaro Uribe of Colombia and Felipe Calderon of Mexico felt compelled to denounce the coup.

What explains this virtually unanimous opposition to the coup? Most of Latin America still remembers the dark days of the 1970s and 1980s when three-quarters of the continent's population fell under military rule. Countries like Chile, Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil still bear the scars and traumas of this period, and do not want to contemplate any opening that would allow their militaries to begin interfering once again in the political sphere.

The United States is also opposed to the coup, with President Obama denouncing it, saying it set a "terrible precedent" and that "We do not want to go back to a dark past" in which coups often trumped elections. He added: "We always want to stand with democracy."

Many observers are suspicious of how solid the US stand against the coup is. Obama, given his emphasis on multilateralism may have had little choice, knowing that his predecessor George W. Bush had roiled Latin America when he rushed to endorse the last coup attempt in the region against Hugo Chavez in October 2002.

The State Department has taken a more tepid stance. When Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was asked if "restoring the constitutional order" in Honduras meant restoring Zelaya, she would not say yes. The New York Times reports that she did not take to the Honduran president when she met him on June 2 at the meeting of the OAS in Tegucigalpa. Zelaya annoyed her by asking her to a private room late at night to have her meet and shake hands with his extended family. In a more formal meeting Zelaya brought up his plans for the referendum on June 28 and US officials took the position that it was unconstitutional and would inflame the political situation.

Washington also has a very close relationship with the Honduran military, which goes back decades. During the 1980s the US used bases in Honduras to train and arm the Contras, Nicaraguan paramilitaries who became known for their atrocities in their war against the Sandinista government in neighboring Nicaragua. John Negroponte, who became the czar of intelligence during the Bush administration after serving as US ambassador to Iraq, first achieved notoriety when he

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HONDURAS: Evidence of US Involvement in Coup

By Eva Golinger, investigative attorney

Ed. Note: *The author is a Venezuelan-American, author of "The Chávez Code: Cracking US Intervention in Venezuela." This article is excerpted; see the source at the end of the article.*

No one doubts that the fingerprints of Washington are all over the coup. Many analysts, writers, activists and even presidents, have denounced this role. Nevertheless, the majority coincide in excusing the Obama Administration from any responsibility in the Honduran coup, blaming instead the lingering remains of the Bush-Cheney era and the war hawks that still pace the halls of the White House. The evidence demonstrates that while it is certain that the usual suspects who perpetrate coups and destabilization activities in Latin America are involved, ample proof exists confirming the direct role of the new administration in Washington in the Honduran coup.

- The Department of State had prior knowledge of the coup.
- The Department of State and the US Congress funded and advised the actors and organizations in Honduras that participated in the coup.
- The Pentagon trained, schooled, commanded, funded and armed the Honduran armed forces that perpetrated the coup and that continue to repress the people of Honduras by force.
- The US military presence in Honduras, that occupies the Soto Cano (Palmerola) military base, authorized the coup d'état through its tacit complicity and refusal to withdraw its support of the Honduran military involved in the coup.
- The US Ambassador in Tegucigalpa, Hugo Llorens, coordinated the removal from power of President Manuel Zelaya, together with Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Shannon and John Negroponete, who presently works as an advisor to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.
- From the first day the coup occurred,

Washington has referred to "both parties" involved and the necessity for "dialogue" to restore constitutional order, legitimizing the coup leaders by regarding them as equal players instead of criminal violators of human rights and democratic principles.

- The Department of State refused to legally classify the events in Honduras as a "coup d'état," nor has it suspended or frozen its economic aid or commerce to Honduras, and has taken no measures to effectively pressure the *de facto* regime.
- Washington manipulated the Organization of American States (OAS) in order to buy time, therefore allowing the coup regime to consolidate and weaken the possibility of President Zelaya's immediate return to power, as part of a strategy still in place that simply seeks to legitimate the *de facto* regime and wear down the Honduran people that still resist the coup.
- Secretary of State Clinton and her spokesmen stopped speaking of President Zelaya's return to power after they designated Costa Rican president Oscar Arias as the "mediator" between the coup regime and the constitutional government; and now the State Department refers to the dictator that illegally took power during the coup, Roberto Micheletti, as the "interim caretaker president."

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served as US ambassador to Honduras in the early 1980s and granted US approval to death squads run by a special Honduran military unit against domestic opponents.

On Wednesday, the OAS meeting in Washington called for the restoration of Zelaya to office by Saturday, July 4. The head of the OAS, Jose Miguel Insulza of Chile, along with the president of the UN General Assembly Miguel d'Escoto of Nicaragua, and Presidents Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner and Rafael Correa of Argentina and Ecuador respectively said they would accompany Zelaya on his return.

It is doubtful he will be allowed to return by the coup leaders. For Micheletti and

- The strategy of "negotiating" with the coup regime was imposed by the Obama administration as a way of discrediting President Zelaya – blaming him for provoking the coup – and legitimizing the coup leaders.
- Members of the US Congress – Democrats and Republicans – organized a visit of representatives from the coup regime in Honduras to Washington, receiving them with honors in different arenas in the US capital.
- Despite the fact that originally it was Republican Senator John McCain who coordinated the visit of the coup regime representatives to Washington through a lobby firm connected to his office, The Cormac Group, now, the illegal regime is being represented by top notch lobbyist and Clinton attorney Lanny Davis, who is using his pull and influence in Washington to achieve overall acceptance – cross party lines – of the coup regime in Honduras.
- Otto Reich and a Venezuelan named Robert Carmona-Borjas, known for his role as attorney for the dictator Pedro Carmona during the April 2002 coup d'état in Venezuela, aided in preparing the groundwork for the coup against President Zelaya in Honduras.

Source: chavezcode.com/2009/07/washington-coup-in-honduras-here-is.html

Vasquez, the Rubicon has been crossed and they cannot abandon power without suffering consequences. Any aircraft trying to descend with this list of dignitaries would require air-landing clearance by Honduran authorities and this would likely be denied. The key may well be whether the Obama administration is willing to bring inordinate pressure to bear on its historic allies or use its military air power to impose the deadline for Zelaya's return. And if the external pressure gets Zelaya back in office, will he be allowed to get the vote for a constituent assembly that the country so badly needs to become a progressive society?

Source: *New America Media, July 3, 2009*

Revolutionary Haitian Priest, Gerard Jean-Juste, Presente!

By Bill Quigley, attorney

Ed. Note: *The author represented Jean-Juste many times in Haiti. He is on leave from Loyola University College of Law in New Orleans serving as Legal Director of the Center for Constitutional Rights. He will be the guest speaker at the Task Force's Annual Dinner on September 20th*

Though Haitian priest Father Gerard Jean-Juste died May 27, 2009, at age 62, in Miami from a stroke and breathing problems, he remains present to millions. Justice-loving people world-wide mourn his death and celebrate his life. Pere Jean-Juste worked uncompromisingly for justice for Haitians and the poor, both in Haiti and in the US.

Pere Jean-Juste was a Jesus-like revolutionary. In jail and out, he preached liberation of the poor, release of prisoners, human rights for all, and a fair distribution of wealth. A big muscular man with a booming voice and a frequent deep laugh, he wore a brightly colored plastic rosary around his neck and carried another in his pocket. Jailed for nearly a year in Haiti by the U.S. supported coup government which was trying to silence him, Amnesty International called him a Prisoner of Conscience.

Jean-Juste was a scourge to the unelected coup governments of Haiti, who served at the pleasure, and usually the direction, of the US government. He constantly challenged both the powers of Haiti and the US to stop killing and starving and imprisoning the poor. In the U.S. he fought against government actions which deported black Haitians while welcoming Cubans. In Haiti he called for democracy and respect for the poor.

Jean-Juste was sometimes called the most dangerous man in Haiti because he was not afraid to die. His computer screen saver was a big blue picture of Mary, mother of Jesus. "Every day I am ready to meet her." He once told me, when death threats came again. "I will not stop working for justice because of their threats. I am looking forward to heaven."

Jean-Juste was literally a holy terror to the unelected powers of Haiti and the elected but unaccountable powers of the US. Every single day, in jail or out, he said Mass, read the psalms and jubilantly prayed the rosary. In Port au Prince he slept on the floor of his church, St. Claire, which provided meals to thousands of

starving children and adults every week. In prison, he organized local nuns to bring him hundreds of plastic rosaries which he gave to fellow prisoners and then lead them in daily prayer.

When Jean-Juste began to speak, to preach really, about justice for the poor and the wrongfully imprisoned, restless crowds drew silent. Listening to him preach was like feeling the air change before a thunderstorm sweeps in. He slowly raised his arms. He spread his powerful hands to punctuate his intensifying words. Minutes passed as the Bible and the Declaration of Human Rights and today's news were interspersed. Justice for the



poor. Freedom for those in prison. Comfort for those who mourn. The thunder was rolling now. Crowds were cheering now. Human rights for everyone. Justice for Haiti. Justice for Haiti. Justice for Haiti.

To the rich, Jean-Juste preached that the man with two coats should give one to the woman with none. But, unlike most preachers, he did not stop there. Because there were many people with no coats, Pere Jean-Juste said, no one could justly claim ownership of a second coat. In fact, those who held onto second coats were actually thieves who stole from those who had no coats. In Haiti and the US, where there is such a huge gap between the haves and the have-nots, there was much stealing by the rich from the poor. This was revolutionary preaching.

During the day, people streamed to his church to ask for help. Mothers walked miles from Cite de Soleil to his parish to beg him to help them bury their children. Widows sought help. Families with sons in prison asked for a private word. Small packets of money and

food were quietly given away. Visitors from rural Haiti, people seeking jobs, many looking for food, police officers who warned of new threats, political organizers with ideas how to challenge the unelected government, reporters and people seeking special prayers - all came all the time.

Every single night when he was home at his church in Port au Prince Jean-Juste led a half hour public rosary for anyone who showed up. Most of the crowd was children and older women who came in part because the church was the only place in the neighborhood which had electricity. He walked the length of the church booming out the first part of the Hail Mary while children held his hand or trailed him calling out their part of the rosary. The children and the women came night after night to pray in Kreyol with Mon Pere.

Jean-Juste lived the preferential option for the poor of liberation theology. Because he was always in trouble with the management of the church, who he also freely criticized, he was usually not allowed regular church parish work. In Florida, he lay down in his clerical blacks on the road in front of buses stopping them from taking Haitians to be deported from the US. For years he lived on the run in Haiti, moving from house to house. When he was arrested on trumped up charges, he refused to allow people with money to bribe his way out of jail, he would stay with the poor and share their treatment.

He dedicated his entire adult life to the revolutionary proposition that every single person is entitled to a life of human dignity. No matter the color of skin. No matter what country they were from. No matter how poor or rich. No matter woman or man.

His last time in court in Haiti, when the judge questioned him about a bogus weapons charge against him, Jean-Juste dug into his pocket, pulled out his plastic prayer beads, thrust them high in the air and bellowed, to the delight of the hundreds in attendance, "My rosary is my only weapon!" The crowd roared and all charges were dropped.

Gerard Jean-Juste lived with and fought for and with widows and orphans and those in jail and those being deported and the hungry and the mourning and the sick and the persecuted. Our world is better for his time among us. Mon Pere, our brother, your spirit, like those of all who struggle for justice for others, lives on! Presente!

PERU: The Amazon's Tiananmen

By Jake Nicol, journalist, Community Media Center, Marin

On June 5th and 6th, 2009, growing tensions between indigenous groups and the Peruvian government erupted violently at a roadblock in Bagua, in the Amazonas region of northeastern Peru, resulting in numerous deaths. Despite contradictory reports on the events, it is clear that the government sent armed troops to evict peaceful protesters in an attempt to reopen a highway in the area known as "Devil's Curve". The roadblock was just one of many simultaneous protests that had been going on in five different regions of Peru for almost two months in response to controversial legislation facilitating Amazon development, but unfortunately the only protest to end in bloodshed. Just how much bloodshed, however, is an ongoing point of contention. Recently dubbed by some in the media as the "Amazon's Tiananmen", details of the incident are still hazy. According to official government reports, 34 people were killed, 24 police agents and 10 civilians. But estimates by human rights groups and indigenous organizations paint an entirely different picture. They report at least 60 civilians dead and hundreds more wounded or disappeared after police agents opened fire on a crowd of more than 2,000 Awajún and Wampi indigenous protesters.

Differing versions of events describe military helicopters sweeping over the crowd and launching tear gas and firing shots with automatic rifles, while others report police agents attacking protestors on the ground. Photographs and testimonies of demonstrators depict horrific scenes of police throwing bodies into rivers, taking wounded or dead civilians from hospitals, and shooting at sleeping protesters. While protestors describe the events as a "massacre," government authorities maintain that this was a "clash" between the police and protestors, brought on by the actions of the protestors. In their official report, the government claims "National Police agents were attacked by organized rioters who acted violently against them, executing 13 agents; 38 other police officers and one civilian were taken as hostages" while guarding a pipeline pump station. In spite of the contradictions in the opposing accounts of the events in Bagua, this conflict has long been developing in Peru, arguably unleashed

by the signing of the US - Peru Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

This particular dispute began on April 9, 2009 when the 1,350 indigenous communities (300,000 members) that make up the AIDSESEP (Inter-Ethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Amazon), organized mobilizations to block highways and gas and oil pipelines in protest of the government's implementation of a number of decrees that eased restrictions on development in territories claimed by indigenous groups. The government, under President Alan Garcia, defended the decrees as a necessary requirement of the US - Peru Free Trade Agreement.

The mobilizations continued, even as the government declared a State of Emergency on May 10th, suspending constitutional guarantees in an attempt to suppress protests. In response, Alberto Pizango, the leader of AIDSESEP, declared, "Our peoples are in insurgency against the government of President Alan Garcia in the indigenous Amazon territories." Soon after, a constitution commission found one of the decrees (LD 1090) to be unconstitutional.

Meanwhile, protests supporting the Amazon struggle grew in size and support. Then, on June 4th, just one day before the violence in Bagua, Congress decided to suspend the debate on the unconstitutionality of LD 1090, causing outrage amongst demonstrators. Within 24 hours, the government sent in armed forces to the "Devil's Curve" and dozens were killed.

These recent protests and mobilizations mirror the uprisings in the Peruvian Amazon in August 2008, where protestors struggled to repeal Law 840, popularly known as the Law of the Jungle, along with other measures implemented as part of the FTA with the US. The legislation "sought to undermine the collective-property regime of... indigenous communities by conceding supposedly 'uncultivated' lands to lumber companies, surrendering the nation's rights over natural resources to foreign investors." In an unprecedented series of simultaneous peaceful protests, indigenous groups successfully pressured Congress to overturn the decrees. However, despite questions around the constitutionality of many of the other decrees, Alan Garcia's government continued to implement the laws, opting not to consult

with indigenous groups.

Behind the decrees, both Amazonian uprisings are linked by the US-Peru Free Trade Agreement. Signed in 2005 in Washington by Alan Garcia and George W. Bush, the FTA has been controversial in both Peru and the US. It is essentially modeled after NAFTA. However, because it incorporated environmental and labor standards into the text, it was redubbed a "Trade Promotion Agreement (TPA)." It passed in the U.S. Senate by a wide margin, with the support of nearly half the Democrats, including Senator Obama.

The connection between the decrees in question and the TPA is explicit. According to the Peruvian government, by law "Congress delegated legislative powers to the Executive branch on various subjects related to the Peru-US TPA and to support improvements in economic competitiveness." Citing this law, Alan Garcia and the executive powers drafted 99 decrees, which are at the root of the current conflict. International analyst Raúl Zibechi describes some of the more controversial decrees causing so much debate:

The most controversial of the decrees are numbers 1015 and 1073... These decrees modify the number of votes required to sell communal lands (just three votes could place community land up for sale). Decree 1064 (Legal Framework for Use of Agrarian Lands) abolishes the requirement of the previous agreement to undertake projects and is also considered unconstitutional. But it is LD 1090 (Forestry and Woodland Fauna Law) that is at the crux of the debate. It leaves out of the forestry framework 45 million hectares, that is, 64% of the forests of Peru, including their biodiversity in flora and fauna, making it possible to sell them to transnational corporations.

President Alan Garcia has made it clear that he thinks this type of development is the only way Peru will progress as a country. In an editorial published in *El Comercio* in October 2007, Garcia argues that the Amazon is really a profitable resource being wasted. "There are millions of hectares of timber lying idle, another millions of hectares that communities and associations have not and will not cultivate. The rivers ...represent a fortune that reaches the sea without producing electricity." He sees the land not as the collective property of local communities but

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rather “idle lands because the owner does not have the training or the economic resources, that’s why their property is feigned.” It appears as though Garcia’s ambitious plans for developing the Amazon are blocked simply by the pesky indigenous communities that happen to live there.

This is not a theme new to Peru. Johann Hari comments in *The Independent* that “the latest protests follow decades of discrimination and a persistent disregard for the rights of indigenous peoples in Peru. During the internal conflict between Peru’s government forces and armed opposition groups which raged for 20 years, it was the indigenous peoples who bore the brunt of serious human rights abuses committed by both sides.” Alan Garcia himself seems intent on continuing this pattern of discrimination. In a press conference after the outbreak of violence he offered this charged comment about the protestors. “These people don’t have crowns. These people aren’t first-class citizens who can say – 400,000 natives to 28 million Peruvians – ‘You don’t have the right to be here.’

No way. That is a huge error.” Forty-five percent of Peruvians are identified as indigenous. Garcia is driving a wedge between already divided groups, using racist rhetoric to vilify the protestors as selfishly preventing Peru from leaping into modernity.

But many Peruvians aren’t buying it. Following the uprisings and unfortunate violence in Bagua, on June 11th, tens of thousands of people marched in support of indigenous protests across Peru, chanting “In defense of the jungle—the jungle is not for sale.” People worldwide staged simultaneous protests. Eight days later, after more than two months of protests, Peru’s Congress voted 82 to 12 to repeal Legislative Decrees 1090 and 1064.

While indigenous groups celebrated the historic victory, Alan Garcia went on national television to admit errors in not consulting with indigenous groups of the Amazon. AIDSESEP called off all protests and roadblocks, but also called for the safe return of Alberto Pizango, president of the association, who was forced to seek asylum in Nicaragua. Prime Minister Yehude Simon

resigned after the dispute was settled.

In spite of the tragic loss of life in Bagua, indigenous groups are savoring this victory. AIDSESEP has emerged as a formidable political force in Peru. But the victory will be short lived as long as the US-Peru TPA is in effect. “The reality is that the US-Peru Trade Agreement gave license to the Garcia Administration to roll back indigenous rights and has contributed to increasing social conflict and human rights abuses in Peru,” said Amazon Watch’s Andrew Miller. “The Obama administration should send a clear signal that it is not willing to accept the erosion of democracy, stability, and human rights in pursuit of free trade.” Sustainable development in Peru will require collaboration and alternative indicators of “progress.”

Sources: “*Massacre in the Amazon*” Raul Zibechi, *Americas Program Special Report*, Jun 16, 2009; “*Trade Agreement Kills Amazon Indians*,” Laura Carlsen, *Foreign Policy in Focus*, 6/20/09.

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ballot, and cuarta refers to the idea that it would be the 4th ballot in November, added to the votes for president, congress and mayors. It was hard to miss the sense of enthusiasm running through the country.

Those who had held power in the country were fearful of these winds of change. Congress and the Supreme Court tried to block the consultation, and the Army Chief of Staff refused to have his soldiers guard the vote, leading to his dismissal by Zelaya. All these events cascaded together, only days before the coup. One question worth asking is why the old guard politicians, along with military leaders, risked staging a coup and possible international condemnation? Had they really thought that Sunday’s vote was going to win? If our earlier visit was any measure, it seemed poised to win, and in a big way. Therefore, it needed to be stopped before it happened.

The initial idea for the consultation came not from Zelaya, but from the social movements, beginning some five years earlier. These were not the groups with whom Zelaya was accustomed to rubbing elbows as a member of the landed elite. But as he told us at the meeting, his fellow elites refused to

collaborate when he asked them to lend a helping hand to their country. And so, he turned to the social movements. And, apparently they responded, but so did he. He raised wages significantly, paid attention to the needs of poor urban and rural communities, brought doctors and teachers from Cuba and cheap oil for public transportation from Venezuela. Mostly, the poor felt that they were taken into account, that they mattered.

During the past days in Honduras, we joined the people on the streets, which is where this political battle seems to be waged. At a road block along the southern highway, Hondurans came up to us to shake our hands and thank us for being there. Some had been on the streets for ten days. Despite the blazing sun and the many days into the coup, their spirits seemed intact. Later, we were invited to a meeting of the newly formed Front of Resistance Against the Coup in Honduras. I found many of the same leaders of the social movements whom I had met at the meeting with the president. Labor leaders, campesinos, indigenous groups, taxi drivers, teachers and artists were planning the next day’s strategies. People were tired but determined, amazingly

united and efficient in their planning. As time was dedicated to determining who would offer the sound system, provide buses, water, etc; it was clear that no one was bankrolling this operation.

While I never actually saw pro-coup marches in the streets, the local TV stations looped the same scenes of them repeatedly. What called my attention was that everyone was dressed in white, and signs were professionally printed. This was a contrast to the motley crowd and creative colorful handmade signs of the pro-Zelaya crowd.

As I head to Venezuela I know that I will not leave Honduras behind. Just days ago (though it feels like months), when I asked the taxi driver taking me to the Caracas airport how he was doing, I expected a reply about the traffic or weather or local political scene. His response was, “Worried, about Honduras.” The reason for this response is likely both one of solidarity (never has Latin America looked more towards one another than now) and, it is one of survival. There is a sense that this battle in Honduras is larger than Honduras. The coup is a push-back against new models, arising from the social movements in the South. ●

The Dark Side of Plan Colombia

By Teo Ballvé, freelance journalist

Ed. Note: Research support for this article was provided by the Puffin Foundation Investigative Fund at The Nation Institute. The article is excerpted.

Since 2002 Plan Colombia has authorized about \$75 million a year for “alternative development” programs like palm oil production. These programs provide funds for agribusiness partnerships with *campesinos* in order to wean them from cultivating illicit crops like coca, which can be used to make cocaine. These projects are concentrated in parts of northern Colombia that were ground zero for the mass displacement of *campesinos*.

USAID insists that the agency screens vigilantly for illegal activity and has not rewarded cultivators of stolen lands. But a study raises questions about the agency’s ability to detect links to narco-paramilitaries, violent crimes and illegal land seizures. In 2002 USAID awarded \$650,000 to Gradesa, a palm company with two accused paramilitary-linked narco-traffickers on its board of directors. Another palm company, Urapalma, also accused of links with paramilitaries, nearly won approval for a grant before its application stalled because of missing paperwork.

Urapalma has illegally claimed more than 14,000 acres of dense tropical land in Chocó—land seized with the help of people like Brig. Gen. Latorre and his paramilitary collaborators. Latorre, a graduate of the US Army’s School of the Americas, was charged last year with laundering millions of dollars for a paramilitary drug ring.

In 2005 Colombian President Álvaro Uribe urged the country to increase palm production from 750,000 acres to 15 million acres—an area the size of West Virginia. Critics point out that many of the new palm growing regions exhibit patterns of narco-trafficking and paramilitary violence similar to that in Chocó, including massacres and forced displacement. Almost all of these regions have also been targeted for palm cultivation support by USAID.

Almost half the palm oil produced in Colombia is exported each year. The government now has its sights on the stalled US-Colombia free trade agreement which

would allow Colombian palm oil to enter US markets duty-free.

Human rights groups have long accused palm companies in Colombia of cultivating stolen lands. The Congressional Black Caucus has frequently expressed its concerns about the palm industry, which is concentrated in areas with large Afro-Colombian populations. Worried that Congress will withhold Plan Colombia funds or block the trade deal, the Colombian government announced an investigation into allegations that twenty-three palm companies in Chocó worked with paramilitaries to seize community-owned land. Around the same time, Senator Patrick Leahy attached an amendment to Plan Colombia funds that prohibits the financing of palm projects that “cause the forced displacement of local people.” Congress will soon debate Plan Colombia funding for 2010, the first foreign appropriations budget penned by the Obama team. In the bill’s current draft, Leahy’s amendment is marked for deletion.

Chocó’s rainforests, in the northwest corner of Colombia, are among the most biodiverse on the planet. Here, hundreds of rivers flow to the Caribbean gulf; locals call this area Urabá. In 2000 the government awarded collective title to 250,000 acres in the Urabá to slave-descended black communities, who enjoy the same territorial rights as indigenous peoples under Colombia’s Constitution. In recent years, palm companies have taken more than 20 percent of the most habitable and agriculturally viable part of the territory.

In the late 1980s this part of Colombia became a base for paramilitary groups, or “paras,” founded by warlords, who received generous logistical and financial support from businessmen, wealthy landowners, drug traffickers and members of the army. They collaborated so closely with the Colombian military’s dirty war against guerrillas of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) that Human Rights Watch referred to them as the army’s “sixth division.” Fueled by zealous anticommunism, warlords slaughtered thousands of innocents accused of harboring guerrilla sympathies.

By the mid-1990s the paras turned their violence to an economic purpose: gaining lands and businesses, eliminating opponents

and protecting their most lucrative activity, drug trafficking. Warlords and their allies became Colombia’s undisputed cocaine barons, earning them top spots on the US government’s most-wanted lists. The warlords began a bloody march into Urabá. The military, backed by US financial support, teamed up with its “sixth division” to hammer northern Chocó. Army helicopters and fighter jets rained bombs and high-caliber gunfire on the jungle communities, while the paras “cleaned up” behind them. International human rights groups documented massacres, torture, murders and rapes, including the slaughter of thirty-one *campesinos* a week before Christmas.

The 1997 offensive forced some 17,000 people from their homes, and 140 farmers were confirmed killed or disappeared. Survivors report that paras came to their farms with one chilling offer: “Sell us your land, or we’ll negotiate with your widow.”

Urapalma submitted a grant application to the Bogotá offices of ARD Inc., a thirty-year-old rural development contractor based in Burlington, Vermont. ARD describes itself as guided by “Vermont’s ideals of leadership in environmental affairs and local participation in government.” USAID, a major source of ARD’s revenue, has \$330 million in active contracts with the company.

In January 2003, ARD began administering \$41.5 million for USAID’s Colombia Agribusiness Partnership Program (CAPP). In August 2003, Urapalma was one of the first palm companies to send an application. ARD’s quarterly reports show that Urapalma requested financing to cover the planting of palm on some 5,000 acres in Urabá—the epicenter of stolen land.

USAID officials refer to Urapalma’s proposed project as a “strategic alliance” and typically call such efforts “community driven.” “Without our support,” said an embassy official, “farmers would have a weaker ability to negotiate fair alliances with the industrial processors.” But according to documents from the Colombian attorney general’s 2007 investigation, palm companies in Chocó set up these partnerships to legitimize illegal land acquisitions after the fact—often through fraud and coercion. Investigation files include an affidavit by a former Urapalma employee who

The New *Banco de ALBA*

By Carol Costa and Carolina Dutton,
Task Force on the Americas

Ed. Note: *The authors participated in the June 2009 delegation to Venezuela*

The Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) is an alternative to the US-sponsored Free Trade Area of the Americas. It promotes cooperation rather than deregulated competition and profit maximization. ALBA, which was originally formed between Venezuela and Cuba, is expanding rapidly. There are now nine member countries including Antigua, Bolivia, Dominica, Ecuador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. The total population involved is now about 74,500,000. Other countries, like El Salvador, Paraguay and Uruguay are showing interest in joining.

ALBA aims at achieving a trade agreement in which all of its members benefit by exchanging their resources and their strengths in order to help one another meet their needs. Consequently, you have the Cubans exchanging their literacy program and their doctors for Venezuelan fuel. These programs are now functioning in other member states as well. Honduras, for example, benefits from Cuban literacy and medical programs and Venezuelan fuel and water sanitation programs. The exchange can be achieved by bar-

tering, or buying and selling, or sometimes by humane contribution. Other examples of ALBA trade are: drug production between ALBA countries for health not for profit, low cost or free books, and the prioritization of food self-sufficiency of every country before focusing on profit.

One of the obstacles to be confronted by ALBA is the deep disparity that exists in development between the countries of the hemisphere. In order to help overcome trade disadvantages, ALBA pushes for solidarity with the economically weaker countries, with the aim of achieving a trade block in which all of its members benefit. Venezuela has been working to transfer resources to the more underdeveloped countries so that these may develop the economic infrastructure they need to compete on more favorable terms.

On the latest Task Force-SOAWatch delegation to Venezuela, we visited the recently opened Banco de ALBA, and met with the Director, Bernardo Alvarez, (who has since returned to the United States as the Venezuelan Ambassador). He explained to us how the new bank functions. All the countries belonging to ALBA have an equal vote in this bank regardless of how much money they put into it. The presidency is rotated in alphabetical order by country. Be-

sides a council of ministers of foreign countries, a council is being created for social movements within countries. The MST (Landless Workers Movement) of Brazil already has a meeting place in the *Banco de ALBA!* Any country, or social movement, not only those belonging to ALBA, can apply for funding for a particular project.

It is a bank fund nurtured by barrels of oil. *The Fondo ALBA Caribe* has been set up to help Caribbean countries. *Petrocaribe* countries (there are 18 member countries in the Caribbean) buy Venezuelan oil at market prices but Venezuela only receives 50%. The rest is put in the ALBA fund for these countries to use for economic development. The fund is used for short term economic needs. Guyana, for example, is only paying 50% for its oil so that it can move ahead with its project for electricity. A major portion is also reserved for long term infrastructure projects which benefit more than one country according to a master plan agreed upon by these countries. The Banco de ALBA is considering a common currency, the *sucre*, to be used in trade between ALBA countries. Venezuela has made a major policy decision in using its oil money not only for the benefit of its own people, but as a tool for economic integration in Latin America; an alternative model which strengthens the entire region. ●

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charges that Urapalma created campesino “front” organizations to secure phony land titles and gain access to public funds.

The most notorious case of fraud involves Lino Antonio Díaz Almario, who allegedly in 2000 acquired 14,645 acres—an impossible fortune for a poor campesino—and immediately sold these lands to the Association of Small Palm Oil Producers of Urabá, an organization started by Urapalma. But Díaz had been dead since 1995. According to the affidavit, all of Urapalma’s campesino organizations were set up by Teresa Gómez, whom the US Treasury identifies as the “financial manager” of a vast narco-paramilitary federation. She managed at least two other paramilitary-affiliated NGOs and is wanted for the murder of a campesino leader in Córdoba province.

Urapalma never received the grant

money in question. Its application stalled because the company failed to submit paperwork on land titles. Urapalma’s questionable past did not come to light, however, until a USAID “review committee” came across a magazine article published five months after the proposal was put on hold.

While USAID eventually tabled Urapalma’s proposal, the agency awarded a grant to Gradesa, located in the Urabá region. At the time USAID awarded Gradesa’s grant on December 19, 2003, corporate filings show that two brothers, Carlos and Antonio Zúñiga, with links to drug cartels, were invested in Urapalma and also sat on Gradesa’s board. In March 2005, Colombia’s attorney general announced that he was seizing the Zúñigas’ stake in the firm and filed criminal charges against the brothers for using Gradesa to launder narco-dollars. The case is now

plodding through Colombian courts, the government’s fifth attempt to pin drug-laundering charges on the Zúñigas.

Despite this pending legal action, USAID approved a second Gradesa grant in 2007. A US embassy official said that since USAID received no formal notice of the case against the Zúñigas, “there was no way that USAID could have been aware of the link between Gradesa and the Zúñiga investigation.”

In April the government returned 6 percent of the stolen land to some farmers. Twelve years after they were forced to flee, the rest remain displaced. The government says it is pressing the palm companies to return the remainder of the lands voluntarily, but locals have heard such promises before. Meanwhile, the companies are shipping out palm kernels by the truckload.

Source: *The Nation*, June 2, 2009

VENEZUELA: Healthcare System

By Caitlin McNulty, journalist

Ed. Note: *The article was excerpted*

The right to healthcare is guaranteed in the Venezuelan Constitution, which was written and ratified by the people in 1999. Through implementing a state-funded social program called *Barrio Adentro* (Inside the Barrio), free comprehensive healthcare is available to all Venezuelans. Beginning in June 2003 through a trade pact with Cuba, Venezuela began to bring Cuban doctors, medical technology, and medications into rural and urban communities free of charge in exchange for low-cost oil. The 1.5 million dollar per year program expanded to provide a broad network of small neighborhood clinics, larger regional clinics, and hospitals which aim to serve the entire Venezuelan population. Chavez has referred to this new healthcare system as the “democratization of health care” stating that “healthcare has become a fundamental social right and the state will assume the principal role in the construction of a participatory system for national public health.” In Venezuela, not only is healthcare a right; it is recognized as an essential for true participatory democracy.

Some of what characterizes this movement towards health care for all includes popular participation, preventative medicine, and evaluation of community health issues. Western medicine typically operates in a top-down fashion. Doctors treat symptoms, and often fail to evaluate the larger picture of community health issues or teach prevention. *Barrio Adentro* began constructing clinics within neighborhoods where many had never been to a doctor. Through this program, a community can organize to receive funding to build a clinic and bring in doctors. The community is responsible for creating health committees, the members of which go door to door to assess the specific health issues of their community. Doctors who live in the communities also make house calls. People participate in the process of serving the health needs of the entire population.

The extensive health program is also being used to train a new generation of Venezuelan doctors. The training program takes place within the clinic system itself and relies heavily on experiential learning. The program seeks to build a new relationship between

doctor and patient based on the values of service, solidarity and compassion. Doctors participating in the training program are coming from the communities they are learning in and serving, building on their intimate knowledge of the communities to provide truly compassionate and personalized care. Using popular forums, medical professionals are able to respond to the needs of the community and offer education, treatment and consultation addressing unique public health issues.

Although the system began by focusing exclusively on preventative health, it has expanded to include emergency health services, mental health services, surgeries, cancer treatment, dental care, access to optom-



A typical urban barrio health clinic

etrists, free glasses and contact lenses, support systems for those with disabilities and their families, as well as access to a large variety of medical specialists. They have succeeded in taking an under-funded, corrupt public health care system and changing not only the quality and accessibility but also the mentality of those working there. Instead of a for-profit industry systematically denying access to large sectors of the population, healthcare in Venezuela is seen as a basic human right. No one is turned away, and no one is denied care. In Venezuela, they treat the whole person, not simply their illness, and money stays where it belongs: outside of the healthcare system.

During my time in Venezuela, I developed a cough that went on for three weeks and progressively worsened. Finally, after I

had become incredibly congested and developed a fever, I decided to attend a clinic. The closest one available was a *Barrio Adentro II Centro de Diagnostico Integral* (CDI) and I headed in without my medical records or calling to make an appointment. Immediately, I was ushered into a small room where Carmen, a friendly Cuban doctor, began questioning me about my symptoms. She listened to my lungs and walked me over to another examination room where, again without waiting, I had x-rays taken. Afterwards, the technician walked me to a chair and apologized profusely that I had to wait for the x-rays to be developed, promising that it would take no more than five minutes. Sure enough, five minutes later he returned with both x-rays developed. Carmen studied the x-rays and informed me that I had pneumonia, showing me the telltale shadows. She sent me away with my x-rays, three medications to treat my pneumonia, congestion, and fever, and made me promise to come back if my condition failed to improve or worsened within three days. I walked out of the clinic with a diagnosis and treatment within twenty-five minutes of entering, without paying a dime. There was no wait, no paperwork, and no questions about my ability to pay, my nationality, or whether, as a foreigner, I was entitled to free comprehensive healthcare. There was no monetary value connected with my physical well-being; the care I received was not contingent upon my ability to pay. I was treated with dignity, respect, and compassion, my illness was cured and I was able to continue with my journey in Venezuela.

Primary care and preventative medicine are seen as the first steps towards sustainable universal health care, keeping people out of costly hospital stays, tests, and treatments down the road. Socializing the costs of medicine keeps costs low by preventing expensive treatments and health problems. It is difficult to understand how much quality, free healthcare means until you find yourself in a position of vulnerability and need. I felt a sense of security traveling in Venezuela that I do not feel in the United States; in Venezuela, there is a safety net ready to catch you when you fall.

Source: *UpsideDownWorld.org*, June 25, 2009

L E T T E R T O L U G O

Ed. Note. *In early June, ten US citizens traveled to Paraguay as part of an educational and solidarity delegation. They were academics, journalists and activists from different parts of the US. The delegation was jointly sponsored by the Task Force and SOA Watch and organized in Paraguay by SERPAJ (Service in Peace and Justice).*

To: His Excellency President of the Republic of Paraguay.
Fernando Armindo Lugo Méndez

June 30, 2009

Dear Mr. President,

First, we wish to congratulate you on your historic election to the presidency of Paraguay in 2008. We the signers of this letter are a group of citizens of the United States, part of a delegation from School of the Americas Watch, to Paraguay to learn about the history of the Stroessner dictatorship and the existing realities in the country. We communicate with you here, to make you aware of what we observed during our mission, which took place the beginning days of June, and we advocate certain policies and actions we consider necessary to change these situations.

We met with numerous working groups to discover and bring to light the crimes committed during the Stroessner dictatorship, such that those crimes are never again repeated. We were left with a very good impression of the selflessness and care of those people working for the memory of the nation in this regard. Many people in the US do not realize the extent of support of our own government to that dictatorship, and how far reaching was the repression within Paraguay. On learning about this reality, we were very upset with the support of our government for the dictatorship of Stroessner, either direct or tacit.

As you undoubtedly know, since 1990, progressive people in the United States have struggled to close the School of the Americas of the United States Army (now called Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation-WHINSEC). This year we are close to victory and we appeal to you to give us your support and solidarity in this effort, by withdrawing the soldiers and officers of Paraguay from the Institute.

Five Latin American countries have already announced the withdrawal of its students from the School: Venezuela (2004), Argentina (2006), Uruguay (2006), Costa Rica (2007) and Bolivia (2008). The announcement of the withdrawal of Paraguay could be the final step in closing this pernicious institution. In 2007, we were only six votes short of closing the school in the US Congress. Another vote in Congress to terminate funding for the school will take place this year, including with new members in the legislature. Our hope is that the withdrawal of a sixth country will give us the impetus to get increased support in our legislature and close the School of the Americas.

We want to mention to you that we visited the parts of Asuncion called *Banados*, and had profound conversations with Banados community leaders concerned with improving the lives and infrastructure of their neighborhoods. For example, roads and sewers there require immediate attention as these affect the health of the residents. We learned that the residents of these neighborhoods lack opportunities, and also suffer much discrimination. We were saddened to learn that one quarter of the population of Paraguay lives in extreme poverty with little hope that their children will have a better future.

Also, in a trip to the countryside, we met with members of *campesino* organizations and learned about their educational projects designed to directly benefit their own communities. We were saddened to learn of the negative impacts of agro-businesses on the environment, particularly the effects of soybean cultivation near communities adjacent to the plantations. We learned about the impact of spraying and chemical fertilizers, and about the unregulated use of such chemicals which end up displacing entire communities.

We talked with landless farmers who can not live with dignity or use their traditional methods of cultivation. These circumstances sometimes influence good people to take desperate measures. We observed with concern that the press and also the government, rather than proposing solutions that would address the roots of the problem, have criminalized social protest, and that extrajudicial violence by large landowners has actually increased. Since 1989 more than a hundred peasant leaders have been killed, but these crimes have never been thoroughly investigated.

We also express our concern with the treatment of the proposed Bill before congress, "The Promotion and Protection of Investments made by domestic and foreign investors in the country," which could exacerbate attacks on the peasant sector and give impunity to the landowners and their private police. We urge the President that, should this legislation be approved, that you use your presidential powers to veto it and also to promote a genuine agrarian reform and preserve the ecological richness of Paraguay for its future citizens.

In conclusion, and as citizens of the world, we hope that you can follow through with the promises made to the Paraguayan people during the election campaign. We certainly understand that there are many hurdles, but you have a powerful voice to advocate on behalf of the poor and to unite your followers. During our brief stay we were greatly impressed by the energy, intelligence, and generosity of the people of Paraguay. They have put so much of their hope in you. It is now time for action. We the undersigned commit ourselves to support the new Paraguay through outreach to our fellow citizens and public officials about the challenges and also the great promise that is Paraguay.

Delegations for 2009

Honduras: August 7-17 (flexible)

Global Exchange Emergency Delegation seeks to bring attention to coup d'etat against democratically elected President Mel Zelaya. Participants will accompany community leaders, document human rights abuses in solidarity with the Honduran people. \$900 (approximate). Contact Sneh: 1-800-497-1994 ext. 221 or register on line: www.globalexchange.org

Chile: October 8-18

Experience the magic of springtime while grasping how the deep wound of Pinochet remains raw. Answer the question: is Chile the economic model of success that it is purported to be by mainstream economists? Learn how the Mapuche people are struggling to keep their vibrant culture alive and join them on October 12 for the "Day of Indigenous Resistance." Our guide Pablo Ruiz is a former political prisoner under Pinochet, a torture survivor. \$1300 includes accommodations, most meals and in-country transportation. Contact: Dale Co-sponsors: Task Force and SOA Watch.

Cuba: Nov. 4-14. Havana and Santiago de Cuba

Come to the island Columbus declared, "The most beautiful of all islands." After 50 years, it's time to lift the embargo and travel ban against Cuba. Experience music, and art, learn about Cuba's free education and health systems, advances in solar technology. Visit urban gardens, community development projects and meet informally with Cuban citizens.

Cost: \$2395 included: roundtrip Cancun to Havana and Havana to Santiago, visas, 10 nights hotel, most meals, Cuban guide. Sponsored by California Cuba Cultural Exchange. Contact: ersh2000@yahoo.com or 415-457-9528. This is an unlicensed trip.

Ft. Benning Georgia: Nov. 20-22

SOA Watch Vigil and Direct Action. Contact: 202-234-3440; www.soaw.org

Haiti: Dec 28 - Jan 7

Visit political prisoners Task Force on the Americas & Latin America Solidarity Coalition
Contact: Dale, 415-924-3227 or geodale2@earthlink.net

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