

Report

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PERU: Humala's Victory Brings Hope

By Benjamin Dangl, author and editor of *Upside DownWorld.org*

Fried pork rinds, fish, potatoes and eggs were sold by street vendors outside polling stations on election day in Lima, Peru. By nightfall, thousands of people gathered in a central plaza waving the white flags of Ollanta Humala's political party.

Ollanta is an Incan name meaning "the warrior everyone looks to." Indeed, all eyes were on the leftist president-elect as he greeted the crowd just before midnight with the words, "We won the elections!"

Humala, a former military officer who led a failed military uprising in 2000, lost the elections in 2006 to Alan Garcia. In the June 5th presidential elections this year, he narrowly defeated Kieko Fujimori, the daughter of ex-president Alberto Fujimori, who was jailed in 2007 for corruption and crimes against humanity. If elected, Kieko would have likely worked to release her father from jail, and carry on his administration's capitalist and repressive policies.

This election puts Humala among a growing number of leftist presidents in Latin America and offers hope to the poorest sectors of Peruvian society.

The poverty rate in Peru is just over 31 percent; in the countryside, two out of three people live under the poverty line. In Sunday's elections, it was the impoverished rural areas that went for Humala over Kieko Fujimori.

"You cannot speak of Peru advancing if so many Peruvians live in poverty," Humala said in his victory speech, explaining that he would work to make sure that the government functioned "above all for the poorest people in the country."

Peru's economy has been booming for the

past decade, with seven percent growth expected this year – one of the highest growth rates internationally. Sixty five percent of the country's export income comes from the mining industry, and investors are expected to provide over \$40 billion in the coming decade

during the month of April alone. Most of these occurred in poor and rural areas of the country and were focused on social and environmental issues.

Walter Aduviri, the president of the Front for the Defense of Natural Resources in

Southern Puno, has been active in protests against the government's licensing of Canadian Bear Creek Mining Corp's silver mining in Peru's border region with Bolivia. The protesters believe the mining would lead to the contamination of land and water, and that local communities would not benefit from the private operation.

While protests and blockades were postponed for election day, activists have threatened to restart the mobilizations. Aduviri told reporters, "The election of Humala was positive, but the promises of the candidates should be reflected in documents and agreements."



Presidential candidate Ollanta Humala, a former military officer, waves after casting his ballot in the general elections in Lima, Peru.

for mining operations.

Yet many Peruvians have not benefited from this growth. This is partly because former administrations have not been interested in redistributing wealth to the poor through social and development programs.

Humala wants to change that. He plans to redistribute wealth by increasing taxes on the lucrative mining industry. The new government funds will go to expanding access to water, electricity and homes, and providing free school lunches and preschool care. The president-elect has also pledged to expand pensions and healthcare for the poor, and lower gas exports to reduce the cost of this resource for Peruvians.

Such plans for economic and social reform contributed to Humala's victory on Sunday. Yet his first months in office will likely be anything but peaceful. Over 230 protests, road blockades, and strikes took place in Peru

Source: *toward freedom.com*. June 07, 2011

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Argentine Torture Survivor to Speak at Annual Dinner

By *Camilla Schneider, Task Force Board*

Patricia Isasa of Argentina, the speaker at the Marin Interfaith Task Force on the Americas Annual Dinner (MITF) September 25 in San Rafael, is a very special friend of Dale Sorensen, Director, and George Friemoth, long time board member. She will join us in honoring them as they retire from many years of dedication to the work of the Task Force.

In 2005 while on a delegation to Argentina, Dale met Patricia Isasa who was disappeared, tortured and held prisoner for two and a half years during the military dictatorship of 1976 - 1983 when 30,000 disappeared. She was so impressed with Patricia's story of her own kidnapping at age 16 that Dale and George brought her to the School of the America's (SOA) annual November demonstration so she could share her story at the site that trained one of her kidnappers. Patricia's incredible struggle to bring her torturers to justice endeared her to Dale and George who helped bring her to the US several times for speaking tours and meetings with legislators in DC about her case.

Patricia was a student leader at her high school when kidnapped from her home in 1976. Police denied knowing her even while she was being tortured in a secret area in back of the very same police station. Only months later when her name appeared as a legal prisoner did her parents know of her whereabouts.

After beginning a career as an architect, Patricia decided to identify her kidnappers. Ten years of relentless research led her to Judge Garzon in Spain where she asked that warrants be issued for their arrest. The torturers were powerful community leaders including a former federal judge, a former mayor, a

former secretary of security for her town and an ex-policeman. Instead of extraditing them, Argentina decided to try them at home but stalled for years. In 2006 Dale and other Task Force members returned to Argentina in solidarity with Patricia and helped generate publicity to pressure about her case. They met with the federal judge in charge of her case and presented a Dear Colleague letter Dale had requested from US congressional legislators.

President Nestor Kirchner lifted the amnesty for crimes committed under the military dictatorship and the trials began. After death threats and disappearances of witnesses in other trials, Patricia was put in the Witness Protection Program and escorted by security guards. Briefly she fled to the US for safety but returned home fearing her trial would be delayed without her presence.

In 2009 when Patricia's trial began, Dale and others from MITF returned to Argentina in solidarity with Patricia to witness the trial. They were honored to be able to attend the trial that culminated in Patricia's long-fought struggle for justice. The six perpetrators were convicted and are now imprisoned.

Recently President Christina Kirchner



Fernandez appointed Patricia to a "Truth Commission" to investigate the theft, during the 'Dirty War,' of a large company that provided the raw paper for newspapers. After the death of the owner, his wife was pressured to sell the company, worth tens of millions, for only two million. Then she, her children, and numerous staff were kidnapped and imprisoned so the buyer could claim he couldn't pay because he couldn't find the family. Patricia's research skills helped find the smoking gun proving the scheme to defraud the family.

Over the years of working in solidarity with Patricia, Dale and George have developed a close friendship with her and are pleased that she will be the speaker at the dinner honoring their retirement. ●

Impunity for Perpetrators of Deadly Peru (Bagua) Clashes

A judge shelved charges, including sedition, conspiracy, and rebellion, against indigenous leader Alberto Pizango and four other indigenous leaders in connection with fatal clashes between police and indigenous protesters that killed 33 in an Amazon town in Bagua on June 5, 2009. The clash was over a series of decrees that would fast-track investment projects on native lands without residents' approval. "But the underlying problems at the root of this terrible event remain: Indian land is still being targeted for development projects without their consent," said Stephen Corry, director of an international indigenous rights organization.

The violence in Bagua opened up a heated debate in Peru over how to balance economic growth with the long-ignored rights of indigenous peoples who inhabit the areas the government and corporations are often most interested in developing. Many of the indigenous protesters argued that the decrees would mean industry with high levels of pollution, such as mining and oil drilling, on their lands.

A report approved by Peruvian lawmakers found several former ministers politically but not criminally responsible for the 2009 clashes. Pizango and other activists have called for incoming President Humala, to press charges against the authorities they say are responsible for the clashes.

Source: *Latinamerica Press*, 7/7/2011

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ARGENTINA: Rural Slavery at Time of Record Earnings

By *Marcela Valente, Inter Press Service (IPS)*

Crowded into precarious mud-floored dorms or sheet-metal trailers or forced to live in tents of plastic sheeting, with neither piped water nor electricity, after working 10-14 hour days: these are the harsh conditions faced by hundreds of thousands of rural workers in Argentina despite bumper crops and record earnings for agribusiness. "They have no alternative but to accept work under these conditions," says Reinaldo Ledesma, a leader of the *Unión Solidaria de Comunidades del Pueblo Diaguita Cacano* – an organization representing the Diaguita Cacano indigenous community – in the northern province of Santiago del Estero, told IPS. The conditions faced by casual farm workers have remained exploitative while industrial-scale plantations have grown in size and number, harvests have reached nearly 100 million tons, and more than 30 million hectares – 11 percent of the total land area in Argentina – are farmed.

Santiago del Estero, whose capital of the same name is located 1,150 km northwest of Buenos Aires, is one of the main sources of seasonal rural laborers who clear land, weed, manually spray or harvest crops for big agricultural corporations. Nearly all of the members of the *Unión Solidaria de Comunidades del Pueblo Diaguita Cacano* depend on temporary farm work to survive, said Ledesma, who described the conditions they work in as "servitude."

The seasonal migration of farm workers is a centuries-old phenomenon in Argentina, one of the world's major agricultural producers. But in recent years it has taken on new characteristics, with global human resources firms operating as intermediaries for agribusiness corporations. The recruiters offer the workers a contract for a fixed amount. But later they learn that the payment is conditioned on the entire group of workers earning a certain amount of arbitrarily set "points" based on performance and behavior. "The entire team has to work between 10 and 14 hours a day, Monday to Monday, even when it's raining, and without complaining because if someone protests, points are docked for every member of the group," Ledesma said. In addition, the contractors subtract the cost of transportation, clothing, work tools and food - at higher than market prices - from the worker's pay.

Ledesma said it is difficult for unions to

advocate on behalf of migrant laborers, because although the workers are often organized in their hometowns, they are widely dispersed when they find work in the fields. The worst jobs are in the potato, asparagus, blueberry and olive harvests, he said, along with clearing out stumps and roots with picks, shovels and bare hands after the bulldozer has knocked down the trees and brush. "They sleep on the ground under plastic roofs," he said. Most of the camps have no running water, electricity, toilets or showers. And in some cases, the workers are not allowed to leave the compound, under the threat of losing points.

"The same multi-national companies that push peasants and native people off their land to expand monoculture plantations later employ them as slave labor," Ledesma complained. According to the Labor Ministry, 50 percent of rural workers are not enrolled in the social security system. Labor and living conditions are especially harsh among unregistered migrant farm workers from impoverished northern provinces like Santiago del Estero and Tucumán, and from the neighboring country of Bolivia, who find seasonal work in provinces such as Sante Fe, Misiones, Buenos Aires, Córdoba, Mendoza and Río Negro.

The study, by the Centre of Research and Training of the Argentine Republic (CIFRA), reports that in the last decade, agriculture has enjoyed "extraordinarily high profit levels, in historic terms." Not only have international agricultural prices soared, but production costs have gone down and the value of land has risen 4.5 times in the most fertile land in central and northern Argentina, the authors report. Nevertheless, the creation of jobs was fairly insignificant in that same period due to the growing mechanization of agriculture, says the report, which also points to the high proportion of unregistered workers.

In this country of 40 million people, with a population that is 92 percent urban and an economically active population of 17.8 million, permanent or temporary rural workers total one million according to official figures, and 1.5 million according to rural trade unions. CIFRA economist Mariana González stressed that farm workers employed in modern-day slavery conditions do not work for small companies but for transnational corporations that rake in billions in profits. "Unregistered employment is common in this sector," she said.

"That is partly because of the difficulties of oversight and monitoring due to the huge extensions of land, in isolated areas. But it has also come to be seen as something normal." The CIFRA report states that while unregistered employment stands at 36.5 percent in the economy at large, the proportion climbs to 60 percent in agriculture.

Sociologist Guillermo Neiman at the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO) told IPS that seasonal work in precarious conditions is a longstanding problem in Argentina. Monitoring and inspection are difficult not only due to the distances involved and the spread-out nature of the rural workforce, but also; "In the countryside, when an inspector shows up, it's easier to hide a worker than in a factory or a closed facility," he said. But he noted that the problem has taken on a new visibility in the last few months, and said the workers themselves – many of whom are young people from cities, not just small towns – are daring to speak out. Neiman, whose expertise is in the area of rural employment, also emphasized the government's greater commitment to improving oversight and the determination of the courts to crack down on rural servitude and human trafficking, through cases that have been filed.

Argentine President Cristina Fernández acknowledged that there is "illegal slave labor in subhuman conditions" in Argentina, when she launched a government program on "digital registered work; real-time monitoring" in February. Through the program, the labor ministry and the tax collection agency, AFIP, are carrying out inspections of urban and rural establishments, using laptops with wireless connection that enable the agents to visit camps in remote areas and verify, in real time, working and housing conditions and whether or not workers are registered.

But the work has just begun, and it will not be a simple task. Neiman pointed out that hiring unregistered workers is a widespread practice among agribusiness companies in Argentina. "Some have up to 400 unregistered laborers working for three months at a time," he said. And the situation of registered workers is not much better. The great majority earn less than the minimum wage.

Source: *UpsideDownWorld.org, March 17, 2011*

ECUADOR: Tests Rights of Nature

By Carlos Zorrilla, director of DECOIN, Defensa y Conservación Ecológica de Intag

Ed Note: *Article was excerpted*

In the next few weeks the Correa government will sign exploitation agreements with Chinese and Canadian transnational miners looking to exploit the country's copper and gold reserves. The legitimacy of the nation's Constitution, which grants nature rights, will also be tested.

Water is the resource most impacted by mines. Millions of gallons per day are used during a normal mining operation; and much of that water is mixed with toxic chemicals, like cyanide, to extract the few grams of gold found in a typical ton of gold-bearing ore. Some of the water draining from mines is as acidic as car battery fluid, and more toxic.

According to the US Environmental Protection Agency, mining in the US accounts for over one half of all toxic releases into the environment and produces an unimaginable 8-9 times more solid waste, per weight, than all its municipalities put together. A mining project in Montana is the single biggest Superfund site in the US, with nearly one billion dollars earmarked to try to clean up the huge toxic mess left behind after decades of mining and milling. In the US, the economy of mining adds less than 1% to the nation's GDP.

Large-scale mining cannot avoid serious, irreversible, and long-lasting environmental impacts. This is especially true in places like Ecuador's Condor Range, in the south east of the country where the first large-scale copper and gold mining projects are slated to start. The Condor Range is an area of exceptional biological diversity, and is extremely rich in

water resources. It is also rich in primary and secondary cloud forests—one of the most threatened ecosystems in the world. The very steep topography, heavy rains (3000 millimeters annually) which gives rise to copious underground water, and ore laced with heavy metals, will make mining's impacts at this site especially destructive. There is no way that this large-scale mining project can avoid grossly violating the rights of nature as guaranteed in the country's Constitution.

Currently, Correa is strapped for cash. The Chinese need copper (and petroleum) and have been lending heavily to Correa's government. Thus, the government will bend over backwards to try to supply this raw commodity to the Chinese, so they can add value to it and ship it back to Ecuador as finished products. Not much change there since the good ol' colonial days. The main difference is that the Constitution forces the government to get more money from the extraction of the country's mineral resources. The details are being worked on right now in the form of case-by-case exploitation agreements with each company. If the letter of the law is minimally respected, mining companies will have to pay a lot more for Ecuador's minerals than anywhere else in Latin America and, possibly, the world. Thus, there is a real economic incentive for the Correa government to switch the green light on for mining.

In Ecuador, local governments are autonomous. Some have said openly that they will not allow large-scale mining in their territories. In these cases, the executive will try to impose the rights of the national government over local government rights. It will not be easy, even with co-opted courts. Since the

Constitution gives local governments firm rights, they will fight hard to keep the national government from usurping them.

Besides giving nature rights, Ecuador's Constitution gives its people the right to resist activities or processes that threaten Constitutional rights. Two of those rights are the right to a safe environment and the right to a "good life," or well-being. *Campesinos* and indigenous peoples consider peace within the communities and a healthy environment very much part of that vision; and they will use the Constitutional right to resist in order to stop mining from creating social strife and contaminating their environment.

A coalition of urban activists and academics will also resist the government's extractive plans. In an exceptionally biologically and culturally diverse country such as Ecuador, they argue, the extractive model not only no longer makes any sense, but threatens the country's potential to develop a truly sustainable economy. The social strife, environmental impacts and cultural havoc, added to the usual economic boom-and-bust nature of resource dependency that the extractive model delivers cannot be justified.

In 2007 President Correa publicly said that anyone opposed to development is a terrorist. The government legally classifies as terrorism the blocking of roads in protests, one of the most popular forms of public protest in the country. If, in spite of all the social and legal mayhem the mines are allowed to open, and given the clear Constitutional violations the action implies, it will undoubtedly lead to human rights and environmental justice challenges, which will likely end up being resolved in international tribunals.

If civil society succeeds in stopping Correa's mining agenda, the first clear proof of its intention will have come from the regional meeting that took place in Cuenca, Ecuador in June of 2011. Representatives from local governments, indigenous people, NGO's and communities affected by mining from all over Ecuador and Latin America came together for three days of discussions, and debated the mining issues and the deeply flawed development model. The results put into evidence the growing, and fierce, resistance taking hold all over the continent to the extractive model of development. The most important message resulting from the event: **THEY WILL RESIST** the imposition of that model.

Source: *UpsideDownWorld.org, July 1, 2011*

Challenging BP over Violation of Rights of Nature

On 26 November 2010, activists and indigenous people's leaders filed a lawsuit against British Petroleum (BP) with the Constitution Court in Ecuador based on provisions in the new Ecuadorian constitution that recognizes that nature has inherent legal rights which any person may enforce before a court of law. The lawsuit relates to the harm to natural ecosystems caused by the oil spill from the Deepwater Horizon platform in the Gulf of Mexico.

The Ecuador case can perhaps be seen as the first salvo in a growing upsurge of support for new mechanisms and instruments to stop environmental destruction. The lawsuit would be the first to look in its totality at the impact of the oil spill on the marine environment and surrounding ecosystems. Our legal systems do not afford effective protection to nature, because nature has been confused with property, which by definition cannot have rights and which is available to be traded and exploited. Unless that changes, environmental disasters like the Deepwater Horizon oil spill will continue.

In November, Pittsburgh became the first major US city to ban natural gas drilling while elevating community decision-making and the rights of nature over corporate rights.

Source: *Cormac Cullinan, EnAct International*

COLOMBIA: Chiquita Murders and Free Trade

By Dan Kavalik, labor and human rights lawyer

Ed. Note: Article excerpted

Recent documents obtained by the National Security Archive at George Washington University from the US Justice Department show that Chiquita Brands International, in direct contradiction of the claims of both Chiquita and the US government for many years, made illegal payments to both guerrilla groups and then AUC (right-wing paramilitary group) death squads over the course of about 14 years in return for security from these groups.

Just as importantly, these documents show that the US Justice Department was aware of this fact when it accepted a plea bargain from Chiquita in which it pleaded guilty to paying these groups a total of over \$1.7 million and running them 3000 guns as “protection” from “extortion.”

In return for this plea to the lesser crime of paying “protection” from “extortion” (rather than making payments as a quid pro quo for security for its operations), Chiquita was given a slap on the wrist by the Justice Department, a mere \$25 million fine, which Chiquita was permitted to pay over five years. Chiquita was given this light sentence, with no jail time whatsoever for the offending officials, despite the fact that, according to Colombian Attorney General Mario Iguaran, these payments resulted in the murder of almost 4,000 people and helped to give the AUC death squads a foothold throughout Colombia, and despite the fact that was designated as a “terrorist organization” by the US State Department.

Again, the recently-released documents, which had been in the possession of the U.S. Justice Department, show that the Justice Department, as well as current US Attorney General Eric Holder who helped negotiate the plea deal as a defense lawyer for Chiquita, were very aware that Chiquita had been involved in a far worse crime (the knowing supplying of guns and money to a terrorist group in return for security) than they pleaded to and than they were punished for. What this shows is that the Justice Department, contrary to its mandate, actually aided and abetted Chiquita in covering up its crimes.

While the National Security Archive states that, “What we still don’t know is why US prosecutors overlooked what appears to be clear evidence that Chiquita benefited from

these transactions,” it is quite clear why they did so—because it is the policy of the United States to aid corporations in their quest for profit at any cost, even to the cost of the lives of innocent civilians. The Chiquita case proves this as does the Colombia FTA, which the Obama administration is now poised to push through Congress.

The new Chiquita documents show the following:

- The Colombian military, itself a long-time beneficiary of US aid, encouraged Chiquita to finance the AUC death squads through the Convivir group.
- The Convivir group—the conduit for the illegal payments—was strongly supported by then-governor of Antioquia Alvaro Uribe, who would later become President of Colombia and close ally of the US, Chiquita provided funds to support Alvaro Uribe’s campaign for governor.
- Chiquita used various accounting tricks to try to hide its “sensitive payments” to the illegal armed groups, payments it designated in its own records as for “security services.” Chiquita’s internal communications with its lawyers show that they decided to claim that the payments were the product of “extortion” so that they could justify these as legal.
- Chiquita was also assisted with its “security” by a Colombian general who, as Chiquita’s records show, was forced out of the military for his connection with, in the words of Chiquita, “death squads”—the very “death squads” Chiquita was itself funding.
- Paramilitary sources revealed that Dole and Del Monte were also involved in the payment scheme.

All of this confirms what Colombia’s Attorney General under President Uribe, Mario Iguaran, had claimed years ago that Chiquita was not paying protection money as they had claimed, but that they were in fact paying for “blood;” for “the bloody pacification” of the Uraba banana region. And, in response to Iguaran’s request to the US that it turn over the identities of the Chiquita officials involved in the payment scheme to the Colombian gov-

ernment for purposes of extradition for their crimes, the US refused.

In the end, the US let Chiquita off the hook easily and helped it to conceal the full extent of its crimes for two obvious reasons: (1) because the US sees its role as protecting US corporate interests (even from its own laws against supporting terrorist organizations); and (2) because the US is itself culpable of doing exactly what Chiquita did—advancing its perceived security interests in Colombia and the region by funding violent groups.

Now, the US is set to pass the long-stalled Colombia FTA (Free Trade Agreement) even as massive violence is being carried out in Colombia against labor leaders (seven of whom have been murdered so far this year), peasant leaders, Afro-Colombians and Indigenous. Indeed, the FTA is designed to benefit companies, just as Chiquita, in their quest to intensify the exploitation of Colombian land and labor—many times through violence. The FTA will support the massive expansion of palm oil companies, about half of which are actually owned and controlled by paramilitary death squads.

Such violence in Colombia is only accelerating in order to prepare for the FTA. And so, according to the Black Communities Process (PCN) of Colombia, a group advocating on behalf of Afro-Colombians, the Colombian army has been forcing Afro-Colombians from their home—including by burning down their homes and bombing their villages, leading to the deaths of civilians, including children—in order to make way for new ports and tourist infrastructure which will be built once the FTA is passed. In one area alone, the PCN reports, 3500 Afro-Colombian families have recently been displaced for such purposes, adding to the more than 1.5 million internally displaced Afro-Colombians.

Colombia already has over 5 million internally displaced peoples, the largest in the world, even surpassing that of Sudan. And, the FTA, by accelerating the further exploitation of Colombia by corporate interests; by allowing cheap, subsidized agricultural products from giant US agricultural interests to be dumped into Colombia duty-free, thereby wiping out the livelihood of tens of thousands of small farmers (just as such trade policies did in Haiti and Mexico), will only add to the violence, displacement and misery plaguing Colombia.

Source: *Huff Post*, May 16, 2011

HAITI: Next Wave of Disaster Capitalism

By Kanya D'Aleida, *Inter Press Service (IPS)*

Miles from his island nation's earthquake-ravaged capital city Port-au-Prince, Haitian president-elect Michel Martelly exchanged warm handshakes and heartfelt promises with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in Washington Wednesday, just prior to the formal announcement of the pop star's victory in the highly-contested March 20 election.

Receiving the former carnival singer turned president elect 'Sweet Mickey,' who seized 67 percent of the vote at an election that drew a record-low turnout of less than 25 percent of the electorate - at the US State Department early Wednesday afternoon, Clinton reaffirmed the solid bilateral relationship between the two countries. While spotlighting the 750,000 internally displaced persons, rubble-strewn cities, broken institutional infrastructure and the approaching hurricane season as some of the most pressing problems confronting the embryonic new regime, Clinton expressed great confidence in Martelly's ability to rebuild his country.

After months of outrage from scores of human rights, research and advocacy organizations regarding the legitimacy, mandate and professionalism of Haiti's Provisional Electoral Council, which arbitrarily banned the hugely popular Fanmi Lavalas party, tens of thousands of urban working class Haitians boycotted the polls. Despite this, Clinton happily accepted the results and, alluding to Martelly's election slogan 'Tet Kale,' assured him that the US was behind him "all the way."

Roger Annis, a journalist with the grassroots weekly *Haiti Liberte*, wrote this week that Martelly's six million dollar campaign cost was largely financed by what the president-elect refers to as his "friends in the US," marking today's commitment by the two heads of state to preserve their relationship as the logical next step in the US's age-old practice of profiting immensely from "aid and development assistance" to the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere.

In her seminal work "The Shock Doctrine," journalist Naomi Klein writes, "I call

these orchestrated raids on the public sphere in the wake of catastrophic events, combined with the treatment of disasters as exciting market opportunities, 'disaster capitalism,' " a summation that perfectly encapsulates the current wave of development, led by the US, under way in Haiti.

Addressing a panel on post-election Haiti at the United States Institute for Peace yesterday, Francois Pierre-Louis, associate professor of political science at the City University of New York lamented the bleak prospects that Martelly's election offers to the Haitian people, and posed questions that, in these early days, remain largely speculative.

"Five years ago I sat in this very room and expressed a wish that the next time Haiti was on the news it would be for the right reasons," Pierre-Louis said. "That dream has not come true - Sweet Micky is vastly unprepared and

The residents of Caracol, a village in Haiti's Northeast department, say they were never consulted or even warned about plans to build a huge new "free trade zone" (FTZ) on land where many of them have been farming for some 20 years. "It's the most fertile area we have at Caracol, resident Renel Pierre told journalist Sylvestre Fils Dorcilus. "It's inconceivable and unacceptable that the government could choose this part of the land to set up an industrial park."

The new FTZ is clearly a priority for the US government. In early June Cheryl Mills, chief of staff for US secretary of state Hillary Clinton, paid her second visit to the site, accompanied by a high-level delegation that included US ambassador Kenneth Merten, USAID deputy mission director Anthony Chan and Mark D'Sa, an executive from the US retailer GAP who is "on loan" to the State Department. (Haiti Libre (Haiti) 6/15/11)

inexperienced; he did not run under an established party and thus is yet to present a realistic program for dealing with reconstruction and unemployment, and much of his team represents some of the most notorious anti-democratic forces in the country," he added.

Ambassador Albert Ramdin, Assistant Secretary General of the Organization of American States outlined at the panel, a point-program for Haiti's reconstruction, including fostering an environment of political unity, developing Haiti's agricultural sector and "building strong institutions"—a favorite catch phrase of the international community with regards to the country still fighting off the chains of colonial debt. Ramdin's optimism that the post-election climate might generate a hopeful march forward is not shared by the bulk of analysts, historians and observers.

"Haiti hasn't invested in the agricultural sector since the 1990s and continuing the old trade policies will likely create a food crisis very shortly, if the promised agricultural reforms are not met, there'll be demonstrations and protests and Martelly's mandate will shift from developing the country to keeping people in check," Francois Pierre-Louis added. Indeed, if the track record of international aid assistance to Haiti post-quake is any yardstick of what is to come, the numbers paint a rather grim picture.

Indeed, during the week of June 22 of this year, thousands of farmers and supporters of Haitian peasant agriculture marched for hours in Hinche to call for more government support for locally grown seeds and agriculture. The demonstration was organized by farmers associations, human rights and women's groups, the Haitian online agency *AlterPresse* reported from the march. The official theme of the peaceful demonstration was "Land Grabbing is

Endangering Agricultural Sovereignty."

On the other hand, following the one-year anniversary of the quake, Alex Dupuy, a professor of sociology at Wesleyan University, wrote that the estimated cost of the earthquake damage, amounting to nearly 14 billion dollars in February this year, was generating a tidy sum for US companies.

"Of the more than 1,500 US contracts doled out, worth 267 million dollars, only 20, worth 4.3 million dollars, have gone to Haitian firms," Dupuy wrote. "The rest have gone to US firms, which almost exclusively use US suppliers. He added, "although these foreign contractors employ Haitians, mostly on a cash-for-work basis, the bulk of the money and profits are reinvested in the United States."

Nora Rasman, interim director of Latin America and Caribbean Policy for the Trans Africa Forum, who worked on the ground in Haiti prior to the second round of elections, told IPS, "USAID has made very clear to us that they don't have the capacity on the ground to carry out everything they had promised in terms of reconstruction."

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CUBA'S ENERGY INITIATIVE

By Al Anaya, Task Force board

Most of us are aware of the need to conserve energy for the good of our planet and our pocketbooks. We replace our inefficient incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescents, shop for energy efficient appliances, perhaps saying “goodbye” to our old but dependable energy-guzzling refrigerators, air conditioners, and similar appliances. Those who are able, take energy conservation a step further with the purchase of (generally expensive) hybrid vehicles and solar panel installations.

Now think of doing almost all of the above on a national scale, where the vast majority of the population embraces energy conservation and strives to leave a smaller energy consumption footprint on our fragile planet. Specifically, think of Cuba. Since 1993, Cuba's PFNE (Program for the Development of National Resources of Energy), has been working to distribute sustainable energy to every community on the island. Today, the vast majority Cuba's citizens enjoy affordable, often renewable energy sources to power their homes, schools, hospitals, and work places.

Unlike many nations of the world, which envision increased energy production to facilitate an equal surge in consumption, Cuba has opted for an alternative route to energy self-sufficiency. The philosophy of “less means more” has driven Cuban energy policy to notable accomplishments. In May, 2006, President Fidel Castro addressed workers of the Cuban national electric utility company by asserting that, “We are not waiting for fuel to fall from the sky, because we have discovered, fortunately, something much more important – Energy Conservation, which is like finding a great oil deposit.”

In addition to the free distribution of compact fluorescent light bulbs, and affordable, energy-efficient large and small appliances, Cuba also initiated an energy use billing system which rewards household energy conservation with low, affordable rates, while increasing the cost of energy for use above 100 kWh per month. Families are given the option to pay lower rates in exchange for conservation-minded energy usage, or pay within a higher rate structure for every additional 50 kWh per month used.

Sustainable and renewable energy has

been a major priority for the Cuban government. As of 2009, 100 wind measuring stations were built in 11 provinces throughout the island. Two wind farms have been constructed, which generate 7.23 MW of electricity. Additionally, 180 micro-hydraulic systems have also been constructed to turn flowing rivers and streams into electricity-generating natural resources.

Cuba's ample sunlight is being effectively harnessed by over 8,000 solar electric systems installed primarily in places where connection to a “master electrical grid” would be too costly and/or impractical. Solar panels have thus become familiar sights in some rural areas, which would have traditionally relied on gas generators which burn precious, non-renewable fossil fuels and emit noise and air pollution.

When Cuba's ever-present export crop, sugar, is processed there is a residue left over called the “bagasse.” This residue is now being put to work as a fuel to be burned to generate useable energy. This energy is used to power the sugar cane processing plant as well as contribute to the island's electrical grid.

Haitis, continued from page 6

“Thus most of the money allocated to Haiti goes back to NGOs in the US that do have the resources required to implement programs locally, so it is no surprise that USAID funding ends up funneling straight back into US back accounts,” she added. The meeting between Clinton and Martelly not only acknowledged this pattern of exploitation, but also promised to cement and embolden it throughout the new president's reign.

Perhaps the most frank admission of what the struggling Haitian people can expect in the coming years was summed up in Clinton's praise for the joint effort between the US and the Inter-American Development Bank to build a new industrial park close to Cap Haitien. “It already has its first tenant,” Clinton proudly announced Wednesday, “the global textile firm Sae-A, which alone is projected to create 20,000 permanent export-oriented jobs.”

Countless books, papers and articles have documented the extent of the devastation wrought on the Haitian workforce

Perhaps Cuba's greatest energy conservation resource is its own people. Whereas the literacy brigades of the 1960s swept across the island to teach people without access to education to read and write, a new group of primarily young people have ventured forth since 2006 to teach citizens about energy conservation. These energetic social workers replace light bulbs with fluorescents, explain the proper use of energy efficient appliances, and explain strategies for using less energy in day-to-day living. Cuba's energy conservation social workers have also traveled abroad to countries such as Haiti, where energy conservation awareness is vital to the creation of sustainable energy policies and development of sustainable energy initiatives.

What will we likely NOT see on Cuba's immediate energy conservation horizon? I speculate that Cuba's highways will not become jammed with fleets of shiny new hybrid and electric vehicles anytime soon. The much beloved (and occasionally cursed) 1940s and 1950s “cacharros” (pre-revolutionary American cars) have little to worry about – For the moment...

Source: renewableenergyworld.com/realnews/article/2009/04/

when the economy was forcibly transformed from a largely agricultural, self-sustaining model into an assembly-line export processing zone for the US, a fact that Clinton ignored in her remarks.

Commentators running the gamut of the political spectrum have criticized these policies. In his essay “Disaster Capitalism to the Rescue: The International Community and Haiti After the Earthquake,” Dupuy wrote, “even at the height of it's operation in the mid 1980s, the assembly-line industry never employed more than seven percent Haitian workers and did not contribute significantly to reducing the underestimated 38 percent unemployment rate of the active urban labor force.”

With unnerving foresight, Dupuy summed up Clinton and Martelly's Wednesday meeting nearly a year ago when he said, “The dual strategy of urban sweatshops and laissez-faire agriculture, which subordinated Haiti in the 1980s, is now its reconstruction plan.”

Sources: UpsideDownWorld.org April 24, 2011; *Weekly News Update*, July 10, 2011

HONDURAS: Human Rights Violations Continue

By Caitlin Payne Roberts and edited by Roger Harris, Task Force board

Ed. Note: Both Caitlin and Roger were members of the July delegation organized by the Alliance for Global Justice. Another human rights delegation organized by Witness for Peace, the Task force and La Voz de los de Abajo is scheduled for Sept 8-17, contact Dale if interested; 415-924-3227 or Tanya, wfpsw@witnessforpeace.org

Here in Honduras, rifle-bearing soldiers, police dressed in military garb, or private security guards are vigilant at grocery stores, Dunkin' Donuts, and banks, as well as rural communities. Where do these armed forces get their funding? Of all security funds pouring into Central America from Washington, 52% go to Honduras' post-coup regime.

Since the military coup d'état on June 28, 2009, over 400 Hondurans have been killed in acts of state repression, whether for violating curfew, for being a feminist, or for working in alternative media. Thousands more have been detained, wounded, and tortured, and countless Hondurans are harassed daily for their political views and actions.

Peasants, or campesinos, are fighting for their right to land for subsistence farming. Thirty percent of the land in Honduras was recently promised to foreign mining corporations. Hydroelectric dams, coastal tourism projects, and monoculture megaprojects are all threats to Honduran campesinos. As indigenous, Garifuna (communities of African descent), and campesino resistance movements

gain momentum, repression against them also grows.

Honduras was reintegrated into the Organization of American States (OAS) on June 1, 2011, after the celebrated return of ousted President Zelaya. The National Front of Popular Resistance (FNRP) welcomed his return with the largest gathering in Honduran history. The FNRP had proposed four requirements for reintegration: Zelaya's return along with all other exiles; the recognition of the FNRP as a political party; the improvement of the human rights situation in the country; and a participatory national assembly for a new constitution. Of these requirements, only one has even been touched. Just a handful of exiles have returned to the country, one of which, Enrique Flores Lanza, is under house arrest.

Twelve families run the country. This oligarchy owns a vast proportion of fertile land, controls legislation, business, the military, and all other state institutions. One example of this web is that former president Carlos Flores Facussé, the nephew of the richest man in Honduras, landlord Miguel Facussé, founded *La Tribuna*, the largest newspaper in Honduras, and his daughter Lizzy Flores is the country's new United Nations ambassador.

Campesinos across the country are organizing against Facussé and several other underhanded landlords. The Aguán valley, located in northern Honduras, is a militarized region. This valley is attracting foreign investors in African palm cultivation for export as biodiesel and palm oil. Some farming communities have been displaced for over a decade, migrating from one palm plantation occupation to the next in eviction processes. The author was present during an attempted eviction of a community from the land it had been holding for 11 years.



Police approach the community of Rigores

On July 1, 2011, a group of 18 US and Canadian citizens traveling as human rights delegates with Alliance for Global Justice arrived at the community of Rigores, as a response to an alert that police were scheduled to evict campesinos from their land. Upon arriving, delegates learned that about 114 families had already been evicted on June 26.

Shortly after the delegates arrived, they received word that the police were again approaching, burning houses along the way. The delegation along with community members stood in a line facing the police, who were slowly approaching. Some police took positions hiding behind vegetation.

Community leaders, local human rights activists and delegates spoke to the police chief about the legality of the eviction. When asked for the eviction order, the chief presented a document of complaint that cited an event involving "heavily armed campesinos," which had supposedly occurred on June 30, though it was signed by a judge on June 11. No eviction order was presented. After about three hours the police finally left; however, the risk that they could return remains.

The delegation members collected testimony from the campesinos about the violence perpetrated by police forces on June 26. One woman's account detailed the brutality with which the police tore these campesinos away from their land. The police entered her home

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Roger Harris

Resident of Rigores in front of burned out community building / church.

NICARAGUA: Delegation Finds US Still Involved

A top official of the US Embassy in Managua dismissed Nicaragua as no longer important to the US and told a Nicaragua Network delegation from the United States that he wanted nothing to do with the country's political parties, all of which he characterized as "feckless, corrupt, nasty and worthless."

Despite these comments by Matthew Roth, the political officer of the US Embassy, the US Agency for International Development is funding Nicaraguan groups to provide training in "democratization" and media skills.

Media programs, such as those offered by the International Republican Institute, are supposedly designed to help Nicaraguan media, particularly radio stations, learn to provide fair and balanced coverage. However, leaders of the Association of Nicaraguan Journalists (APN), told the delegation that they intended to teach reporters to oppose the re-election of President Daniel Ortega and to play a double role as reporters and unofficial electoral observers. Jan Howard, the USAID officer for the embassy, acknowledged, "Sometimes they get a little carried away."

In the 2001 and 2006 presidential elections, the US embassy overtly supported a particular candidate opposed to Ortega. Such public decla-

rations have not been issued this year, although the delegation heard concerns about the possibility of threatening or leading public statements from US officials late in the campaign term as occurred in 2001 and 2006. Such prior statements included threats about the termination of remittances, which many Nicaraguan families rely on. Additionally, the US has urged and even organized a united opposition in past elections. In the current cycle, a representative of the Constitutional Liberal Party implied that the party has privately been encouraged by the US Embassy to withdraw from the race.

The delegation from the Nicaragua Network, which has more than 30 years of experience following Nicaraguan issues, recently concluded a one-week trip to Nicaragua to investigate the role of the United States in the upcoming Nicaraguan elections. The delegation met with officials from the US

embassy, Nicaraguan government officials, three political parties and alliances of parties running presidential candidates, and several US and Nicaraguan non-governmental organizations that have received funding from the United States government.

Source: *Nicaragua Network Press Release, July 1, 2011; Nicanet.org*



President Daniel Ortega meets with the delegation.

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with guns drawn and pointed menacingly at her family members. They pulled a mattress out from under her four small children, who rolled onto the floor, treated "like little rats." A cop asked for her identification card and promptly burned it. These police, including a special forces COBRA unit, poured gasoline around her house and set it on fire, leaving no time to collect any belongings.

After this violent process, several pregnant women either gave birth or miscarried due to the physical and emotional stress of these events. Community corn fields were scorched. These shameless police reportedly walked through the orange tree fields cutting branches off the plants and eating the fruit. They also confiscated a pig and other livestock, as well as a tractor given to the community by ALBA, the Latin American trade alliance.

The United States government has been pouring taxpayer dollars into militarization in Honduras for decades. One example of this is the U.S. air force base of Palmerola.

On the morning of June 28, around 200 people gathered a few miles away from the entrance to Palmerola Air Base, which is located in Honduras but is used by the United States Air Force. The marchers proceeded towards the main gate to denounce the U.S. military presence and its role in the overthrow of Honduras' democratically-elected government on June 28, 2009. The plane that sent Honduras' President Zelaya into exile on that day flew from the capital, Tegucigalpa, to Palmerola before continuing in the opposite direction to Costa Rica.

The protest was organized by COPINH, the Civic Counsel of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras, which works to oppose multinational mining, agricultural, tourism, and hydroelectric energy projects. These projects, which have been fast-tracked under the post-coup government, cheat Garifuna, Lenca, and other Honduran people out of their farms and land. Also attending the march were about 25 citizens of the U.S. and Canada, who were present to monitor police behavior, to support COPINH's anti-exploita-

tion struggle, and to protest the misuse of taxpayer money on militarization.

Upon reaching Palmerola's main gate, there was a rally in the driveway in which the people chanted, "Yankee trash out of Honduras!" and "More food, zero weapons!" The crowd also remembered the hundreds of activists that were shot and killed by the police in the two years since the coup, chanting, "Present with us today, tomorrow, and always, they keep on living through our struggle!"

One much needed role for international activists is that of accompanier or human rights observer. Honduran organizations are calling for Spanish-speaking international activists to join long-term international accompaniment teams which monitor human rights violations and live in communities in which militarization is escalating, such as the Aguán Valley. International accompaniment allows local organizers to continue with their work with a highly decreased risk of state violence. For more information on accompaniment, go to campamentoshonduras.blogspot.com or www.friendshipamericas.org/honduras. ●

EL SALVADOR: Saying No to Monsanto

By Carlos Martinez, co-author,
 “Venezuela Speaks!”, PM Press 2010

Ed. Note: Article excerpted

On Friday, May 6 President Mauricio Funes of El Salvador’s left-wing FMLN party, met with hundreds of small family farmers to launch a new “food sovereignty” program.

The FMLN, which initially formed around an ideology of national liberation from US hegemony, has now adopted the goal of “food sovereignty,” the idea that countries hold the right to define their own agricultural policies, rather than being subject to the whims of international market forces. Officials of the Ministry of Agriculture and the local governorship accompanied President Funes in reactivating the country’s historically ignored rural economy and reversing El Salvador’s growing dependence on imported grains.

The Mangrove Association, a non-governmental organization established by members of a grassroots social movement called *La Coordinadora*, has been supporting initiatives for food security and environmental sustainability for over 15 years. The Ministry of Agriculture has been working closely with the Mangrove Association and other *campesino* organizations to develop the new program’s agricultural policies: a goal that by 2014 all corn and bean seed needed for agriculture be produced by Salvadoran farmers, rather than purchased from multinational seed companies, namely Monsanto.

According to official figures, almost 95% of fruit and vegetables consumed in El Salvador are imported from abroad, along with 30% of beans and 40% of corn. Meanwhile, non-commercial small family farmers are said to produce up to 70% of the basic grains that are cultivated domestically, mostly for their own family’s consumption, making them particularly important for El Salvador’s food security.

Support to small family farmers is a central plank of the initiative as indicated by its name, the Family Agriculture Plan. At the end of last year, *La Coordinadora* lobbied the Ministry of Agriculture to adopt sustainable agriculture techniques as part of the plan. However, the Ministry chose to use conventional hybrid seeds, and their associated chemical inputs, for the first three years of the program.

Despite this setback for the sustainable agriculture movement, the Ministry of Agricul-

ture expressed interest in partnering with *La Coordinadora* and other *campesino* organizations in the first major pilot project in El Salvador to produce conventional corn seed on a massive scale. Recognizing that this overture from a government institution to collaborate with the *campesino* movement presented them with an unparalleled opportunity, they decided to work with the Ministry.

The Mangrove Association recruited three large cooperatives which historically had only planted conventional monoculture crops, such as sugar cane, to participate in the pilot project. This way the organization could ensure that none of the over 125 farms that have diversified their crops and weaned themselves from chemical inputs over the last fifteen years under its tutelage would be reconverted to conventional monoculture. Moreover, the Mangrove Association sees the conversion of those sugar cane fields – whose toxic practices have been linked to an epidemic of chronic kidney disease locally – to somewhat less-noxious conventional corn seed fields as a moderate yet important step towards both reduced environmental harm and greater food security.

The Family Agriculture Plan aims to serve over 325,000 families that rely on subsistence agriculture as well as over 70,000 small family farmers that produce for the market, through a multi-pronged strategy. One key element, the provision of free “agricultural packets” containing seeds and chemical fertilizer, has been a hallmark of El Salvador’s agricultural policy even before Funes entered office. While his administration heavily criticized the way the prior government under the right-wing ARENA party ran the program for being a “genuine failure as a policy in the struggle against poverty,” Funes decided to continue providing the agricultural packets, with the significant change that the government would also provide both low-interest loans and technical assistance to farmers to ensure that they have the support needed to succeed in food production.

Prior to the implementation of this new policy, all seeds distributed in the agricultural packets were purchased at above-market prices through Semillas Cristiani Burkard, the leading Central American corn seed company focused on hybrid corn production and a subsidiary of the agriculture biotechnology giant Monsanto. Semillas Cristiani

Burkard was founded by the family of former Salvadoran President Alfredo Cristiani, who served as head of state from 1989 to 1994 with the ARENA party.

In 2008, prior to the FMLN’s presidential victory, El Salvador’s National Congress voted to abolish Article 30 of the Planting Seed Law, which stated that it was prohibited to import, conduct research on, produce or commercialize (GMO) seeds. According to the US Department of Agriculture’s Global Agriculture Information Network Report, this policy change was “due to over three years of pressure from the private sector.” The same year that Article 30 was abolished, Semillas Cristina Burkard’s parent company, Marmot, S.A, was acquired by Monsanto. Funes says, “Only if we become independent in seed [production], will we become independent in food, that is to say, can we achieve food sovereignty.”

Funes contends that his new plan will give greater attention to the needs of small farmers and will lead to a 25% increase in the production of basic grains by adding more focus on providing technical support and low-interest loans, on top of continuing the distribution of agricultural packages. The two state-owned development banks, will provide small farmers with loans for growing basic grains at below market interest rates. They will offer about \$45 million in initial capital at rates as low as 4% on credits. This represents a reduction of over 50% from the earlier rate of 8.70%, but will be restricted to loans of up to \$3,000 for each borrower.

Although the seeds now being provided by Salvadoran farmers are not native organic seeds, the Mangrove Association is using the learning and the profits from its participation to improve its own organic seed production and expand its system of seed banks. From the perspective of the Mangrove Association, it is incumbent upon them to work with a government program that they see as imperfect in order to further their own work and move El Salvador towards environmental sustainability.

Grassroots movements and organizations like *La Coordinadora* and the Mangrove Association will continue to play a critical role in pushing to make the Salvadoran government’s discourse of promoting food sovereignty come closer to reality.

Source: *Alternet.org*, May 27, 2011

EL SALVADOR: Like Water for Gold

By Robin Broad and John Cavanagh,
journalists

Ed. Note: *Article was excerpted*

Thirty years ago, several thousand civilians in Santa Marta quickly gathered a few belongings and fled the US-funded Salvadoran military as it burned their houses and fields in an early stage of the country's twelve-year civil war. Dozens were killed as they crossed the Lempa River into refugee camps in Honduras

People in Cabanas living near mining exploration activities began to notice environmental impacts from the mining exploration - reduced access to water, polluted waters, impacts to agriculture, and health issues. Today, residents of this area are fighting US and Canadian mining companies, including Vancouver based Pacific Rim, eager to extract the rich veins of gold buried near the Lempa River, the water source for more than half of El Salvador. Once again, civilians have been killed or are receiving death threats. The communities' goal: to make El Salvador the first nation to ban gold mining.

We were greeted by Miguel brother of anti-mining leader Marcelo Rivera, who was assassinated in 2009. "We are the second most environmentally degraded country in the Americas after Haiti," Miguel explained. Later we would hear testimonies from dozens of people in Cabañas, many of whom are risking their lives in the struggle against mining. "Water for life," for drinking, for fishing, for farming - not just for Cabañas but for the whole country.

At ADES (the Social and Economic Development Association) local people talked about how they had come to oppose mining. ADES organizer Vidalina Morales acknowledged that "initially, we thought mining was good and it was going to help us out of poverty ... through jobs and development." Francisco Pineda, who received the 2011 Goldman Environmental Award, talked about watching the river near his farm dry up: "This was very strange, as it had never done this before. So we walked up the river to see why. And then I found a pump from Pacific Rim that was pumping water for exploratory wells." Francisco and others set out to learn everything they could about gold mining. They already knew that Cabañas was prone to earthquakes potentially strong enough to crack open the

containers that hold the cyanide-laced water used to separate gold from rock. They found out that only a tiny share of Pacific Rim's profits would stay in the country, and that the El Dorado mine was projected to have an operational life of only about six years, with many of the promised jobs requiring skills that few local people had.

As the anti-mining coalition strengthened with support from leaders in the Catholic Church, small businesses and the general public (62.4 % opposed mining), tensions within Cabañas grew. "We use theater, songs, murals and other cultural forms to show resistance. ADES's created Radio Victoria which teaches young people to become deejays, production engineers and the other roles of running a station. These young people also took courses on mining, and spread what they learned over the airwaves.

Over a six-day period in late 2009, two local activists were killed, one a pregnant woman; the two-year-old in her arms was wounded. Lawyers and community leaders had their homes broken into while the family slept, and documents related to their work were stolen. Many of the people we interviewed, including youths at Radio Victoria, have received death threats. Anti-mining sentiment was so strong in 2009 that both the reigning ARENA president and the successful FMLN candidate, Mauricio Funes, came out against mining.

Much of the credit for this goes to the National Roundtable on Mining, formed in 2005 as leaders in Cabañas began meeting with groups from other departments where mining companies were seeking permits, as well as with research, development, legal aid and human rights groups in San Salvador. Roundtable facilitator Rodolfo Calles enumerated the goals they agreed upon: help resistance at the community level; win a national law banning metals mining; link with anti-mining struggles in Honduras and Guatemala, since the Lempa River also winds through those two countries; and take on the international tribunal in which Pacific Rim is suing El Salvador. Part of what moved the Roundtable to the "complete ban" position, Francisco Pineda explained, "was the realization that the government lacked the ability to regulate the mining activities of giant global firms."

Roundtable members told us the Funes

government announced it would grant no new permits during his five-year term and was considering a permanent ban. They told us the government had initiated a major "strategic environmental review" to help set longer-term policy on mining. With gold's price skyrocketing from less than \$300 an ounce a decade ago to more than \$1,500 an ounce today, it is an increasing temptation in a nation of deep poverty to consider mining.

We met FMLN members of the national legislature's environment and climate change committee, including Lourdes Palacios. Palacios explained that they had ready a bill to ban metals mining, but the executive branch requested they wait for the review before introducing it. A representative from the department of Chalatenango expressed his conviction that "economic and political powers" were "putting pressure on non-FMLN legislators." The government faces an epic decision about mining, amid deep divisions and with institutions of democracy that are still quite young. As Vidalina of ADDS reminded us when we parted, the "complications" are even greater than what we found in Cabañas or in San Salvador, because even if the ban's proponents eventually win, "these decisions could still get trumped in Washington."

At the World Bank a little-known tribunal will be central to the Salvadoran gold story. The Salvadoran government never approved Pacific Rim's environmental impact study, and thus never gave its permission to begin actual mining. In retaliation, the firm sued under the 2005 Central American Free Trade Agreement. CAFTA allows foreign investors to file claims against governments over actions—including health, safety and environmental measures and regulations—that reduce the value of their investment. The affected farmers and communities are not part of the calculation.

Pacific Rim "is trying to dictate El Salvador's environment and social policy using CAFTA's arbitration mechanism.. Pacific Rim is demanding \$77 million in compensation. Back in Santa Marta, citizen groups are building sustainable farming as an alternative economic base to mining. Their goal: a "solidarity economy," or, as Vidalina termed it, a "people's economy."

Source: thenation.com/article/162009/7/11/2011

CHAIPAS: Apartheid Housing, a Solution to Climate Change

By Jeff Conant, *Global Justice Ecology Project*

Ed. Note: *In March of this year, the author traveled to the new Rural City of Santiago del Pinar. The article was excerpted from a much longer one, the balance can be found on upside-down-world.org*

Chiapas, Mexico's poorest state, with the country's largest indigenous population, has always been extremely vulnerable to volatile climate events. High levels of hunger and marginalization are exacerbated almost annually by torrential rain and flooding, which can only be expected to get worse as the climate crisis deepens. In 2009, the state launched and began widely publicizing its Climate Change Action Program (CCAPCH). The plan includes vast biofuel plantations, forest carbon offset projects, and a statewide "productive conversion" initiative to convert subsistence farmers into producers of African palm, *Jatropha*, and export-oriented crops such as roses, fruits, and coffee.

The plan also includes a program called the Sustainable Rural Cities initiative; under this plan, the state is developing between six and twenty-five prefabricated population centers designed, according to the state's publicity, to "promote regional development, combat the dispersion and marginalization of local peoples, and play a significant role in making efforts [to develop infrastructure and provide basic services] cost-efficient."

In a brief interview I conducted at the United Nations Climate Summit in Cancún last December, Chiapas Governor Juan Sabines said that "The Rural Cities program has three objectives: to mitigate poverty, to mitigate the risk of people facing climate-related disasters, and to reduce the threat of global warming. It is based in the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations, which in Chiapas are obligatory."

In 2009, Chiapas revised its state constitution to include a commitment to the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, the highly touted set of eight benchmarks for reducing the worst impacts of poverty worldwide. The UN Development Program (UNDP) explicitly supports the Rural Cities Initiative; Gontrán Villalobos Sánchez, in charge of Disaster Preparedness at the UNDP office in San

Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, told me in an interview that the Rural Cities are "a good option. Before anything, the Rural Cities intend to bring together the dispersed population. [They] are also an answer to disasters," he said. "The challenge is that the people themselves are not accepting the project."

While state officials and UN officials promote the Rural Cities as a positive response to the climate crisis, even a superficial analysis makes it clear that the program will increase vulnerability, not decrease it. Worse, critics such as the recently disbanded Chiapas progressive think tank, (CIEPAC) suggest that the project is part of a regional integration strategy designed to move rural and indigenous peoples off their lands in order to gain access to strategic resources. In this regard, the Chiapas Climate Change Action Program appears to be a complex and interwoven set of initiatives that use the climate crisis as a pretext for large-scale economic and territorial restructuring, with the goal of freeing up productive land and destabilizing local resistance. This, critics point out, is tantamount to ethnocide.

Santiago Del Pinar is in the highlands of Chiapas, less than two hours from San Cristóbal de las Casas, just beyond San Andrés Larráinzar (known to the Zapatistas as San Andrés Sacamchen de Los Pobres) and directly contiguous with the community of

Oventic, one of the five Zapatista *caracoles*, or centers of resistance. What we found there was a set of insultingly diminutive pastel-painted ticky-tacky houses made of chipboard, set on stilts on a bald hillside, burning in the open sun; fenced playgrounds of concrete; greenhouses full of pesticide-treated roses; and an angry local official who said that the houses might endure "eight to ten years at most," and that the floor of his own house "had broken when the children were playing on it."

Santiago del Pinar became a municipality after the dialogues of San Andrés Larráinzar between the government and the EZLN (Zapatista Army of National Liberation) in 1996. It's there that they signed the San Andrés Accords (the 1997 peace agreement that binds the Mexican government to constitutional reform but was later ignored). So San Andrés becomes one of the first Zapatista autonomous municipalities. As a counter measure, the state governor at that time, Albores Guillen, in 1999 made a remunicipalization plan, to combat the autonomous municipalities. So, Santiago del Pinar had this objective from the beginning, the disarticulation of the autonomous municipalities. After that time, the town was virtually abandoned for a long time, becoming one of the municipalities with the highest indices of poverty in the state of Chiapas. And now

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"Sustainable Rural City" of Santiago del Pinar, Chiapas. Photo: Orin hangelle / Carolina Dutton

Chiapas, continued from page 12

they've taken it up again, let's say, as a model for the resettlement of the population in indigenous territory. The other Rural Cities they've begun, as in the case of the first one that was founded, Nuevo Juan de Grijalva, are in *campesino* territory, not indigenous territory. The defining characteristic of Santiago del Pinar is that it's in indigenous territory; this aspect gives it a different connotation.

In Juan de Grijalva, the houses are much bigger, like 60 cubic meters, while here the houses are 30 cubic meters, and rather than walls of brick they're made of pressboard, this wood conglomerate that is essentially good for nothing; so the houses that the State is giving the indigenous have very little useful life. You can see the racism implicit in these new houses. According to CIEPAC there's a mentality of "they're indigenous so we'll give them less and they'll accept it."

You can see also that there's no sense of the indigenous cosmovision, of how to live in a place. For one thing, there are no agricultural plots, or a place to plant. Another aspect fundamental to the indigenous culture is cultivating and eating corn, and it's clear that they'll have no land to plant corn to eat, nor will they be able to make tortillas in the house, because tortillas are cooked over firewood. If they do this inside, they'll burn the house down.

For another, indigenous families tend to be large, so you have eight, nine people; and you're putting them in these little houses, two rooms of 30 cubic meters. The architects have no idea, no vision of how the indigenous live.

Making a map of all the Rural Cities that are planned for the State of Chiapas, you discover the elements that go unspoken by the government, and the bigger picture that's not in the official discourse: basically, in the Northern Zone, where you find Juan de Grijalva, the key element is that they want to clear the territory to advance the mining industry. There have been huge mining concessions authorized in the last two years, without any consultation. So, all the relocation of the people to Juan Grijalva, which the government says was done due to the natural disasters there, in reality it wasn't due to that, but to the economic plan, to ensure access to the mineral reserves in the region.

In the case of Santiago del Pinar, the concern is that there are large extensions of territory here, and important natural reserves, so its an area that's important for the sale of carbon credits. These large areas are to be decreed as

reserves, so the carbon they capture can be legally sold to other countries. They're going to make forest reserves that can be sold to other countries for sequestering carbon.

In the Soconusco, the coastal zone of Chiapas, they plan to build a Rural City, and behind this one is the fact that they are making huge plantations of biofuels there, African palm and *Jatropha*; seven out of every nine biodiesel plants in Mexico are in Chiapas, and the largest is in the Soconusco, therefore they need to "liberate" huge extensions of land in order to transform it into monoculture plantations and get them producing for agroindustry.

In Jaltenango they're planning another Rural City; there what they plan is to clear the land in El Triunfo, a Reserve almost as large as Montes Azules [the largest of the Protected Natural Areas in Chiapas, in the Lacandon Jungle.]. Just like what's happened in Montes Azules, the objective is to clear the area to make it useful for bioprospecting and for sales of carbon credits.

These aspects are not in the official discourses. The official discourse only speaks of combating poverty and the dispersion of the population, but they don't speak about the most fundamental element, which is the ex-

traction of natural resources from the territories of Chiapas.

It's clear that the principal impact on the families that live in these places is their loss of food sovereignty: this is completely broken because the population no longer eats from what they plant; now they need to seek work, wage labor, and this work is going to be either for tourism or for industrial agriculture. So what's at the bottom of this is Project Mesoamerica 2011, a project with enormous ambitions that intends to free up vast extensions of territory between southern Mexico and Colombia, for global economic production.

There is inherent manipulation and racism with the Rural Cities program. They call this social action because they're giving home to people, and giving them work, when what the people need is for their indigenous way of life to be respected, and not to have a foreign model of development imposed on them, like Apartheid: a little house with four square walls and an occidental model of development that in many cases clashes directly with the indigenous cosmovision.

Source: *UpsideDownWorld.org*, May 13, 2011

BRAZIL & HAITI: Small Farmer Exchange

The MST (Landless Workers' Movement) and the Via Campesina (a coalition of farmers and landless people's organizations from around the world) in Brazil have had contact with small farmers in Haiti for many years. Since 2004 a solidarity exchange program between *campesino* movements in Brazil and Haiti had been considered but in early 2009 the MST and other small farmers' organizations from Brazil began sending brigades to Haiti to achieve a solidarity exchange between farmers. Brazilians eat and sleep in Haitian homes and Haitians in Brazil learn about how farmers organize there. With the objective of helping Haitians strengthen their autonomy and organizational capacity, the program is based on an exchange of learning in both directions and a great respect for Haitian farmers and movements.

Diversity of skills is important and brigade participants include veterinarians, professors, medics, construction specialists and technical agronomists as well as farmers. 1200 cisterns are being built in Haiti and the program provides cooperation in agricultural production and training schools.

The program includes four aspects; the first is the exchange and provides opportunity for cultural and intellectual training, for example, 30 Brazilians came to train in Haiti and Haitians went to Brazil for one month of classes in various subjects. The second phase is, producing seeds which includes saving, maintaining and producing seeds (including legumes and corn) and includes establishing six centers of seed production. The third phase is a program of reforestation and includes planting avocados, mangoes and other trees to provide income for farmers. The fourth phase is construction of intermediate-level technical schools to train young farmers in agricultural technologies.

These programs have a fundamental objective; to help farmers strengthen their autonomy and their organizational capacity, the base of social movements which is the principal philosophy of the cooperation. It is proving that a solidarity exchange is possible between peoples, not just between governments.

Source: *Beverly Bell, Other World*, June 23, 2011

Mark your calendar!

MITF's Annual Dinner

Sunday, September 25, 2011

UNIVERSALIST UNITARIAN
CONGREGATION OF MARIN

240 Channing Way
San Rafael, California

6 PM Social Hour & Silent Auction

7 PM Dinner

Music **FRANCISCO HERRERA**
with a medley of Jon Fromer songs

Guest Speaker PATRICIA ISASA



Torture survivor from Argentina, whose testimony resulted in convictions of several high-ranking government officials for their roles in the dirty war of the 70s

Inside: Land Grabs, a Human Rights Issue

By Camilla Schneider, Task Force board

Several articles in this newsletter focus on the theme of land use including extractive industries such as gold mining, flooding communities to build hydroelectric dams, evictions in order to plant palm oil plantations, deforestation, imposition of GMO seeds, a monoculture export agribusiness model, or land grabs for sweatshops and tourist complexes. These so-called 'development projects' become a motivator behind violence, expulsions, terrorism, murders and violations of national and international laws and of human rights. Such actions, directed at communities of peasants, farmers and original peoples, are the instruments of corporations and the wealthy as they implement a neoliberal economic model dependent on exploitation of raw resources, low wages and the transfer of wealth to the already wealthy. Supported and encouraged by the IMF, World Bank and other international lending agencies, these models are not sustainable.

The proceeds of the palm oil or pulp plantation, electricity, gold, oil or other resources derived from these land grabs, rarely benefit the displaced persons or communities. The sweatshops do not provide livable wages. However, the pollution, environmental destruction and the expulsion of peoples from their homes and livelihoods have very direct and destructive impacts. The kidnappings, death threats, criminalization of social protest, beatings, imprisonments, assassinations and rapes impact not only the communities but also human rights defenders who support them.

These articles not only show the devastating impact on affected peoples but also their courage, determination, and successes in fighting back. They also reflect new sustainable models of struggle such as the lawsuit against BP based on the 'rights of nature' as stated in the Ecuadorian constitution, the struggle for indigenous peoples' right to informed and prior consultation, and the cooperative model between Haitian farmers and the Landless Workers' Movement and other farmers of Brazil and Cuba's energy initiative.

This collection of articles will throw a spotlight on the issues and the peoples' struggle to resist the extractive models and land grabs which threaten their country's potential to develop a truly sustainable economy.

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