

Report

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BRAZIL: Dilma Rousseff in Lula's Shadow

By Benjamin Dangl, author of "Dancing with Dynamite: Social Movements and States in Latin America," 2010

When the confetti was still falling after her victory at the polls on October 31, Dilma Rousseff, Brazil's first female president-elect, said, "I want to state my first commitment after the elections: to honor Brazil's women so that today's unprecedented result becomes a normal event and may be repeated and enlarged in companies, civil institutions and representative entities of our entire society."

In a country where women have typically played a limited role in politics, the election of a woman to Brazil's highest office signals a major break from the past. But Rousseff's term will likely be marked by continuity with her predecessor, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. Lula, a member of the Workers' Party (PT), is leaving office with 87 percent support in the polls. An economist, PT bureaucrat, chief of staff under Lula and former guerrilla in the anti-dictatorship movements of the 1960s and '70s, Rousseff was handpicked by Lula to follow his lead as president. When she is sworn in on January 1 she will inherit Lula's popular legacy and will be further empowered by the fact that her party and allied parties won a majority of seats in the Senate and Congress.

Considering the major economic and social gains Brazilians have enjoyed since Lula took office in 2003, the popularity of the PT candidate in the recent election was not a surprise. During Lula's two terms as president, 20 million Brazilians rose out of poverty, and the minimum wage was raised by more than half. These advances were enabled by the country's economic growth, spurred on in part by major exports to China, but they were also a result of Lula's political will to promote social programs. In her victory speech, Rousseff pledged to extend these popular pro-

grams—at one point she vowed to eradicate poverty entirely. "We must not rest while there are Brazilians going hungry," she said.

Among the initiatives likely to expand is

through healthcare exams and receive vaccinations. More recently, Rousseff helped develop the My House, My Life program, which provides subsidies for home ownership.

Rousseff's early cabinet appointments suggest that continuity will be the name of the game on issues of health and social development. She tapped Lula aide Tereza Campello to manage the Family Grant program as minister of social development, and Alexandre Padilha, a Lula adviser, will take over as health minister. The size and impact of these initiatives will likely increase in the coming years with help from new state oil revenues. Rousseff was the chairwoman of the state-run oil company, Petrobras, and she helped draft legislation that will give the state a key role in the exploration and extraction of oil reserves recently discovered off the coast of the country. Some of the funds generated for the government from this resource will be directed specifically to healthcare and education programs.

While expanding positive social programs, Rousseff is also expected to continue Lula's less progressive politics in the area of land reform and agriculture. His powerful support for agribusiness, particularly soy and corn, over small farms and landless farmers has been one of his biggest failures as president. Thanks to Lula's en-

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Brazil's new president, Dilma Rousseff was inaugurated on January 1, 2011 Photo: Brazil.gov.br

the Zero Hunger program, developed by Lula, which provides direct vitamin and food subsidies alongside projects to generate employment through infrastructure projects in electricity and irrigation. The Family Grant program is another success story: the program, which gives stipends to poor families that earn less than 120 Brazilian reais per month (about \$71 US) has touched the lives of some 12.4 million families. In order to receive funding, families are required to send their children to school, where they have to attend at least 85 percent of classes, go

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COLOMBIA: Summit of Women against Militarization

By Rachel Dickson, Fellowship of Reconciliation

Ed. Note: Article was edited for length.

In August, Colombia hosted the first “International Summit of Women and People of the Americas against Militarization,” which was attended by almost 3000 people, including around 200 international delegates from the Americas and Europe. The event provided a unique space for organizations and social activists to come together to share, denounce, and show the effects of militarization and war on women, territories, and civil society, with the objective to systemize the experiences of resistance against militarization and to define a strategic agenda to coordinate a social movement of women and people for the defense of territories. Although the Colombian Constitutional Court deemed the agreement leasing seven Colombian bases to the US unconstitutional on the second day of the summit, the focus of the attendees remained centered on building a strong opposition to the rise of US military presence in Latin America.

The summit, convened by the Social Movement of Women against War and for Peace, came out of a long process involving 60 Colombian social organizations that have spent the last four years developing a common agenda against militarization. According to Betty Puerto of the Women’s Popular Organization (OFP), the goal of the movement is to eventually present a proposal of peace from women to the Colombian national government urging a political negotiation to the armed conflict, along with various measures to assure that human rights are protected in Colombia. The Social Movement of Women was spearheaded ten years

ago by the OFP, when they began to collect information about the suffering of women caused by the effects of the internal conflict. Jacqueline Rojas, the Barrancabermeja regional coordinator, said that they later opened the movement to other regions of the country, where other organizations already had initiatives, and began a campaign of popular education in schools and neighborhoods, teaching the effects of militarization on women and civil society.

The movement now includes indigenous communities, labor unions, housewives, Afro-Colombian communities, political and church organizations, academics, student movements, displaced people, small-scale farmers, community mothers, and regional peace processes, all of whom were represented in the summit, united under the slogan “We do not birth sons and daughters for war.”

The summit successfully brought together a lot of people working against the expansionist interests of the US in the region, people who denounce the growing militarization of the region as a strategy of appro-

priation of the natural resources and wealth of territories, and the effects on women in particular. Women’s bodies are used as commodities in war, and while femicide rates are rising, women are frequently left behind to raise and support the family when their partners go to war or are killed. The event brought hope and promise to a broken movement, a movement that has been systematically marginalized, threatened, and suppressed by the powers that be. Already many women who helped organize the event have received subsequent threats – one organizer has been followed by men on motorcycles taking pictures outside her house, another has been forced to flee the country. Around the time of the event a human rights defender was found murdered in retaliation for her participation in public, international human rights events. The picture remains grim inside Colombia, but the international community of opposition to the status quo gets stronger after each event such as this one.

Source: www.paz4colombia.wordpress.com, Sept. 12, 2010

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couragement, multinational agro-industrial corporations—including Monsanto, Archer Daniels Midland, Cargill and Syngenta—have expanded their operations throughout the country, increasing their ties with large landowners and Brazilian politicians. As political scientist Miguel Carter notes, “From 2003 to 2007, state support for the rural elite was seven times larger than that offered to the nation’s family farmers, even though the latter represent 87 percent of Brazil’s rural labor force and produce the bulk of food consumed by its inhabitants.” The result of this imbalance is an endless sea of soy plantations, massive cattle ranches and poisonous industrial farms that displace poor Brazilian families and cut down ever larger swaths of rainforest while enriching a handful of global elites.

Although this trend has empowered certain aspects of the Brazilian economy, it has destroyed the countryside and displaced farmers at an unprecedented rate. In the face of Lula’s policies, Brazil’s Landless Workers’ Movement (MST) continued occupying unused land and settling it. Over the past twenty-five years, the MST has expropriated 35 million acres of land, settling some

370,000 landless families.

The MST supported Rousseff during her campaign, taking into account that the right-wing candidate José Serra would have been catastrophic for the movement and its allies. This is consistent with the movement’s continued backing of Lula during elections, despite the president’s slow progress with land reform; the analysis of the MST leadership is that a relative ally in the government is better than an outright enemy. MST leader João Pedro Stedile explained this position to a Reuters reporter: “A worker in the face of a reactionary boss does not mobilize,” he said. “With Dilma, our social base realizes that it is worthwhile to mobilize, that we can move forward, doing more [land] occupations and [labor] strikes.” Hopefully, the MST will find an ally in the Rousseff presidency. In any event, the movement will likely continue with its direct-action tactics to build a better world for its members regardless of who resides in the presidential palace.

Rousseff is also expected to build on the epic gains Lula made in establishing Brazil as a regional power and helping to lead the re-

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VENEZUELA: Setting the Record Straight

By Eva Golinger, author *“The Chavez Code: Cracking US Intervention in Venezuela.”*

With so much misinformation circulating in different media outlets around the world about Venezuela and President Hugo Chavez, it's time to set the record straight. Venezuela is not a dictatorship and President Chavez is no dictator. Just last evening the Venezuelan head of state participated in a meeting with a group of housing activists, who not only criticized live on television government policies and inaction on tenant and housing issues, but also proposed laws, regulations and projects that were received with open arms by Chavez himself. And last week, the Venezuelan President vetoed a law on higher education that had been approved by the prior year's majority pro-Chavez legislature, calling for more “open and wide” debate on the subject, to include critics and those who had protested the bill. That is not the behavior of a brutal dictator.

As someone who has been living on and off in Venezuela for over 17 years, I can testify to the extraordinary transformation the country has undertaken during the past decade since Chavez first was elected in 1998. He has been reelected by landslide majorities twice since then.

When I arrived to Venezuela for the first time in 1993, the country was in severe turmoil. Constitutional rights had been suspended and a nationwide curfew was imposed. Repression was widespread, the economy was in crisis, several newspapers, television and radio stations had been shut down or censored, and the government had imposed a forced military draft targeting young men from poor communities. There was an interim president in power, because the actual president, Carlos Andres Perez—hailed by Washington as an “outstanding democrat”—had just been impeached and imprisoned for corruption. Perez eventually escaped confinement and fled to Miami, where he resided until his death last month, living off the millions he stole from the Venezuelan people.

Even though a new president was elected in 1994, constitutional rights remained suspended on and off for years, until the elections in 1998 that brought Chavez to power. Since then, despite a short-lived coup d'état

in 2002, an economically-shattering sabotage of the oil industry in 2003 and multiple attempts against his government during the following years, President Chavez has never ordered a state of emergency that would limit rights or shut down media outlets. He even issued a general pardon in 2007 giving amnesty to all those involved in the 2002 coup, with the exception of individuals directly responsible for crimes against humanity or homicide.

Under the Chavez administration, poverty has been reduced by half; universal, quality, free healthcare and education have been guaranteed for all Venezuelans. New industries have been created, and more and more political power has been placed in the hands of “ordinary” people, who were previously excluded by the elite that ruled the country throughout the twentieth century.

You may not like Hugo Chavez's way of speaking, or the fact that he was born into poverty, comes from the military, is a leftist and doesn't fit the stereotypical image of a head of state. But that doesn't make him a dictator.

In Venezuela more than 80% of television, radio and print media remain in the hands of private interests critical of the government. Despite what some international press claim, there is no censorship or violation of free expression in Venezuela. Calls to overthrow the government or to incite the armed forces to rebel against the state, which would clearly be prohibited in most nations, are broadcast on opposition-controlled television channels with public concessions (open signals, not cable). Just last month, the head of the Venezuelan chamber of commerce, Fedecamaras, gave a press conference broadcast live on television and radio stations, during which he called the armed forces “traitors” who would “pay the price” if they didn't disobey government orders and “obey” the dictates of business operators.

Imagine if a business leader in the United States were to go on television and call the US Army “traitors” if they didn't disobey the federal government. Secret Service would arrest the man immediately and the consequences would be severe. However, that would never happen in the US, since no television station would ever broadcast anything that constituted a call to rebellion or disobedience against the government. That's illegal.

So, not only is there no censorship in Venezuela, there is an excess of “free” expression. One positive aspect of the permissive attitude assumed by the Chavez government with regards to media has been the proliferation of community and alternative media outlets throughout the nation, which have provided space and voice to those ignored by mainstream corporate media. During governments prior to the Chavez administration, community and alternative media were banned.

Recently, the Venezuelan legislature passed a law called the Law of Social Responsibility in Radio, Television and Digital Media. The law does not censor internet or any other form of media. It disallows calls to assassinate the president or other individual, as well as prohibit incitement to crime, hate or violence on web sites operated from Venezuela. This is a standard in most democracies and is a sign of civility. The law also instills on media a responsibility to contribute to the education of citizens. Media have a huge power over society today.

Another issue widely manipulated in mass media is the Enabling Act that was approved last month by the Venezuelan parliament. This law gives “decree” powers to the Executive to legislate on specific issues as stipulated in the bill. The Enabling Act does not usurp, inhibit or limit legislative functions of the National Assembly, nor is it unconstitutional or anti-democratic. The parliament can still debate and approve laws as usual within its authority. The Enabling law, which is permitted by the Constitution, was requested by President Chavez in order to provide rapid responses to a national emergency caused by torrential rainfall that devastated communities nationwide at the end of last year and left over 130,000 homeless. The law will not affect any constitutional rights nor impose a “dictatorship” on the country; it is merely a valid, legitimate response to an emergency situation that needs quick solutions.

And speaking of the Venezuelan legislature, there is a lot of deceitful information repeated and recycled in media worldwide about the composition of this year's new parliament. Venezuela had legislative elections in September 2010, and opposition—anti-Chavez—parties won 40% of the seats.

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Some say this is a majority, which is very strange. The pro-Chavez PSUV party won 60% of seats in the National Assembly, as the Venezuelan legislative body is called. That's 97 out of 165 seats, plus 1 more which was won by the pro-Chavez PCV party, for a total of 98.

The opposition bloc has already announced it will seek foreign intervention to help overthrow the government. Not only is this illegal, it's incredibly dangerous. Many of the candidates and most of the parties that conform the opposition in Venezuela have already been receiving millions of dollars annually in funding from several US and international agencies, such as the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and the US Agency for International Development (USAID), both financed with US taxpayer monies. The stated purpose of this funding has been to "promote democracy" in Venezuela and help build the opposition forces against Chavez. This is a clear violation of Venezuelan sovereignty and a waste of US taxpayer dollars. US citizens: Is this the way you want your hard-earned money to be spent?

This week opposition leaders will meet with their counterparts in Washington. They have already said their mission is to seek more aid to help remove President Chavez from power. Unfortunately, their undemocratic actions have already been welcomed in the US Capitol. Representative Connie Mack (R-FL), now head of the House Subcommittee on Foreign Relations for the Western Hemisphere, announced on the first day of Congress that his one goal this year is to place Venezuela on the list of "state sponsors of terrorism." And Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), now head of the House Foreign Relations Committee, has backed that objective, even going so far as to publicly state she would welcome the "assassination of Fidel Castro or any other repressive leader," such as Hugo Chavez.

On January 1 President Chavez held a brief, informal and amicable encounter with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in Brasilia, during the inauguration of Dilma Rousseff, Brazil's new president. No agreements were reached, but the exchange of hands and smiles stabilized an escalation in tensions between both nations, which had produced a diplomatic crisis at the end of last year. But upon her return to Washington,

Clinton was severely criticized by media, particularly The Washington Post, which accused her of being too "soft" on Venezuela.

The Washington Post's calls for war against Venezuela are dangerous. Conditioning of public opinion is necessary to justify aggression against another nation. The campaigns of demonization against Saddam Hussein, Iraq and Islam were essential to initiate the wars in the Middle East which have yet to cease. Is the public willing to be influenced by media that have a political (and economic) agenda that seeks to oust a democratically-elected and popularly supported government just because they don't like its policies?

With the recent tragic events in Arizona it should become even more evident that media have power and influence over individual actions. Hate speech, demonization campaigns, manipulative and deceitful information are dangerous and can lead to abominable consequences, including war.

It's time to stop the escalating aggression against Venezuela and accept the facts: Venezuela is not a dictatorship, and while many of you may not like Hugo Chavez, a majority of Venezuelans who voted for him do. And in this scenario, they're the ones who matter.

Source: www.chavezcode.com/2011/01/setting-record-straight-on-venezuela.html

CRISIS ON THE BORDER

By Ellen Mc Gill and Martin Lepkowski, members of Witness for Peace

In late February 2010 we left Rhode Island for a visit to the US/Mexican Border. We thought we were prepared for the reality of the war being waged there, but it was far worse than we had imagined. Under the guise of protecting the country from drug smugglers and Mexican cartels, our government is using our tax dollars to abuse and terrorize undocumented immigrants—those coming into the country for the first time and those who have lived and worked in the US for years.

Many of the undocumented have fled their country since the implementation of the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement, (NAFTA). Since NAFTA, according to Ann Vigna in "NAFTA Hurts Mexico Too," there has been a 452% increase in immigration to the US. Witness for Peace, a Latin American human rights organization, confirms that over two million farms were lost and wages fell to where one half of the population of Mexico now earns \$3.00 a day. The "Free Market" economy has resulted in higher food, electric and gas prices for Mexicans. This has resulted in more displaced people with nowhere to turn except north, to the desert and the border.

In Tucson, we were met by our friend Molly Little from South Kingstown. Since last November Molly has been working for No More Deaths (NMD), where she interviews recent deportees to document human rights abuses that occur during the arrest and deportation process. Molly also joins NMD

volunteers who hike into the Sonoran Desert to uncover migrants' trails and to leave water and food; when necessary, they provide medical aid. Since 1998 over 5,600 men, women, and children have died trying to reach the border, succumbing to exhaustion, injury, bad water or food. NMD volunteers have found bodies in the desert, some un-identifiable. Sometimes they find handmade wooden crosses. The desert has become a cemetery.

Migrants apprehended on or near the border encounter the Border Patrol, the "Migra," have a reputation for using racist language, beating people with flashlights or pistols, kicking them in the knees, taking their food, and forcing them to abandon their backpacks in the desert. Undocumented immigrants already living in the US are arrested either by local law enforcement or by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers, often in raids.

Upon arrest, both migrants and US residents experience the same kinds of abuse. In some facilities detainees do not receive food or water for as long as 24 hours. Often they are not allowed to make phone calls to loved ones. Frequently, they do not have access to a lawyer and are told to sign paperwork they do not understand. They may be transferred quickly to detention centers or prisons in other states, where they are "disappeared" from family and friends who might help them.

Prisons and detentions centers everywhere are overcrowded, with as many as 30-40 people jammed into a small cell. Usually there is one exposed and dirty toilet, with a pipe next to the toilet the only water supply. Often

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there are no chairs or beds, and little or no room to sit or lie down. Some take turns sleeping on cold concrete floors. Nearly all detainees report that they are held in extremely frigid conditions and that requests for blankets are regularly denied. If blankets are distributed they are very thin and dirty. Some cells have bunk beds with thin mattresses and no ladders. The old, the infirm and women are bruised from constant climbing.

Meals, served twice a day, are sparse and portions are very small; sometimes the food is cold or frozen, and smells and tastes bad. Breakfast, served at 6 am may consist of two small pieces of bread, some peanut butter, a cup of juice or milk. Dinner at 6 pm may be a small amount of potatoes and beans and a little canned fruit. Should the detainees try to save a little food for later, the guards take it away. Sometimes the guards withhold the food and eat it themselves.

Medical care for detainees is poor and often denied. A young man whose knee is painfully swollen after being kicked by a Border Patrol Officer, asks for, but receives no treatment. A pregnant woman is beaten but is refused medical care. Another pregnant woman is screaming in pain but ignored. A diabetic does not get Insulin. A woman suffering from lung cancer needs her medication every four hours but does not get it. A man suffering from epilepsy is refused medication, suffers a seizure, and splits open his chin. A prison guard and a nurse stand over the man while he continues to thrash on the floor. Eventually he is taken to a hospital, where he receives stitches. Two days later—still with no medication—he returns to the prison where he has another seizure. This time he breaks his nose.

Physical and verbal violence is always a threat. An old man, who is shaking, is thrown onto the floor. A diabetic in a wheelchair is slammed against a wall. Women are strip-searched and groped. One woman has a gun held to her throat. Men are stripped and forced to sit naked on the floor. Documented interviews reveal that Guards laugh and mimic the mentally ill and the infirm, and call the detainees “Dirty Mexicans” and “Stinky Pigs.” “Shut your f-ing mouths,” they say, or “Shut up, bitches.” Women are “F-ing whores,” and their cells “Whorehouses.” Lockdowns can occur for the slightest infraction; in one case, women were not allowed to talk or leave their beds for three days.

These documented stories are consistent.

Whether the deportees have been apprehended in the desert or in the US, whether they are held for three days or three months, in local jails such as those run by the notorious Sheriff Joe Arpaio in Maricopa County, Arizona, in one of the 350 ICE prisons na-

mented immigrants. Both ICE and CCA prisons operate with minimal oversight and with impunity. CCA, a for-profit prison business, has a long and documented history of allowing detainees to die as a result of inadequate medical care. For example, Hiu Lui

Stories of local immigrants

A dozen migrants from Latin America living in San Rafael, California, tell their own stories about why they felt compelled to leave their homes and endure the arduous journey to El Norte, the United States of America. In *Por Que Venimos (Why We Come)*, these powerful, often heartbreaking, always stirring and inspiring stories offer an intimate look at lives lived at the outer limits of poverty and at the extraordinary courage of ordinary people as they take great risks seeking a better life for their families, especially for their children. They and many, many others just like them are the real heroes among us.

The film was produced by members of the Marin (County) Immigrant Rights Coalition, whose mission is to end exploitation, dehumanization, and criminalization of people solely because they are undocumented. To request a copy of the film, email: whywecome@gmail.com.

tionwide, or in one of the 60 prisons run by Corrections Corporation of America (CCA)—the interviews reveal a disturbing pattern of abuse—abuse that seems clearly designed to support our government’s policy of deterrence.

At present there are no nationwide standards to control the treatment of undocu-

Ng, a 33-year-old computer engineer from New York who had overstayed his visa, was interred in the CCA Wyatt Detention Center in Central Falls, RI. In agony from an undiagnosed fractured spine and advanced liver cancer, Ng was repeatedly denied medical care. He died in Rhode Island Hospital on Aug. 5, 2008. ●

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gion toward independence from the United States. He helped strengthen regional economic and diplomatic blocs such as Mercosur and the Union of South American Nations, championed resistance against President George W. Bush’s push for a Free Trade Area of the Americas, denounced the coup against Honduran President José Manuel Zelaya, and supported Presidents Evo Morales of Bolivia and Rafael Correa of Ecuador during right-wing destabilization efforts in those countries. Rousseff has appointed Antonio Patriota, a close colleague of former minister Celso Amorim, as the minister of foreign relations; Patriota is likely to follow in his predecessor’s footsteps.

On the international front, Rousseff’s administration will bring increased clout to negotiations over climate and global trade. In late January, just weeks after Rousseff takes office, Brazil will attend the annual World

Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. The global spotlight will be on Brazil when Rio de Janeiro hosts the 2014 World Cup as well. Already, preparations for the event have served as an excuse for increased police repression and displacement in the city’s favelas.

As the world looks to Rousseff for signals about her governing style and policy plans, the focus may be on areas where she distinguishes herself by breaking with the past—particularly with regard to women’s rights. As Rousseff told reporters after her victory, “Equal opportunity between men and women is an essential principle of democracy.” Yet the first female president of the region’s largest nation and economy must operate within the same economic, environmental and political constraints as her mentor and predecessor. Rousseff is unlikely to step out from under Lula’s shadow for some time.

Source: www.thenation.com/article/157364/dilma-rousseff-lulas-shadow, Dec. 29, 2010

CUBA: Medics on the Frontline in Haiti

By *Pascal Fletcher, journalist; edited by Bill Trott*

Ed. Note: Cuban doctors are the real heroes of the Haitian earthquake disaster and subsequent cholera epidemic

They don't send out press releases, don't have public information officers and their contacts are not widely publicized by the huge international humanitarian operation helping cholera-hit Haiti. But when the United Nations appeals for more doctors and nurses to combat the deadly disease that is killing dozens by the day, it is to Cuba's medical brigade that UN officials are likely to turn to first.

With a tradition of service in the world's poorest and most forgotten states, the Cubans are a major front-line force in the multinational response to the raging epidemic, which has killed at least 3,000 people and probably more, since mid-October in the impoverished country.

While many Western aid workers crowd Haiti's capital, where more than 1.3 million vulnerable homeless survivors of the January 12 earthquake are crammed into tent camps, Cuba's medics are seeking out cholera victims in hard-to-reach rural hamlets.

A Cuban-led team trekked this week to one such settlement—the dirt-poor mountain village of Plateau in Haiti's cholera-ravaged Artibonite department, where they set up an emergency makeshift cholera treatment centre on the benches of a Protestant church.

"We don't look for publicity but we do look for the people," Dr. Lorenzo Somarriba, coordinator of the Cuban Medical Brigade in Haiti, told Reuters at the brigade's headquarters in a Port-au-Prince suburb. "The Cuban doctors are working in the most difficult places. It's our policy to concentrate on areas outside the national capital," he said, a fact acknowledged by both Haitian and foreign health authorities. A small Cuban flag sits on the table in front of Somarriba, while pictures of former President Fidel Castro and guerrilla icon Ernesto "Che" Guevara, himself a doctor, adorn the walls.

Plateau represents the 39th cholera

treatment location set up and run by the Cubans across much of Haiti's daunting geography, from the coast to the denuded mountains of the interior where poor, illiterate peasants are helpless victims of a deadly diarrheal disease they have never known before. These locations are carefully marked on a map of Haiti in the Cuban brigade's headquarters and Somarriba, a Cuban vice minister of health, reels off figures and statistics like a general marshalling his forces in a military campaign.

The Cuban-led medical brigade in Haiti is 908 people strong; it includes Cuban-



*Haitian boy walking through refugee camp.
Photo: Thony Belizaire/AFP/Getty*

trained professionals from 19 countries, mostly Latin American, Caribbean and African nationals who serve under the Cuban flag. It is the largest medical contingent in Haiti from any one nation, treating 30 to 40 percent of the cholera patients.

The Cuban contingent consists mostly of doctors and nurses but also includes technicians and logistics experts. They have warehouses, a fleet of trucks, and planes that fly in supplies and personnel from the communist-ruled island to the west. The scale, organization and experience of this presence make Cuba the country that Haiti's government and its relief partners seek out when they need to ramp up the struggling response to the unchecked epidemic. "We know the terrain. We have people who speak Creole and the people know us," said Somarriba, citing the 12-year presence of a Cuban medical brigade in Haiti.

The United Nations' top humanitarian

official, Briton Valerie Amos, said during a visit to Haiti last month that the country needed an urgent surge of foreign medics, at least 1,000 nurses and 100 more doctors, if it was to have any hope of curbing the death rate of the raging epidemic. Britain's government said days later it would fund 115 doctors, 920 nurses and 740 support staff from the region to set up 12 treatment centers and 60 subsidiary units in Haiti.

UN officials said Cuba was the first to offer more personnel. "There is a call for everybody but the response came first from the Cubans. They are going to send 300 additional doctors," Edmond Mulet, head of the UN peacekeeping mission in Haiti, told Reuters.

Somarriba said the Cuban medical reinforcements were ready in Havana and would be flown in. Besides its own resources, the Cuban brigade was receiving significant contributions for its work from the Panamerican Health Organization/World Health Organization, the UN children's agency UNICEF and the World Food Program. Cuba also had been working since 2007 with socialist ally and oil producer Venezuela to create a health service network across Haiti. Havana already had helped Haiti after the devastating January earthquake, with a medical response reaching a peak of more than 1,700 personnel in March. Somarriba said Cuban doctors and nurses already in Haiti had treated the first cases of the cholera outbreak on October 15 in Mirebalais in the Centre Department, raising the alarm about severe diarrhea later confirmed to be cholera. In centers run by the Cuban brigade, fewer people were dying from cholera, the mortality rate there was less than one percent, below the national average of 3.5 percent.

They may not have the public relations punch of many international charities, but the Cubans have a powerful cheerleader in former President Fidel Castro, who has recounted their exploits in statements on Cuban government websites. "Haiti needs to be rebuilt from its foundations, with the help and cooperation of everyone," Castro said.

Source: *Reuters, Dec. 4, 2010*

HAITI: OAS Backs Illegitimate Election

By Mark Weisbrot, Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR)

A year after Haiti's devastating earthquake, an estimated one million people are still living in accommodation intended as temporary shelter, while millions of dollars were spent on an election that was effectively boycotted by the majority of Haitians.

What is it about Haiti that makes the "international community" think they have the right to decide the country's fate without the consent of the governed? Yes, Haiti is a poor country, but Haitians have fought very hard, and lost many lives, for the right to vote and elect a government.

Yet on 28 November, nearly three quarters of Haitians did *not* vote in the presidential and parliamentary elections. That is what we at the CEPR found when we went through 11,181 tally sheets from the election. This is a ridiculously low turnout for a presidential election.

Now, according to an AP report, the Organization of American States has decided that the election should go to a runoff, finding that the top two finishers were former first lady Mirlande Manigat and the popular singer Michel Martelly. The OAS is proposing a runoff between presidential candidates who received about 6% and 4% respectively, of the electorate's votes in the first round.

One reason that most Haitians did not vote is that the most popular political party in the country, Fanmi Lavalas, was arbitrarily excluded from the ballot. This was also done in April 2009, in parliamentary elections, and more than 90% of voters did not vote. By contrast, in the 2006 presidential elections, participation was 59.3%. And it has been higher in the past, even for the parliamentary (non-presidential) election in 2000.

Haitians have taken great risks to vote when there was political violence, and have been pragmatic about voting even when their first choice was not on the ballot (as in 1996 and 2006). But the majority won't vote when they are denied their right to choose. This is the big story of the election that most of the major media have missed entirely.

Our recount of the vote also showed that even among the votes cast, there was a

sizable proportion of votes – about 12.7% – that were never received by the Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) or were quarantined by it. This quantity is much higher than was previously reported by either the CEP or the OAS.

A statistical analysis of the vote totals found that some 8.4% of tally sheets had vote totals that were irregular (that is, with irregularities that could be expected to occur by chance less than one in a hundred times). Another 5.4% of tally sheets had obvious clerical errors – for example, total votes cast exceeding the number of registered voters at a voting booth. We did not include these errors among the irregular vote totals, because they did not necessarily affect the outcome. But the high percentage of clerical errors on the tally sheets further undermines confidence in the overall results.

Our analysis confirmed what many observers saw on the ground, including ballot box stuffing, fraud and people unable to vote because they did not appear in the registry. People in the areas hardest hit by the earthquake had much lower participation rates.

This election was the first round of an election that was supposed to proceed to a runoff election, which has now been postponed until February. The top three finishers were Manigat, Martelly and the government's candidate, Jude Celestin. But since second and third place were separated by just 0.6 percentage points, there is no way – given the massive irregularities – to tell which two candidates would proceed to the second round.

Clearly, an election that was so severely flawed and plagued by irregularities cannot be considered legitimate. But even less excusable is the exclusion of the country's most popular political party – the equivalent of banning the Democrats or Republicans in the United States. This "exclusion will undermine both Haitians' right to vote and the resulting government's ability to govern," wrote 45 Democratic members of Congress to US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on 7 October 2010. They asked her not to provide "funding for elections that do not meet these minimum, basic democratic requirements." These

pleas were ignored.

Haiti's first and last democratically elected president, Jean Bertrand Aristide, was overthrown (for the second time) in a coup that Washington helped to bring about in 2004. According to his account he was kidnapped and put on a US plane to Africa, where he remains in exile, in violation of the Haitian constitution and international law.

Three weeks ago, Ricardo Seitenfus, the OAS's special representative to Haiti, was removed from his post for publicly criticizing the role of the UN mission and the international community in Haiti. Last week he revealed something even more damning:

"At the meeting of Core Group (donor countries, UN and OAS), something that seemed just creepy [was discussed]. Some representatives suggested that President Rene Preval should leave the country and we should think of an airplane for that. I heard it and was appalled."

Washington and its allies, including the people who are currently making decisions about Haiti at the OAS, are pushing these illegitimate elections for the same reason that they overthrew Aristide and will not let him back into his own country – in violation of the Haitian constitution and international law. These people want to determine who rules Haiti, without allowing the majority of Haitians themselves to decide. There will be resistance to this, as to the dictatorships and foreign occupations of the past. We can only hope that it does not result in similar levels of violence.

Source: *The Guardian Unlimited (UK)*, Jan. 10, 2011

Urgent Action

Sign petition: Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti, to the State Department demanding the US support new elections: www.ijdh.org

NICARAGUA: Sandinista Government Achievements

By *George Friemoth, Task Force on the Americas*

Ed. Note *The current Sandinista government, while somewhat controversial has achieved much since Daniel Ortega was sworn in as president. He is running for a second term in 2011.*

The government of Daniel Ortega has slashed the illiteracy rate by 85 percent, from when it assumed office in January 2007. On June 22, 2009, the United Nations officially declared Nicaragua to be free of illiteracy, making it only the fourth country in Latin America to achieve this distinction.

The Ortega government rescinded the education fees imposed by previous right-wing governments and, as with the first Sandinista government in the 1980s, has made free education a right for all Nicaraguans. The government also guarantees students at least one free meal a day and, during 2010, provided free daily meals to one millions students. Nearly 4,000 new teachers were hired, over 900 schools expanded or renovated and 700 high schools have libraries for the first time. New Community Centers for Child Development provide, for the first time, tens of thousands of children under six years of age with pre-schooling and one free meal a day.

As with education, the Ortega government has de-privatized health care and is committed to providing free, quality, universal health care for all Nicaraguans. It is particularly committed to providing quality health care to those who have the least access to care, the poor peasantry in the countryside. To this end, teams of Sandinista doctors have formed medical brigades that have gone throughout the rural areas of Nicaragua performing thousands of surgeries and tens of thousands of lab tests and medical consultations. Consultations increased by 68 percent during the three years of the Ortega government. The maternal mortality rate was reduced by 24 %. Many diseases that have plagued Nicaraguans declined; most strikingly, malaria declined by 75 %. In celebrating the 31st anniversary of the Sandinista Revolution, President Ortega inaugurated 15 public health facilities that were remodeled or newly built and furnished with modern equipment and technologies.

Zero Hunger, the flagship poverty reduction program of the Sandinista government,

met its goals at the end of 2010, according to Program Director Herminio Escoto. He said the program was highly successful. Since 2007 Zero Hunger has benefitted 70,000 families who before had nothing; now they have chickens, pigs, cow and much better diets. The families in the program were able to improve their income by forming associations and selling meat, eggs and produce. The government buys their beans and rice at good prices to sell in subsidized markets for the poor. The program includes technical and financial training as well. The program benefits are granted to the women in the households, because they form the majority heads of households in Nicaragua. Through the program, poor families have become self-sufficient. The women beneficiaries have even created a fund which now holds US\$2.1 million. With these funds some have purchased inputs for their farms; others have invested in more cattle, pigs or chickens and are setting up small businesses. Still others, for the first time in their lives, have savings in the bank. "The life of people has changed. Life has gotten better...and they've recovered their self esteem," said program director Escoto.

Through the Houses for the People program, 5,600 new homes were built for poor Nicaraguans, benefitting 28,000 people; another 5,800 existing homes were remodeled and/or expanded to benefit 15,000 people. Under a roof program, 64,000 families, averaging six members each, received 10 galvanized roofing sheets per family. The goal is to allow the poorest of the poor to replace plastic tarp roofing with galvanized sheets, bringing an immediate improvement to their lives.

Sewage treatment and electricity were provided to 105 municipalities, benefitting 340,000 people. Access to safe, potable water was made available for the first time to 217,000 people. Nationally, electricity generation was increased by 50 percent, thus significantly reducing the number of periodic blackouts that had damaged the national economy and caused significant difficulties for ten of thousands of Nicaraguan home dwellers and small businesses.

In the domain of Indigenous rights, the Ortega government made substantial progress in securing titles for indigenous peoples to their lands in the Atlantic Coast Autonomous Region in accord with the Autonomy law

passed by the first Sandinista government. Thus it reversed the policies of the 1990-2007 administrations which actively encouraged Spanish-speaking settlers and ranchers to move into these indigenous lands.

On the international front, Daniel Ortega reacted immediately and decisively with enlightened solidarity to the criminal coup d'etat in Honduras. Under his government, Nicaragua was in the forefront of opposing the coup serving, in effect, as a base for international opposition to the coup and providing safe haven for Honduran President Manuel Zelaya.

On the economic front, the Nicaraguan economy is expected to close 2010 with growth of between four and 4.5 percent, according to Central Bank President Antenor Rosales, who said, "Nicaragua is one of the Central American countries whose economy has grown the most this year." He attributed the increase in the growth to the country's exports which had gone up by 27.7% compared with 2009. The principal exports are coffee, beef, sugar and gold. On August 16, the minimum wage rose six percent, bringing the minimum monthly wage to US \$132.80.

Nicaragua, along with Argentina and Bolivia, are the countries that have shown the greatest reduction in inequality in the past decade according to the UN's Economic Commission on Latin America and the Caribbean. Other countries that have shown improvement are Venezuela and Brazil.

Polls show substantial support for the government's social policies and President Ortega's reelection in November 2011. The poll released on December 14th by M & R Consultores showed support for the Ortega government above 50 percent in areas of importance to the population, including health and education. Almost 58% of those polled said they observed better quality and access to public education while 53% said they saw improved health services in hospitals and health centers. Regarding the reelection of Ortega in November, 47.2 % said they would vote for him; 31% said they didn't know or they did not want to say now. The two opposition presidential candidates polled 14.4 % and 7.4% respectively.

Sources: *Nicaragua Network News, 2010, www.NicaNet.org; Robert Siegel, AFGJ, March 11, 2010*

US: Wrong on Honduras

By Dana Frank, professor of History at UC Santa Cruz and author of *"Bananas: Women Transforming the Banana Unions of Latin America"*

As we awake to the nightmare of the new Republican-controlled House of Representatives, Congressional liberals face an immediate test on the Latin American front. Two fanatically right-wing Congress members from South Florida, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and Connie Mack, now control the Foreign Affairs Committee and the subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere respectively, and Honduras is at the top of their agenda. They are already aggressively challenging the Obama administration on what they regard as its softness toward Honduras's deposed president, Manuel Zelaya, the democratically elected leader who was ousted in a June 28, 2009, military coup. They are also attacking the administration's initial reluctance to give the coup regime its unqualified support.

Ros-Lehtinen and Mack are well aware that Honduras matters immensely as a vulnerable testing ground for expanded US domination of the hemisphere. That's why the presidents of almost every country in Latin America closed ranks immediately to condemn the coup, aware that they could easily

be the next domino to fall; and why Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Venezuela and many other countries continue to oppose Honduras's readmission to the Organization of American States (OAS).

As we brace ourselves for the Florida Congress members' attacks on Obama, it's important to be clear how dangerous Obama's policies on Honduras have been. Thanks to a WikiLeaks cable, we know that Hugo Llorens, US ambassador to Honduras, informed the State Department in July 2009 that "there is no doubt that the military, Supreme Court and National Congress conspired on June 28 in what constituted an illegal and unconstitutional coup." Yet Secretary of State Hillary Clinton avoided using the phrase "military coup," chastised Zelaya when he tried to return to his own country and eschewed a full condemnation of post-coup de facto President Roberto Micheletti, treating him as Zelaya's equal during negotiations.

Llorens's leaked cable further calls into question the Obama administration's eager embrace of current President Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo in a bogus November 2009 election, which was managed by the coup perpetrators and boycotted by most of the opposition and international observers. Since

the coup, the United States has constructed two new military bases in Honduras (in Gracias a Dios and on the island of Guanaja), ramped up police training and, most recently, on December 27, announced that drones will be operating out of the joint US/Honduras air force base at Palmerola.

Meanwhile, the coup government continues its vicious repression of the opposition. On September 15, Honduran Independence Day, police and the military invaded an opposition radio station, tear-gassed it and then tear-gassed and clubbed peaceful demonstrators. On November 15, paramilitaries allegedly working for Miguel Facussé, a wealthy oligarch and key backer of the coup, assassinated five more *campesino* activists in the Aguán Valley, which remains under military occupation. On January 8, Juan Ramón Chinchilla, a journalist and prominent representative from the Aguán Valley to the national resistance front, was kidnapped and tortured by paramilitary forces. He escaped after two days, but not José Luis Sanabria, a teacher active in the resistance, who was kidnapped on December 30 in Florida, Copán, and found dead two days later. All this continues with near impunity. As Eduardo David Ardón wrote recently in the Honduran daily *El Tiempo*, "State terrorism has a green light to exercise every kind of violence and commit crimes of every sort across the spectrum, without being judged or investigated."

The State Department, though, desperately wants to legitimize Lobo's government internationally, especially through its readmission to the OAS. It very much wants to revive the corrupt two-party system in Honduras so that the country can simulate a democratic electoral process. The giant elephant in the room, though, is Zelaya, the deposed president still in exile in the Dominican Republic and still the grand symbol of resistance to the coup, uniting the broad movement for social justice that has risen up since. The Honduran right wants his hide, in jail; the United States wants him back in Honduras, freed of the trumped-up charges against him. Lobo is afraid, however—quite rightly—that Zelaya's cult of personality is so immense that the minute he steps into the country, Lobo's ability to govern, already marginal, will evaporate.

Now Representatives Ros-Lehtinen and Mack are riding in to raise the stakes, with

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Security forces occupy the community of Guadalupe Carney in the Aguan valley.
Photo: Dana Frank

Honduras, continued from page 9

Honduras at the top of their long ultra-right to-do list in Latin America, rolling back the wave of left and left-center governments that came to power democratically in the past fifteen years. (Ros-Lehtinen has openly called for Fidel Castro's assassination.) Both visited Honduras after the coup to demonstrate their support for the Micheletti dictatorship. On January 5, in one of her first acts as chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Ros-Lehtinen wrote Arturo Valenzuela, assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs, and said that she was "gravely concerned" about reports that the United States was pressuring the government of Honduras to drop charges against Zelaya, and demanded that US officials cease interfering in Honduran judicial processes.

Mack, meanwhile, has indicated that he wants to hold new hearings on Honduras. He too wants to push the dialogue back to cast Zelaya as the criminal. "What happened in Honduras was not a coup," he insists. "To this day we're still punishing Honduras for doing what we would hope all countries in Latin America would do." In response to the leaked cable from Llorens stating that it definitely was a coup,

Mack has called for the ambassador's resignation and promised to investigate him.

The shady figure behind much of the pro-coup spin in Washington is lobbyist Lanny Davis, Hillary Clinton's longtime confidant. Davis was recently forced to resign from representing Laurent Gbagbo, the vicious strongman currently terrorizing the Ivory Coast—fueling "growing criticism that Mr.

criticisms of the regime.

Congressional liberals, then, face an immediate and daunting challenge regarding Honduras. They are under tremendous pressure to close ranks behind Obama against the resurgent GOP on this and many other fronts. Will they help the White House pacify Ros-Lehtinen and Mack by softening their line on Lobo? Or will they assert themselves and call for an end to US support for his repressive regime? On October 19, twenty-nine Congress members joined Representative Sam Farr in signing a letter to Clinton demanding that the United States stop all aid to Honduras and stop pressuring the OAS to readmit the country. Will their numbers continue to grow, and will any Democratic senators speak out on ongoing human rights abuses in Honduras?

On the ground the resistance is alive and well despite terrifying and relentless repression. But in order for the Honduran people to rebuild their country from below, with their own broad vision of social justice, they desperately need progressives in the United States to back them

and to take on repressive policies in Latin America—whether they're Obama's version or the even scarier agenda of the right.

Source: www.thenation.com/article/157725/, Jan. 11, 2011

World Bank Funds Corporations Responsible for Massacre

On November 5, 2010 the World Bank (WB) loaned Dinant Corporation a \$30 million for biofuel production (from African palm oil) in Honduras. Dinant Corporation is owned by Miguel Facusse, an agro-businessman probably the largest land owner and richest man in the country. Facusse was widely implicated as a key supporter of the June 2009 military coup.

Ten days later, on November 15, private security forces employed by Dinant Corp. massacred five Honduran campesinos when Dinant attempted to illegally evict them from land in the campesinos possession and for which they held provisional title.

The biofuel industry in Honduras has demonstrated a pattern of illegal land grabs and violence that has resulted in the killing of at least 19 farmers since the June 2009 coup.

The WB decision to release funds to Dinant sends a message to the company that the WB will even tolerate murder to further the interests of biofuel agro-business.

Source: *Annie Bird, Rights Action, Nov. 19, 2010*

Davis has become a kind of front man for the dark side," as the *New York Times* put it nicely. Quickly after the Honduran coup, Davis went to work for an elite group of its backers, selling the coup in the United States. Now he has signed a contract with Lobo promising a "rapid response" to US media

N E W S B R I E F S

COSTA RICA: US Ship Deployment

On December 20, Costa Rican legislation approved a deployment of 46 US Coast Guard ships, 42 armed helicopters, and up to 4,000 sailors to combat drug trafficking. The decision came at a moment when the country's relationship with neighboring Nicaragua remains tense over a heated border dispute regarding Nicaragua's dredging of the San Juan River which borders Costa Rica.

Last July, Costa Rica agreed to the deployment for counter-drug operations of 7,000 US Marines and 46 warships, some of them assault ships armed with Sparrow missiles. Some Costa Ricans were upset. "I love my country without soldiers," read a popular

statement. Only two of the announced ships actually deployed one of them for "humanitarian missions." The other, USS Rodney Davis, conducted counter-drug operations in August.

The US Navy's Fourth Fleet again plans to deploy ships to Costa Rica for the first six months of 2011. However, this time there are no Navy ships on the list (and no US Marines), only US Coast Guard vessels. The fact that Navy warships were excluded from the agreement represents a victory for the efforts opposing the deployment of warships to Costa Rica, a neutral country with no army.

It is possible that the Navy did not anticipate opposition to the arrival of the ships? "We are not sure why there is this uproar," said US Ambassador Anne Slaughter. Or they

could be testing reactions, in order to get the public used to the idea that the US can send troops wherever it wants.

Source: *John Lindsay-Poland, Jan 12, 2011, www.cipamericas.org/archives/385;*

MEXICO: Oaxaca Voters Hope for Change

"A dark chapter has come to a close in the history of Oaxaca. A chapter that must never again be repeated," said Congressman Flavio Sosa, the leader of the Popular Assembly of the People (APPO), a social movement that brought this southern Mexican state to its knees for several months in 2006 and was bru-

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Mexico News Brief, continued from page 8

tally repressed. On December 1 a new state governor was sworn in: Gabino Cué, who headed an opposition alliance that put an end to 80 years of rule by the PRI in Oaxaca. The opposition parties in the alliance won 28 of the 42 seats in the state Congress, one of which went to Sosa who was imprisoned eight months in a federal prison and eight months in a state prison after the 2006 protests.

The APPO movement has around 300 social organizations, including the teachers union that mounted a six month uprising against the notorious corrupt government of outgoing governor Ulises Ruiz. More than 20 demonstrators and journalists were killed in the crackdown on protests, including US citizen Brad Will.

Investigations of these murders and 1,300 politically motivated detentions will mark the direction the new Cué government plans to take. Another big question hanging over the incoming government is what will it do with respect to the conflict in the Triqui region, where the autonomous municipality of San Juan Copala remains under siege since January by paramilitary groups, under the complacent gaze of state and federal authorities. On October 16 two prominent leaders of the Triqui indigenous movement were ambushed and killed on their way to their community. And there is a camp of displaced Triqui women in the Zocalo of Oaxaca city.

Source: *Daneila Pastrana, IPS, Dec. 1, 2010*

GUATEMALA: State of Siege Declared

On December 19, President Alvaro Colom of Guatemala declared a State of Siege and suspended civil liberties as Mexican Zetas drug cartel overran the department of Alto Verapaz. Gunmen with assault rifles, grenades and armored vehicles started openly cruising cities such as Coban. Guatemalan security forces detained 21 suspects and seized small planes and 150 weapons, including grenade launchers belonging to one of Mexico's bloodiest narco-organizations—the Zetas.

Under the law, the state of siege allows soldiers to ban guns, and public gatherings, censor local media and search and detain suspects without warrants. President Colom told reporters, "These individuals were not just preparing to confront security forces they

were preparing to take control of the country."

Guatemala community organizers and human rights defenders fear that handing over blanket powers to the very same corrupt forces controlled by organized crime networks, will result in more repression, more violence in communities.

Alta Verapaz has one of the highest levels of agrarian conflict in Guatemala, mostly between indigenous communities and large landholders. Municipalities in Alta Verapaz are also conducting important community consultations, expressing their opposition to hydroelectric dam projects—like Xalala, downstream from the Chixoy dam that was the cause of the Rio Negro massacre. These kinds of projects are planned throughout the department without the consent of affected communities. The State of Siege prohibits assembly, making consultations impossible.

Source: *Annie Bird, RightsAction.org, Jan 5, 2001; Rory Carroll, guardian.co.uk, Jan. 7, 2010*

COLOMBIA: Death Squad Leader Becomes President

Juan Santos, notorious Defense Minister under outgoing president Uribe and closely identified with crimes against humanity was sworn in as president of Colombia on August 7, 2010. Most of the US mainstream media hailed Santos' election, as a great victory for democracy. According to the Financial Times (FT), "Colombia not Venezuela is the best model for Latin America." Citing Santos' "overwhelming" margin of 69% of the vote, the FT claimed he won a strong mandate. The US media accounts exclude the most egregious facts about the elections and the profoundly authoritarian policies pursued by Santos over the past decade.

In fact Santos received 30% of the vote of the electorate, hardly a mandate. The real 'winner' was the "abstentionists" with 56% of the electorate. In shanty towns and rural areas the abstention rate rose to 80%. On Election Day, the regime mobilized over 350,000 military and police officials to oversee the elections, reminding voters of the force behind the "official candidate."

During the previous eight years of Uribe's and Santos' rule, over two million mostly rural poor, were forcibly uprooted and driven from their homes and land and displaced

across borders into neighboring countries, like Venezuela, or the urban slums. The Uribe-Santos administration relied on both military and paramilitary death squads to kill and terrorize entire population centers deemed sympathetic to the armed guerillas. Over 20,000 people were killed, including many poor urban youth who were randomly rounded up, shot and dressed up as guerillas so that the military could claim a resounding victory over the FARC insurgents.

During the period over 2,000 unionists, human rights activists, journalists and congressional people critical of Uribe-Santos were murdered by hit-men. According to almost all international trade unions, Colombia became the most dangerous country in the world for workers' representatives. The fact that the mass-media have so enthusiastically embraced a government with the worst human rights record in the hemisphere does not speak well of the Obama administrations nor the media which would have us believe Colombia now qualifies as role model for Latin America.

Source: *James Petras, www.countercurrents.org, June 27, 2010*

NICARAGUA: Border Crisis with Costa Rica

A border dispute between Nicaragua and Costa Rica has inflamed patriotic fervor in both countries since Nicaragua began dredging the Caribbean mouth of the San Juan River. Silting over the past sixty years has made the river unnavigable and changed the path of its flow. The 152 year old Jerez-Cañas Treaty set the border between the two countries on the southern bank of the river, meaning that Costa Rica's northern border stops at the river's edge giving Nicaragua sovereignty over the river itself. The World Court confirmed the treaty in 2009 rejecting Costa Rica's claims.

Both Nicaragua and Costa Rica have sent troops to the disputed area. Costa Rica has no army but, with a higher defense budget than Nicaragua, can field heavily armed security police forces. The OAS has passed two resolutions calling for demilitarization of the area, but Nicaragua has refused to remove its forces from a wetlands island near the mouth of the river, citing drug trafficking in the area. Costa Rica has taken its claims to the World Court and Ecuador has offered to mediate.

Source: *News from Nicaragua, www.afgj.org, Oct-Dec. 2010*

GET INVOLVED, GET GOING, SEE FOR YOURSELF



Days of Action, Anti-Militarization Conference and Delegations-2011 More complete information: www.mitfamericas.org

*Mexico in March: Chiapas with Chiapas Support Committee, cezmat@igc.org
Oaxaca with Witness for Peace wfpw@witnessforpeace.org*

*Washington DC: April Days of Action, 4/4 to 4/11, SOAWatch, www.Soaw.org
Anti-Militarization Conference, 4/8-4/10, www.lasolidarity.org*

*Costa Rica: June 11-19, Task Force on the Americas & SOAWatch
info: geodale1@earthlink.net*

Nicaragua: June 19-27, Nicaragua Network, nicanet@afgj.org

*Honduras: June 27-July 5, Alliance for Global Justice/Rights Action,
chuck@afgj.org*

Venezuela July 2011, Task Force on the Americas



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