



Delegations: Nicaragua, Honduras & Colombia

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

The Nicaragua Network and Alliance for Global Justice are organizing back-to-back and overlapping delegations to Nicaragua and Honduras in June 2011 and an early May-June delegation to

Colombia. Delegates considering the Central America delegations will have the choice of participating in one or both, or to choose a two day extension of the Nicaragua delegation in order to participate in activities with the Honduras democracy movement on the second anniversary of the coup against democratically elected President Manuel Zelaya.

The purpose of the Nicaragua delegation from June 19-27, will be to investigate US interference in Nicaragua's presidential and legislative elections scheduled for Nov. 2011. The Honduras delegation, from June

27-July 5, will accompany the Honduras nonviolent popular resistance during the activities on June 28, the second anniversary of the coup and in the days following.

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Political graffiti in Honduras saying, "Here we all live in peace in democracy, (expletive)!" (Photo: Chuck Kaufman)

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FBI Raids: Statement on Grand Juries

The following is a statement from a subpoenaed activist, as well as the Stop FBI website (www.stopfbi.net).

On September 24, the FBI raided the homes of anti-war and international solidarity activists and delivered grand jury subpoenas to activists across the country. The subpoenas claim that the grand jury is investigating violations of the 1996 law on the issue of “material support” of “designated foreign terrorist organizations.”

The activists targeted in the raids are people who have been very involved in the anti-war and international solidarity movements for many years. They all worked together to organize an anti-war protest attended by tens of thousands at the Republican National Convention in 2008. Some of those targeted have traveled to other countries to understand our government’s role in places like Palestine and Colombia. While there, they met with people to learn about their experience facing brutal repression from U.S. sponsored regimes, and brought their stories back to people in the U.S. Hearing about the reality of U.S. military aid is not a crime, and yet this appears to be the target of this investigation.

The grand jury subpoenas are part of the fishing expedition targeting these committed activists and organizers. The use of grand juries to conduct sweeping investigations dates back to the Nixon administration’s attack on the social movements in the 1970s. The grand jury is neither fair nor even handed, no matter who is in charge.

A grand jury is a panel of jurors who hear evidence from a prosecutor and decide whether or not to charge someone with a crime. The grand jury can subpoena pretty much anyone they want and ask about anything, and people can be jailed for contempt if they do not answer questions. The jurors are hand-picked by prosecutors with no screen for bias. All evidence is presented by a prosecutor in a cloak of secrecy. The prosecutor has no responsibility to present evidence that favors those being investigated. Grand jury witnesses have no right to have a lawyer in the room to object to

how the prosecutor is conducting the proceedings.

The grand jury has been used as a tool of political repression against many movements for social change in this country. From the pre-civil war abolitionist movement to the Civil Rights movements, the movement against the war in Vietnam, the American Indian Movement, the Central America solidarity movement, the Puerto Rican Independence movement, animal rights and environmental movements, there have been many targets of political repression and grand jury inquisition.

We believe we have been targeted because of what we believe, what we say and who we know. The

“...the government is working to establish a dangerous precedent in targeting us.”

grand jury process is an attempt to violate the inalienable rights under the constitution and international law to freedom of political speech, association and the right to advocate for change.

One does not even need to be opposed to U.S. foreign policy to recognize that the government is working here to establish a dangerous precedent in targeting us. This case endangers the right of every person in the U.S. to organize for and express their views.

We fear the the government may be seeking to use the recent Supreme Court decision in Holder vs Humanitarian Law to attack conduct

that clearly falls under the realm of freedom of speech and that we never imagined could be construed as “material support for terrorism.”

Those with Grand Jury dates for October 5 and those whose subpoenas are pending have declared that we intend to exercise our right not to participate in this fishing expedition. The next legal step is in the hands of the Department of Justice. They could cancel the grand jury. They could carry on, but leave us alone. They could send subpoenas again giving us the option to talk or go to jail. We don’t know when they will take the next step, or what it will be. We do know what our next steps will be.

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**PHOTO
HIGHLIGHT:**

AFGJ sent four board members and three staff members to SOAW's annual vigil at Fort Benning, GA.

The Latin America Solidarity Coalition held a conference on confronting US Militarism in conjunction with the event. Board member Bruce Wilkinson and staff member Jamie Way are pictured here in front of the base.



LA Solidarity Conference Review

The following is a summary of the decisions made and work plan that came out of the LASC Conference on confronting US militarism.

Sixty US Latin America solidarity organizers met for a day-long strategy session on Nov. 18, 2010 in Columbus, GA. The meeting was called to discuss strategies and tactics to build a larger movement to confront US militarism and the militarization of relations with Latin America. Alliance for Global Justice Co-Coordinator Chuck Kaufman, in the opening plenary, called on the delegates to declare a “culture war” on US militarism, equating it to the struggle to abolish slavery. “It is unthinkable today that we would reintroduce chattel slavery,” he said. “We need to make US militarism equally unthinkable.”

The bulk of the work was done in two sessions of small group break-outs. The first session dealt with issues and the second with sectors. In the final session groups reported back and organizations and individuals took responsibility for advancing different pieces of the recommendations. The work of the Nov. 18 organizers’ conference will be deepened at the Latin America Solidarity Coalition’s three-day conference scheduled for April 8-10 in Washington, DC.

Issue break-out groups made lots of recommendations. Included here are those which participating groups agreed to continue or develop the strategies, tactics and organizing tools. In some cases the organization is listed for identification purposes only.

Domestic Costs of Militarism

Recommendation: Create materials showing how militarization affects communities, war profiteering, etc. Organization: Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), Alliance for Global Justice (AfGJ), Veterans for Peace (VFP).

Recommendation: Develop an “activist school” or “summer camp” to train organizers on militarism issues. Organization: Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR), AfGJ, Media Island.

Recommendation: Develop organizing/educational tools such as maps, fliers, a website with interactive tools, etc. and a comprehensive list of what resources are already available from other groups. Organization: AfGJ, Media Island, Nicaragua Information Center for Community Action (NICCA).

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Wikileaks' Honduras & Nicaragua Cables: What Do They Mean to US?

By George Pauk, M.D. (Pauk is on the board of AFGJ.)

To most of us, the release of the WikiLeaks cables about Nicaragua and Honduras was welcomed as an opening up and increase in the visibility of the terrible policies of our State Department. The poor

quality, political and right-wing toadying actions of our embassy staffs have been obvious for many years. The spy and other intervention activities of the embassies have been very obvious, even to those that simply follow the mainstream news from Central America.

With the release of the few documents published so far, there has merely been a public confirmation of the shoddy and ideological work being done at our expense. Perhaps

it is embarrassing to some of the long-term career diplomats and intelligence employees that masquerade in our name. But, in general we will certainly be turned a bit more to the real democracy roadways by WikiLeaks.

We are quite accustomed to the ignorant, bigoted and ideologically poisonous work of our embassies. The major exposes of our failed and corrupt foreign policy toward Latin America will probably not be clarified

much more by the WikiLeaks cables. The Bay of Pigs, the Cuban embargoes, mining of the Nicaragua harbor, military exercises of the Contras and our military bases in the area are well known.

We have also seen this corrupt foreign policy in the arrogant and punishing way that the government takes money from the progressive activists that we invite to tour and speak in the United States. We have seen it in the coup and military intervention threats that are planted in the right-wing press of these small nations by our embassy staffs and our visiting right wing politicians and activists such as Oliver North. We have seen it in the organizing work of our embassy staff and our government supported organizations such as the National Endowment for Democracy and the Senator McCain-led International Republican Institute. We have seen it crescendo just before the elections in Nicaragua, Honduras and most of the other Latin American nations where we are allowed to "donate" our dual-purpose funds and programs.

What is amazing about the WikiLeaks is the spin that the right-wing organizations are putting on the releases. It seems that the spin-doctors of our government and the intervention organizations are working overtime in picking pieces of the leak documents and writing media articles about their vision of "truth." For instance, fabulously inventive and fanciful articles are appearing in the Christian Science Monitor, Washington Post and other mouthpieces for the State Department and the right-wing organizations.

The obvious moves for the purveyors of confusion and evil deeds are to use not just the classical "plausible deniability," but to actually spin the content of the cables and leaks to be evidence of the great work of our government workers. Telling lies about the events is a classic tactic of totalitarian society. And, unfortunately, we will probably see the right-wing believers actually absorb the falsehoods and distortions.

What is there to do? We must not sit back and passively wait for the truth to ring clear in the United States. The attack on Julian Assange and WikiLeaks is underway and the initiative of the mainstream media has been seized. The general mode of WikiLeaks has been to be a journalistic platform. This was clearly stated by Mr. Assange in that the dissection and public discussion of the leaks was to be done by others and hopefully the public. The challenge we have received is clear: to speak out, to support the organizations that properly interpret the documents and to counter the false and negative counter attacks in the media.



Education & Strategy Conference on US Militarism

Washington, DC – April 8-10, 2011

INVITATION TO ENDORSE AND TO PLAN

Sponsored by: Latin America Solidarity Coalition (www.lasolidarity.org)

in Conjunction with School of the Americas Watch Days of Action

April 4-11, 2011

Many movements and organizations have concluded that the United States is at a crossroads. Down one road lies permanent war, a stagnant economy and loss of liberty. Down the other lies a new world of cooperation, prosperity and freedom. The Latin America Solidarity Coalition and School of the Americas Watch share with the vast majority of Latin Americans and people of the world the desire to travel on the road to a new and better world.

We invite your organization to partner with us to plan a conference to bring together Latin America solidarity activists, people of faith, academics, youth and students, anti-war activists, labor, women and all sectors which are working to build a better world. A major obstacle to that better world is the militarization of US relations with the world and the bankrupting of our economy under the weight of a nearly \$1 trillion budget for war and preparation for war.

Please join us to help plan a weekend of plenaries and workshops to educate and inspire each other and to plan actions, strategies and organizing tools to build a greater movement to overcome US militarism. Participate in SOA Watch's Days of Action including lobbying and direct action to shut down the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, better known as the School of the Americas at Ft. Benning, for the closing of US military bases in Latin America, and for an end to US militarization throughout the Americas.

We recognize that US militarism affects both the entire world and everything about our daily lives. If your group is working to end the wars, has a moral stand in favor of peace, stands in solidarity with the oppressed, is working to end racism and the criminalization of immigrants, stands solidly in favor of our First Amendment freedoms or is working to create new economic models that defend the interests of workers and farmers over those of corporations and bankers – then we would like to partner with you both to plan this conference and to build a strong and unified movement against US militarism.

Some topics covered by this conference will include: US military bases, military spending, immigration and border militarization, coups, war profiteers, privatization of war, closing the School of the Americas, foreign military and police aid, growing our skills in media, research, and other organizing, counter recruitment and support for active duty resisters, US relations with Cuba, Venezuela, Colombia, Haiti, Mexico, Honduras, etc., organizing within sectors to resist militarism, cross movement organizing, domestic costs of militarism, direct action and much more.

Endorsing organizations are expected to promote the conference to their base and participate in one or more committees (Outreach, Program, Logistics and Action) and/or a Sector Working Group. We invite endorsing organizations to submit educational, skills-building, or strategy workshop proposals and to participate in an initial conference organizing teleconference on January 18, 2011 at 5pm EST. To add your organization to the endorsers of the conference, to learn more, or to obtain the phone number and access code for the Jan. 18 teleconference, send an email to AFGJ@AFGJ.org. Endorsing organizations can submit workshop proposals to stansfieldsmith@yahoo.com. SOA Watch Days of Action web page: www.soaw.org/take-action/lobby-days

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Nicaragua delegation members can choose a two day extension to join the Honduras delegation for the activities of the 28th and then return to the US from Tegucigalpa on June 29. Nicaragua Network Co-Coordinator Katherine Hoyt, Ph.D., who lived in Nicaragua for 16 years, and is the author of *The Many Faces of Sandinista Democracy*, will lead the delegation. A similar delegation in 2006 found substantial US intervention, which Nicaraguans who met with the delegation felt had gone well beyond what was appropriate or correct. A representative of the International Republican Institute in Nicaragua equated the relationship between Nicaragua and the US to that of a son to a father. “Children should not argue with their parents,” she said. At a time when foreign funding in US elections has raised an outcry, it is important to expose the role of US funding in other countries elections as well.

The delegation will meet with a wide range of political party, government, and civil society representatives, US agencies and diplomats, international observers and Nicaraguan analysts in Managua. The group will then travel to Esteli where it will meet with grassroots and popular organizations. Those participating in the Honduras extension will be accompanied on a first class bus trip from Esteli to Tegucigalpa where they will meet up with the Honduras delegation.

Cost for the Nicaragua delegation, which includes all lodging, food, translation and in-country travel, will be \$975. The two day Honduras extension will cost \$200 including all costs and bus fare to Tegucigalpa. The fees do not include travel to and from the US. Those participating in the Honduras extension should book their return flight from Tegucigalpa.

Mark your calendars and write now to nicanet@AFGJ.org to put your name on a list to receive information about this important delegation! Tel. 202-544-9355 x2.

AfGJ National Co-Coordinator Chuck Kaufman will lead the Honduras delegation along with Rights

Action’s Honduras Coordinator Karen Spring. The delegation will be hosted by the National Front for Popular Resistance (FNRP), a non-violent coalition of human rights, unions, peasant and popular movements demanding a return to democracy following the June 28, 2009 military coup. The coup-spawned government of Porfirio Lobo is allowing military, police, and para-military repression of democracy and human rights organizers with impunity while at the same time, under US sponsorship, it is seeking international recognition and a return to the Organization of American States from which it was expelled following the coup.

On June 28, the FNRP will present to the nation and international community its plan to return to democracy and “re-found the nation” -- the result of several months of meetings by its Popular Assembly with representation from every region of the country.

International accompaniment plays an important role in decreasing the violence against popular mobilizations since international witnesses to violence would harm its campaign to return to the community of nations. No international observers have been harmed or harassed to date and delegation leaders will take every precaution to protect the security of delegates.

The delegation will meet with human rights groups, labor, teachers and peasant

representatives, journalists, artists and students. It will also visit a rural community where peasants are struggling for their land against powerful Honduran elites who seek to evict them. The highlight of the delegation will be to accompany tens of thousands of Hondurans on an historic march on June 28 and the presentation of their proposal to “re-found the State.”

Cost of the Honduras delegation will be \$800 which includes all lodging, food, translation and in-country travel. It does not include international travel. Mark your calendars and write now to AFGJ@AFGJ.org to put your name on a list to receive information about this important delegation! Tel. 202-544-9355 x1.

The Alliance for Global Justice and the National Lawyers Guild are co-sponsoring a delegation to

“International accompaniment plays a important role in decreasing the violence against popular mobilizations....”

Colombia, May 27-June 5 led by AfGJ Co-Coordinator James Jordan and NLG lawyer Mark Burton. The delegation will investigate human and labor rights under the new administration of Pres. Juan Manuel Santos. The delegation will visit the first of sixteen prisons designed by the US government, political prisoners and their families, displaced persons, labor, student and political opposition leaders, a cooperative farm and various human rights organizations. The trip will be mainly based in Bogotá, with air travel to Barranquilla on the coast and road trips to the city of Valledupar and to rural areas in Sumapaz. Cost for the delegation, not including international air fare, is \$1,400, which covers all food, in-country transportation, lodging, translation and other relevant expenses.

Develop a listserv. Organization: Malcolm X.

Recommendation: Promote Global Women's Strike's "Bring back Aristide" petition. Organization: Marin Task Force on the Americas (MITF), NICCA

Recommendation: Promote membership and knowledge of the Honduras Solidarity Network. Organization: MITF

Recommendation: U.S. speaking tours of Honduran activists including, possibly, Zelaya. Specifically, organize a US tour in April 2011 of Gerardo Torres, the Honduran resistance's liaison with North American solidarity. Organization: MITF, AfGJ.

Recommendation: Re-open Rep. Farr "Dear Colleague" letter on Honduras for more signatures. Organization: MITF



EXPERIENCE NICARAGUA:
The beautiful Pearl Cays off the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua.

Corporate Media and Culture of Militarization

Recommendation: Hold rallies outside corporate media stations; perhaps a national day of action. Organization: Media Island

Recommendation: Use wiki-technology. Organization: Lawrence Sohnel.

Bases, 4th Fleet, Military Training & Aid

Recommendation: Recruit a member of Congress to write a "Dear Colleague" letter to stop funding of Colombian military. Organization: MITF, FOR.

Recommendation: Develop a campaign of letters to editors re: 4th Fleet – where it is, cost, what it does. Organization: FOR, VFP.

Recommendation: Rallies/vigils at other US training and deployment bases besides Ft. Benning. Organization: FOR, VFP

Recommendation: Support SOA Watch's "Bridges Not Bases" campaign. Organization: SOA Watch

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We will not be silent. We will not allow the harassment of activists to quiet our opposition to immoral policies. We will continue to speak out against the unjust investigation, the unjust law, and the unjust foreign policies of the US government. Our communities are strong, and are already showing amazing solidarity around the country with 60 demonstrations last week, many statements of solidarity and a very successful call in day yesterday. We will need that support to continue to push back against this attack.

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Coups and Occupations

Recommendation: Target MSNBC (Maddow, Olberman) to talk about Haiti. Organization: Malcolm X Grassroots Organizing Committee (Malcolm X).

Immigration & Border Militarization

Recommendation: Develop materials re: costs of militarization of the border (on both sides). Organization: AfGJ

Recommendation: Develop an organizers study guide with links to various issues related to migration. Organization: AfGJ.

Drug War

Recommendation: Promote FOR's "Drug War Road Show" which includes information on drugs as health issue, legalization, prison industry complex, and fact sheets on drug war costs, etc. Organization: FOR

Recommendation: Do FOIAs for more info. Organization: Sanho Tree, Dave Schott.

After the break-outs on issues, participants then broke out into small groups to talk about how to enlist greater involvement in anti-US militarism work by strategic sectors. Following are those groups recommendations which participants volunteered to move forward.

Religious

Recommendation: Do something like Colombia Days of Prayer and Action focusing on militarization. Organization: Maryknoll Office of Global Concerns.

Recommendation: Delegations to military bases in Latin American and U.S. Organization: FOR, MITF, SOAW

Recommendation: Compile statements from religious orgs re: militarization. Organization: Mary Ann Perrone, Raymond Tetrault, Dave Schott.

Culture Workers

Recommendation: Organize a video and writers contest on issues of militarism and its effects on community. Organization: AfGJ.

Labor

Recommendation: Invite labor leaders to LASC conference in April. US Peace Council, AfGJ.

Recommendation: Compile union statements re: US militarization of Latin America. Organization: Chicago Free the Cuban Five Committee Students,

Youth, Academia

Recommendation: Create a list of activist professors around country by areas of studies. Organization: AfGJ.

Recommendation: Organize a speakers bureau of people who can talk to groups and schools. Organization: AfGJ

Get Involved Today
Groups or individuals wishing to get involved with any of these campaigns or efforts may contact us at AFGJ@AFGJ.org for more information. If your organization has specific campaign or ideas for organizing tools which you can volunteer to coordinate, please contact us.

Recommendation: Write reviews of books on militarization. Organization: Midge Quandt.

Women

Recommendation: Prepare materials, including video and organize speaking tours on the ways that women are affected by militarization. Organization: Baltimore/Limay Sister City, FOR.

Veterans

Recommendation: Prepare cost of war materials including for the web. Organization:

VFP.

Recommendation: Promote Dec. 16 Vet event at White House. Organization: VFP

Recommendation: Organize Vets delegations to Venezuela, Honduras and Colombia. Organization: VFP.

Groups or individuals wishing to get involved with any of these campaigns or efforts, contact the organizations which volunteered or send an email to AFGJ@AFGJ.org to be put in touch with the proper person. There were additional recommendations made by each break-out group which no one present at the conference volunteered to move forward. If your organization has specific campaign or ideas for organizing tools which you volunteer to coordinate, please contact AFGJ@AFGJ.org.

News from Nicaragua

October 5 - December 15, 2010

Nicaragua-Costa Rica Crisis

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-Cañías 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.

Patriotic fervor in Nicaragua caused a rare show of unity in the usually deadlocked National Assembly, which passed by large margins three military governance laws sent by the government of President Daniel Ortega. Dissident Sandinistas attacked the laws as usurpation of power by Ortega, but the other parties largely supported the government. A song released in 2005 by the Nicaraguan group Dimension Costeña called, "The San Juan River is Nicaraguan" became an instant hit. Costa Rica issued an arrest warrant for Eden Pastora, the former Sandinista-turned-Contra-turned-Sandinista who is heading the dredging project, and a Costa Rican women's group issued a communiqué on Nov. 11 condemning "the escalating xenophobia against the Nicaraguan population that we have seen in recent weeks in our country."

While tensions between Nicaragua and Costa Rica were at their height, the Minister of Defense of Honduras' defacto government, Oscar Alvarez, accused Nicaragua of training thousands of Honduran peasants in the Aguan Valley where official and paramilitary violence has been escalating during land rights disputes between peasant cooperatives and wealthy Honduran land owners. Defacto President Porfirio Lobo was forced to disavow the claims several days later.

US-Nicaraguan Relations

US-Nicaraguan relations continue to be decidedly mixed. Wikileaks cables show that the US continues to pour millions of dollars into the anti-Sandinista opposition, and that diplomatic cables are unrelentingly negative toward President Ortega, including one by current US Ambassador Robert Callahan reporting that sources called Ortega "completely crazy."

The State Department's 2010 "report card" on Nicaragua accused the Ortega government of abusive policies, lack of respect for the rule of law, corruption and generalized politicization of the judiciary and Supreme Electoral Council and other government institutions. The report also claimed fraud in the municipal elections in the North Atlantic Autonomous Region which had been delayed to March 2010 due to damage by the 2009 hurricane. The State Department report alleged that there had been an erosion of freedom



Google Earth image of the disputed territory between Nicaragua and Costa Rica.

of the press and claimed that reporters are intimidated by the government.

At the same time, Ambassador Callahan has announced that Nicaragua is again eligible for Millennium Challenge Fund grants, which the US cut off after claiming fraud in the 2008 municipal elections. Arturo Valenzuela, U.S Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, told an interviewer, who said that Ortega's candidacy for reelection was "illegal," that the US was "ready to work with whoever is elected in conditions that achieve a standard level of transparency and follow the law." US Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis announced a grant to Nicaragua of US\$2 million for the "Better Work" program that promotes labor rights as a component of increasing foreign trade. She praised Nicaragua saying, "Nicaragua is among the countries that accept that there is a gold standard of respect for labor rights in the textile and assembly sector."

Juxtaposed to that praise, the US continues to try to build a unified anti-Sandinista opposition. Five hundred opposition youth have been selected to study for a "Diploma in Leadership and Political Management" funded by the National Democratic Institute (NDI), a core group of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). At the end of November, NDI also announced that it was introducing two programs claiming to "promote the participation of women in local politics." Thirty-eight percent of ministerial positions in the Ortega government are held by women.

While the US continues to work for regime change, US News and World Report ranked Nicaragua the number one affordable paradise for retirees living abroad. Nicaraguans of many political stripes noted that the US Congressional elections

will result in “rabid anti-Sandinista” Florida Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen taking over the chairmanship of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

Energy and Infrastructure

In mid-October President Ortega halted the two dam Brito hydroelectric project on the San Juan and Brito rivers until the Brazilian-financed US\$600 million project conducts a new environmental impact study to insure that it would not cause environmental damage to the river, the Indio-Maiz nature reserve, and Lake Cocibolca (Nicaragua). In mid-December the National Assembly Infrastructure Committee heard testimony from Alberto Vega representing the US company, Environmental Resources Management (ERM), which will conduct the study. Vega told the committee that the dams did not threaten the environment and that steps could be taken such as canals and fish locks to prevent damage to migrating fish species. He said that preliminary data indicated that the dam would be unlikely to affect the water level of Lake Cocibolca (Lake Nicaragua) or cause flooding in

the periphery of the city, and lack public services such as potable water. The general manager of the governmental International Airport Administration Company (EAAI), Orlando Castillo, announced that it will build an international airport on the island of Ometepe in Lake Cocibolca. He said that the airport would be built on 25 acres of land in the community of Las Palomas, one mile from Moyogalpa. Once feasibility and other studies are completed, the airport construction is expected to begin immediately and be completed by the end of 2011.

Twenty-six low income communities along the North Caribbean coast of Nicaragua now have access to solar energy. Prior to the solar panels’ installation, these communities did not have electricity and due to their remoteness, had limited connectivity to the outside world. Among the 26 communities that benefited from this project were 13 indigenous communities and 13 rural villages in the mining triangle of Rosita, Siuna and Bonanza in the North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN).

Large infrastructure projects frequently have large impacts on the affected populations. Members of the Rama/Creole community of Monkey Point, a 45 minute motorized canoe trip from Bluefields, capital of the South Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAS), are facing another effort to move them and their community, leaders say. The first effort to evict them was in 1905 when government of Liberal President Jose Santos Zelaya wanted to displace the community to build a port and railroad. In the 1970s the dictator Anastasio Somoza wanted to build a port and inter-oceanic canal as well as an oil refinery and pipeline on the site of the community.

Today their community is targeted by the government of President Daniel Ortega for a deep water port and high speed railroad to connect it with Nicaragua’s Pacific Coast. While the majority of the community says that it does not oppose the mega-project, they are concerned about the lack of information and community input into this matter of vital importance to their community. Harley Clair, spokesperson for the Communal Council said, “This is our life, our culture and for more than two centuries our ancestors have lived here. If they want to move us...we know we have the right to be partners in that project.” The Rama and Creole territorial governments in the South Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAS) have issued a denunciation complaining that they have been excluded from negotiations between South Korean companies and the national government.

Health and Education

While Nicaragua escaped additional major damage from October’s Hurricane Paula, 70 people died and thousands were driven from their homes. But the hurricane came on top of a record breaking rainy season that destroyed much of the food crops in the northern and eastern parts of the country and caused a major outbreak of leptospirosis, a disease contracted by animal urine in stagnant water, and fear of a cholera outbreak.

Leaders of 62 North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN) communities along the Rio Coco, including indigenous leaders in Waspam, declared a food emergency. Authorities in the municipality of San Jose de Bocay, in the department of Jinotega, also declared a red alert in 43 communities due to food shortages. Local authorities estimate that the rains destroyed 80% of the region’s rice harvest, 76% of its corn, 45% of bananas and plantains, 37% of its root crops and 19% of its cacao. The Humboldt Center reported that in some communities over one-



Monkey Point, a center of Rama indigenous life, is slated for a deep water port by the central government.

communities along the San Juan River, including those in Costa Rica.

The state-owned Nicaraguan Electricity Company (ENEL) announced on Nov. 6 the signing of contracts for the modernization of two of the nation’s hydroelectric plants, the Central American Hydroelectric Plant (in the Department of Jinotega) and the Carlos Fonseca Amador Plant (in the Department of Matagalpa), each of which produced 50 megawatts of electricity. ENEL officials noted that the project is part of the commitment of the government to transform electricity production from petroleum-based sources to renewable sources.

The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) approved a US\$30 million loan to Nicaragua for water purification projects that will benefit at least 20 neighborhoods in Managua. According to the Nicaraguan Water and Sewerage Company (ENACAL), the new system will benefit 300,000 individuals living in the southeast and western portions of the city. Currently, Managua has a population of approximately 1.8 million people in 600 neighborhoods. Many of these have popped up in recent years in

third of the population is suffering from severe malnutrition. The government has distributed food and seeds to the worst affected communities. Bean shortages began to recede as the year's second harvest began to hit the markets.

The polling firm M&R Consultants released a poll on Oct. 9 which showed that the government's response to the crisis has caused President Daniel Ortega's poll number to improve by a substantial amount. The poll indicated that 45.1% of those interviewed approved the government's performance (up from 31.9% in June) while 31.2% disapproved with 22.6% not offering an opinion. Raul Obregon of M&R said, "The FSLN activists were those who were in front of or alongside the community organizations in the villages, everywhere, helping people. The opposition, where were they?"

Quick action by health authorities including health brigades that have visited houses in all the affected towns in search of people who have fevers and to talk to residents about preventive measures, halted the leptospirosis outbreak before it got out of hand. The disease can be treated successfully with antibiotics if discovered in time and is now under control. Health centers also prepared for a potential cholera outbreak following the deadly outbreak in Haiti. To date there have been no confirmed cases in Nicaragua.

In mid-December it was announced that Nicaragua will be the first developing country to begin vaccinating infants with a new vaccine against the pneumococcal bacteria which causes pneumonia, the top killer of children under five years old at 500,000 worldwide annually. Twenty percent of Nicaragua's infant mortality is due to pneumonia. Nicaragua has one of the best immunization systems in the world with 98% of infants vaccinated but, like most developing countries, has previously been unable to afford pneumonia vaccine which cost between US\$50-\$90 a dose. This is the first time a developing country will obtain a new vaccine at the same time as the developed nations according to the World Alliance for Vaccination and Immunization (GAVI Alliance) which is funding purchase of the vaccine for the next five years.

In October, The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the European Union (EU) teamed up with the Nicaraguan government with the goal of improving agricultural yields in the country. FAO and EU representatives hope that by doing so, they will decrease rural poverty. Also in October, German NGO Welthungerhilfe (Help Against World Hunger) stated in a UN conference in Rome that Nicaragua is the country in Latin America that has made the most progress against hunger. In December the United Nations Economic Commission on Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), said that Nicaragua, along with Argentina and Bolivia, are the countries that have shown the greatest decrease in inequality in the past decade.

Efforts to end child labor got a lot of attention during the first week of December. On Dec. 6 the Sandinista government, employers, labor unions and social organizations jointly adopted a plan and timetable to eliminate the worst forms of child labor by 2015 and all child labor by 2020. Also the international anti-poverty group CARE, and the US Millennium Challenge Fund conducted trainings in Leon and Chinandega with the goal of ending child labor in the agricultural sector.

On the negative side, Nicaragua continues to criminalize therapeutic abortion. On Sept. 28 the Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights (CENIDH) and the Strategic Group for the Decriminalization of Therapeutic Abortion led a march to deliver

37,000 signatures and a sample of 6,000 postcards collected internationally by Amnesty International to the home of President Daniel Ortega. The group demanded a meeting with Ortega. Four members of the group were allowed entry where they turned over the signatures to a functionary.

On Nov. 25, the UN International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women marches were held in Managua and other cities demanding more effort by the government to put an end to violence against women and children. Fatima Millon of the Network of Women against Violence said, "This year we already have had 84 women murdered and eight of them were girls under ten years old. The Network reported that in 2000, there were only 4,000 rapes reported to the Special Police Stations for Women and Children but in 2009 that number increased to 31,000.

Marcia Ramirez, Minister of the Family, told CNN that the government did have programs to change attitudes toward sexual violence against women and children, contrary to the accusations of a recent Amnesty International report. She said that in the poorest communities, Ministry workers go door-to-door to talk to householders about their rights and obligations to prevent violence within the family. She said that the Ministry works in coordination with the police and prosecutors to give support immediately to victims, including shelter where necessary. The draft of the bill "Against Violence Towards Women," which has as its goal protecting women from domestic violence, is under review by 23 women's groups and agencies around the country. This solidarity network includes women's organizations as well as representatives from state institutions.

Finally, in education news, in December, some 63,000 students will receive their high school diplomas, which represents an 85% completion rate. Some 29,000 are from Managua, with the rest from the other departments. The government is working to expand vocational and technical training so that graduates will be able to continue to develop professionally. Meanwhile, as part of the "Battle for the Sixth Grade," the goal is for 300,000 students who dropped out to be brought back into the educational system. Education Minister Miriam Raudez said rural schools, where there are still many students who make it only to the fourth grade, would see an increase of 50,000 students. Overall enrollment this year reached 1.6 million students, with a historic 95% retention rate. The new education plan includes the training of more teachers and to attain this goal the Ministry is using workshops, long-distance conferences and other techniques.

Politics

On Sept. 30, the Supreme Court confirmed the decision of its Constitutional Panel last year saying that the article of the constitution prohibiting the consecutive reelection of the president and the limiting of any president to a total of two terms was "inapplicable" because it violated citizen rights. Radio La Primerisima noted that, similarly, the Supreme Court of Costa Rica had ruled that Oscar Arias could run for a second consecutive presidential term and a total of three terms as president of that country. Supreme Court spokesman Roberto Larios said that the Constitution of 1987 had no prohibition on reelection. That prohibition was added by the amendments of 1995. As expected, opposition parties condemned the decision. The Supreme Electoral Council (CSE) denied the requests of the Constitutional Liberal Party (PLC) and the Conservative Party that changes be made in the electoral calendar and declared the calendar finalized in mid-November. Election

Day 2011 will be Sunday, Nov. 6 for president, vice-president, National Assembly and Central American Parliament. Eighteen political parties registered with the CSE. Many are expected to form alliances but all wanted to register to avoid losing their legal status as recognized political parties.

El Nuevo Diario (END) laid out what the daily saw as four possible alliances in the race for the presidency and seats in the legislature. A number of small parties will be joining the governing Sandinista Party to support the reelection of President Daniel Ortega. Another group of parties will join the Constitutional Liberal Party (PLC) behind former President Arnoldo Aleman. The candidacy of broadcaster Fabio Gadea Mantilla is supported by both wings of the Independent Liberal Party-PLI- (one of which includes Eduardo Montealegre and his supporters) and other parties, including the Sandinista Renovation Movement (MRS). And finally, a number of parties may go it alone, including the Conservative Party and the Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance (ALN), but these could also join those behind Aleman, according to END. The CSE has made no reference to national or international election observers. However, business leaders Jose Adan Aguerri of the Superior Council of Private Enterprise (COSEP) and Roger Arteaga of the American Chamber of Commerce of Nicaragua (AMCHAM) said that their presence was necessary for the results

to be considered valid. Eija Rotinen, Finland's ambassador to Nicaragua, said that her country hoped that national organizations would be approved for electoral observation. She spoke at the inauguration of a new office for Ethics and Transparency, a national observation group which receives funding from the US government.

A poll by Borge y Asociados released on Oct. 13 indicated that if the elections were held then President Daniel Ortega would receive 42.1% of the vote, followed by Fabio Gadea, with 25.1%. "None of the above" comes in third with 20.7% and former President Arnoldo Aleman garners only 7.7%. Confidence in the governing Sandinistas was at 49.1% while only 16.2% had confidence in the parties in opposition. Only 25% expressed confidence in the National Assembly.

At the same time, 57% classified the political situation as negative while only 39.7% thought it was okay or positive. While 52.3% said they were satisfied with democracy in Nicaragua, 42.4% said they were not satisfied. When asked if they planned to vote in the 2011 elections, 53.4% said that they had a high possibility that they would vote, 32.1% had some possibility of voting while 10.7% said there was no possibility of them voting.

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