



Marine Matters

Special Edition

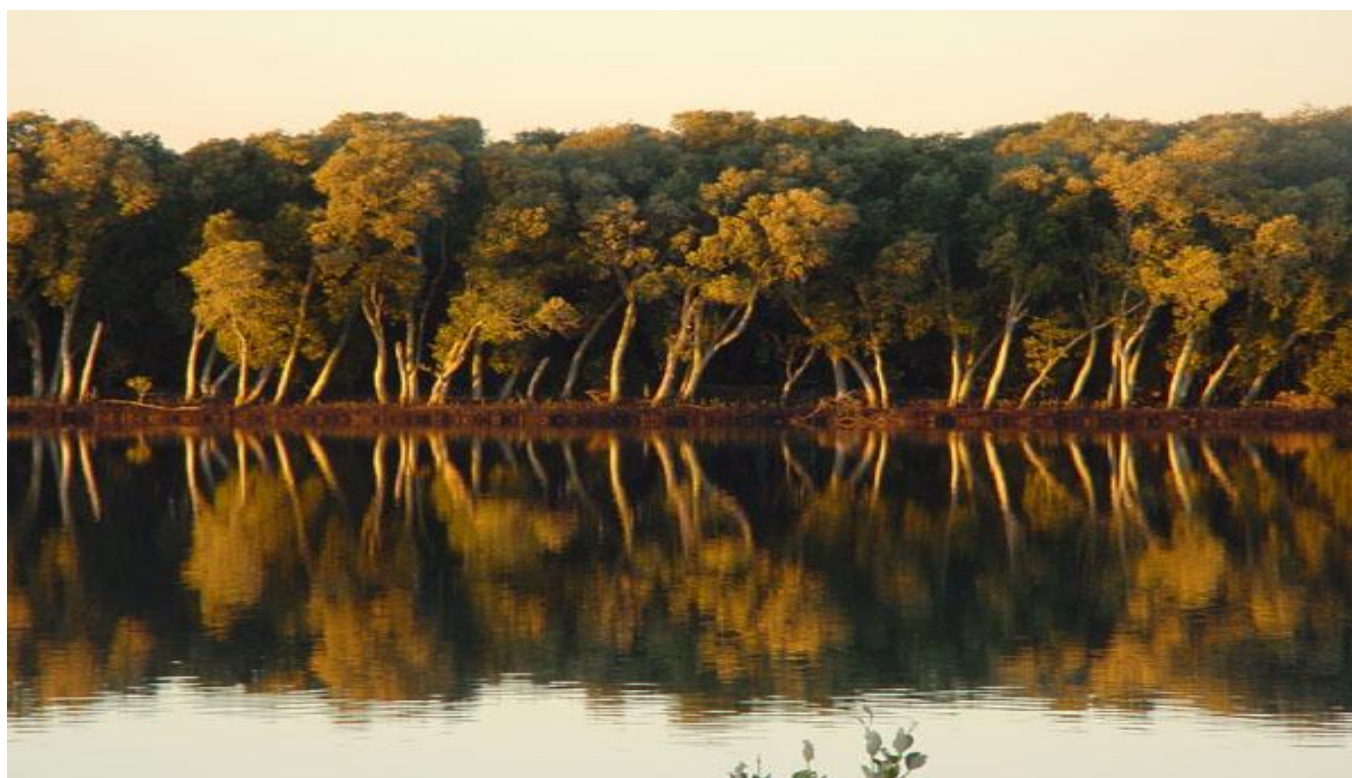


Photo: KWRP

In this edition of the ENCA newsletter we are taking a closer look at the marine environment in Central America and have compiled a range of reports and short essays that try to get at the complex interconnections in the environment and unearth how these processes are being interrupted or mis-managed by people and corporations operating in Central America.

Grettel Navas writes of the importance of Blue Carbon and the necessity of mangroves in holding pollutants, while our articles *Gangsters in the Mangroves* and *M&S Prawns* both outline how the destruction of these mangroves is can have an immediate impact on the local environment.

Stephanie Williamson reports on the critical levels of contamination in the watercourses and salt-water

mangrove swamps in Jiquilisco Bay, El Salvador.

Away from the mangroves, we have reproduced a report on the effects of drug trafficking on turtle populations, and despite the severe dangers to human populations who oppose the Honduran government, there is good news that sharks have been offered some protection in Honduras.

As well as all this, this issue contains details of what ENCA have been working on this summer, the expansion of the Panama Canal and the tragic news of those who have been assassinated or disappeared because of their commitment to the environment and people of Central America. [eds]

Blue Carbon

Grettel Navas Obando of the *Fundación Neotropica* in Costa Rica introduces the notion of Blue Carbon.

(Translated by James Harrison)

Carbon capture. Greenhouse gas emissions. Compensation. Climate change. These and other concepts are repeatedly used in academic discussions, in expert forums and press articles around the world. But they are also used in everyday conversations about the state of our planet and its future.

Only recently, however, has the concept of Blue Carbon been introduced in official discussions on climate change. It was the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea who, based on a global study carried out on the carbon fixation of marine and coastal ecosystems, presented this concept to the international community at the United Nations.

Parallel with the concept of Green Carbon (stored in the forest and the ground), Blue Carbon can be defined as that stored by different marine and coastal ecosystems – for example, plankton, bacteria, seaweed, marshland plants, mangrove swamps and other wetlands. It has been found that these contain five times more carbon than tropical forests and are therefore hugely relevant to the fight against climate change. In Costa Rica, for example, in light of the government's commitments to achieve carbon neutrality by 2021, attention is refocusing on these mistreated and forgotten ecosystems as an intelligent strategy.

Whilst it is true that marine and coastal ecosystems make up only 0.05% of living biomass, they store an important quantity of carbon in the earth since they are the most intense carbon sink on the planet. Historically the coastal ecosystems have been undervalued and unjustly called 'swamps' or 'unhealthy marshes'. This has given the green light to their systematic destruction. Unlike the capture and storage of carbon in the earth (where it can be locked away for decades or centuries), carbon storage in the ocean can last for thousands of years.

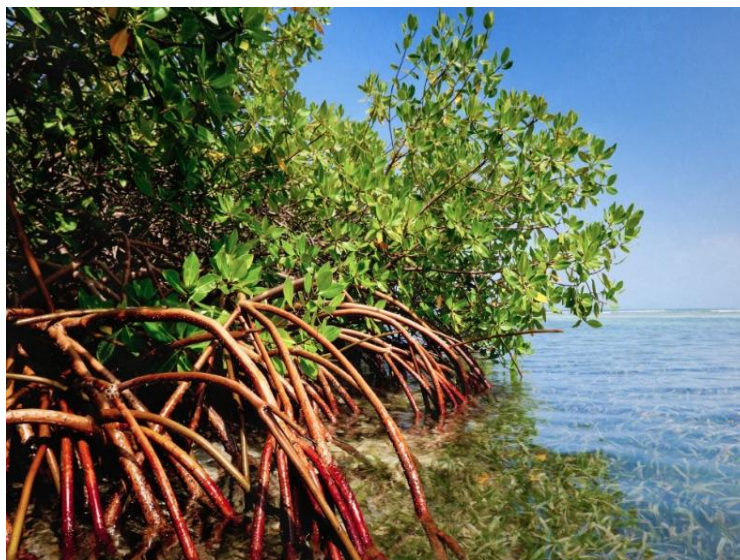
This much has been confirmed in a United Nations Environment Programme report: "of all the green carbon captured annually in the earth – that is carbon captured for the process of photosynthesis – about 55 per cent is captured by marine ecosystems" (Falkowski *et al*, 2004; Arrigo, 2005; González *et al*, 2008; Bowler, 2009; Simon *et al*, 2009).

The idea behind seeing blue carbon separately and giving it a different name is that it is able to highlight the importance of coastal and marine ecosystems, because in many international forums on carbon and

climate summits, the role of the oceans has often been minimised or gone unnoticed. In rescuing its role in climate change we can carry out conservation projects of wetlands, protection of the oceans and protection of different ecosystems.

From 2009 the Costa Rican *Fundación Neotropica*, aware of the importance of these resources, has continually worked on programmes of community conservation of mangrove swamps. In addition to raising people's awareness of the importance of the mangrove swamps bordering the Golfo Dulce, the Mangle-Benín project resulted in the strengthening of these areas with the planting of around 100,000 mangrove plants and established environmental clubs with primary school students. The project had strong local support through local organisations and schools, achieving a community-wide management of mangrove areas.

Moreover, with the ECOTICOS project, the ecological economics of the Térraba-Sierpe National Wetlands for the community, Costa Rica and the world were assessed. This wetlands area houses the largest area of mangroves of its kind in the American hemisphere, which even by conservative estimates, produces environmental benefits to the value of \$10,000 per hectare p.a..



Mangrove forests are highly effective at capturing and storing carbon. Photo: The Blue Carbon Project

Another important initiative has been the *Wetlands Life for All* campaign held in conjunction with other organisations and institutions such as Apreflofas, the School of Biology at the University of Costa Rica and student associations at the major state universities. Through this campaign they look to achieve a greater awareness of the importance of these coastal ecosystems, the benefits that they provide and the need for their effective conservation.

In Costa Rica, despite all its important conservation initiatives, a significant number of mangrove areas are not designated as Protected Wilderness Area having only the general declaration that the law affords to wetlands. This

Continued...

creates a great deal of uncertainty on the future of their management and conservation. These ecosystems are fragile and under constant threat by pressure from production activities, sedimentation and climate change, amongst other factors. This is true in the case of the mangrove areas of Golfo Dulce for example.

"From the incorporation of Costa Rica as a member of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands in 1991, a movement for the conservation and rational use of this type of ecosystems was begun. In addition to serving as a source of income from their diverse products and benefits, they

also serve as a habitat for rich biodiversity." (Source: EARTH)

In the fight to counteract climate change, the application of the concept of Blue Carbon and the conservation of coastal and marine ecosystems becomes an urgent action, both beneficial and vital, being an extremely important link for all sectors of society: environmental organisations, social movements, government institutions, academics, private companies and concerned individuals, all committed to conservation.

Reproduced from Boletín Neotrópico No.16, the newsletter of Fundación Neotrópica – www.neotropica.org

Gangsters in the mangroves.

The expansion of shrimp aquaculture in Honduras began in 1972. By 2010, it remained without any plan for its development and expansion. The only mechanisms controlling its growth are shrimp diseases, the fall of international shrimp prices, falling demand and sometimes pressure from local communities. The destruction, pollution and displacement of communities plus the plundering of natural resources have given rise to a social movement aimed at reducing its impacts. The NGO CODDEFFAGOLF has led the movement since 1988 and set its objective to achieve the declaration of Wetland Protected Areas in the Gulf of Fonseca.



40 hectares of mangroves clear-felled for a shrimp farm on the Nicaraguan edge of the Gulf of Fonseca. Photo: Martin Mowforth

In July 1999, during the Ramsar Convention held in Costa Rica, Honduran shrimp farmers (ANDAH) were surprised by the announcement that wetlands of the Gulf of Fonseca had been designated as Ramsar site (30,304 ha.), which became the #1000 site among the world's wetlands. ... On 20 January 2000, this 'site' was included in the Protected Areas of the Gulf of Fonseca (81,378 ha.) by Decree 5-99-E of the National Congress. An area known as 'La Berbería' was assigned 2,293 hectares of wetlands.

A few months after the publication of the decree, a Spanish company known in Honduras as 'El Faro' of Mr. Jamie

Soriano, disrespecting the Ramsar Convention and national laws and without an environmental license, converted over 100 hectares of wetlands in La Berbería's protected area into shrimp ponds. Complaints, demonstrations and protests of fishermen were of little use. The El Faro company, supported by the police and with the complicity of government officials, had its way. It forced fishermen to negotiate inadequate compensation measures.

Meanwhile the EMAR I company expanded without an environmental license over tens of hectares.

In 2004 the Central American Water Tribunal condemned the government of Honduras and the shrimp farms El Faro, Sea Farms of Honduras and the World Bank for pollution and destruction of wetlands. The verdict was an ethical and moral conviction, and therefore did not result in any punishment.

2008: Destruction was spurred by high international demand for shrimp. In 2008 CODDEFFAGOLF presented a complaint during a Workshop on Protected Areas attended by regional and central authorities. It presented images of La Berbería where shrimp farmers had been caught red-handed using 6 tractors to destroy hundreds of acres of wetlands without an environmental license. The authorities ordered a halt to operations but they were resumed the next day to finish the shrimp farm which is called EXCASUR.

On 26th January 2010, EMAR II was granted an environmental permit for construction of shrimp farms in 169 hectares by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (SERNA) in a unique process which lasted only 5 days. It also gave a license to EMAR I that had been operating for several years without an environmental license.

EXCASUR, which had earlier been punished for environmental crimes, waited for EMAR II to finish its shrimp farm with impunity before expanding its own on tens of hectares, claiming to have an environmental license dated 15th December 2009.

The irony and cynicism is that in all these cases the police and army have been protecting operations, equipment and facilities of the shrimp farmers. The President of the Honduran Council of Private Enterprise (COHEP) said: "We need more security because while farmers in the Lower Aguán try to recover land, in the south (Gulf of Fonseca) they [campesinos] have 'seized' a shrimp farm and this cannot be allowed because it will scare away investment."

The granting of environmental permits that led to the expansion of aquaculture within Ramsar site #1000 in La Berbería did not consider the General Environmental Law. It did not respect the National System of Environmental Impact Assessment. It did not respect Site Ramsar #1000

M&S and Honduran Prawns

It has been brought to our attention that some Marks and Spencers shops are selling prawns (shrimp) from Honduras. As noted in the previous article, prawn farming – at least large-scale, export-led prawn farming – is generally a very environmentally destructive activity. The areas used for prawn farming were previously mangrove swamp, so there is considerable environmental destruction in setting up the farms.

The process of farming is itself an environmentally damaging one:

- Most of the nutrients used to feed the prawns/shrimp is waste and falls to the bottom of the shrimp beds
- The water and silt at the bottom of the shrimp beds becomes acidic pretty quickly owing to the chemicals excreted by the shrimp/prawns.
- Because of this the shrimp beds are flushed out into the sea/river in order to provide fresh water to avoid the toxic sludge from poisoning the shrimp growing in the beds.
- The land around the shrimp beds becomes contaminated with salt and acid for tens or hundreds of metres around the beds themselves.
- Despite the flushing of the shrimp beds they eventually become so contaminated by acid build-up that they have to be abandoned and new shrimp bed created; the mangrove swamp cannot be rehabilitated for a long time and we believe the shrimp farming industry makes little or no effort to rehabilitate the shrimp beds after they have been abandoned.

At the moment we feel it is too early to take any direct action with Marks and Spencers, but instead would like to ask our readers to help us gather more information on this subject.

or the guidelines of the Management Plan.

On 5 March 2010, over 80 hectares of wetlands were converted into shrimp farms in the Gulf of Fonseca in addition to thousands of others that had already been converted. In La Berbería, wildlife has lost most of their habitat and fishermen have lost or are struggling for access to the mangroves and food sources for survival. ...

*As the insatiable demand for shrimp continues in Europe, Japan, USA and Australia, wetland ecosystems continue to disappear. **Does it matter?***

Extracted and adapted from Jorge Varela Marquez (March 2010) 'Consumerism in developed countries causes destruction of wetlands in the tropics', CODDEFFAGOLF, Honduras



A packet of the prawns in question

We are asking our readers to see if their local Marks and Spencers are stocking Honduran Prawns.

If they are, you might like to write to M&S and ask the following questions:

- Are the prawns in question farmed?
- Have M&S checked how sustainable the prawn farming process is?
- Was mangrove swamp removed to make way for the prawn farming?
- Who owns the land that is used for the prawn farms?
- Have M&S checked whether the shrimp beds will be rehabilitated after they fall into disuse?

Let us know the results of your investigations, and help us map the extent of this problem to enable us to challenge these practices. Email us at:

enca2011@gmail.com

Share your findings or comments through our Facebook page

Search for Environmental Network for Central America

ENCA Newsletter 54, October 2011, p.4

El Salvador urged to declare state of environmental health emergency in southern coast

By Stephanie Williamson

The southern zone of Jiquilisco Bay has become El Salvador's priority concern for human health and environmental protection due to critical levels of contamination in the watercourses and saltwater mangrove swamps. A year ago health authorities were alerted to a very high incidence of kidney disease, following a survey conducted by Cuban renal experts. The survey found that 11 out of every 100 inhabitants in the Jiquilisco and Bajo Lempa areas suffer chronic renal health problems and that the incidence is particularly high among men. This compares with an incidence rate of 2 per 100 in other countries. There are suspicions that the problem may be related to contamination of water sources, including wells, by insecticides and herbicides used in cotton production decades ago. The Mayor of Jiquilisco has called for the government to declare the zone a state of emergency so that all relevant government agencies prioritise efforts to address the health problems.

The Salvadoran Waterworks Board and the Ministry of Environment are working together to provide clean drinking water as a first step. Locals are demanding a water treatment plant to be set up as they fear that many of the artisanal wells used by rural communities may be contaminated.

Jiquilisco Bay is one of the jewels of El Salvador's ecological crown, providing home to over 1,500 species of animals and plants, and serving as an important wetlands for migratory birds. The Bay and its 18,000ha of mangroves, the most extensive in all Central America's Pacific coast, have been declared an international RAMSAR site and Biosphere Reserve. José Acosta from the NGO Centre for Appropriate Technology (CESTA, a longstanding partner of ENCA's) believes the Bay area deserves permanent special attention and should become a fully protected ecological reserve.

An independent Salvadoran research unit has now detected residues of 10 prohibited pesticides in water samples and evidence that empty pesticide drums are being used to store water for drinking purposes for humans and cattle. The expanding sugarcane cultivation is being blamed for a current wave of pesticide contamination, with run-off draining into the mangrove forests. Ecosystem degradation, along with deforestation by the large-scale shrimp farming industry, has led to an 80% reduction in mangroves in recent years.

So far in 2011 the authorities have distributed 4,000 household water filter units and have submitted for presidential approval plans for a larger programme for drinking water supply. Following further analysis of water samples, the Ministry of Environment may declare a state

of emergency if contamination levels are high. The government awaits news of a US\$5 million World Bank project to restore ecological health in Jiquilisco and support employment and local fishing livelihoods.

Sources:

El Salvador: Bahía de Jiquilisco con residuos de plaguicidas, *La Prensa Gráfica*, 7th October 2010.

ANDA en busca de solución de corto plazo, *La Prensa Gráfica*, 7th March 2011.

Pobladores y autoridades preocupados por casos de deficiencia renal en Jiquilisco, *La Pagina.com* 08/06/11.

Turtle refuge threatened by drug trafficking

The following short piece is reproduced from the weekly Nicaragua News Bulletin of 17th August 2011. It was a summary of an article in the daily La Prensa of 9th August 2011.

Every year, more than 30,000 turtles arrive at the Chacocente Wildlife Refuge in Nicaragua to lay their eggs. Unfortunately, the beach and the nearby forest area have also become a key route for drug trafficking, according to police officials.

The Chacocente Refuge includes over 11,400 acres of tropical dry forest that borders the Astillero, Huehueté, Casares and La Boquita beaches. Environment Ombudsman Pablo Morales said that even though the area has not yet been declared a site of world importance, it should be treated as such. Currently, there are only five guards supplied by the Nicaraguan Army and five park rangers on duty covering all the protected land.

This level of personnel has proven to be insufficient for addressing the drug problem. In addition to this challenge, the roads within the refuge are in poor condition, making tips about drug traffickers difficult to address in a timely fashion. "[W]e can't deny that the zone has become a key point for drug traffickers, but it has been difficult to respond as we should due to the lack of financial resources and personnel," said a policeman specialising in narcotics.



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Panama Canal expansion a 'game changer'

The following article by Alex Leff appeared in Costa Rica's English language weekly newspaper the Tico Times on 21 June this year.

Tico Times, June 21st 2011, San José, Costa Rica



Panama's \$5.25 billion canal expansion project, to be ready in 2014, has prompted a flurry of projects throughout the region, including terminal improvements at 13 of the leading US ports, as well as expansion plans at Costa Rica's Moín Port on the Caribbean coast.

As Costa Rica squabbles over an almost \$1 billion project to expand its Caribbean port of Moín, the country is not just jittery about the plans for its east coast. Costa Rica is also keeping one eye south of the border, on Panama. Costa Rica is not alone. Major port revamps from Moín to Miami are under way with that small but mighty isthmus country in mind.

When the Panama Canal was built almost 100 years ago, it revolutionised travel and trade. Now expansion of the canal, set to be unveiled in 2014, is a new driving force for ports across the hemisphere that see the need to gear up for the future it promises: an all-water route for oversize ships transiting from Asia to the Atlantic.

Before the 1960s, virtually every commercial ship on the seas could fit through the Panama Canal's locks, which measure 1,000 feet by 110 feet (305 meters by 33.5 meters). But the size of ships has been swelling over the years. Today the canal is too narrow and shallow for vessels deemed 'post-Panamax', which are larger than the 'Panamax' limit set by the canal's current dimensions. The canal's size causes it to miss out on as much as 15 percent of seaborne shipping, according to the US National Maritime Domain Awareness Coordination Office.

Squeezed by rising fuel prices, shipping-line companies are quickly moving to supersize their fleets to protect their profit margins. Bigger boats can save money by way of fewer journeys and greater economies of scale. The Panama Canal Authority saw expanding as a critical move to accommodate the new fleets, according to Rodolfo Sabonge, the authority's vice president of market research and analysis.

The Panama Canal will have larger locks and deeper and wider channels to make way for the post-Panamax world of shipping. Sabonge said the expansion will nearly triple per-ship cargo capacity from the current 4,400 20-foot container limit to 12,600 containers.

Other ports in the Americas lack the capacity to handle vessels loaded with that many boxes, so the race is on to deepen and widen harbours and upgrade port equipment in time for Panama's much hyped canal opening.

The expansion project has prompted a flurry of projects throughout the region, including terminal improvements at 13 of the leading US ports, as well as expansion plans at Costa Rica's Moín Port on the Caribbean coast.

The United States' 13 leading ports have slated \$8.57 billion for terminal improvements and channel deepening projects in the next five years, according to a report by real estate consulting firm Jones Lang LaSalle. The country's new infrastructure kick is largely motivated by the Panama Canal project, an absolute "game changer," said the report's author, John Carver. "The Panama Canal ... is stimulating a great deal of infrastructure investment and attention into the port systems, particularly along the East Coast of the US, the mid-Atlantic coast and certain areas of the Gulf Coast as well," Carver said. He added that on the US West Coast, which has long held a market advantage for handling ships from Asia, the expansion is forcing ports there "to really step up their game to remain competitive."

The American Association of Port Authorities (AAPA) has been observing these trends closely. While some experts argue the canal expansion is win-win for all, port officials are wary that some docks are positioned to become bigger winners. "The bigger ships will make fewer stops to be efficient," said Rafael Díaz-Balart, AAPA's coordinator for Latin America. "That means on the one hand there's going to be a lot more transshipment than there is right now, and ultimately there are certain ports that will benefit from those ships visiting the ports, but there won't be that many ports."

Which ports will benefit most? "That is the question everybody has and nobody has answered," Díaz-Balart said. The United Nation's top Latin America infrastructure authority expects winners in this region as well. "The expansion, by allowing larger ships to pass, will also give an advantage to other countries in the Americas that are also going to see greater possibility of connection through Panama," said Ricardo Sánchez, infrastructure chief at the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, or ECLAC.

Sánchez said the biggest Latin American beneficiaries outside Panama will be Peru, Chile and Ecuador. Costa Rica, which expects its yearly container traffic to more than

double in the next 35 years, is planning its own maritime overhaul. The publicly run port of Moín struggles with a maximum haul of 2,500 containers and relies on the ships' own cranes to move them.

In March, the government awarded a \$992 million contract to Dutch firm APM Terminals to expand and modernise the port's outdated facilities. The new Moín Port would have state-of-the-art loading equipment to handle vessels lugging as many as 8,500 containers, said Paul Gallie, APM Terminals' director of business development for the Americas. Because of increased costs, the privatisation and revamp of Moín is still a hard sell to domestic exporters such as banana businesses, which are challenging the

concession in court. Many dockworkers also object to privatising the ports. ECLAC's Sánchez said the plans laid out for Moín are "very interesting and ambitious." However, he urges the region overall to cool down. The expansion is clearly a game-changer for the US East Coast but it does not guarantee that the rising tide will lift all boats at Latin America's nearly 400 ports. Rattling off the list of expansions at the Dominican Republic's Causedo, Jamaica's Kingston, Trinidad's Point Lisas, Guadeloupe, Martinique and others, Sánchez begins to worry. "It makes us a little concerned that maybe it's too much," he said. "I don't think there will be so much impact for so many ports."

Sharks offered some degree of protection

Despite the appalling record of human rights abuses conducted by agents of the state in Honduras, the illegitimate, post-coup Honduran government has acted to continue and improve its 2010 moratorium on shark fishing. Recognising the importance of sharks to its coral reef systems and to its tourism industry, the government has created a 92,665 square mile shark sanctuary in its waters.

Recognising that protecting sharks helps both the environment and people, Honduran Vice President María Antonieta Guillén de Bogran said, "When tourists come to Roatán and other destinations, they spend money to see the sharks. But these animals don't just help the Honduran economy. Our coral reefs and marine environment thrive because these apex predators are safe in our waters. Today's declaration will help us all, underwater and on land, for generations to come." [Ed. We could suggest a few other measures that the Honduran government should take to protect its citizens on land.]

Swimming with whale sharks is becoming a major tourist attraction, as these awe-inspiring giants are of little danger to humans.

About one third of all shark species are threatened with extinction, primarily due to overfishing for their fins. Honduras banned all shark fishing last year, and hopefully with this additional move will show other countries how fishing for tourist dollars is a smarter move in the long run, if handled correctly.

In Nicaragua at the end of August, the Nicaraguan Sustainable Development Foundation (FUNDENIC) submitted 7,850 signatures to the president of the National Assembly Commission on the Environment, Francisco Jarquin. The petition demanded a clarification of the law prohibiting the harvest of shark fins and an extension of regulation to small-scale local fishing as well. Proponents hope to expand already existing legislation on the subject.

Sharks are captured, their fins removed, and the sharks returned to the water, where they die. Shark meat sells on the Nicaraguan market for a mere US\$0.50 per pound while the fins bring around \$35 a pound in Asia, making it uneconomical to bring in the meat but extremely lucrative to harvest only the fins.



Photo via Pew, credit George Stoyale

According to environmentalist and FUNDENIC consultant Fabio Buitrago, the current law states, "It is prohibited to capture sharks in continental waters for the sole purpose of cutting off their fins," but it does not list any specifics about shark species, sizes, etc. FUNDENIC President Jaime Incer said that the law has gaps that "unscrupulous" fishing companies that have been expelled from the waters of other countries take advantage of. Buitrago added that lawmakers should mandate an end to permits for the unloading of sharks or shark fins in Nicaraguan ports, as happened recently in San Juan del Sur.

Jarquin responded favourably to the petition saying that he recognises that Nicaragua cannot allow practices such as shark fishing to negatively impact the future.

Sources:

UPI Briefing 24.6.11, 'Honduras declares shark sanctuary'.

La Prensa, Sept. 3 2011, Managua.

Radio La Primerisima, Sept 3 2011, Managua.

El Nuevo Diario, Sept. 3 2011, Managua.

ENCA Newsletter 54, October 2011, p.7

Once Again, Forced Disappearance is being Implemented in Honduras

The Committee of Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared in Honduras (COFADEH), with great concern, would like to inform the international community, and the Honduran population in particular, that the practice of forced disappearance is once again being systematically implemented in Honduras, as demonstrated by the following cases.



Osmin Obando Cáceres (age 22), son of Eliodoro Cáceres, Coordinator of the National Popular Resistance Front (FNRP) in Tela, department of Atlántida, has been disappeared since Sunday, June 13, 2010 at 4:30 PM after his taxi was surrounded by police.



Denis Alexander Russel (age 19) a student in the Instituto de la Patria in La Lima, was captured in an operation of the Special Anti-Kidnapping Taskforce (GEAS) on July 13, 2010. The operation was commanded by Vice Minister of Security Armando Calidonio and police spokesperson Juan Rochez.



Luís Alexander Torres Casaleno, detained on July 20, 2010 by police agents while driving his motorcycle, after having passed a police checkpoint on the Corocito highway towards Tocoa, Colón. A few kilometers past the checkpoint he was detained by four agents of the Preventative Police who were riding in a white unmarked double-cab pick-up truck and crossed in front of him on the highway. Two agents in uniform got out of the truck and put him into the vehicle, leaving his motorcycle behind. The motorcycle was retrieved by the Corocito police shortly afterwards. A habeas corpus was filed in his name and there has been no response to date.



Vilmar Edmundo Talavera Avilez, a police officer, was detained by the Border Police (Policía de Frontera y Análisis) on July 15, 2010 while he was riding a bus. He was detained after presenting his identification documents. Before his disappearance he was reportedly threatened by a police officer by the name of Tercero.



Kelvin Omar Andrade Hernández (age 18), son of political exile Dagoberto Andrade, disappeared on June 11, 2011 when he went out to ride his motorcycle in the neighbourhood of Bella Vista in Catacamas, department of Olancho. He has not appeared since.



Samuel Josué Pastrana Molina was kidnapped on February 7, 2011 at 2:30 by armed men with ski masks in the department of El Paraíso.



Oscar Elías López Muñoz (49) was kidnapped by masked men around 5:00 AM on Sunday August 21st in the Suyapa neighbourhood of Chamelecón in the North of Honduras. The men arrived in three cars and broke down the doors of his home, where López Muñoz was with his wife and ten year-old daughter. They said they were agents of the National Department of Criminal Investigation (DNIC). They were wearing hoods and ski masks.



Francisco Pascual López of the Rigores agricultural cooperative in Tocoa, Colón, is disappeared since May 15, 2011.



Mauricio Joel Urbino Castro (34), who worked as a taxi driver in La Ceiba in the department of Atlántida. He was at a garage when four men whose faces were covered with ski masks, carrying long and short barrelled weapons, identified themselves as police and immediately ordered all present to get on the ground. Mauricio Joel Urbino Castro was beaten, his hands fastened behind him, was forced into a grey pick-up truck with heavily tinted windows and no licence plates. He has not been seen since.



José Reynaldo Cruz Palma, president of the Community Council (Patronato) of Planeta Neighbourhood in San Pedro Sula was kidnapped on August 30, 2011 by agents of the DNIC and Preventative Police when the bus he was riding in was intercepted by various agents of both police forces. The uniformed agents got on the bus, and took him by force.

In light of these facts COFADEH has filed the corresponding denunciations but to date the Ministry of the Attorney General, the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, and state investigative bodies have maintained a conspiratorial silence and have not taken any action in any of these cases.

Committee of Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared of Honduras (COFADEH)

www.cofadeh.org

Environmentalists under threat

It is one of the most depressing aspects of editing the ENCA Newsletter that never does an issue pass by without us having to consider for inclusion some news or information about assassinations, forced disappearances and other human rights abuses committed in the region. The targets of these abuses are social activists, trade unionists and environmentalists, namely anybody who stands in the way of the powerful and the elite in their quest to make ever greater financial profits from the exploitation of the natural and/or human resources of the Central American countries.

Since the neoliberal surge of the 1990s, these elites have increasingly included the management sectors of the transnational corporations (TNCs) which have begun to impose a corporate culture on the region. The abuses of course are carried out by groups within the recognised armed forces – that is, the old-style death squads, still operational within the region – and by gang members and hitmen hired specifically for the job. This enables the intellectual authors of this violence, such as the Honduran power-broker, influence-peddler, businessman and gangster Miguel Facussé, to distance themselves from the violence and to deny all knowledge of it. But it is not just local businessmen and power-brokers who are the intellectual authors of these deeds; management personnel of transnational corporations are also joining the gangster class and paying off mayors to support their planned mines, dams, plantations and other projects. The mayors then serve as the hirers of the assassins, which helps the businessmen to insert the distance between themselves and the perpetrators.

The last few months have seen the killings of numerous activists, especially in Honduras where assassinations and forced disappearances are now routine thanks to the climate of impunity promoted or at least allowed by the illegitimate government currently in power. To do justice to these victims we would devote considerable space to each of them – of course real justice would demand thorough investigations into each of their assassinations, but the chances of getting that with such a government are slim. Instead, then, we give here a simple list of a few of the assassins' victims of the last few months.

- 14.06.11 **Joel Hernández Godoy** (SITRAPI union leader) Guatemala
 03.07.11 **Juan Francisco Durán Ayala** (Environmental Committee of Cabañas) El Salvador
 July 2011 **Facundo Cabral** (Argentinian poet and activist) killed in Guatemala
 20.08.11 **Secundino Ruiz Vallecillo** (MUCA member in the Aguán valley) Honduras
 20.08.11 **Pedro Salgado** (La Concepción community, Aguán valley) Honduras
 20.08.11 **Irene Licóna** (wife of Pedro Salgado, Aguán valley) Honduras

- 02.09.11 **Olvin Gonzalez** (Marañones settlement, Aguán valley) Honduras
 06.09.11 **Neptaly Mendes** (attacked, beaten and left for dead, but survived – Aguán valley) Honduras
 Sept 2011 **Medardo Flores** (member of the Front for National Resistance, FNRP) Honduras

In our next edition, we are planning a more thorough article to cover the struggles which have led to a few of these killings.

Please help ENCA in reporting the injustices in Central America, to help us and others hold those responsible to account. Please consider making a donation through our website or use the form below to join us in fighting for environmental issues in Central America



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**Return to: ENCA, c/o NSC, Durham Road Centre,
 86 Durham Road, London N7 7DT**

Re-Activation Programme for SELVA's Tezoatega Ecological Park

Over the years, ENCA has frequently supported the Nicaraguan organisation SELVA (Somos Ecologistas en Lucha por la Vida y el Ambiente / We are Ecologists Fighting for Life and the Environment) with small grants for specific purposes. We can probably say that they are one of our closest partner organisations in the region.

A few ENCA members will be aware that SELVA and its Tezoatega Ecological Park on the edge of the town of El Viejo went through a difficult financial period from 2007. Those who attend ENCA meetings will probably also be aware that an anonymous donor has granted them funds sufficient enough to re-activate their ecological park and to re-energise their membership and activities. The funding required amounted to approximately \$30,000 and a twelve month programme of work for the re-activation was designed by SELVA. The programme began in November 2010 and will be close to an end by the time you receive this newsletter.

They now have a large conference and meetings rancho (shown below), a large kitchen and dining rancho, small ranchos offering overnight accommodation for visitors, and appropriate toilet and shower facilities. Additionally, they are undertaking a range of recycling work as well as growing a variety of crops and trees on the land surrounding their refurbished buildings.



In November this year, Jason Searing, an ESOL lecturer in City College Plymouth, will be volunteering with SELVA helping them with their publicity programme designed to attract visitors to the park and conferences to make use of the venue. He has taken unpaid sabbatical leave for one year from his job and will work with SELVA for an as yet unspecified number of months. We hope that Jason will provide a report of his time with SELVA for ENCA 55 or ENCA 56.

www.selvanic.org

No More Politics and Business as Usual with War Criminals in Guatemala

In August this year, ENCA received a request to add our name to a sign-on letter that was presented to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture in support of an Allegation letter that was sent to the same person. The request was sent to us by Grahame Russell of the Canadian organisation Rights Action and referred to the criminal human rights record of leading Guatemalan presidential candidate, ex-General Otto Pérez Molina.

After an exercise in telephone and email democracy around the regular attenders at ENCA meetings, ENCA agreed to add its name to the sign-on letter. Below we reproduce the Allegation letter which provides the background to and details of the issues involved in Guatemalan 'democracy'.

Dear Mr. Mendez,

We would like to begin this letter by thanking you for your many decades of crucial human rights work. We are writing today to express our growing concern about the torture record of General Otto Pérez Molina of Guatemala. As you know, he is currently a Presidential candidate for the September 2011 elections.

However, there is very strong evidence that he was in a command position in the Ixil triangle in 1982, when acts of torture, terror and genocide were daily events in that region. Moreover, the evidence shows that he was the key intellectual author of the forced disappearance and long term torture of Efraín Bamaca Velásquez in the 1990s. He is implicated in a number of other serious war crimes as well.

For many years he was able to conceal his past through the use of false names, the destruction of records, and of course, intimidation. However, the evidence has slowly but surely come to light.

At this time, General Pérez Molina claims to be a reformist and a leader for peace. He has completely silenced the press as well as his opponents in Guatemala. The Mayan survivors in the Ixil area remember Pérez Molina only too well, but cannot speak without placing their families in jeopardy. Moreover, a large percentage of the Mayan survivors cannot vote. Worse yet, as discussed below, his military allies have heavily obstructed the prosecutions of the emblematic war crimes cases, a special program which began in late 2009.

Each of us has long been involved in human rights work in Guatemala, and we have observed the accelerating chaos and violence during the last year with growing alarm. We believe that the lack of official recognition of Pérez Molina's and other military leaders' serious involvement in crimes against humanity is contributing heavily to the current crisis. The unlawful impunity which has so long shielded the military is now threatening the civilian institutions, the rule of law and the fragile transition to democracy.

We of course do not ask you to become involved in the electoral process in any way. We do however, ask that quite apart from the elections, and whatever their results, your offices investigate and help to break the long standing silence regarding Pérez Molina's substantial involvement in torture and genocide in Guatemala.

As you know, the Peace Accords ended the armed conflict but did not bring peace to Guatemala. We are especially concerned with the ongoing crisis in the judicial system. When the government first moved to advance the prosecutions of a number of key emblematic cases, organized crime networks strongly tied to influential military figures responded by trying to position one of their allies into the position of Attorney General.

This resulted in the resignation of Carlos Castresana, Director of the CICIG, in the spring of 2010. After he disclosed the candidate's close ties to networks of corruption and abuse, the recently appointed Attorney General was forced to resign.

Apparently in response, human heads appeared in strategic locations in the capitol, one on the doorstep of the Congress. Thanks to the sacrifices of Lic. Castresana, at the end of 2010, after almost six months of intense work by human rights organizations, Claudia Paz, a jurist recognized for her long struggle to reform the justice system in Guatemala, was named as Attorney General.

The military then focused its attention on the courts and judges. In the beginning of 2010, the Constitutional Court, apparently bowing to heavy pressure, began to issue remarkable rulings, defying international law and direct orders from the Inter American Court.

In the Bamaca case two amparos were granted which directly contradicted the Corte IDH resolutions.

In the case of the Rio Negro massacre, the same court asked for reconsideration of the obediencia debida defense, despite the clear holdings of Nuremberg.

Meanwhile, the magistrates of the Supreme Court are intent on complying with international norms, but fear for their lives. In a historical advance, on June 20 a General was formally accused of participation in acts of genocide.

However, all advances will be lost under a military administration which will doubtless move to swiftly change the Fiscal General. In short, the entire transition to the rule of law is in jeopardy.

Accordingly, we are asking your offices to carry out an investigation of the long term involvement of General Otto Pérez Molina in torture throughout the war, including but not limited to the systematic use of torture in the Ixil triangle and other areas in the 1980s, as well as the systematic torture of all prisoners of war, especially as National Director of the intelligence division in 1992.

Once again, we will be happy to connect you to key witnesses, but have omitted their names here in order to protect them and their families.

Please let us know if we can offer you further information or documentation. We await your response, and thank you once again for your lifelong commitment to the defence of human rights.

Sincerely,

Rights action

(This letter was also co-signed by ENCA and a number of other human rights and socio-environmental groups.)



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www.enca.org.uk

CDM fail to Recognise Human Rights

This summer ENCA also signed an open letter outlining concerns about the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) in Bajo Aguan.

Grupo Dinant's palm oil biogas CDM project in Bajo Aguan has been registered by the CDM Board, despite objections from many civil society groups, international media attention on the company's involvement in human rights abuses, and despite even the fact that EDF Trading (who were going to purchase the CDM credits) publicly withdrew from the project.

Martin Hession, the European chairman of the CDM board, said in an emailed statement that as much as the board deplores the allegations of human rights abuses, it is "not equipped to investigate whether they are true." This is despite the well-documented land conflicts and serious human rights abuses as well as the complete impunity which have been documented by FIAN, a human rights group, amongst others. 12 more peasants have been reported killed in the Bajo Aguan valley in the last four months alone, yet the CDM Board doesn't see that as a problem for the CDM, only for the Honduran (de-facto) Government (which has consistently failed to investigate and prosecute those killings).

The CDM Board's clear message thus confirms that human rights are and will be ignored in all cases. So far, no company has come forward wanting to purchase CDM credits from the project, but it could happen any time.

Two Longo Maï videos on YouTube

ENCA has long had a close relationship with the community of Longo Maï in southern Costa Rica. The people of Longo Maï have supplied us with much information about the pineapple industry which surrounds them; quite a few of us have supported their small-scale, low impact ecotourism and we have awarded small grants for various items and ideas in the community; and some of us have even gone so far as marrying into the community!

Recently the community has produced two new ten-minute videos which are now accessible on YouTube at:

1. Longo Mai 1

www.youtube.com/watch?v=HFsw6fZzJFE

2. Longo Mai Costa Rica - Part 2:the US Pineapple Industry's Toxic Impact.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=0TCu7ysPt98

We urge all our supporters to visit and view these two videos.

for more information about Cooperative Longo Mai please see website: www.sonador.info/en/

Mail bag

In July this year we received a letter of great encouragement for ENCA from Linda Holland who is the Director of the Institute for Central American Studies (ICAS) in San José, Costa Rica and who used to produce the monthly Central American news journal 'Mesoamerica' until it ceased hard copy publication and went online only. She says:

"Since you were last here, I have received two ENCA Newsletters--Nos. 52 and 53--and appreciated reading those very much. I think No. 52 was exceptionally good--not that the news is good, you understand, but it is important to get this kind of news out to the public. And, now, I depend on you for this kind of news--I still find it sad that I have no part in publishing this kind of information and interacting with interns. Oh well... How many years have we been writing about those disastrous gold mines? Good grief, it just goes on and on. Banana plantations or pineapple farms, pretty much the same story."

We thought our readers would like to know that some of ENCA's efforts are appreciated in the region of Central America itself, not just in the UK. Linda also made a generous donation to ENCA's work and we are extremely grateful to her. We are also in full agreement with her point about the need to get this kind of news out to the public.

www.mesoamericaonline.net

We are also very pleased to have received the following letter from Isabel MacDonald, former director of Centro de Amigos Para la Paz in San José, Costa Rica and of FECON, and who is now working on a campaign to ban depleted uranium from the Americas.

Thank you very much and congratulations on this very complete and graphically appealing newsletter 53. Starting to read it while stranded at the San Pedro Sula airport on my way back to Costa Rica where bad weather did not permit our landing.... on the way back from a Film Festival in Brasil where we won a prize for our documentary on uranium weapons URANIO 238.

www.bandepleteduranium.org

From Karen Inwood, Director of IPES, the Salvadoran Permaculture Institute, after receipt of ENCA's donation of \$500 in response to their recent appeal:

"Thank you all so much. We'll let you know for sure but it looks like we are set to climb out pretty soon, and ENCA's support is helping us get through this difficult moment. Regards and thanks to everyone in ENCA."

www.permaculture.org/elsalvador.html



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Write to us and tell us what you think of the newsletter, our work or to bring to our attention your concerns or organisation

enca2011@gmail.com

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ENCA meeting dates 2012

26th February
17th June
21st October

ENCA meetings are held at the NSC's office at the Durham Road Centre – see address on page 12. The nearest tube station is Finsbury Park on the Victoria and Piccadilly lines. Meetings are held on Sundays from 12:30 pm to 5 pm and we start with lunch which is made up of whatever people attending choose to bring with them to share.

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