

Another way is possible



fair trade, cooperation and solidarity

NICARAGUA AND THE BOLIVARIAN ALLIANCE FOR THE PEOPLES OF OUR AMERICA (ALBA)

Millions around the world are protesting against TTIP (Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership) and against TPPA (Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement). Why? Because of the power that these so-called 'free trade' agreements will give transnational corporations: power to sue governments, to privatise public services, to sack workers, to reduce environmental protection, and to undermine democracy.

ALBA: Solidarity not 'Free Trade'

In contrast, the Latin American and Caribbean countries of the ALBA alliance have developed relationships between states based on solidarity, complementary trade, and respect for national and regional sovereignty. Using Nicaragua as an example, this briefing examines how, in a world driven by transnational companies and neo-liberal greed, ALBA's principles are put into practice.

Brief History of Nicaragua

Nicaragua is a small Central American country, the size of England, with a population of six million. After Haiti, it's the most impoverished country in the Americas. Although rich in natural resources, centuries of intervention and invasion by foreign powers, both direct and indirect, left Nicaragua with a weak, dependent economy – shaped to serve the interests of the North.

1927–1933 Nicaragua's revolutionary hero, Augusto César Sandino, leads a successful rebellion against the 18-year US military occupation of Nicaragua. He becomes a symbol of resistance to US domination of the region.

1979 A broad coalition of forces, led by the Sandinistas (FSLN), overthrows the US-backed Somoza dictatorship that had ruled Nicaragua for the previous 43 years.

1979–1990 The FSLN government implements a radical programme of reforms to restore national dignity and overcome

high levels of poverty left by centuries of foreign domination. President Reagan's US administration – determined to destroy the Sandinista Revolution by whatever means – launches a military, economic and propaganda war against Nicaragua. In 1986 the International Court of Justice rules that the US is in violation of international law and orders the US to pay reparations. The US refuses to accept the jurisdiction of the Court or to pay the estimated £12 billion damage to Nicaragua's infrastructure.

1990 After a decade of immense suffering as a result of the contra war – in which 30,000 people on both sides lost their lives – and in the face of economic collapse, the electorate makes a pragmatic choice: they vote for a US-backed coalition.

1990–2007 A succession of neo-liberal governments implement austerity programmes: cutting back on public expenditure, semi-privatising public services, and implementing mass public-sector sackings.

Investing in public services, poverty reduction and infrastructure

After 17 years in opposition, the FSLN returned to power in 2007 – committed to improving the lives of the 50% of the population suffering chronic and persistent levels of poverty. Mindful of the disastrous consequences of hyperinflation and economic collapse caused by the 1980s US-backed contra war and US trade embargo, the government embarked on a programme that combines macroeconomic stability with extensive investment in infrastructure and social programmes to combat poverty. Education and basic health services are now free.

“Joining ALBA marks a decision to work within the logic of fair trade, mutual respect and solidarity in order to build our own Latin American and Caribbean space, so that we can all have more stability to enable us to really attack hunger and poverty.”
President Daniel Ortega
2007

In what the World Bank has described as a “remarkable economic turnaround”, GDP has increased by four to five per cent annually, inflation has dropped to single figures, exports

have doubled, and Foreign Direct Investment – critical to macroeconomic stability – has quadrupled. The UN Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) has praised Nicaragua's social programmes that address food security and malnutrition. According to the International Foundation for the Global Economic Challenge (FIDEG), poverty has fallen from 48% to 40%; and extreme poverty from 17.2% to 9.5%. This represents improvements in the lives of tens of thousands of people, particularly women, whose suffering had been ignored by previous governments. Integration into ALBA has been critical to these advances.

Latin American Integration

ALBA (the Bolivarian *Alliance for the Peoples of Our America) set up in 2005 is a socialist political and economic bloc of 11 Latin American and Caribbean countries who believe that integration is essential to overcoming poverty, inequality and social exclusion. ALBA is based on the fundamental principles of solidarity, complementary trade, social justice, and respect for national and regional sovereignty. Trade is a tool to fight poverty, rather than the enrichment of powerful countries at the expense of impoverished ones. ALBA consists of 11 countries: Antigua and Barbuda, Bolivia, Cuba, Dominica, Ecuador, Grenada, Nicaragua, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Venezuela.

Petrocaribe is an oil alliance set up in 2005 based on the same principles as ALBA. It is made up of Venezuela and 18 countries of Central America and the Caribbean, with a total population of 100 million.

Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) is a regional bloc of 33 Latin American and Caribbean states. Set up in 2011, it represents 600 million people – including all countries of the Americas apart from Canada and the US. It was created to deepen Latin American integration and to dilute US influence in the region.

UNASUR is a political and economic alliance of twelve South American States with a population of 380 million.

“ ALBA [in Spanish] means daybreak, hope, a new opportunity for a trading exchange to escape poverty and to ensure a more just distribution of wealth at a national level and across Latin America. With ALBA it isn't a case of I get what I need and everyone else can get swept away on the tide....it is an integrated way to fight poverty, the poverty we have inherited from unjust trade treaties.”

Walmaro Gutierrez
FSLN deputy in the National Assembly

*The sixth Summit of ALBA-TCP in 2009 changed the name from 'Alternative' to 'Alliance' in recognition of the fact that FTAA no longer represented a threat.

Burying the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA)

In 1994 the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between the US, Canada and Mexico came into being, followed in 2005 by the Dominican Republic–Central America Free Trade Agreement (DR-CAFTA) with the US. Both these agreements are based on neoliberal principles of the removal of trade barriers, deregulation, minimising the role of the state, austerity, and privatisation of state-owned services and companies. However, the next stage in this US grand plan, the creation of the FTAA, disappeared into the sea at the Summit of the Americas in 2005.

Fidel Castro warned of the threat to the Americas of the FTAA as early as 1994: “Like never before, we need the ideas of Bolívar and Martí. In this unipolar world, our people are threatened by being devoured by empire, destroying our independence and sovereignty. The imperialist strategy is very clear: to impose a political and economic regime convenient to the United States. But if

we put the ideas of Bolívar and Martí into practice, it will lead to an end to injustice, the end of exploitation.”

Bolivian president Evo Morales described the FTAA as “a proposal to legalise the colonisation of the Americas.” It was a US attempt to

create the world's largest trading bloc, swallowing up the 34 countries of the Americas with their population of 745 million. However, opposition grew rapidly throughout the Americas, involving social movements, left and centre-left parties, and governments.



Ecuadorian president Rafael Correa with the late Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez

The Emergence of ALBA

When President Hugo Chávez took power in Venezuela in 1999, he advocated a new kind of Latin American integration to confront neo-liberalism and hegemonic initiatives like the FTAA. “We have had the idea of launching a proposal which could be named ALBA,” Chávez said in 2004, “or the Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of Our America. A new concept of integration

that is hardly new. It's about bringing back to life a dream that we hope to be possible. It's about forging another path; a search for something because integration is vital for us. Either we unite, or we drown. Which is why I say: ‘Let us choose the alternatives!’”

In 2005, these two opposing visions of the future for Latin America and the Caribbean – ALBA and FTAA – came to a head at the fourth Summit of the Americas in Argentina. A

belligerent President George Bush was determined to promote the FTAA; an equally determined Hugo Chavez stated: “I believe we came here to bury the FTAA. I brought my shovel to join in the burial. The hour of the continent's second independence has arrived!” This was a reference to liberator Simón Bolívar's sixteen-year struggle against the Spanish for a unified independent state known as Gran Colombia (Great Colombia).

Principles of ALBA and Petrocaribe

Trade and investment should not be an end in themselves, but instruments to achieve sustainable state regulated development.

Special and differential treatment taking into account levels of development, guaranteeing all countries that take part have access to the benefits of integration.

Cooperation and solidarity meaning shared responsibility that includes joint projects and strategic alliances for mutual benefit. These projects such as literacy and health programmes have extended far beyond just ALBA member countries – see page 8

Complementary action – recognise the strengths and potential of each country. For example, Nicaragua produces food that Venezuela needs; Venezuela has oil, essential for non oil producing Nicaragua.

Respect for national sovereignty – no rigid formulas. ALBA initiatives operate in different ways in each country, according to their characteristics.

Defence of the identity of the peoples of the region – for example, the creation of Television of the South (Telesur) as an alternative instrument for disseminating information about Latin American reality

How ALBA-TCP (People’s Trade Treaty) Differs from Conventional Trade Agreements

A LBA-TCP is an agreement based on fair and complementary trade. Venezuela supplies and interchanges oil to non oil-producing countries, based on an agreement whose characteristics are socialist, that liberates countries from the excluding rules of the market economy. It is an agree-

ment which stimulates trade in products and services, and that allows the countries of Central America and the Caribbean preferential markets for their exports.

Trade treaties with the US and with Europe are unfavourable for Latin American countries, because they fail to take into account very different

levels of wealth – the consequence of centuries of the North serving its own interests by shaping the economies of the South.

Nicaragua is a member of DR-CAFTA (Dominican Republic-Central America Free Trade Agreement with the US) and the EU-Central America Association Agreement as well as ALBA – TCP.

	ALBA-TCP (2005)	DR-CAFTA (2005)	EU-Central America Association Agreement (2012)
Origins	Politically motivated by twenty-first century socialism, as outlined in the ALBA-TCP Manifesto of Caracas (2010).	Politically motivated by neo-liberalism. Promotes a capitalist model of integration based on ‘free trade’	Responds to geopolitical interests of the EU in building an integrated foreign policy towards Latin America.
Model	South-South integration. Holistic model that incorporates political, social and economic aspects. ALBA tries to address the very unequal levels of wealth between the countries involved.	North-South integration. Asymmetric, and limited to trade and investment.	A capitalist model of North-South integration.
Purpose	Overcoming poverty and social exclusion. Maintaining Latin American identity. Restricting the impact of neo-liberal policies.	Promoting complete ‘freedom’ of trade and investments.	Encouraging political dialogue, co-operation and ‘free trade’ in order to reduce structural inequalities.
Economics	Centred on energy and food sovereignty, and on security. Using oil as a mechanism for integration.	Agreement allowing for complete ‘freedom’ of trade and investments. Elimination of tariff barriers and other ‘obstacles’.	Agreement allowing for complete ‘freedom’ of trade and investments. Elimination of tariff and technical ‘barriers’.

Theory into Practice: Energy, Social and Production Programmes

When they returned to power in 2007, the priority of the Sandinista government was to transform the economy by regenerating investment in the public sector, the social economy and energy infrastructure. Key elements in government strategy were: guaranteeing free health care and education and investing in social and production programmes to eradicate poverty. Fundamental to their implementation

has been Nicaragua's integration into ALBA.

How does the Venezuela – Nicaragua trading relationship work?

- The Venezuelan state oil company, PDVSA, provides oil to a Nicaraguan company called Albanisa, who refine the oil and sell petrochemicals internally at world market prices.
- Nicaragua repays half of the cost to PDVSA through a 25-year loan at an interest rate of 2% annually.

- The other half is paid within 90 days, in cash and in kind (beef, cooking oil, coffee, sugar, milk, and beans).
- This arrangement enables Nicaragua to invest in production, social programmes and energy and road infrastructure.

ALBA-Supported Social Programmes

Between 2007 and 2014, social programmes all or part-funded by ALBA were worth a total of US\$1,383m (about £885m).

Participants	Scope	Impact
Zero Hunger programme for impoverished families in rural areas.	150,000 women organised into 1,775 groups and 295 co-operatives.	Reduction in hunger and malnutrition. Increased income and food security.
Public transport passengers.	Subsidised travel for two million people nationally.	Public transport system affordable for all sectors of society. Increase in real incomes.
Housing for the People. In 2007, Nicaragua had a deficit of 932,000 houses – houses in poor condition, overcrowding, and in high-risk areas.	50,000 new homes including whole neighbourhoods especially in Managua, 70,000 house repairs.	Restoration of the right to dignified, comfortable, secure housing. Generation of jobs in construction.
Streets for the People People in poor neighbourhoods living in streets with insanitary infrastructure and high incidence of disease such as respiratory problems and diarrhoea.	26,500 blocks in over 4,000 neighbourhoods constructed and paved.	Improved infrastructure – to promote social and economic development of neighbourhoods.
Sporting facilities for young people.	Availability of sports facilities, equipment, and training – for 500,000 young people.	200,000 young people actively integrated into sports and recreation programmes.
Solidarity bonus for low-paid state employees and retired people.	100,000 state employees and 30,000 retired people paid in cash or in kind.	Increased spending capacity and security.

The ALBA supported energy revolution

In 2006, Nicaragua's infrastructure was in crisis. Electricity distribution, telecommunications and other previously state owned enterprises had been privatised: investment in road, port, water and energy infrastructure was stagnant and in some cases riddled with corruption. A chronic power shortage had left many Nicaraguans suffering power cuts of up to 12 hours per day. With Venezuelan support the new government immediately installed more generating plants and began converting to renewables and extending the national grid. Only 25% of power generation was from renewables in 2007; this has increased to 52% in 2014 with a target of 86% by 2020. In 2015, 79% of the country is connected to the national grid, as opposed to 54% in 2006. UN General Secretary Ban Ki-moon [seen in photo visiting the ALBA – funded Parque Eólico Camilo Ortega Saavedra] praised Nicaragua's progress highlighting how critical electricity is to *'eradicating extreme poverty, promoting education and health programmes and human dignity.'*



UN/MARK GARTEN

ALBA-Supported Production Programmes

Between 2007 and 2014, production programmes all or part-funded by ALBA

have been worth a total of US\$2,043m (about £1,308m).

Participants	Scope	Impact
Zero Usury credit programme for urban women living in poverty.	100,000 women provided with credit at low rates of interest and fair repayment terms to develop their own small businesses.	Generation of employment and greater income security for families.
Credit for small-scale farmers.	Credit provided to 75,000 farmers annually to sow 100,000 <i>manzanas</i> (174,000 acres) of maize, beans, rice and sorghum.	Increased food production – contributing to greater food sovereignty and security.
Energy sovereignty – in 2006, only 40% of the population had electricity.	Connecting urban and rural areas to the national grid. Conversion to renewable energy – including hydro-electric, biogas, wind, and geothermal.	Goals: that 87% of the population has electricity by 2017; and 86% renewable energy by 2020.

Zero Hunger programme supports rural families

In 2005, according to the International Foundation for Global Economic Challenges (FIDEG is a Nicaraguan research NGO), 30.5% of the rural population lived in extreme poverty. By 2013, this figure had been reduced to 17.1%; a significant achievement in overcoming entrenched poverty caused by centuries of under-development. However, this means that over 400,000 people, particularly women and children, still live on the edge of subsistence on less than US\$1 per day.

The Zero Hunger programme forms part of a government strategy related to food sovereignty and security. The programme supports women heads of families in rural areas with small amounts of land, who suffer from insufficient food and from malnutrition.

Zero Hunger provides women with: cows, sows, goats, hens, seeds; materials to house the animals; and training and support in animal husbandry, administration, accounting, and building self-confidence. This improves family diet and generates income. 150,000 women participated in the programme between 2007 and 2014, organised into 776 groups and 295 co-operatives.

In September 2013, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) praised Nicaragua as an example of what can be achieved when a government prioritises food security.

Zero Hunger in Action

Farmer Marta Gutiérrez and her family live in the rural community of El Limón, near the town of Estelí. Her husband Alberto is a casual worker earning, when he can find work, two or three dollars a day. The family income before 2010 was well below the poverty line, averaging US\$50 a month (about £32).

Through the programme, Marta received a pregnant cow and sow, some chickens, and building materials. Participation in Zero Hunger has seen

The FAO Director-General, José Graziano da Silva, highlighted the Zero Hunger programme together with support for small-scale farmers, as examples that neighbouring countries could learn from.

the family income double to US\$100 a month, and their nutrition has improved through having their own fresh eggs and milk. Marta and 19 other women in her community have now set up a chicken rearing co-operative financed by micro credit loans and their own contributions.

Building the social economy

Nicaragua has a long history of co-operatives dating back to 1933 when the Nicaraguan liberation hero Augusto Cesar Sandino set up the first co-op in

Wiwili in 1933. This tradition continued through the Sandinista agrarian reform programme in the 1980s. In the early 1990s co-ops were formed to defend land and to gain access to markets (particularly through Fairtrade) and credit. Today Nicaragua has more than 5,000 registered co-ops with 250,000 members across every sector. The strengthening of this sector is critical to the government's vision of 'promoting socialism from above and below' through shared responsibility of the government and society.

Carmen Zelaya is a single mother living in Nejapa, a rural community just outside Managua. Before 2007, the family was living in extreme poverty, eking out a living as street sellers. For the past six years, she has been participating in the Zero Hunger programme. Along with other women in the community from her core group, Carmen received a Production Package, which included a cow, pigs, hens, and materials to construct pens. The whole group was given 200 hours' training in caring for livestock and in setting up small businesses.

Carmen says: "My involvement in the programme has been very important for building self-confidence, and for staying proud and strong." The core group of 41 women have set up a co-operative so that they can access credit from a revolving loan fund. Carmen reports that the Zero Hunger programme has played an important part in strengthening families, the community and the local economy of Nejapa.



Micro-Credit for Urban Women

The Alba-funded Zero Usury programme is for women, most of them single mothers, who earn a precarious and often dangerous living by selling goods in the streets. Through the programme women can get credit at low rates of interest and with fair terms of repayment which they use to develop small businesses. The programme aims to raise their income, self esteem and dignity through improving their family's standard of living.

- For women to qualify they must be over 18, under-employed or without an income, and organised into a solidarity group of five women.
- The initial maximum credit is £130 (in córdobas) per woman, repayable over five to eight months at 5% interest. Providing they meet the conditions of this loan, they are then able to access further credit.
- The programme provides training in running a small business, basic accounting and administration.
- Over 100,000 women in urban areas have participated in this programme between 2007 and 2014, with over 500,000 loans granted worth a total of £16 million (an average of £32 per loan).

Flor de María Avellan, street seller, trade unionist and city councillor

Flor de María Avellan comes from a campesino family in Matiguás, Matagalpa region. She went to the capital of Managua aged eleven, where she worked until nineteen as a domestic servant while studying at night. Since marrying, she has worked selling at traffic lights for twenty-five years. After their daughters were born, Flor had to give up her studies to bring up her children and to work at traffic lights selling things like towels, car accessories and seasonal items. Slowly, however, the family's economic circumstances have improved:

"Many years have passed. Humbly, I feel that I am active as a woman, a worker for the working class, and with great hopes of being able to pass on with love a better world to our children."

Flor de María has participated in the Zero Usury programme since 2008. She has used her credit to invest in buying a selection of sunglasses, enabling her to expand both business and income. This has helped provide an education for their children. One requirement of Zero Usury was to organise five women into a grupo solidario (solidarity group). The group worked together to find out more, make their application for credit, and they were given training.

They are individually and collectively responsible for repaying their loans.

The Confederation of Self-Employed Workers (CTCP)

Sixty-five per cent of the Nicaraguan workforce work in the streets. That's around 90,000 people who eke out a living in whatever way possible, many working up to twelve hours a day. Yet this critical sector contributes 44% of GDP. Their union is the Confederation of Self Employed

by Marxism." Orlando Nuñez, presidential advisor on the social economy, referring to reasons why the CTCP was set up.

The CTCP fights for the rights of its members and to eliminate poverty and marginalisation. Flor de María joined the union in 2002. Because of this involvement, she acquired new skills that enabled her to develop her knowledge and ability to support workers selling in public places such as markets, bus stops and traffic lights.

"Humbly, I feel that I am active as a woman, a worker for the working class, and with great hopes of being able to pass on with love a better world to our children."

Workers (CTCP), the largest trade union in Nicaragua with 60,000 members. The CTCP was set up in 2002 initially to counter Managua Council's evictions of street sellers working at traffic lights:

"We are isolated and invisible. We are the sector that has been marginalised by governments, by the capitalist system, by businesses, by academics,

This experience has changed her life as a woman, mother, comrade, wife and leader. Flor took on co-ordinating the CTCP women's committee in 2005: "I have been able to understand the needs and problems of self-employed women workers, how trade unions are organised and how to promote greater activism of women."



Flor de María selling towels at her street stall in Managua. Spiderman is a particular favourite with Nicaraguan boys

GILL HOLMES

Achievements and Challenges of ALBA

Challenges facing ALBA

Nicaraguan presidential advisor Orlando Nuñez views ALBA as a seed that will grow to cover the whole region to 'build an alternative Latin America to the one that we inherited.' Key challenges to achieving this vision are:

- Strengthening Latin American sovereignty, integration and unity as a bloc that represents regional interests and stands up to the European Union, North America and Asia.
- Supporting and strengthening workers and marginalised sectors so that they can integrate politically and economically into society through organisational forms such as cooperatives. This includes developing the internal market for these sectors and taking advantage of ALBA's Special Economic Zone (ECOALBA) to link with cooperative businesses in Venezuela, Cuba, Ecuador and Bolivia.
- Strengthening the region's industrial base

Challenges facing Nicaragua

- Financing and maintaining the institutional structure necessary to eliminate poverty, especially extreme poverty in rural areas which in 2013 stood at 17% despite substantial improvements in health care, food sovereignty, education, housing, roads and electrification.
- Maintaining membership of ALBA, DR-CAFTA and the EU-Central American Association Agreements: on one hand taking advantage of business opportunities while on the other managing the complex inherent contradictions (See page 3). For example, DR-CAFTA came into force in 2005 and contained clauses allowing Nicaragua to maintain tariffs on US products for a ten-year transition period to protect its own farmers and small businesses. But in 2016 Nicaragua must remove tariffs on 32 products: this could severely undermine key sectors that Nicaragua supports through ALBA.
- Raising economic growth to above 5% annually
- Maintaining political and economic stability through a tripartite consensus involving the government, the business sector, and workers and cooperatives
- Vulnerability to extremes of weather, the consequence of climate change

Achievements of ALBA: Another Way is Possible

ALBA, together with other Latin American integration mechanisms, has proved in theory and in practice that another way is possible – politically, socially and economically. According to presidential advisor Orlando Nuñez: 'Only the creation of powerful alternative financial and economic structures with global reach will protect the majority world from predatory Western elites desperate to maintain control over the global economy. ALBA has shown in Nicaragua and elsewhere, in a very practical way, how this could be possible.'

Economic democratisation:

ALBA has enabled countries to democratise their economies by integrating hundreds of thousands of previously excluded people, the great majority women. See pages 4–6 for Nicaraguan examples. According to the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the Nicaraguan economy will grow by 4.8% in 2015, well above the regional average. ECLAC also notes that ... 'capital formation has remained constant thanks to road building and social infrastructure projects such as housing and electrification.' ALBA has played a significant role in these achievements.

Integration and Solidarity:

ALBA has been at the forefront of accelerating regional political, social and cultural integration, in particular through the formation of CELAC in 2011 (see page 2). Mirroring the shifting balance of power across the continent, all countries in the Americas, except the US and Canada, belong to CELAC. Since its inception CELAC has boosted the region's importance on the world stage politically and economically: in 2015 summit meetings were held with China in January and the European Union in June.

Unity against US destabilisation:

On 9 March, 2015 President Obama declared that 'the policies and actions of the Government of Venezuela constitute an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States and [I] hereby declare a national emergency to deal with this threat.' Such threats have normally been a forerunner to a declaration of war. Condemnation of Obama's action by all countries across the region was swift and unanimous. As Nicaragua's representative to the UN, Maria Rubiales, pointed

out: "We cannot permit attacks against a sister republic, wherever they are from ... because today it's Venezuela, and tomorrow it could be anywhere else, as history has demonstrated." The 33 member countries of CELAC unanimously rejected and condemned the US declaration. They called for the Executive Order to be withdrawn and the US to dialogue with Venezuela. This represents a major advance in terms of regional unity as national leaders on the right and left put aside their political differences to unite against US aggression. ALBA and CELAC have also consistently expressed solidarity with Cuba, condemning the US blockade and thus further isolating the US.

ALBA social movements:

In the lead up to the 2005 Summit of the Americas, a broad coalition of social movements across the Continent protested against the FTAA. This movement now extends far beyond ALBA countries (the last continental meeting in April 2014 was attended by groups from 21 countries) and continues to mobilise around ALBA principles. In July 2015 an ALBA trade union group was set up that includes the Nicaraguan National Workers Front (FNT).



Political Solidarity with Palestine:

ALBA has consistently pledged political support for Palestine in international forums. After the Israeli invasion of Gaza in 2014, ALBA countries sent over 100 tons of emergency supplies and condemned Israeli human rights abuses.

Freedom from Hunger:

Venezuela, Cuba, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, all ALBA countries, have been declared free from hunger by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Nicaragua, Bolivia and Ecuador have made significant progress towards achieving this goal.



Tree nursery workers employed by the Managua City Council participate in ALBA-funded literacy classes

Operation Miracle:

This Cuban – Venezuelan initiative for the visually impaired was set up in 2005. By mid-2015 over four million people across the region living in poverty had benefitted, including 136,921 Nicaraguans. In addition, ALBA has trained 21,075 doctors and 1,590 medical specialists in Cuba and Venezuela.

Literacy Campaign Yo si Puedo (Yes, I can):

This Cuban method of teaching adults has been implemented globally, reaching six million people in 29 countries. It incorporates not only literacy training but also life skills and social mobilisation. With ALBA support, Nicaragua carried out a literacy campaign after the Sandinistas returned to power. By 2009, adult illiteracy had dropped from 25% to 4.73%, and UNESCO declared Nicaragua free of illiteracy – the fourth Latin America country to achieve this status, along with ALBA countries Venezuela, Cuba and Bolivia.

There is much that we, in Europe, could learn from an experience that rejects the dogma of austerity and prioritises the needs of the impoverished and marginalised.

Rejecting the dogma of austerity

Nicaraguan presidential advisor Orlando Nuñez views ALBA as a seed that has to develop to include the whole of Latin America on the basis of ALBA principles of solidarity, complementary action, cooperation and respect for national sovereignty.

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The Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign (NSC) and the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign Action Group (NSCAG)

NSC and NSCAG work with Nicaraguan trade unions and co-operatives fighting for social and economic justice by promoting and seeking support for their activities in the UK.

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