



US Military Surge in Costa Rica

By Jamie Way (Way is the Media and Communications Coordinator for AFGJ)

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In a controversial decision that is likely to fan the flames of regional tensions in Latin America, Costa Rica recently granted the US permission to move 7,000 troops and 46 warships (along with their accompanying planes and helicopters) into Costa Rican waters. Officially, the act is considered to be part of the “Drug War,” which appears to be increasingly more war-like in nature due to such actions and mounting violence in Mexico and Colombia. Costa Rica’s neighbors, however, see the massive military presence as a potential base for regional strikes. The increase is of particular concern, as Costa Rica has a long-standing pacifist tradition.



The combat ship “USS Freedom” conducts counter-trafficking operations in the U.S. 4th Fleet region. (Photo: U.S. Navy)

Due to the long history of US intervention in Latin America (perhaps most notably in neighboring Nicaragua), the region is clearly justified in its concern over the disproportionate and virtual invasion of troops into an area that could potentially provide such a logistical and geographic striking point. Internally, many Costa Ricans are

questioning the military presence and its impact on the nation’s sovereignty. One party, the United Social Christian Party, has even brought forth a claim questioning the constitutionality of such an act. The Citizen Action Party, the United Social Christian Party and its former presidential candidate, Luis Fishman, have been amongst the most vocal opponents of the US military presence. Fishman has compared the permission granted to handing the US a carte blanche, and has denounced the act as having negative repercussions for the nation’s sovereignty.

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Six Months After the Quake

By James Jordan (Jordan is a National Co-Coordinator for AFGJ)

Even before the earthquake that hit Haiti this year in January, there was much talk of Haiti being a “failed state”. But our experience is that the Haitians have shown themselves quite capable of self-government, from the beginning, in 1804, when they threw out the French slave-owners and colonialists, to the 1990s and first years of the 21st century when, despite constant interference and interruptions by outsiders, the Haitian people elected a popular government that achieved several notable accomplishments. These included the establishment of a medical school, inroads in health care and the construction of more schools than had been built in Haiti’s previous 200 years. Even under the despotic rule of the Duvaliers, Haiti was completely self-sufficient in rice production and as of 1987, was still producing 75% of its rice.

In 2004, Haiti’s elected government was overthrown in a US, French and Canadian sponsored coup. This coup was largely the responsibility of the International Republican Institute (IRI), chaired by Sen. John McCain (AZ). The IRI trained, funded and created the “Democratic Convergence” organization that derailed democracy in Haiti. This was followed by a UN military occupation which has carried out a number of abuses, atrocities and massacres. While the earthquake was itself devastating, years of interference had stunted Haiti’s growth and infrastructure development. This, and the abject poverty suffered by the Haitian people, have been, by far, its biggest killers.

The Alliance for Global Justice was shocked to see the US response to the Jan. 12, 2010 earthquake - going in first with a huge military force. Contrary to reports in corporate media, following the earthquake, the streets of Port Au Prince and Jacmel were not scenes of rampant crime, but, rather, of an explosion

of people helping people. Over and over we heard from our on-the-ground contacts how this school, that house, this soccer field, that church had been turned, within hours, into make-shift hospitals and aid stations. Such stories from the streets abounded. Into this massive outpouring of mutual aid, the US marines undertook a new occupation and, in doing so, began arresting children looking for food in the streets, turning away fully equipped airplanes sent by Doctors without Borders and flying helicopters over the heads of Haitians, using loudspeakers to tell crowds that they should not come to the US as refugees.

“Today the general situation regarding aid to Haiti is simply shameful. The failure rate of nations to meet their pledges to Haiti is a disgrace -- only Brazil has met its pledge and Venezuela has given greatly and continues to provide substantial aid. ”

Today the general situation regarding aid to Haiti is simply shameful. The failure rate of nations to meet their pledges to Haiti is a disgrace -- only Brazil has met its pledge and Venezuela has given greatly and continues to provide substantial aid. While it has not yet met its pledge, this must be put into context, as Venezuela has pledged \$2.4 billion, twice the \$1.2 billion pledged by the US government. Venezuela was also the first country to respond with aid to Haiti after the earthquake and it was the first country to forgive Haiti’s debt.

Furthermore, what aid is being given and plans for development are mostly designed not toward reinforcing Haiti’s self-governance and autonomy, but toward creating long-lasting dependence. Really, what is being offered is mostly charity, but little development. Haiti has already been flooded with foreign rice, while its own agricultural development is virtually nonfunctional. Adding insult to injury, Monsanto has offered Haitian farmers genetically modified seeds that do not produce viable next-generations, instead forcing farmers to buy seed each year from Monsanto instead of saving a portion of seed for the next planting.

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Organizers' Conference

By Chuck Kaufman (Kaufman is a National Co-Coordinator for AFGJ)

A one-day organizers conference to develop campaigns and strategies to confront US militarism and militarization of US relations with Latin America is scheduled for Nov. 18 in Columbus, GA. The conference will be held at the Howard Johnson the day prior to this year's annual SOA Watch vigil at the gates of Ft. Benning. It has been called by the Latin America Solidarity Coalition (LASC). The Alliance for Global Justice (AFGJ) sits on the LASC's coordinating committee.

AFGJ National Co-Coordinator James Jordan encouraged people to attend. "This is an important strategy conference building on the well-attended LASC Peoples Movement Assembly at the US Social Forum in Detroit, and building toward the LASC conference on April 8-10, 2011," he said. "Growing US militarism affects every phase of progressive organizing from Latin America solidarity to trade and environmental issues, to US immigration and border issues to prison and drug policy issues. Every local organizer should participate in the Nov. 18 conference if they want to maximize their own organizing." Online registration for the conference can be made at <http://salsa.democracyinaction.org/o/727/t/5959/signUp.jsp?key=4993>.

AFGJ Media and Communications Coordinator Jamie Way (see article on page 4) said, "The Peoples Movement Assembly at the US Social Forum in Detroit was a good step towards identifying problems. On Nov. 18 we'll be concentrating on solutions – campaigns, strategies, and a plan for working with other movements."

The SOA Watch vigil, from Nov. 19-21, includes dozens of workshops, tabling,

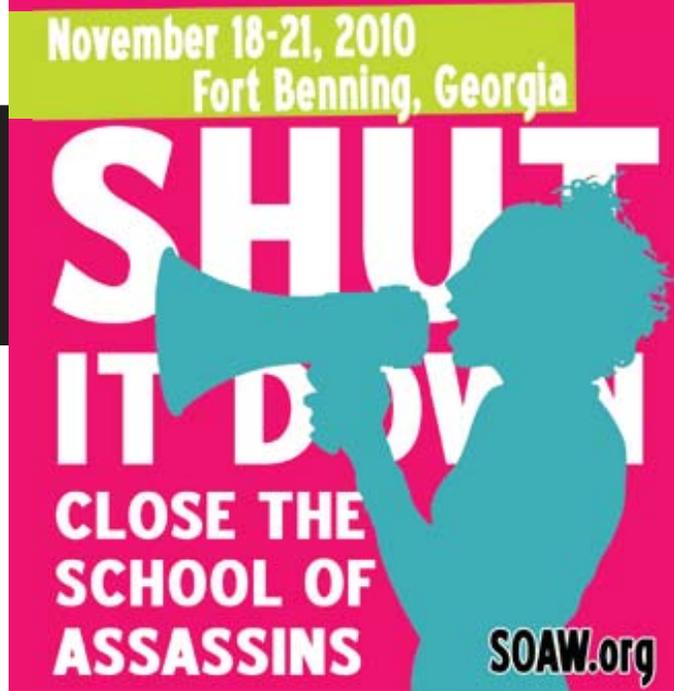
plenaries, speeches and music from the main stage at the gates of Ft. Benning, direct action, and Sunday's

moving procession while the names of victims of School of the Americas (now Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation) are sung out. It is the largest annual gathering of Latin American solidarity activists and a rewarding and important event in its own right. For more information visit www.soaw.org.

High hopes that the Obama Administration would improve relations with Latin America and end the Bush regime's military aggression in the Middle East have crashed on the reality that Obama has continued Bush policies and actually accelerated militarization of US relations with Latin America. Several speakers at last year's SOA Watch vigil noted that for Latin America, Obama's policies are actually more dangerous than were those of his predecessor.

The recent agreement of the Costa Rican government to allow 46 US warships and 7,000 US soldiers on Costa Rican soil, on top of the agreement by Colombia to allow the US military to use seven bases in that country, are a warning bell for solidarity activists. When added to the dramatic increase in violence in Mexico following US military and police funding through the Merida Initiative and the US tacit support for the coup in Honduras and the continuing repression there, it is critical that the Latin America solidarity movement develop a coordinated response to growing US militarism. US government hostility toward Left governments in Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Nicaragua also remain unchanged under the Obama administration.

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**From Top Left
Clockwise:** AFGJ's James Jordan and Chuck Kaufman work in a small group on the corporate profit connection with militarism. AFGJ Board Member Tom Baker explains his perspective during the PMA. AFGJ Intern Duke Feldmeier (left) listens during the discussion on militarism and the US-Mexican border.



Building a Movement Against US Militarism

By Jamie Way (Way is the Media and Communications Coordinator for AFGJ)

From June 22 to June 26, all sectors of the progressive movement converged in Detroit, MI for the US Social Forum (USSF). Emulating a tradition started in Brazil as the World Social Forum about ten years ago, this second USSF created the opportunity for progressive thinkers, organizations and activists from around the country to meet and discuss common struggles and strategies in hopes of increasing collaboration and solidarity, particularly focused on challenges related to the US.

With the goal of “creating space for social movement convergence and strategic discussion” amongst various groups, the USSF hosted the four day event complete with marches, workshops, tabling, art and movies. In order to better define the movement’s hopes for the future, the forum functions as more than just a conference, and is instead a place for people to meet and build relationships as they push for real social change. In addition, the location of this forum allowed progressive voices from across the country to see Detroit’s challenges and triumphs first hand.

Amongst the approximately 15,000 people in attendance, the Alliance for Global Justice was happy to send three staff members, an intern and three board members to the event. Besides making a number of important connections with other individuals and organizations working on similar topics, we were able to host a People’s Movement Assembly workshop with

the Latin America Solidarity Coalition. The large workshop focused on the increasingly important topic of combating US militarism and the militarization of US relations with Latin America. Speakers presented on a number of topics, ranging from the justifications for militarism (including terrorism and narcotics) to how this attitude had manifested itself thus far in the region and should be seen as a deeper cultural issue.

In order to generate the beginning point for building opposition to militarism, small groups met in a breakout session during the larger meeting. These small working groups focused on a number of more specific issues, and generated some excellent focal points for future strategy discussions.

The small group that met on the topic of counteracting US military expansion in Latin America argued that one of the most effective tools for combating militarism would be to follow the money trail.

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Day of Action Against US Militarism

The Alliance for Global Justice is a member of the LASC Coordinating Committee, which is calling this national day of action. We encourage all organizers to form local coalitions to participate in this important event. Please sign up to do so at www.lasolidarity.org

Latin America Solidarity Coalition member organizations urge you to join us in a National Day of Action to Confront US Militarism in the Americas on Monday, October 11, 2010. October 11 is the day the United States “celebrates” the beginning of the European invasion of the Americas and when indigenous peoples mark as the 518th year of resistance to invasion and colonialism.

We represent Latin America solidarity and peace groups. We are initiating and urge others to undertake the formation of local and regional coalitions – across movements for indigenous rights, immigrant justice, fair trade, peace, human rights, labor rights, gender justice, drug policy reform and other urgent goals – to confront the growing militarism of our culture and budget, the increasing propensity to commit national resources to wars of aggression, and the militarization of U.S. foreign policy, especially in Latin America.

We are calling on local coalitions to organize creative, strong actions consistent with these themes and issues of concern in your area. In border regions, actions might focus on militarization of the border and immigration policy. In urban areas, actions might focus on the militarization of law enforcement and prisons. In areas with major military contractors, actions might focus on war for profit, and in areas where there are military bases that act as staging areas for troop deployment to other countries, actions could focus on de-funding war and bringing the troops home now.

There is no city, town, or hamlet in the United States that does not have some connection to the war machine. We urge and support the organizing of myriad creative, coordinated actions on October 11 to draw attention to that fact... **Story Continued on Page 7 “Oct. 11”**

Goals for the Oct. 11 Day of Action

To support:

1. Cancellation of the threatening and unnecessary U.S. military exercises in Costa Rica
2. Closing the School of the Americas (now Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation)
3. Ending the U.S. military presence on bases in Colombia, Honduras, Guantanamo, and elsewhere in hemisphere
4. Ending the Merida Initiative and the increased militarization of the US border with Mexico
5. The proposal by Rep. Barney Frank to start reducing the social debt by cutting the US military budget immediately by 25%



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The US has responded by disregarding opposition. According to a Tico Times article, US Ambassador Anne Andrew responded by saying, “We are not sure why there is this uproar,” and furthermore stated that the request was the same as the one that had been submitted each year for the last decade under a bilateral agreement. Past agreements, opposition argues, however, appear to have only granted US vessels permission to enter the area in pursuit of suspects and do not seem to have mentioned troop or warship presence. Furthermore, the opposition argues that the massive military presence of 7,000 troops and 46 warships is a disproportionate and inappropriate measure for fighting narcotics trafficking and money laundering.

Regardless of how this act varies from past US actions, it is clear that within the present context, the military surge is more disconcerting. This action comes amidst increasing disappointment with the Obama administration and its failure to create mutual respect between the US and Latin America as many had hoped. In fact, to the contrary, through the shuffling and increase of military presence in the region, not only has the region’s relationship with the US remained strained, but additionally regional tensions have flared. Due to newly granted US access to seven bases in Colombia (said to replace the loss of a base in Ecuador), internal regional relations have been further challenged, as unease grows between Colombia and many of the countries in the region led by left leaning leaders, who see the US military presence in the region as a direct threat to their democratic rule. In fact, the Colombian-US agreement even drew heavy criticism from President Lula of Brazil, who is widely regarded as one of the region’s most reasonable actors.

From its Southern border to South America, the US has increased its military presence. Most recently, the Obama administration sent 1,200 troops to the US-Mexico border, further militarizing this already violent area. This regional increase in military presence is also accompanied by an increase in military and police aid. According to a report by the Center for International Policy, the Latin America Working Group Education Fund, and the Washington Office on Latin America, during most of the 2000s, military and police aid accounted for less than 40 percent of all aid that the US sent to Latin America. However this year, before aid to Haiti is added to the equation, military and police aid will total approximately 47 percent of all US aid to the region. Perhaps most telling, after 58 years of

inactivity, in 2008 the US government reactivated the 4th Fleet, the navy fleet in charge of the waters in the Southern Command.

Amidst a growing climate of US militarism and the militarization of its relations with Latin America, the region is justified in its apprehension over impending threats to its sovereignty. While the media speculates about war against Iran, US solidarity activists are concerned over the near to total media blackout of news about the escalation of US militarism in our own hemisphere. Whether all of this is a mere shifting of the pawns or an increase, this massive military presence in the region (paired with the US’s regional track record) necessitates careful vigilance if we are to address US military expansionism.

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Job development has been aimed at low paying, sweatshop jobs that assemble clothing and parts from materials shipped in from other countries into finished products shipped out for foreign consumption without paying Haiti any taxes. But even these low paying jobs programs have not been pursued with much vigor.

Countries would do well to consider the examples of Venezuela and Cuba. When I visited Haiti, leaving just five days before the earthquake, the example of Cuba and Venezuela was a stark contrast to the many charities that offered some services, but no major infrastructure development. And it was certainly a contrast to the foreign military troops who were occupying the city. We saw a power plant built by both Cuba and Venezuela, and Venezuela has built several new power plants throughout the country and was in the process of refurbishing the airport in Cap Haitien. In Port Au Prince, we visited a huge market built by Venezuela for local merchants to sell their wares and produce. Cuba and Venezuela are not only providing mobile hospitals and medical care for Haitians -- they are training a new generation of Haitian doctors. This is quite a juxtaposition to the US/France/Canada sponsored coup in ‘04, which shut down Haiti’s only medical school.

Since this foreign-imposed coup, Haiti’s largest and most popular political party, Lavalas, has not been allowed to participate in elections. This is indicative of how a “failed state” is achieved in Haiti -- by foreign intervention, military occupation, charity and the kind of job development that undermines self-sufficiency and sustainability, and the outlawing of real, functional democracy. For those of us who are in solidarity with

the Haitian people, the best thing we can do is to demand an end to the occupations, aid that supports Haitian autonomy, and the inclusion of Lavalas in an open political process, free from foreign manipulation. Most of all, we must call on our government to allow the return of former Haitian President Aristide to Haiti.

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The bloated Pentagon budget, in a time when massive cuts in social programs are being contemplated, begs for the creation of a cross-movement mobilization to combat the culture of militarism in the United States and to demand budget cuts that reign in its aggressive war-making ability, while freeing up money to address unemployment and the health, housing and education needs of US residents. Making alliances with the immigrant rights movement and movements working on prison and police reform, as well as faith-based, labor, anti-war and other movements are also necessary steps to turning US residents away from the racist and jingoistic movements represented by the tea baggers and right-wing talk radio radicals backed by corporate funding.

The November 18 organizers conference in Columbus, GA and the April 8-10 LASC conference in Washington, DC will be important milestones in movement building and important to progressive activists of every stripe. For more information visit www.lasolidarity.org.

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and to imperative to redirect resources to meet domestic needs left wanting due to our nation’s expenditures on war.

For organizing materials you can adapt for your local needs go to www.lasolidarity.org. To have your local organizing materials posted so that others can adapt them, send them to info@lasolidarity.org.

Background

The United States spends as much on its war-making capabilities as the rest of the world combined. It has nearly 1,000 military facilities on foreign soil. It is engaged in wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and supporting armed conflict in Pakistan, Somalia, Philippines, Mexico, Colombia, Palestine, and other countries. And it is threatening war against Iran.

The Obama administration has accelerated the militarization of US relations with Latin America,

virtually erasing the goodwill with which Latin Americans welcomed the change of government in Washington. In June the United States signed an agreement with the government of Costa Rica – a pacifist nation that outlawed its army in 1948 – allowing unrestricted access for 7,000 Marines from 46 ships, armed with missiles, 200 helicopters, and other assault weapons; numbers totally disproportionate and inappropriate for official claims that it is to fight the drug war. This mobilization follows a basing agreement with Colombia for the use of seven bases; the recognition of a coup government and construction of a new naval base in Honduras; continued expansion of the U.S. military base in Curacao just over the horizon from Venezuela’s oil fields; and the military response to Haiti’s devastating earthquake in January 2010.

Local coalitions are invited include their own goals for planned actions. Add your organization to the list of co-sponsors at http://salsa.democracyinaction.org/o/727/p/dia/action/public/?action_KEY=4426 through the Latin America Solidarity Coalition website at www.lasolidarity.org

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The group was quick to caution, that some “aid” or non-profit groups can hinder more than they help. They also emphasized the importance of local resolutions that divert funds from military efforts and toward other social programs. They suggested that perhaps one of the biggest weaknesses of the movement was our inability to organize nationally around pressure points. There was some debate about the importance of public opinion and how it could be mobilized. Generally, the group felt that it needed to better utilize existing public opinion, as it is largely already in agreement with anti-militarism. The group suggested that we stop seeing the media as an institution to be courted, and instead view it as a target for our protests and education campaigns.

Another small group focused their time on issues of militarizing the US-Mexico border, and how immigration has been a factor. The group also argued that challenging local legislation was central to the larger movement of challenging the prevalent mentality of militarization. They did, however, also say that organization and coalition work on a national level was vital as well. The group suggested that sending fact-finding delegations to the border might have a positive impact on motivating action and raising awareness.

The small group on US militarism and the

budget focused their efforts on discussing strategies for reaching out to other groups (teachers, various unions) to ally with them in pressuring a shift of spending priorities. The group concluded that pushing for increased social spending in exchange for military spending might be an effective campaign strategy. Moreover, they emphasized the need to reveal groups with inconspicuous ties to the military, such as research universities.

The fourth group focused on the connection between corporate profits and militarism. They felt that it would be important for the anti-militarism movement join the challenge to corporate “personhood.” Essentially, the group called for a broad campaign against war profiteering that would be less legislatively focused and primarily stress the importance of grassroots through broad education campaigns, divestment and worker organization. Increased education on how specific corporations profit from the violence of war would make incentives clear. Additionally, the group argued

that defense corporations should be nationalized.

Finally, the fifth group met to focus on deeper cultural changes that could be central to combating militarism. The group called for more imagination and vision. They believe that the movement must creatively embrace the cultures of the South and move away from electoral life cycles to see the bigger picture. They feel that relationships are of vital importance in building an alternative to the status quo.

This productive meeting is the first in a series of steps toward creating a strategy and action plan for opposing US militarism. It will be continued in Columbus, GA on November 18th. This conference on the militarization of Latin America is open to anyone interested in the topic, and coincides with the School of the Americas Watch annual vigil and protest at the gates of Ft. Benning. At this meeting, we hope to build upon the important base for this struggle that we began to construct at the USSF.

News from Nicaragua

May 11 - July 20, 2010

July 19

More than half a million people came out to a Managua plaza on July 19th to celebrate the 31st anniversary of the Sandinista revolution. In his speech, President Daniel Ortega reviewed the achievements of his government for the past three years, saying that levels of illiteracy in urban areas had been lowered to 4% and in rural areas to 8%. He noted that Nicaragua had the smallest decline in economic growth between 2008 and 2009 of any country in Central America and predicted the economy would grow in 2010. He said that 300,000 Nicaraguan farmers and ranchers were actively producing, noting that the production of corn had risen 22.6%, beans 18.5% and rice 17%. He stated that his government had built 400 miles of new highways, and maintained and repaired thousands of miles of roads and streets. Dissident Sandinistas held a celebration in Masaya on July 17.



President Daniel Ortega (Photo: Voiceseducation.org)

Social Programs

In addition to the advances mentioned in President Ortega's July 19th speech, he also inaugurated 15 public health facilities built or remodeled to celebrate the 31st anniversary of the Sandinista Revolution. The government also released a series of statistics-laden reports on the progress of its poverty reduction programs. Zero Usury is the program designed to reactivate credit for small merchants, particularly women, after 17 years of being cut off from credit by the neoliberal governments from 1990-2007. Zero Usury has extended affordable loans to 80,649 women in the three years of the Sandinista government. Primarily it has gone to cooperatives of women operating small food stores and restaurants, dressmaking businesses, beauty salons and to those making tortillas or fruit drinks to sell on the streets and in the plazas.

Some 23% of the population still suffers from malnutrition. This, however, represents a significant decrease from 27% just three years ago. While Nicaragua produces much food, the greatest challenge is access to adequate quantities of highly nutritious foods that provide for a balanced diet, when according to Guillermo Gonzalez, Director of Food Sovereignty and Security (SESSAN) at a forum organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the UN, "2.4 million have serious economic problems in acquiring high quality food. Of these, 800,000 live on a dollar a day, which obviously limits their ability to acquire food."

The National Food Company (ENABAS) has increased the number of distribution centers across the nation to 3,000 (from 2,200) since December and hopes to add more by year's end. The government-owned company is also increasing the number of monthly food packets supplied to workers in the Free Trade Zones from 15,000 to 30,000 over the next year. Additionally, the FAO has extended its Urban Agriculture program to Nicaragua in hopes of increasing food security.

And with the help of the Sandinista government and civil society organizations, a variety of important development projects are taking place throughout Nicaragua. The government has undertaken a project to improve the housing of poor families in Managua in the aftermath of the recent torrential downpours. The Sandinista government, the mayor of Pantasma, and the Fund for Social Emergency Investment (FISE) worked together to bring potable water to the rural community of Pantasma, in the department of Jinotega. The project will benefit the town's 900 inhabitants.

The Ernesto Che Guevara Medical Brigade of Cuba examined patients in the South Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAS) at the Muelle de los Bueyes Hospital. They performed over 437,000 consultations and completed over 3,400 operations at no cost to patients.

Thanks to a US\$12,000 investment by the International Rotary Club, San Benito will now have a health clinic to benefit its 5,000 people plus many others from the surrounding area. Rotary International also announced that soon it will begin construction of a health center in El Higueral. Moreover, six communities in the town of Santa Teresa will have new schools this year. The government is working with Architects Without Borders to rebuild and expand the schools.

The National Technological Institute of Agriculture (INTA) supplied 45,000 small farmers with high quality rice, beans, corn and sorghum seeds. This not only helps to guarantee that these families will harvest food for their own consumption, but also helps to insure Nicaraguan food security. The Sandinista government, through the Institute of Rural Development (IDR) and working alongside a number of other organizations, is undertaking a plan to introduce micro-irrigation systems. The projects will incorporate some 28,000 small family farmers in 34 municipalities in 10 departments.

Throughout Nicaragua, more conservation projects are taking root. The Federation of Secondary School Students, the July 19th Sandinista Youth, the National Forestry Institute (INAFOR) and the Ministry of the Environment (MARENA) officially launched a National Reforestation Campaign on July 1st, with the goal of planting 1.5 million trees. The governmental campaign hopes to enlist the participation of 300,000 young people from around the country.

The construction of the Managua Sewage Treatment Plant and its environmental impact were recognized on a global level. At an event held in Paris, the project was the recipient of the Global Water Award in the category of "Environmental Contribution," one of 12 categories. The award was presented by Queen Noor of Jordan.

For more than 30 years Managua's garbage has been dumped without processing at the enormous La Chureca dump. Thanks to cooperation from Spain, today the landfill is being transformed. Twenty-four hectares of the 41 hectare plot have already been leveled and covered with about 20 inches of earth. Pipes have been installed to vent the methane gas produced by decomposition of the buried garbage. Seventeen hectares of the dump will continue to receive municipal garbage until August 2011 when a processing plant, built by the Spanish company

Tragsa, together with national companies, will process the trash and allow the closing of the landfill.

The Operations Chief for the World Bank Nicaragua, Coleen Littlejohn (who is a former Nicaragua Network in-country coordinator), announced on May 21 that the World Bank will fund US\$40 million in sustainable development projects including roads, potable water, sewers and telecommunications through the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure. She said that the World Bank has committed loans of between US\$50-\$60 million per year and is satisfied with the Nicaraguan government's use of the funds.

After a building occupation by seniors, the government agreed to pay reduced pensions to seniors who have not paid in to the National Social Security Institute (INSS) for the required 14 ½ years (58 quarters). The government agreed that, besides the pensions, wheel chairs, canes and crutches will also be supplied free of charge to those who have reached age 60 and have paid in to the INSS for at least five years (20 quarters). The International Monetary Fund wants Nicaragua to raise the retirement age for social security.

The government announced on May 29 that over 53,000 low-salaried government workers had received their "solidarity payment" of US\$25 by that date, about 45% of the total number scheduled to receive the payment. Communications Coordinator and First Lady Rosario Murillo said that by June all workers will know which bank branches to visit to get their payments. The payments are a supplement to their salaries funded by the Bolivarian Alliance for Our Americas (ALBA) and are outside the national budget.

In early May the IMF had postponed a visit from an IMF mission over concern about several matters, among them the US\$25 solidarity payments. The National Workers Front (FNT) called a march in protest against IMF policies on Tuesday June 1. Gustavo Porras, a Sandinista deputy in the National Assembly and head of the FNT, said "The IMF should not be trying to deny workers the solidarity payment or demanding that retirement age be put at 70."

The Network of Women against Violence reported on June 15 that the number of women murdered in Nicaragua was up this year with 37 women killed so far, compared with 35 last year. Virginia Meneses, coordinator of the Network, called on the government and in particular the Special Police Stations for Women and Children to increase efforts to eradicate the violence. Mercedes Ampie, general commissioner of the National Police in charge of the Special Police Stations, said

that her department is using "mobile police stations" to visit communities and neighborhoods where permanent women's police stations staffed by women officers do not exist. She noted that as the number of stations increases, the number of reports of violence goes up. According to the Global Peace Index, produced by the Institute for Economy and Peace, headquartered in Australia, Nicaragua is the third least violent country in Latin America.

A museum marking the Literacy Crusade of 1980 was inaugurated May 4 by the Carlos Fonseca Amador Popular Education Association (AEPCFA). August will mark the 30th anniversary of the completion of the campaign by the revolutionary Sandinista government to end illiteracy in Nicaragua. During the literacy campaign, 115,000 mostly young people taught 450,000 mostly rural peasants how to read and write.

And finally, in an effort to reduce dependency on petroleum, Nicaragua's Ministry of Energy and Mines (MEM) has set the goal of running entirely on renewable energy by 2016. Today, approximately 30% of Nicaragua's energy comes from renewable sources (including geothermal, wind, hydroelectric, and biomass) while the other 70% comes from oil.

Politics

No progress was made during the period covered here on breaking the deadlock within the political class over electing 25 high level agency heads and the magistrates of the Supreme Court and Supreme Electoral Council. On July 11, the Constitutional Liberal Party chose former President Arnoldo Aleman to head its ticket in next year's presidential campaign. A combined right-wing primary is still set for March 6, 2011 with the goal of unifying around a single candidate if, as expected, Ortega runs for reelection.

The political deadlock appears to be hurting the opposition more than President Ortega. The Nuevo Siglo agency released a poll in the middle of July reporting that, if the election were held today, 45.5% said they would vote for Ortega (who was elected in 2006 with 38%). Coming in second was Eduardo Montealegre with 8.2% and Aleman with 5%. Other candidates fared even worse. 32.3% were undecided. An M&R Consultants poll conducted June 19-28 revealed that 81.1% view the work of the opposition as "negative."

On July 16, Cesar Zamora, vice-president of the American Chambers of Commerce (AMCHAM) of Latin America, said that the opposition to President Daniel Ortega's government "doesn't have a product to sell to society (and) doesn't have a program of what it

would want to do for the country.” He said that business leaders have told the opposition if they don’t offer plans for governing, they will have no other alternative than to tie their wagons to the Sandinista government.

In June Jorge Solorzano, Bishop of Granada criticized religious leaders who meddle in political topics without naming fellow Bishop of Esteli Abelardo Mata who has served as mediator between right-wing political factions in an effort to create a united front against the Sandinistas. Meanwhile, President of the Sandinista Rescue Movement Monica Baltodano, called on voters to cast a null ballot next year if Ortega runs for reelection.

Indigenous/Caribbean Coast

Usually the Caribbean half of Nicaragua is ignored by the Pacific Coast media, but during this period there were a number of important stories. Politically, against expectations, the PLC retained control of the South Atlantic Autonomous Region in May when an FSLN councilman walked out of a meeting allowing the PLC

titles for more than 22,000 square miles of land. When accomplished, this feat will be an historical vindication for these indigenous communities, which have fought for their ancestral lands for so long, according to Estrada.

Titling of indigenous land has caused a backlash from mestizo settlers who have moved into indigenous lands and nature preserves over the last two decades. Five to six hundred peasant farmers blocked the land route to the northern Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua for eleven days in June to demand land titles for mestizo farms. Several indigenous communities have also reported death threats and vandalism by mestizo settlers and one demarcation team was forced out of the area due to threats of violence.

Several illegal settlements in the Bosawas Nature Preserve have also been removed by the government. The mestizo settlers, who were damaging portions of the environmentally sensitive nature preserve, were angry, but the government promised a number of supports to enable them to earn a living without moving back into the preserve.

The perennial dream of building a deep water port at Monkey Point, which is a nightmare for the Rama people living there, possibly came closer to reality when two South Korean firms in July signed a “memorandum of understanding” with the National Port Company for a port project estimated to cost US\$500 million. In June Mexican investors exploring the possibilities of investing in Nicaragua expressed interest in building an environmentally friendly “ecological city” between Managua and Granada and a megaport at Monkey Point as well. Investors from Iran and Russia are also studying the possibility of a port.

Monkey Point is in the heart of land claimed by the Rama people for thousands of years. The Rama are a threatened people with as few as 2,000 remaining. Holding on to their culture and language is an even greater struggle in the

face of land grabs by foreign investors and invasion by mestizo settlers. Walter Ortiz, now 70, has been teaching the Rama language for 21 years on Rama Cay off the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua. Every school day the students receive two hours of instruction in their native tongue from Ortiz who says that students have the most difficulty in the first and second grades but, after that, “It is easy.”



Francisco Campbell (Photo: El Nuevo Diario)

to put together 23 votes to elect the regional governor. And, President Ortega nominated FSLN Costeño Francisco Campbell to be Nicaragua’s ambassador to the United States.

But the most important news was that on June 9, Attorney General Hernan Estrada stated that Nicaragua will complete the titling of indigenous communal land on the Caribbean Coast by the end of this year. Upon completion, the government will have issued communal

Banana Workers

The long quest for justice by banana workers poisoned by the pesticide Nemagon suffered further set-backs



Nicaraguan banana worker who survived the effects of Nemagon.
(Photo: Opticalrealities.org)

during this period when Victoria Cheney, a Federal Court judge in California, on July 15 threw out a US\$2.4 million judgment against Dole Foods in the case *Tellez vs. Dole* that had been won by six Nicaraguans who said they were made sterile by the pesticide Nemagon, while working on Dole banana plantations. The judge said generalized fraud by American and Nicaraguan attorneys had tainted the trial and spoke of a larger conspiracy that included even the Nicaraguan legal system. The ruling overturning the November 2007 decision puts in question not only other Nicaraguan cases but claims against Dole by former banana workers from Costa Rica, Guatemala, Panama and Honduras. Nemagon was banned in the United States in 1979, but was used after that around the world by banana companies.

In April 2009, Judge Cheney had thrown out similar cases (*Mejia vs. Dole* and *Rivera vs. Dole*) when secret witnesses for Dole said that the plaintiffs had never worked on the plantations and that laboratory exams had been falsified. Months later seven of those secret witnesses came forward to say that they had been bribed to testify for Dole against their fellow Nicaraguans. Many of the secret witnesses have since recanted their testimony, including one who made a deathbed

confession. They say that lawyers representing Dole offered them varying amounts of money, passports and US visas, but after their testimony returned them to Nicaragua and refused to pay the bribes. The Sandinista government is providing medical care for the victims in Chinandega and Managua and recently announced that it will build 400 homes for former banana workers on the Managua site where they have been camping under tarps for several years.

US/Foreign Relations

Central American and Caribbean social groups, meeting in Managua on July 18, condemned Costa Rica's recent agreement to allow US military ships and troops entry into that country saying that it was done "behind the backs of the Costa Rican people and is a threat to the nation's sovereignty." The statement came during a meeting of 80 representatives of social movements, unions, and left

organizations meeting in Managua on the occasion of the 31st anniversary of the Sandinista Revolution.

US Ambassador Robert Callahan and Nicaraguan Vice-President Jaime Morales Carazo traded veiled barbs at the US Embassy's Fourth of July party. Callahan said the checks and balances of good government are "the separation of powers, rule of law, free and fair elections, and the rotation of people and parties in power." Morales reminded Callahan that "domestic policies are exclusively the province of Nicaraguans." Callahan went on to praise the US for its "tolerance, ability to reconcile differences, respect for the integrity of institutions, and aversion to cults of personality." Morales, in turn, noted that in the 234 years that the US has been a nation state, it has also shown a propensity for "intervention and expansionism." Morales reminded the audience that Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Central America and the Caribbean Julissa Reynosa had said on a recent visit that the US does not have a candidate (in next year's election) and that "we are in no position to question the internal processes of Nicaragua." Morales expressed confidence that, despite understandable differences, normal relations would continue between the two countries.

On June 30 the United States government apologized “profoundly” for the detention and interrogation of Nicaragua’s ambassador to the United Nations, Mari Rubiales, at the Miami airport on June 26, in violation of the Geneva Convention. The detention and interrogation of Ambassador Rubiales in Miami followed a similar incident at New York’s JFK airport on June 8. Nicaragua protested both violations of diplomatic immunity “vigorously” and demanded an explanation and guarantees that the violation of international law would not be repeated in the future. US State Department official, Julissa Reynoso apologized directly to Rubiales. In addition, the US State Department Office of Central American Affairs transmitted an apology to the Nicaraguan embassy in Washington, DC. Nigaglioni said that the US was taking steps to “insure that Ambassador Rubiales does not suffer similar treatment in the future.”

Although recently the country seems to have shown some restraint, the US continues to attempt to exert influence over the political future of Nicaragua through so-called civil society groups backed by Washington’s funding, Alfredo G. Pierrat, Nicaragua correspondent for the Cuban news agency Prensa Latina wrote in mid-June. While some aspects of US policy toward Nicaragua seem to be changing, there is little proof that the US will halt its traditional pestering of the Sandinista government. Indeed, some changes in policy may simply signify a change in strategy, Pierrat said. Pierrat gave examples of National Endowment for Democracy and US Agency for International Development financial and training support for civil groups that are hostile to the Sandinista government.

During the Organization of American States meeting June 15 in Peru, two members of Nicaraguan “civil society,” including Maria Jose Zamora, president of the NED-funded Hagamos Democracia, called for OAS intervention in Nicaragua under the Inter-American Democratic Charter. Their appeal was rejected by OAS Secretary General Jose Miguel Insulza because there has not been a “rupture in democracy.”

The recent nomination by US President Barack Obama of Mark Feierstein as the new USAID Deputy Assistant for Latin America and the Caribbean set off alarm bells in Nicaragua and throughout the hemisphere. Bolivian President Evo Morales threatened to expel USAID from his country if Feierstein is confirmed. “If USAID continues to work as they are now, I am not going to hesitate to expel them, because we are dignified and sovereign and we won’t allow any interference,” Morales said. In Nicaragua, Feierstein is accused of running the dirty NED campaign during the 1980s to topple the Sandinistas; a campaign which succeeded in the 1990 election. He was later the director of the National Democratic Institute’s Latin America and Caribbean project to manipulate election results in favor of pro-US candidates.

In other news, Nicaragua suspended diplomatic relations with Israel after its attack in international waters on the Liberty Humanitarian Flotilla carrying humanitarian aid to Gaza resulted in the killing of 9



Banana workers encampment (Photo: Opticalrealities.org)

civilian flotilla members and the wounding of many more. And, Russia announced it will donate US\$10 million for unrestricted budget support along with other donations and loans. President Ortega praised the accord contrasting it to aid from the European Union and United States that “has political conditions that don’t give the country assurance of that cooperation.”

And finally, on May 18 Central American countries

and the European Union signed a free trade agreement, calling it an Association Accord, which has been under negotiation for years. The Humboldt Center, a respected Nicaraguan environmental group, warned that the Association Accord threatens biodiversity, because it will allow European transnational corporations to patent national seeds and genes for commercial purposes.

Economy

For the first time in Nicaragua's history, exports for two quarters exceeded US\$1 billion in value, 35% more than for the same period of last year. According to Jorge Molina, director of the Center for Export Processing (CETREX), from January 1 to July 1, 2010, Nicaragua exported 954,000 tons of goods, up from 716,000 tons for the same period of last year. In dollar terms the increase was from US\$745 million in the first half of 2009 to US\$1.005 billion in the first half of 2010. The leading exports were coffee (US\$235.7

million), beef (US\$141.2 million), sugar (US\$97.8 million), gold (US\$86.2 million), beans, milk, cheese, peanuts, farmed shrimp and tobacco. Other significant crops and products included: scrap metal, sesame seed, candy, bananas, plastic products, lobster, okra, mangoes, cacao, leather, processed wood, vegetables and artisanry products.

In other economic news, figures released for the first quarter of 2010 revealed that the Nicaraguan economy improved, growing at an annualized rate of 2.8%, with growth in agriculture, commerce, industry and mining. The same period of 2009, in the middle of the world recession, showed a decline of 5.5%. Construction is still slow, although it has picked up from last year. Financial activity has continued depressed with less credit being extended based in part, sources say, on the uncertainty caused in the microfinance sector by the "Won't Pay" Movement.

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