

# Report

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## MEXICO: Drug War on the Poor

By Laura Carlsen, Director of Americas Policy Program

A wounded man, blood-covered and frantic, approached a military checkpoint in San Fernando, Tamaulipas, 100 miles south of Brownsville, Texas, with a horrifying story. Reportedly shot in the neck himself, the Ecuadorian would-be migrant to the United States led members of the Mexican Naval Forces to an even more horrendous scene.

Seventy-two migrants from Central America, Brazil and Ecuador lay piled on each other in a large room, dead from gunshot wounds. From the man's testimony it seems that the 58 men and 14 women murdered refused to comply with extortion demands from a drug cartel that President Calderón has identified as most likely being the Zetas. According to the "plata o plomo" (money or bullets) law of organized crime, the migrants got the bullets.

The migrants likely did die at the hands of Mexico's most brutal drug gang. But they also died as a result of both US and Mexican

policies that foment violence and have led to a previously unimagined state of lawlessness and brutality south of the border. US immigration and trade policies and Mexico's US-supported drug war and human rights crisis all played a role in their deaths.

The seventy-two migrants' names will pass to the growing list of civilians who have become the casualties of a war entered into without thought to its consequences or a coherent strategy for success. That is, if we ever know their names. Representatives from the countries of origin are working to identify the rest and have demanded a full investigation, calling the Mexican government's information to date "insufficient."

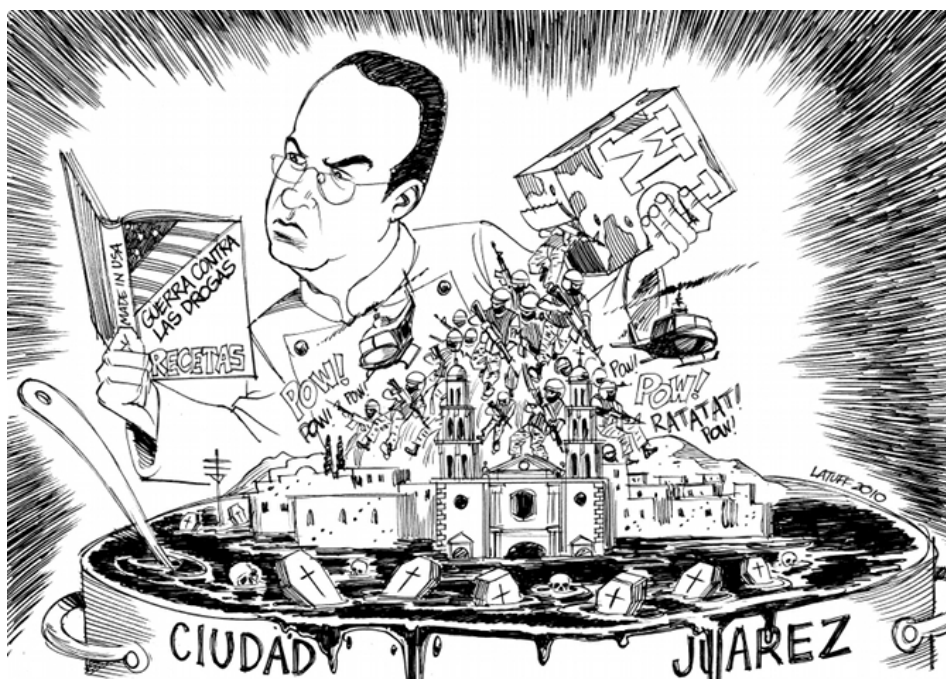
These latest victims come from the ranks of the human beings considered superfluous to an economic system that drives them from their homes and communities to seek work in the United States, despite the risks. Unprotected by the Mexican government – despite numerous reports of these kinds of extortion kidnappings over the past few years – and criminalized by a US society that wel-

comes their labor and rejects their humanity, they continue to travel north because they can't find work in their countries.

Imagine the trajectory of the 72 lives that were snuffed out on August 24. Each man and woman sold land, used savings or went into debt to make the trek to the United States. They have no legal channels to enter the US despite the demand for their labor. The cost of crossing has skyrocketed and the risks increased because security measures on the US border have forced them to use human smugglers where before they crossed with migrant guides. The women are particularly vulnerable as they face sexual abuse from criminal gangs and police along the route.

The global crisis is falling on the shoulders of the poor in developing countries. While the US adopts stimulus and jobs programs, its free trade policies have led to imports that displace local production and cut back state subsidies and supports in southern countries.

But the US immigration debate largely ignores the dire conditions they faced in their countries and during their journey, even though alternative policies and actions could help develop livelihoods at home and protect the basic human rights and safety that every human being deserves.



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The migrant group found dead in Tamaulipas was reportedly kidnapped arriving in the border region. Typically, organized criminal gangs not only steal the money migrants carry to pay smugglers to take them across the border, but also demand that they contact family in the US to send more money. Neither the Mexican nor US governments have done much to stem this transnational extortion ring, probably because both the migrant victims and often the families extorted are undocumented, placing them in a class that has been illegally stripped of state protection and humane concern.

Mexican authorities charged with the protection of people within its borders too often form part of the problem rather than the solution. Crimes against migrants have been rising, as criminals and corrupt police alike find them easy pickings.

Although the economic situation of their countries force thousands to seek jobs in the north, US aid has been concentrated in military equipment and security and intelligence training, such as in the \$1.5 billion-dollar aid package to Mexico known as the Merida Initiative. Throughout the Western Hemisphere, the drug war has become the latest pretext for militarization in a wide net that not only targets organized crime but also undocumented workers and political opposition.

In Mexico, the drug war strategy has set off a no-holds-barred battle for routes and markets among competing cartels that has broken through the boundaries of crime-on-crime and now affects daily life (and death) in border cities and other regions.

To get an idea of how violence begets violence, take a look at the Zetas. Briefly, they are a group of former Mexican military elite with US

training that crossed over into organized crime, taking with them their government-sponsored knowledge of counterinsurgency tactics and brutal repression. They are associated with the infamous Kaibiles in Guatemala who have a similar history. After acting as the armed forces for the Gulf Cartel, they split off and formed their own cartel. Their bid to take over lucrative trafficking routes is at the root of the drug-war violence in many points on the border.

Weaker financially and with fewer political contacts, the Zetas work their one comparative advantage, their willingness to be absolutely ruthless. The massacre of the migrants could be a reaction of rage when the migrants refused to pay up, but it could also be an easy way for the Zetas to flaunt their ability and disposition to break all previous codes of behavior between the government and the cartels.

Through the bodies of the migrants, the Zetas are sending yet another bloody message to the armed forces, and to the other cartels, which have unified against them in some border cities.

As far as the Calderón administration is concerned, every act of increasing brutality on the part of the drug cartels is a sign of victory. Calderón issued a communiqué on the massacre saying, “The Zetas are resort-

ing to extortion and kidnapping of migrants as a mechanism of financing and recruitment due to the fact that they are facing a very adverse situation in attaining resources and people... This is the result of the activity of the State against them, which has significantly weakened the operating capacity of organized crime.”

Incredibly, Calderón publicly admits responsibility, albeit indirect, for the massacre of the migrants and further notes that their brutal assassination is a sign of success in the drug war. He went on to warn that there will be more violence to come. This is perhaps the one aspect of his campaign that no one doubts.

The constant spin, where each act of greater violence is interpreted as an advance in the drug war, has left much of the Mexican population feeling nauseous. How much more violence can the nation take? And when will the increasing toll of civilians finally reach a point where leaders in Mexico and the United States admit that the drug-war strategy has dragged us into a downward spiral that must be reversed now before more innocent people die?

Source: *ciponline.org; Counterpunch, Aug. 30, 2010*

## Remembering Reverend Lucius Walker

Lucius Walker died on September 8, at the age of eighty. He was executive director of the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization and the founder of Pastors for Peace. A longtime advocate for ending the US embargo of Cuba, Reverend Walker led 21 annual US-Cuba Friendship Caravans to Cuba, providing medical supplies and yellow school buses for the Cuban people, in defiance of the US embargo.

Lucius said, “We don’t consider Cuba our enemy, but rather our neighbor. And as people who are motivated by the great teachers of faith, we believe that we are to love our neighbors. That means we have to act contrary to US policy, which is an imposition of a blockade against Cuba to try and force it to do the will of the US rather than to pursue its own path towards a better world.”

Members of the Task Force on the Americas supported and participated in many Friendship Caravans, collecting humanitarian aid and traveling to Cuba risking arrest and fines. In addition to Cuba, caravans traveled to Central America and Mexico. In fact Pastors for Peace was actually founded by Lucius when he was in Nicaragua during the Contra War. Caravans brought much needed aid to Honduras and Nicaragua during the 80s and 90s and food to indigenous communities in Chiapas Mexico after the Zapatista uprising. In addition, Lucius helped coordinate the training of over 100 youth from poor neighborhoods in the US to attend Havana’s Latin America School of Medicine. As doctors they will return home to serve in low income communities.

We were always inspired by Lucius’ tireless efforts and commitment to those who struggled for justice. His work was guided by the notion that the arc of history bends toward justice. His persevering, open and honest activism for better relations between Cuba and the United States will be greatly missed.

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# HONDURAS: Repressions Reward, Dinner with Obama?

By Dana Frank, professor of history

Why is the US still supporting a repressive regime in Honduras? While Secretary of State Clinton continues to insist that democracy is marching forward in Honduras, President Porfirio Lobo's ongoing coup government has been escalating its violent attacks against peaceful demonstrators, opposition radio stations, and critics. Repression under Lobo has now achieved levels equal to those after Roberto Micheletti took power in the June 28, 2009 coup. Lobo's reward: dinner at the White House this week.

The details are chilling, and bald. On Wednesday, September 15 – Independence Day, for Honduras – police and the military brutally broke up an opposition demonstration in San Pedro Sula, the country's second largest city. First troops broke into the entrance to Radio Uno, the only opposition radio station in the city, lobbed tear gas into its windows, trashed its offices, and very deliberately destroyed a popular statue of deposed former President Manuel Zelaya. Ten minutes into a concert in the Central Park, police suddenly stormed the stage and destroyed the instruments of all three musical groups ready to perform. At the same time, amidst clouds of tear gas and other chemicals, troops turned viciously on the peacefully gathered demonstrators, grabbing people randomly and beating them with batons. Officers beat up teenagers in a high school drum corps; they smashed all the windows and lights of a union-owned pickup truck parked nearby; an elderly man selling lottery tickets died of the tear gas.

Ever since Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo came into office as President of Honduras in January, after a fraudulent election from which opposition candidates withdrew, he's been testing what he and the nation's elites can get away with, gradually unleashing more and more violence against the opposition. On August 13 police violently attacked peaceful demonstrators in Choloma with tear gas, brutal beatings with batons, and further beatings while in detention. When teachers marched in the capital, Tegucigalpa, on August 26 and 27, they were

met with tear gas, batons, and even live ammunition.

Paramilitary-style assassinations and death threats against trade unionists, campesino activists, and feminists active in the opposition continue unabated, with complete impunity. Last Friday night, September 17, gunmen shot and killed Juana Bustillo, a leader in the social security workers' union. Nine journalists critical of the government have been killed since Lobo took office. On September 19 in

ready impoverished working people. It is demanding that Lobo finally declare a new minimum wage, as he has been legally mandated to do for months now. It is also trying to stop a draconian reformation of the country's basic labor law, that will not only destroy full-time, permanent employment – which in turn, is legally necessary for workers to form unions – but allows employers to pay 30% of what they owe employees not in actual money but in company scrip – with its value set by the company.

President Lobo persists in cloaking his repressive military-led rule by calling it a "government of national reconciliation." All the repression, in his fictional world, is just common crime. Yes, common crime, much of it gang-led, is hideously rampant in Honduras. But it flourishes in the ripe climate of mass poverty the Honduran oligarchs foster; and it doesn't account for the selective assassinations of opposition activists and journalists, over and over. And Lobo, of course, not the gangs, is the one ordering the police to attack demonstrations and countenancing paramilitary assassinations.

The Obama administration supports this chilling regime one hundred percent. Military aid has been fully restored. The International Monetary Fund on September 10 announced an additional \$196 million loan to Honduras. Preposterously, just as Lobo launched the tear gas on Independence Day in Honduras, Hillary Clinton praised once again its "resumption of democratic and constitutional government."

Rather than extolling Lobo, sending him more and more guns and funds, and inviting him to a gracious dinner with other presidents visiting the United Nations, Obama should cut all ties with the regime and stop pressuring the Organization of American States to re-admit Honduras. The White House should heed a letter currently circulating in Congress, sponsored by Representative Sam Farr, and cut all military aid. And please, no dinners legitimating fraudulent thugs.

Source: *Huffingtonpost.com*, September 24, 2010



Photo: Roger Harris

In June, the author posed with statue of Manuel Zelaya. Photo in lower left shows statue after Radio UNO was vandalized by government troops on Sept 15.

Tegucigalpa, unknown assailants shot at Luis Galdamez, a prominent opposition radio and TV commentator, as he entered his home with his young son. The police wouldn't even show up for an hour and a half.

Although many in the US press still cast the Honduran opposition as merely supporters of deposed President Manuel Zelaya, they are united by a far deeper vision that hopes to address the country's overwhelming poverty and break the lockdown of the oligarchs on its political system and economy. The resistance has so far collected 1,346,876 signatures (out of a country of 7.8 million) calling for a constitutional convention through which to refound Honduran society.

The opposition is also trying hard to stop a wave of economic aggression against its al-

## Ecuador: Attempted Coup?

By: *Kristin Bricker, NACLA research assistant*

On September 30, about 1,000 Ecuadoran national police officers took to the streets, blocking key intersections and taking over public space, in protest of a new law that eliminated their bonuses and other benefits.

Even though the protesting police represented a small fraction of the 42,000-member force, things quickly spun out of control. A small number of low-ranking Air Force soldiers shut down airports, the police occupied Congress, and they held Correa hostage in a hospital for more than 10 hours until a mixed Special Operations team rescued him. The unrest left 10 dead and 274 injured.

The police rebellion began after Correa used line-item vetoes to change certain parts of the Public Services Law, which reportedly aimed to streamline Ecuador's public sector by doing away with certain bonuses and forcing many public servants into early retirement. The president's line-item veto power is provided for under the country's 2008 constitution, and the president has often used it to overrule Congress.

According to Edwin Bedoya, vice president of the Ecuadoran Federation of Unitarian Working Class Organizations (CEDOCUT), the version of the Public Services Law that Congress originally passed was crafted in negotiations between Correa's Alianza PAIS party and public servants. "But we saw in the second round of voting that the president had vetoed the agreements and had gotten rid of certain workers' rights," Bedoya said. When Congress, including some members of Alianza PAIS, balked at Correa's changes to the legislation, the president threatened to use his right to dissolve Congress to pass his version of the Public Services law.

But the ensuing rebellion, Correa and others have emphasized, was not a spontaneous uprising. While still being held hostage, Correa declared: "It is a coup attempt led by the opposition and certain sections of the armed forces and the police." Many Latin Americans, still rattled by the successful coup against leftist President Manuel Zelaya in Honduras last year, feared Correa would be next. Others argued that calling the unrest a "coup" is an exaggeration, or even that Correa kidnapped himself in order to increase

his popularity and political power.

Yet the protests took place in at least four provinces in Ecuador, casting doubt on their spontaneity. And as Correa pointed out, the protests were "coordinated with the closure . . . of the airport, coordinated with the attacks on the [state television's] relay antennas, with the invasion of [government-owned] Ecuador TV's studios," and the police takeover of Congress.

Moreover, video footage of the striking police during the operation that freed Correa clearly demonstrates that the police were shooting to kill. Correa told the press that the armored vehicle that drove him away from the hospital was shot multiple times.

While police held Correa hostage, former Ecuadoran President Lucio Gutiérrez, an outspoken critic of Correa, gave interviews from his exile in Brazil, hailing the police rebellion as a coup. "The end of Correa's tyranny is at hand," he said, and called for the "dissolution of parliament" and "early presidential elections." Former president of Congress Alberto Acosta, a Correa supporter turned critic, reported that "ex-soldiers and ex-police, the very people that make up the fat of the Lucio's party," were seen in barracks in multiple cities. When police briefly occupied Congress, Acosta added, the representatives who are members of Gutiérrez's Patriotic Society Party entered and exited freely, while members of other parties "had trouble entering."

Both Correa and former National Police commander Freddy Martínez, who resigned after his failure to control his troops, argue that outside instigators infiltrated the police, misled police about the austerity measures in the Public Service Law, and provoked the uprising. Labor and indigenous organizations in Ecuador, however, have taken a more nuanced line. The police rebellion occurred, they argue, because Ecuador's right wing is taking advantage of weaknesses created by Correa's alienating governing style. Although they opposed any coup attempt and demanded that constitutional order be respected, they also criticized Correa for marginalizing his natural allies in the social movements and leaving himself vulnerable to attacks from the right.

A joint statement from four of Ecuador's largest indigenous organizations rejected the "right-wing's actions that in an undercover

way form part of the attempted coup" and called upon its members to "be on alert and ready to mobilize." However, the statement criticizes the Correa administration for violently repressing mobilizations against transnational mining, oil, and agro-industrial companies. The organizations argued, "The social crisis that was let loose today was also provoked by the authoritarian character and the unwillingness to dialogue in the lawmaking process. We have seen how laws that were negotiated [with social sectors] were vetoed by the President of the Republic. . . . This scenario nurtures the conservative sectors."

Labor leader Bedoya says that on September 30, the CEDOCUT called on all sectors to hit the streets to restore constitutional order. However, like his country's indigenous organizations, he qualified his organization's defense of Correa: "We do believe that part of the blame for what is happening lies with not accepting dialogue with social sectors."

Acosta, who co-founded the Alianza PAIS with Correa, echoed this. "The president and his government don't know how to dialogue," he said. "They impose their laws, without even respecting the criteria of the assembly members of their own block."

Even worse, argued indigenous organizations on the day of the coup, the Correa administration has repressed them just as right-wing governments have. "Faced with the criticism and mobilization of communities against transnational mining, oil, and agro-industrial companies," wrote the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), the Federation of Peoples of the Quichua Nationality of Ecuador (ECUARUNARI), and two other indigenous groups, "the government, instead of creating a dialogue, responds with violence and repression. . . . The only thing this type of politics provokes is to open spaces to the Right and create spaces of destabilization."

Bedoya shares this analysis: "Of course the right takes advantage of this, and takes advantage of the most powerful sector, which is the national police and the military, and it begins to sow discontent . . . but the government's behavior is making that possible."

Acosta hopes that his former ally will

*continued on page 5*

## Paraguay: Americas Social Forum

By Marc Becker, *Latin American historian and activist*

“Our America is on the march,” Paraguay president Fernando Lugo proclaimed at the close of the Fourth Americas Social Forum (ASF) that met in Asunción, Paraguay from August 11-15, 2010. America is on the march, Lugo repeated, but we have not yet arrived at our desired destination. We have a lot of work left to do, and the Americas Social Forum is one of the torches that lights our path forward, he said.

Lugo’s presence at a meeting of social movement activists highlights the aspirations, promises, frustrations, and contractions of the Latin American left. When the World Social Forum (WSF) first met in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre in 2001, all of the countries in the Americas except for Cuba were under the rule of neoliberal governments. The meeting proclaimed an alternative to militarism and the domination of people by capital with the bold claim that “Another World is Possible.”

Almost a decade later, the shifts evident in the Americas Social Forum point to profound changes that have accompanied Latin America’s dramatic shift to the left. Initially, social forums were to be a meeting of civil society, but now government officials are openly invited to the meetings and given a prominent platform to promote their messages. Discourses have also grown and matured. In addition to the original themes of opposition to militarism and neoliberalism, climate change and the *buen vivir* or living well are now prominent messages. Instead of meeting in countries with strong social movements (as with the first ASF in Quito, Ecuador in 2004), the forum has now traveled to the margins of where people might expect it to meet. But along the way, it empowers and motivates local social movements.

During the course of the Paraguayan ASF, about eight thousand activists participated in more than 300 workshops, lectures, panels, conferences and cultural activities. After a day full of self-organized sessions, the first two days of the meeting concluded with ten concurrent panels designed to highlight the main themes of the forum.

At one of the featured panels Bolivian foreign minister David Choquehuanca who

first introduced the idea of *buen vivir* argued that capitalism is the cause of climatic problems. The Bolivian government questions development because it leads to disequilibrium. Politically, they are working toward decolonization and a recuperation of identities. We have to democratize democracy, Choquehuanca said. Indigenous demands go further than democracy, because they want to build consensus. Rather than human rights, they are looking for collective rights that include those of nature.

The third day of discussions concluded with a panel on sovereignty and integration that featured Paraguay president Fernando Lugo. Lugo, who had just returned from São Paulo where he was undergoing cancer treatment, strolled up on the stage to thunderous applause. He was wearing a peasant poncho, and proceeded to read a short 15-minute speech. He talked about the social forum as the refuge of Latin American dignity, a factory of realized dreams. We want to regain our regional integration, he declared, as a model for the development of our countries. He emphasized the sovereign development of Latin American countries. Latin America today is the continent of hope for the world. Another America is possible, Lugo concluded, another world is possible.

Lugo returned the following morning for the closing of the forum, this time accompanied by his counterparts Evo Morales from Bolivia and José Mujica from Uruguay. Mujica gave a short speech on the importance of openness and diversity. Morales talked about the many social conflicts, difficulties, and aggressions they faced. He spoke of the need to continue the struggle to govern without intervention from the United States or neoliberal institutions. He argued that Bolivia was realizing positive results, including a recent announcement that Bolivia had moved from a low to medium income country. Social forums are a great school for all of us, Morales said, and important issues are discussed there, including struggles against military bases and climate change. He concluded by noting that he emerged out of social movements, and that he was obligated by social forces to take the positions he does.

Lugo’s message was that “*nuestra*

*América esta en camino,*” our America is on the march, but we have not yet arrived. We have a lot of work left to do, Lugo said, and the Americas Social Forum is one of the torches that lights the path. We are now realizing the dreams of independence leaders from two centuries ago for a unified Latin America. The presence of all of us at the social forum, Lugo said, provides a force to continue on an irreversible path. The forum is evidence of new winds blowing on the continent. The only guarantee we have that this process of integration will continue on the behalf of the people rather than privileged sectors is this mobilization, Lugo maintained. Popular participation is the motor of integration, of change, of cooperation. If new winds are blowing on the continent, we have to be alert to the risks and continual dangers inside and outside of Latin America. We need to construct new alternatives so that our dreams will be a reality. Lugo closed by thanking participants for being there, and proclaimed that another world, another America, another Paraguay is possible.

All of these presidents have received criticisms from social movements, including Lugo for failing to stop the spread of transgenic soy production. At the same time, they do represent a part of Latin America’s significant shift to the left. The forum, which was originally conceptualized as a meeting of civil society, has become part of a dance between social movements and electoral politics for how to build a new and better world.

Source: [www.yachana.org/reports/asf2010/](http://www.yachana.org/reports/asf2010/)

*Ecuador Coup, continued from page 4*

learn from the police rebellion. “History has given to President Correa, once again, the opportunity to reacquaint himself with the origins of the revolutionary process, to rectify. Hopefully he understands it that way.”

“A Citizens’ Revolution,” argued Bedoya, “implies a respect for the rights of all people, of the workers, of organizations’ collective rights, and to establish a dialogue to reach a minimum consensus with the social sectors.”

Source: [nacla.org/node/6770](http://nacla.org/node/6770), Oct. 12, 2010

## Venezuela: Buying the Press with US Tax Dollars

By *Jeremy Bigwood, investigative journalist*

Ed. Note: *An expanded version of this article appeared in the September/October edition of NACLA Report on the Americas*

The US State Department is secretly funneling millions of dollars to Latin American journalists, according to documents obtained in June under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). The 20 documents released to this author – including grant proposals, awards, and quarterly reports – show that between 2007 and 2009, the State Department’s little-known Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor channeled at least \$4 million to journalists in Bolivia, Nicaragua, and Venezuela through the Pan American Development Foundation (PADF), a Washington-based grant maker that has worked in Latin America since 1962. Thus far, only documents pertaining to Venezuela have been released. They reveal that the PADF, collaborating with Venezuelan NGOs associated with the country’s political opposition, has been supplied with at least \$700,000 to give out journalism grants and sponsor journalism education programs.

Until now, the State Department has hidden its role in funding the Venezuelan news media, one of the opposition’s most powerful weapons against President Hugo Chávez and his Bolivarian movement. The PADF, serving as an intermediary, effectively removed the government’s fingerprints from the money. Yet, as noted in a State Department document titled “Bureau/Program Specific Requirements,” the State Department’s own policies require that “all publications” funded by the department “acknowledge the support.” But the provision was simply waived for the PADF. “For the purposes of this award,” the requirements document adds, “. . . the recipient is not required to publicly acknowledge the support of the US Department of State.”

Before 2007, the largest funder of US “democracy promotion” activities in Venezuela was not the State Department but the US Agency for International Development (USAID), together with the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). But in 2005, these organizations’ underhanded funding was exposed by Venezuelan American attorney Eva Golinger in a series of articles, books, and lectures (disclosure: This author obtained

many of the documents). After the USAID and NED covers were blown wide open – forcing USAID’s main intermediary, Development Alternatives Inc. (DAI), a Maryland-based contractor, to close its office in Caracas – the US government apparently sought new funding channels, one of which the PADF appears to have provided.

Although the \$700,000 allocated to the PADF, which is noted in the State Department’s requirements document, may not seem like a lot of money, the funds have been strategically used to buy off the best of Venezuela’s news media and recruit young journalists. This has been achieved by collaborating with opposition NGOs, many of which have a strong media focus. The requirements document is the only document that names any of these organizations – which was probably an oversight on the State Department’s part, since the recipients’ names and a lot of other information are excised in the rest of the documents. The requirements document names Espacio Público and Instituto Prensa y Sociedad, two leading organizations linked to the Venezuelan opposition, as recipients of “subgrants.”

Neither organization makes clear its connection to the State Department. Espacio Público, according to its website, is a “non-profit, non-governmental civil association that is *independent* and autonomous of political parties, religious institutions, *international organizations or any government*” (emphasis added). Two of three images on the homepage are from anti-Chávez demonstrations. The other “subgrantee,” the Venezuelan chapter of Instituto Prensa y Sociedad, is a Peru-based journalism organization that was started with funding from USAID, and that has continued to receive USAID money while launching a series of attacks on Chávez. It has explicitly opposed Chávez since 2000, when it falsely accused him of harboring Peruvian dictator Alberto Fujimori’s fugitive spymaster, Vladimiro Montesinos (Chávez’s own authorities later arrested Montesinos and extradited him to Peru).

The documents detail a series of grants doled out to unnamed individual journalists. These include two kinds of grants “for innovative reporting and investigative reporting,” with the winning content disseminated online

“and to selected independent media audiences.” While we don’t know who won these grants, we know that they were substantial. One of them consisted of 10 one-year grants of \$25,000 each. For many journalists, especially in Latin America, \$25,000 for a year is a high salary. The PADF also holds “2 competitions, one per year, for a total of \$20,000 in funding awarded to at least 6 entries.”

The PADF’s Venezuela program also supports journalism education, which is undertaken to produce investigative work “via innovative media technologies,” according to an “Action Memorandum” for a fiscal year 2007 grant. This grant includes “a series of trainings for local journalists focused on the basic and advanced skills of Internet-based reporting and investigative reporting,” according to the requirements document. The education program engages “a wide range of Venezuelan media organizations and news outlets, including 4 university partners,” where it aims “to establish one course per school on investigative reporting.” PADF proposes targeting not only universities in the capital city of Caracas, but also regional ones in “the Andes, Center East, Zulia and the Western region of the country.” In each region, “the local partners will sign agreements with academic institutions that teach social communications.”

The revelations of U.S. funding of Venezuelan journalism comes on the heels of a report released in May by the center-right European think tank FRIDE, which found that since 2002 the United States has spent an estimated \$3 million to \$6 million every year “on small projects with political parties and NGOs” in Venezuela, with funds distributed through an alphabet soup of shifting and intertwined channels. (The report was removed from FRIDE’s website soon after it was publicized.) The PADF journalism program thus appears to be part of a much larger project of propping up the Venezuelan opposition.

The Venezuelan journalists and students who benefited from the grants and education may not have known of the State Department funding. Nonetheless, covert foreign state support for ostensibly independent journalism violates basic principles of the profession’s integrity.

Source: *nacla.org, July 15, 2010*

## Bolivia: Conflicting views of Latin America's future

By Benjamin Dangl, author and editor of *Toward Freedom.com* and *UpsideDownWorld.org*

Miners in Potosí, Bolivia set off sticks of dynamite as cold winter winds zipped through the city, passing street barricades, protests, hunger strikers and an occupied electrical plant. These actions took place from late July to mid-August against the perceived neglect of the Evo Morales administration toward the impoverished Potosí region.

This showdown in Bolivia is similar to conflicts across Latin America between the promises of left-leaning governments, the needs of the people and the finite resources of *Pachamama* (Mother Earth).

Diverse social organizations, miners, unions, students, local residents, and even the city's soccer team, united in the protest in late July. The mobilizations shut down the city and many mining operations. Residents criticized what they saw as the government's lack of attention, funding and development projects for Potosí, the poorest department in the country.

Among the demands were the completion of a highway between the neighboring department of Tarija and Potosí, a cement and metallurgical factory, an airport, and the preservation of Cerro Rico, a historic silver mine now in decay. After 19 days of mobilizations, the activists and the Morales government reached a resolution in which the administration agreed to all of the protesters' demands.

This recent conflict in Potosí is one of many that have taken place in the country regarding the distribution of government funds, execution of development projects and access to natural resources. In mid-June, various indigenous movements from eastern Bolivia gathered for a march to assert their autonomy over the management of land and the extraction of gas and minerals in their territory.

At the heart of these conflicts is a question leftist governments and social movements across Latin America are grappling with: what should this "other world that is possible" look like?

"Is it one based on constant economic growth, even if this is 'socialist' and would raise the real income of people in the global

South?" sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein asks about today's Latin America. "Or is it what some are calling a change in civilizational values, a world of *buen vivir* [living well]?" This latter philosophy includes living in harmony with others and with nature, rather than accumulating capital and material things while destroying the earth.

Besides conflicting visions of this "other world that is possible" (from the World Social Forum's slogan) is the divergence between political rhetoric and reality. Many leftist governments across the region lack the political will – or are constrained by economic and political forces, and the state – to carry out much-needed structural changes to allow people to live well.

Government promises and policies are empty without action on the part of both politicians and the people. At the recent Social Forum of the Americas in Asunción, Paraguay Roberto Baggio of Brazil's Landless Workers Movement, told IPS News, "When we talk about agrarian reform, we're talking about making access to property more democratic and laws that make it possible to take action, because a good land re-

form program is not sufficient if concrete actions are not taken."

This view reflects one of the dominant roles Latin American social movements find themselves in now. Few are seeking to overthrow governments as they did when explicitly neoliberal administrations were in power. Rather, writes Uruguayan journalist Raúl Zibechi, there is "something more subtle; the social movements have begun to place limits on governments." From Ecuador and Venezuela, to Argentina and Bolivia, this new relationship between movements and governments is still being defined.

Another participant in this dance is the earth itself. Considering the onslaught of global warming, the soy boom, and the ecological destruction of logging, oil, gas and mining industries, the need to apply the philosophy of *buen vivir* is as pressing as ever.

As Nobel Prize-winning indigenous activist Rigoberta Menchu reminded participants at the Social Forum in Paraguay, "We can't dominate the Earth; she dominates us."

Source: *Toward Freedom*, August 26, 2010

## Venezuela: Participatory Democracy

By Andrew Kennis, journalist

Ed. Note: Article excerpted

Selling goods to a passersby on the street, Jenny Caraballo describes her local communal council. "Some of our members are home-makers who want their community to be pretty," Caraballo says while trying to make eye contact with potential clients in *23 de Enero*, a barrio popular that is one of many rough areas in Caracas, Venezuela.

The balmy weather southwest of Caracas, in the state of Táchira, does not stop Pedro Hernandez, 77, from playing chess with his retired friends in San Cristobel's city square. "Before, the government didn't help the people," he says. "Now they give us benefits." Now there is culture, dance and programs free to the public and organized by our communal council." Hernandez does his part by organizing chess tournaments.

And in the picturesque mountain town of Merida, Alidio Sosa says: "The councils are a symbol of how the old parties are dead and

won't ever come back; the parties of the past never concerned themselves with the community."

Hugo Chávez, Venezuela's president who has spearheaded the country's Bolivarian revolution and garnered so much attention, is not the only one shaking up the country's political system. A community-based revolution is underway in Venezuela. Ordinary people all over are changing how their communities are governed.

In the past four years, hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans have been organizing tens of thousands of *consejos comunales* (communal councils). Each council is composed of about 150 families in urban areas, while in rural and indigenous areas; each council is composed of 20 and 10 families, respectively. The councils are involved in everything from road building and maintenance to cultural activities and events, housing improvements, and providing basic services like water and

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## Haiti: US and International Donors have Failed

By Mark Weisbrot, co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research

The “international community” is in charge of rebuilding Haiti, and one thing has become clear: they are not interested in any kind of democracy there, not even the low level of “democracy” that they have committed to in Iraq or Afghanistan.

Haiti’s provisional electoral commission (CEP) has now decided once again that the country’s largest political party, Fanmi Lavalas, will not be allowed to participate in parliamentary elections scheduled for November. This is the equivalent of excluding the Democratic Party (actually something quite a bit larger) from U.S. Congressional elections in November.

So far there are no indications that the Obama administration, which has - to put it mildly - enormous influence over the government of Haiti, has any objections. They had supported the last elections in April 2009 which also excluded Fanmi Lavalas, even though the exclusion led to a boycott of some 90 percent of voters.

To follow the historical thread, Fanmi Lavalas is headed by Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who became Haiti’s first democratically elected president in 1990. He was overthrown by the military seven months later, in a violent coup that had a lot of Washington’s fingerprints on it. President Clinton restored Aristide three years later, but Aristide offended Washington by, among other things, getting rid of Haiti’s brutal army - which was not so much a military force as an instrument of political violence on behalf of Haiti’s ruling elite.

Paul Farmer of Harvard Medical School is Bill Clinton’s Deputy Special Envoy at the UN. His “Partners in Health” has nearly 5,000 people in Haiti. Testifying recently at a Congressional briefing, he described what happened after Aristide and his party were elected for a second time, in 2000: “Beginning in 2000, the US administration sought . . . to block bilateral and multilateral aid to Haiti, having an objection to the policies and views of the administration of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, elected by over 90% of the vote . . . Choking off assistance for development and for the provision of basic services also choked off oxygen to the government, which was the

intention all along: to dislodge the Aristide administration.”

It was the second Bush administration that finally overthrew Aristide for the second time - in the coup of March 2004. But as Farmer notes, the process was initiated under the Clinton administration in 2000. And the Obama administration is currently silent on Aristide’s forced exile from Haiti, a violation of Haiti’s constitution.

If only Washington were a tenth as good at rebuilding Haiti as it was at destroying the country before the earthquake. But six months after the catastrophe, less than 2 percent of the 1.6 million homeless have homes. Hundreds of thousands have nothing at all, and 80 percent of the homeless that do have shelter are living under tarps where the ground under them turns to mud when it rains. And less than 2.9 percent of all aid money has gone to the Haitian government,

*Venezuela, continued from page 7*

electricity - all while struggling for the official government recognition that provides the opportunity to get funding for their community projects.

Communal councils were modeled after participatory democracy in Kerala, India, and community budgeting practices pioneered in Porto Alegre, Brazil. In Kerala, citizens play an important role in conceiving and implementing development projects at the local level. Since 1989, Porto Alegre has successfully run a system of decentralized planning whereby citizens determine local spending priorities through a series of public meetings. Communal councils in Venezuela embody both of these municipal participatory reforms.

The paperwork required to start and maintain a council is one of the greatest obstacles to communal council organizing. Completion of a multi-step process, including conducting a census and numerous elections, is required. Despite these complexities, councils have taken on government bureaucracy by creating a participatory model of governance that bypasses large institutions and municipal officials.

Local officials and bureaucrats feel threatened by this growing form of self-governance, which is fueled by billions of dollars from the central government. Of the

which makes reconstruction nearly impossible. With a hundred thousand children wounded from the earthquake, public hospitals are closing.

The land that is needed for shelter is owned by rich Haitians, who have other plans. The Haitian government has the authority to take this land, with compensation. The international community can make this happen.

It’s time for members of the U.S. Congress to step up to the plate and change our foreign policy toward Haiti, as they did after the 1991 military coup. Congress can make sure that the aid flows to where it is needed, that land and shelter are available, and that Haitians are allowed to elect their own government. After all that Washington has done to punish Haiti, this is the least they can do.

Source: *McClatchy Tribune Information Services on August 12, 2010*

many national Bolivarian social projects, the communal councils have arguably become the most popular and successful innovations of the Chávez administration.

Communal councils are an effort to combat Venezuela’s bureaucratic red tape and the corruption related to it. But they are also the latest manifestation of Venezuela’s long tradition of community activism and social struggle.

Communal councils sprung up across the country in the wake of National Assembly legislation in November 2006. Their success is attributed to their more decentralized and democratic structure; each council is run by and serves a relatively small number of people.

Direct inspiration for the Law of Communal Councils was drawn from Cumaná, a coastal state capital located some 250 miles northeast of Caracas. In Cumaná, communal councils had been operating successfully because citizens were comfortable deliberating in small, community-oriented bodies. The Cumaná experience was translated into a national success story, as the number of officially sanctioned communal councils rose from about 21,000 in 2007 to 30,179 by 2009, with some 5,000 more slated for formation.

This organizing frenzy was accompanied by significant federal funding. Starting at \$1.5

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## Colombia: Gross Human Rights Abuses

By George Friemoth, Task Force board

A report published on August 11 by the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) focuses on the “false positives” scandal that broke in November 2008, when it came out that, Colombian soldiers had murdered over 3,000 civilians and dressed their cadavers up as guerillas in order to boost results in the war on drugs and terrorism.

The report, which draws on statistics provided by the US State Department and the Colombian military, shows that the Colombian army units which received the most US funding committed the most atrocities. The reverse held true as well, with the number of false positives dropping as funding was decreasing. To be precise, the 16 largest single-year increases of aid to army units led to a 56 percent increase in executions in their jurisdictions, while the reduction in killings was reported from those ju-

risdictions where aid was sharply reduced.

Correlation doesn't equal causation, but one can see why certain segments of society might be less than thrilled about the prospect of more soldiers showing up. As Colombia's investment climate improves, reports of extrajudicial killings and disappearances continue to accrue throughout the country.

As the data in the FOR report indicates, after November 2008 the number of reported killings by the Colombian armed forces dropped precipitously, apparently due to a government decision to address the scandal. Since then, there has been a steep climb in the number of reported killings by paramilitary successor groups.

The principal US law designed to protect against the use of US foreign aid to commit human rights abuses is the Leahy Law (Senator Patrick Leahy authored the law) which prohibits assistance to any foreign

country force unit if the State Department has credible evidence that the unit has committed gross human rights violations. According to the State Department, the application of the law has been most rigorous in Colombia. Yet, the FOR analysis strongly suggests that implementation of the Leahy Law in Colombia requires suspension of assistance to nearly all army field brigades and many mobile brigades. Most military training in Colombia is funded by the Defense Department.

Meanwhile, less than two percent of the false positive murders have led to charges, and the one person who might have been expected to resign over the scandal – Colombia's defense minister at the time, Juan Manuel Santos – has instead become president!

Source: Arno Kopecky, “Canada Backs Colombia's Growing Embrace of US Military”, August 6, 2010

Venezuela, continued from page 8

billion in 2006, funding for communal councils increased to \$5 billion by 2007. That same year, laws governing the distribution of petroleum revenues were modified so that 50 percent of funds (the portion previously directed to state and municipal governments) went to communal councils.

Despite the abundance of financing, legislation limits each council to project spending caps of between about \$14,000 and \$28,000. The caps mean projects can do little more than pave a new road, so councils frequently depend on volunteer labor, a problem for impoverished communities. Still, councils are often able to rely on volunteers due to the councils' popularity. A lack of competitive contracts for council work has also been a source of criticism from opponents of the government.

New laws passed by the National Assembly since November 2009 has helped councils expand their focus into the economic sphere. According to the legislation, councils should now promote new forms of “social property, based on the potentialities of their community,” through a tax-exempt “social, popular, and alternative economy.”

Since the councils were created in part to combat bureaucracy, some reforms aim to streamline council finances and prevent corruption. Financial management of the councils was transferred from communal banks to fi-

nance commissions with elected council administrators, and recall measures were instituted for council spokespersons (elected citizens who manage the councils). Ostensibly, these measures grant more financial autonomy and independence from meddling local officials, who often feel threatened by or are in conflict with the councils.

In May 2010, about 15,000 elected spokespeople participated in workshops conducted by the government's Foundation for Development and Promotion of Communal Power on how to implement the new reforms.

Socialist communes created through additional federal initiatives since last November represent an effort to strengthen councils and expand their scope into the economic realm. As of February 2010, more than 184 communes, each of which coordinates between various councils around the country, were being organized to help councils focus on “social-productive” projects and provide Venezuelans with access to cheaper goods. These projects include growing medicinal and agricultural plants in the coastal state of Miranda, and operating nonprofit arepa shops, which sell food in Caracas at half the market price. Other initiatives take advantage of cheap goods produced or distributed by certain communes.

“Before, neighborhood associations took on the responsibilities of many of the

community's needs,” says Caraballo, the community activist in Caracas. “Now, the communal council does much of the same work, but with the financial support of the government, giving us more resources to do the things we need to do.”

As with any experiment in participatory democracy, the councils are not perfect. Dedicated citizen activists are often overburdened with what arguably should be governmental responsibilities. In addition, much of Venezuela's most important communal council work is being done by un-or-under-employed volunteers often mired in poverty.

Lofty pronouncements about communal councils from federal officials abound. Chávez himself has declared the councils to be “the great motors of the new era of the Revolution,” “a basic cell of the future society,” and “fundamental...for revolutionary democracy.” Yet questions remain about the future role of councils in larger political and economic spheres.

Regardless of how they evolve, if local citizens control the future of the councils, they will surely remain an important part of the far-reaching political changes that have reshaped Venezuela during the last decade.

Source: [CommonDreams.org/headline/2010/8/10](http://CommonDreams.org/headline/2010/8/10); *In These Times*, August 10, 2010

## Chile's Mapuche Hunger Strike

By Alexandra Reed, COHA Research Associate

Ed. Note: Article was excerpted

Most of the news out of Chile recently has been coming from a dark hole 2200 feet below ground in Copiapó, where 33 trapped miners became an international media sensation. The news from Copiapó is particularly joyful, as the long-awaited rescue mission is finally complete; 70 days after the miners' ordeal began.

Some Chileans, however, may have difficulty reconciling the amount of media attention the miners have received over these past two months with the lack of attention afforded to Chile's 38 Mapuche hunger strikers during the same time period. As Chile celebrates the successful rescue of the miners, it is important take a moment to reflect on another group of Chileans whose struggle has not received the attention it deserves.

Three months ago, on July 12th, 34 jailed Mapuche activists across southern Chile initiated a hunger strike to protest their treatment by the Chilean government. The strike expanded to include a total of 38 Mapuche prisoners, all of whom were awaiting trial for crimes committed in the name of reclaiming their ancestral lands in Chile's Araucanía region. The hunger strike initially garnered very little media attention, both in Chile and abroad; the protest only began to receive the coverage it warranted when it reached its second month and the condition of several of the strikers became critical, just as Chile was gearing up to celebrate its bicentennial. As the strike dragged into September, dozens of Chilean political and social leaders, including four members of the Chilean Congress's Human Rights Commission, joined the protest in a high-profile show of solidarity with the Mapuche community.

The Mapuche are Chile's largest indigenous group, representing approximately five percent of the population. Though their struggle to defend ancestral lands in the southern Araucanía region began long before Chile became an independent state, the Chilean government itself was responsible for one of the most brutal and comprehensive campaigns waged against the Mapuche people, the Pacification of the Araucanía (1861-1883). Since then, the Mapuche people have been stripped of the majority of their ancestral lands. For just

as long, Mapuche activists have remained locked in land disputes with the government in an attempt to reclaim just a portion of those territories. Frustrated with inadequate responses from those in power, some activists have given up on negotiations and turned to direct action, including arson, land occupations, road blockages, and occasionally, armed assault. Typically targeted in these attacks are private landowners and large logging companies in the south of Chile. While the victims claim otherwise, the Mapuche protestors maintain that their actions fall in the category of social protest.

Under Chile's old anti-terrorism legislation—a relic of the brutal Pinochet regime—the government was entitled to charge Mapuche activists with acts of terrorism, making them eligible for trial in military courts. The strikers demanded that all charges brought against them under the counter-terrorism legislation be dropped, and even more importantly, they requested direct dialogue with the Chilean government regarding the Mapuche struggle for political and territorial autonomy.

In early September, faced with increasing media coverage and pressure to address the strike, the Piñera administration was forced to supplement its strategy of delegitimizing the protest with more concrete action. Piñera took a tentative step in the right direction by pledging to reform the counter-terrorism legislation in question, but he continued to balk at the Mapuche protestors' pleas for substantive negotiations until September 17<sup>th</sup>. Needless to say, the timing of Piñera's agreement to enter into direct talks with Mapuche representatives seemed to have less to do with genuine concern for the strikers, and more to do with his desire to dispel the dark shadow that the hunger strike threatened to cast over Chile's bicentennial celebrations. Piñera made his opinion of the strikers' tactics clear: by saying that the strikers had, "chosen the wrong path."

The negotiations, which began on September 24th after the bicentennial celebrations had drawn to a close, were facilitated by the Archbishop of Concepción, Ricardo Ezzati. With Archbishop Ezzati's help, on October 1st, the majority of the protestors called off their hunger strike in exchange for the Chilean government's agreement to withdraw the charges brought against Mapuche activists

under the anti-terrorism legislation (and instead charge them under common criminal law), in addition to making permanent changes to the anti-terrorism legislation and Chile's military justice system.

For 14 of the 38 protesters, however, the hunger strike dragged on for another week, until they reached a more comprehensive agreement with the government on October 9th, day 89 of the strike. The Piñera administration managed to convince the remaining strikers of its sincerity with an agreement. In the October 9th agreement, the government finally made good on its pledge to withdraw the terrorism charges filed against the Mapuche prisoners. Additionally, Piñera announced his intention to begin immediate discussions regarding the long-overdue introduction of a law recognizing Chile's indigenous peoples in the constitution.

The Piñera administration's reliance on discussions to address the Mapuche conflict is nothing new. When it comes to the Chilean government's dealings with the Mapuche people, a historical precedent of superficial dialogue and empty promises certainly gives cause for skepticism. As Chile's first elected right-wing leader in over 50 years, Piñera is perhaps subject to particular scrutiny with respect to his management of the Mapuche conflict.

Despite her initial campaign promise to break the cycle of destructive relations between the Chilean government and its indigenous population, former president Bachelet, like her predecessor Ricardo Lagos, ultimately gave in to media pressure to maintain the status quo by allowing Mapuche activists to be tried pursuant to the anti-terrorism legislation. As quiet as the press has been about the strike itself, the mainstream Chilean media has played a crucial role in the conflict between the Mapuche and the government by shaping the dialogue in the years leading up to the hunger strike.

In response to Piñera's attempts to blame previous administrations for allowing this spiral to continue, however, Bachelet pointed out that she did propose reforms to the anti-terrorism legislation as well as the military justice system, neither of which received the necessary support from Piñera's own party in Congress. It seems that Bachelet's commitment to

*continued on page 10*

## Venezuela: Election Results

On September 26, Venezuelans voted for members of the National Assembly. Over 11 million Venezuelans voted, amounting to 66 percent of the country's 17.7 million registered voters. This was the highest turnout for legislative elections in Venezuelan history.

President Hugo Chavez' political party, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), won 98 seats or 60 percent of the National Assembly. The 10 opposition parties won 65 seats and a non-aligned party won two seats. The PSUV continues to be the majority party in the legislature. The elections took place in a fair and transparent way and there were no irregularities reported.

Source: *Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela*; [www.venezuela-us.org](http://www.venezuela-us.org)

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## Colombia: High Court Ends Military Base Deal

Colombia's Constitutional Court ruled invalid the agreement signed last October allowing the United States to use at least seven military bases in Colombia. In a ruling issued on Tuesday, the high court said the agreement is an international treaty, and must be approved by the Colombian Congress and its constitutionality reviewed by the court itself.

"The Obama and Uribe governments in Washington and Bogotá signed this military base agreement in defiance of Colombia's constitutional requirements, riding roughshod over Colombian sovereignty," said Susana Pimiento, action director of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR).

The Colombian constitution prohibits stationing foreign troops in its territory, unless in passing, and then only after approval of its

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*Chile, continued from page 10*

improving the relationship between Chile's government and its indigenous population was no match for the sustained media pressure to reign in the Mapuche conflict.

Piñera's seemingly singular focus on development has met with harsh criticism from many in the Mapuche community and beyond, who perceive it largely as a distraction from the concrete political issues at hand. Moreover, Piñera's development plan may not, in fact, be as beneficial to the majority of the rural indigenous community as it first appears. Plan Araucanía is hardly the answer to the Mapuche people's demands.

Congress. "The ruling by Colombia's high court that this is an international treaty should compel the US Senate to undertake a fundamental review of whatever treaty may be submitted to Colombia's Congress. Senate treaty ratification and basic democracy require at least consideration of the treaty's problems," said Mark Johnson, FOR's executive director.

Source: *Fellowship of Reconciliation press release, August 18, 2010*

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## Costa Rica: Supreme Court Halts US Military

The Costa Rican Supreme Court last week agreed to take a case challenging the constitutionality of a US-Costa Rican agreement that would allow for a massive US military presence. The agreement cannot go into effect until the Supreme Court rules, thus postponing the arrival of US forces.

On July 1, Costa Rica's Legislative Assembly, with 31 votes out of 57, approved the US Embassy's request to open the country to 46 US warships, 7,000 US soldiers, 200 helicopters and two aircraft carriers. This permission was granted through at least Dec. 31 of this year, officially justified by the necessity of fighting drug-traffickers, providing humanitarian services and providing a place for US ships to dock and refuel.

Prior Joint Patrol bilateral agreements between the countries allowed only US Coast Guard presence with Costa Rican law enforcement aboard. The US coast Guard was permitted to follow vessels into Costa Rican waters while in pursuit and awaiting Costa Rican officials. Thus, the new agreement represents a substantial increase in the allowance of US military presence in Costa Rica, a country that abolished its army in 1948 and has a

Indeed, Piñera was unable to entirely avoid the issue of political rights in the October 9th agreement that put a definitive end to the strike. His pledges to recognize Chile's indigenous peoples in the constitution and to amend the anti-terrorism legislation so that it may no longer be used against Mapuche activists were instrumental in ending the strike, and they are certainly steps in the right direction. However, the Mapuche people are no strangers to empty government promises, and the fundamental issue of their right to ancestral lands remains unsolved.

Source: *COHA.org, Oct. 15, 2010*

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policy of neutrality.

Representatives from three political parties have joined together to oppose and challenge the constitutionality of the agreement. Civil society as well is organizing to oppose US military presence in its waters and on its soil.

Source: *narconews.com, July 28, 2010*

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## Brazil: Woman Favored to Win Presidency

On October 3, Workers' Party candidate Dilma Rousseff came in first but with about 47 percent of the vote, she fell short of the majority needed to win in a first round of voting. Analysts say the handpicked successor to Brazil's president Luiz Inacio Lula de Silva is expected to become the country's first female leader following a run-off later this month. Rousseff is a forceful, former leader of the resistance to the western-backed military dictatorship of the 60s and 70s. She was captured, tortured and spent three and a half years in prison.

Rousseff was chosen by President Lula da Silva to succeed him as president. As Lula da Silva's chief of staff, she is credited for many of the pragmatic decisions that won his government praise from Brazilians. The polls widely predict her victory, largely because of her predecessor's enormous popularity in Brazil.

Source: *VOANews.com, Oct. 4, 2010*

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## Nicaragua: US Judge Rules Against Banana Workers

On July 15, a Federal Court Judge in Los Angeles threw out a \$2.4 million judgment against Dole Foods in the case Tellez vs. Dole that had been won by six Nicaraguans who said they were made sterile by the pesticide Nemagon.

The judge said generalized fraud by US and Nicaraguan attorneys had tainted the trial and spoke of a larger conspiracy that included even the Nicaraguan legal system. The ruling overturning the November 2009 decision puts into question not only other Nicaraguan cases but also claims against Dole by former banana workers from Costa Rica, Guatemala, Panama and Honduras. Nemagon was banned in the US in 1979 but was used after that around the world by banana companies.

Source: *La Prensa, July 8, 2010; El Nuevo Diario, July 4,6 &8, 2010*

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**The US spent \$1,153,500,093 on military and policing "aid" to Latin America and the Caribbean in 2009 alone.**

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