



# NICARAGUA NETWORK NICARAGUA MONITOR

September - October 2008

#151

## North and South Join:

# Close Down the School of the Americas!

By Lisa Sullivan, SOAW Latin America Coordinator (Visit: [www.soaw.org](http://www.soaw.org))

On Nov. 21-23, many of us will gather at the gates of Ft. Benning, Georgia to remember those whose lives were stolen by graduates of the School of the Americas. Immersed in this crisis of gigantic proportions: financial disasters, wars, disillusionment in our government, it would seem like no one has the energy to think or move beyond our four walls. Yet, it looks like more people than ever will gather this year in Georgia. Why? Perhaps because this school is such a clear symbol of wrong directions taken by our country. And the sound of ten thousand voices singing "PRESENTE!" a call to remember what *is* important: life, peace, just relationships.

The vigil to close the SOA is also a time when North and South look one another squarely in the eye. Fifteen years ago many of us in the North began to learn how our tax dollars were being directed towards our neighbors in the South through this school. Here, young soldiers from Latin America were trained by the U.S. Army in torture techniques and counter insurgency tactics. Hundreds returned home to rape, torture, and massacre their fellow citizens.

A dozen people began to gather at the gates of the SOA to say "Not in our name," later a hundred, later a thousand, later ten thousand. From the North we looked to the South with compassion and solidarity. A sea of dictatorships and repressive regimes dotted Latin America's map. Fifteen years later, the SOA remains open, but a massive sea change has occurred in the South. Dignity and sovereignty are beginning to raise their heads. Today, a New South filled with fascinating new initiatives is offering the North a new light. Today we must also come to Georgia to fill ourselves with the hope arising from the South.

I have been privileged to experience these sweeping changes taking place in the South. Thirty years ago I took a long train ride to Mexico as a young college student, little realizing that the return ride would bring me back to the U.S. only as a visitor. Embracing the call of the Catholic Church to make a "preferential option



*President Evo Morales, seen here with Fr. Roy Bourgeois and Lisa Sullivan, wrote directly to the head of the SOA.*

for the poor," I lived in hillside slums in Bogota, Cochabamba and Barquisimeto for the next 20 years. I raised my three children where there was a shortage of good plumbing, paved roads, and indoor bathrooms, but an abundance of hugs, blessings, songs, shared pots of black beans and arepas.

In 2004 I was asked to help arrange a visit by Fr. Roy Bourgeois to Venezuela. His goal was to meet with President Hugo Chavez to ask him to withdraw Venezuelan troops from the SOA. I was delighted to help this fellow member of Maryknoll visit my adopted country, but had no clue how to get him to the president. The problem was solved when the president actually invited *us* to visit him, after seeing us speak on TV.

When we met with President Chavez, he admitted that even he was not aware that Venezuela was still sending soldiers to the SOA until we brought this to his attention. This was rather surprising, given the fact that two of the leaders of the 2002 coup were SOA graduates. We learned from Chavez that the SOA often sends invitations to

their courses directly to soldiers of their choice. Until 2002, the U.S. Army even had a small office right at the headquarters of Venezuela's military command.

While President Chavez was well aware of the atrocities linked to the SOA, he was not aware of the massive movement in the U.S. to close the SOA. He was moved to

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### **There is still time to sign up! Two Years of Sandinista Government: What Does It Mean? Delegation to Nicaragua**

**January 10-18, 2009**

Join Nicaragua scholar and Nicanet Co-Coordinator Katherine Hoyt, Ph.D. (who lived in Nicaragua for 16 years), as part of a delegation on the second anniversary of Daniel Ortega's return to office. Meet Nicaraguan educators, community leaders, government and opposition officials, labor leaders, farmers, workers, health professionals, and members of the Councils of Citizen Power to answer questions such as: 1) Are the Sandinista poverty reduction policies making a difference? 2) What are the criticisms of Daniel Ortega's leadership from the left and from the right? 3) Why have the politics on the left become so virulent?

**For application and itinerary, send an email to: [nicanet@AFGJ.org](mailto:nicanet@AFGJ.org).**

# The Ortega Government and Opposition from within Sandinismo

By Chuck Kaufman

[Kaufman is National Co-Coordinator of the Nicaragua Network. The opinions expressed here are his own.]

The first two acts in January 2007 of the new Sandinista government of President Daniel Ortega were to end school fees, which restored free public education for the first time since Nicaragua fell under the sway of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank's savage capitalism prescriptions in 1990, and to sign on as the fourth member of the Bolivarian Alternatives for Our Americas (ALBA) alternative trade framework.

The schools were promptly overwhelmed. There weren't enough classrooms and there weren't enough teachers to handle all the kids whose parents had not been able to afford to send them to school under the neoliberal regimes that had run the government since the Sandinista electoral defeat of 1990. Indeed, some of those parents had seen their own education cut short when the IMF and World Bank mandated an end to government support for human needs. The new Ortega government was criticized, even by Sandinista dissidents, because the school system couldn't immediately absorb those who had previously had no education option at all.

Signing onto ALBA, which bases trade on cooperation rather than competition, opened the door for trade and aid with Venezuela, Cuba, and Bolivia, which resulted in a solution to Nicaragua's chronic electricity shortages, free eye

operations and increased access to health care for five million Nicaraguans, and reactivated the moribund peasant agriculture sector, always Nicaragua's most productive sector, through loans and other inputs to small and medium



The Nicaraguan government's Zero Hunger Program has helped small farmers. Photo: [www.mdgmonitor.org](http://www.mdgmonitor.org)

farmers which had been eliminated under the previous three governments. Criticism from dissident Sandinistas for the Ortega government's reliance on Venezuelan aid was immediate and continuous.

To understand the bitter, and increasingly violent, fights within "Sandinismo," the term now used to identify all groups, inside and outside the FSLN, whose origins are rooted in the

struggle for national liberation from the Somoza dictatorship, we need to consider recent history. [Nicaraguans would begin this account in 1492 or before, but we in the US are accustomed to taking the short view of history!]

Beginning in 1994, the Sandinista Front for National Liberation (FSLN), which led the long struggle to overthrow the US-backed Somoza dictatorship, began to split based on class issues and Ortega's authoritarian style of leadership. Social Democrats left the party that year and formed the Sandinista Renovation Movement under the leadership of former FSLN Vice President Sergio Ramirez and historic combatant and former Health Minister Dora Maria Tellez.

Another faction, the Movement to Rescue Sandinismo, confusingly also called the MRS, broke from the FSLN at the beginning of the 2006 electoral season after their years of effort to democratize the party failed once and for all with the expulsion of former Managua Mayor Herty Lewites and National

Directorate member Victor Hugo Tinoco. Lewites' crime was to challenge Ortega for the FSLN presidential nomination and Tinoco was his campaign manager. The "Rescue" MRS is comprised of what are called the *ortodoxos*, the socialist revolutionaries who were also the faction of the party most committed to democratic process. Its leadership includes Henry Ruiz, the legendary "Modesto" who led the guerillas in the mountains, Monica Baltodano, one of several women who led columns of troops in the war, and Tinoco, a diplomat who represented Nicaragua during the Esquipulus peace talks of the late 1980s.

The socialist revolutionary MRS and the social democratic MRS allied for the 2006 election behind Lewites, a businessman who had run guns to the guerillas and served as Minister of Tourism in the revolutionary government. Their common ground was opposition to Ortega's "*caudillo*" (strong man) leadership and what they called the

**See Ortega Gov't., p. 6**

The **Nicaragua Monitor** is published by the Nicaragua Network (a project of the Alliance for Global Justice) to educate US citizens about the effects of US policy on the people of Nicaragua and to build ties of peace and friendship between our two peoples.

**Subscription information:** Electronic version is free; paper copies \$30 for one year (individuals), or \$60 yearly (committees for 5-10 copies). This publication may be reproduced in whole or in part to educate US citizens about Nicaragua and US policy. Credit the *Nicaragua Network*.

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# Genesis: The Beginning of a Better Life

By Becca Mohally Renk

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Mercedes Cuarezma has a technical degree in industrial chemistry, but like so many other Nicaraguan women, she has done whatever it takes to feed her family – in her case making and selling *nacatamales*, which are traditional Nicaraguan corn and pork tamales.

“I’m forty years old and in this country there are no employment opportunities for women my age,” says Cuarezma, a single mom of three. Now as a member of the fledgling Genesis Spinning Cooperative, Cuarezma works forty hours a week on the construction of their factory – without pay. Her hours of work go toward her sweat equity buy-in to the co-op.

“One of the most difficult things I’ve gone through being here is not earning a salary,” admits Cuarezma. “But the idea of having a steady job and benefiting my family and the community has made me stay in the project.”

Cuarezma is one of thirty women and six men who form the Genesis Spinning Cooperative on the outskirts of Managua in Ciudad Sandino, a city that suffers from 80% under- and un-employment. The Genesis cooperative will be the central link in an organic cotton production chain which is being formed in Nicaragua as a project of the Jubilee House Community-Center for Development in Central America (JHC-CDCA). The chain includes farmers growing organic cotton, a ginning cooperative to process the cotton, the Genesis spinning co-op to produce yarn for cloth, and a women’s sewing cooperative that makes organic cotton clothing for the export market. This production chain not only will create full time employment for 380 people, but will bring these poor Nicaraguans better prices for their goods.

For fifteen years, the JHC-CDCA has been working in sustainable development in Ciudad Sandino, Nicaragua, with projects in health care, education, appropriate technology, sustainable economic development and sustainable agriculture. As part of its development

work in Nueva Vida, a Hurricane Mitch resettlement camp in Ciudad Sandino, the JHC-CDCA worked with the community to set up the women’s sewing cooperative – now called the Fair Trade Zone – which was begun in 1999 as a way to meet the needs of single mothers in Nueva Vida.

From the original twelve women who built their factory with their own hands, the Fair Trade Zone has grown to give employment to over forty women and men in the community, making organic cotton clothing for export. With support of grassroots churches and solidarity groups in the US, their business continues to grow, but the Fair Trade Zone has persistently had problems laying hands on



*Last year the Jubilee House Community enlisted 57 organic farmers to plant organic cotton for use by the spinning mill with good results. Photo: JHC-CDCA.*

organic cotton cloth to make clothing.

It was out of the Fair Trade Zone’s need for raw materials that the Genesis spinning cooperative was born: the Genesis spinning plant cooperative will be an important link in the production chain, buying organic cotton at fair prices to support Nicaraguan cotton growers as well as a cotton gin, and then spinning cotton which it can sell to the Fair Trade Zone, helping the sewing co-op reduce its costs and turn-around time for its clients.

In January of 2007, following several months of working with community leaders in Ciudad Sandino, the JHC-CDCA convened a group of over 100 interested people to discuss the formation of a spinning cooperative.

“In a meeting...they told us that

there was a women’s cooperative being formed...and it would be dedicated to processing organic cotton and the only thing we had to give was our work, which would become our buy-in,” explains Genesis member Juana Jarquín.

At that meeting, 80 people signed up to start the project, and on the 5<sup>th</sup> of February 2007, they officially began construction by clearing the land to build the factory. Since then, co-op members have been working simultaneously on organizing their cooperative and factory construction: all members have received training in cooperativism, business management and organizational development. Over the last year and a half, Genesis members have

racked up an average of 1,100 hours each toward their sweat equity buy-in to the cooperative. And it’s not been easy – of those 80 who began the project, only 36 became members of the cooperative. “It

seemed like a good project to many of us...however many left the project saying ‘Who works without a salary?’ I continue in this project with faith and hope in God that this project will someday be a reality,” says Jarquín.

Even while building their factory, Genesis members have struggled to keep their families afloat. “From a very small age I have been working, but always as a street vendor. With that work I pay for my studies and help my household economically. Although I am part of the co-op, I always have to go work selling in the afternoons,” explains co-op member Leticia Lacayo.

Once the cooperative starts yarn production and co-op members begin to

**See Genesis, p. 8.**

# Multiethnic Autonomy: Self-Governance or Pragmatic Compromise?

By Mary Finley-Brook

[Mary Finley-Brook is an Assistant Professor at the University of Richmond, where she teaches political and economic geography, environmental studies, and international development. She has been researching eastern Nicaragua for more than a decade. This report was based on interviews in Managua and the North Atlantic Autonomous Region in July and August of 2008.]

“We in the regional government may not be doing things perfectly, but we are certainly doing them better than the central government had been when it was administering the region,” stated Carlos Aleman, the President of the North Atlantic Regional Council. He added that although sometimes regional authorities worked slowly, “we are doing it ourselves.” This self-governance is a vast improvement compared to the previous decade when regional offices were not respected as legitimate state institutions with autonomous decision-making authority.

We are able to speak “*tu a tu*” with the central government, confirmed Professor Avelino Cox, the North Atlantic Regional Government’s Outreach Director. As a historian, Cox reminds people that have become impatient with the slow advance of the autonomy process over the past twenty-one years that not long ago, during the administration of Anastasio Somoza, the central government assigned one official to make all governance decisions for the entire eastern half of the country. Now there are two extensive administrative councils that include representation from each regional ethnic group (Miskitu, Mayangna, Rama, Creole and Garifuna).

For years following the approval of regional autonomy in 1987 the Autonomy Statute provided the only legal mandate for decentralized governance in the RAAN (North Atlantic Autonomous Region) and the RAAS (South Atlantic Autonomous Region). Today, in contrast, the governance role of regional institutions is reinforced in more than one hundred national laws regarding forestry, water management, petroleum exploration, transportation, tourism, and many other areas. There are conventions signed

between the regional government and the National Assembly and between autonomous institutions and most major central government ministries. The regional government has co-administered policies with the central government; for example, they drafted the chapter of the 2005 Bolaños government National Development Plan that covered the autonomous region. In other instances they contributed to the definition of national



Young people hold flag at Indigenous People’s Day Celebration in Bilwi (Puerto Cabezas). Photo: Mary Finley-Brook

laws, such as the 2003 demarcation bill that assigned the regional government as the highest authority for land titling in indigenous territories in the east.

In spite of these advances, numerous shortcomings limit the success of the RAAN government. Although greater participation in governance decisions at the national level is now possible, power remains concentrated at the center. National lawmakers do not sufficiently prioritize the concerns of the poor. The abovementioned National Development Plan was criticized internationally for not doing enough to meet the needs of the most marginalized populations, many of whom live in the RAAN, and for prioritizing the payment of debt over spending on social services. Meanwhile, devolution remains truncated as central government officials unfamiliar with local-level concerns continue to draw up budgets for decentralized administrative units.

In eastern Nicaragua there continues to be a high degree of dependence on the central government in fiscal and legal terms. Any change to the Autonomy Statute must pass through the National Assembly, where only 3 of the 92 national deputies represent the RAAN and only 2 represent the RAAS—even though these territories combined make up approximately half of the land mass of Nicaragua. The regional budget is decided

as a line item in the national budget and the regional government controls less than 10% of state funding targeting the Autonomous Regions: the rest is managed by branch offices of central government institutions that receive their marching orders from the capital city of Managua. Although there are a dozen or more permanent commissions functioning within each regional government, they must often resign themselves to national priorities. For example, regional education commissions may stress the need for bilingual education programs in indigenous

languages, but they are beholden to the Ministry of Education to provide the necessary funding.

In 2006 President Daniel Ortega made a series of promises to Autonomous Region leaders prior to re-election. One result has been that people from the coast were sworn into high political positions, such as ministers, vice-ministers or general secretaries, in national offices. There are currently 28 people from the Autonomous Regions serving in such capacities within Managua. Although these appointments have the potential to bring the issues of the east to the forefront nationally, critics believe that this process has led to the cooptation of some key coastal leaders, who now live in Managua. The appointments appear to have contributed to erosion in the confidence in these individuals on the part of people from the east. High state officials cannot be

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## SOA, from p. 1.

hear about the huge grassroots movement to close the SOA and to learn that over 200 people have gone to jail to protest the school.

A month after our meeting, Venezuela announced its withdrawal from the SOA. Suddenly, a new strategy appeared on the horizon. If we couldn't get Congress to close down the doors of this School of Assassins, perhaps we could get countries to stop sending students. Fifteen years earlier, this would have been a ridiculous proposal. Most Latin American leaders were either totally subservient to, or trained and groomed by, the US military.

The shifts that took place began when hardly anyone was watching. In early 1989 the people of Venezuela stood up to austerity measures imposed by the once mighty IMF and said "No!" From the Rio Grande to Patagonia, drastic measures were being forced upon countries, causing some to step directly from military dictatorships to economic dictatorships, plunging all into a decade of dramatic poverty. The massive Venezuelan uprising later known as the *Caracazo*, led to thousands of deaths but was barely a blip on the international screen, occurring around the same time as the events in Tiananmen Square.

A decade of protest followed, ending with Chavez's commanding victory in 1998 and the promise of a new moment with a new constitution. Following this, Venezuela took steps to reaffirm control over its resources (i.e. oil) and has directed the income from these resources to its people through massive social programs in health, education, and agriculture.

Similar changes began to take place throughout the South. Nine Latin American countries have elected left-leaning presidents in recent years. While there are many nuances to changes from nation to nation, one clear direction emerging is that the South is beginning to look to the South. The compass point has shifted. A phrase used again and again here is "*nuestro norte es el sur*" (our North Star is in the South). Numerous expressions of this south-to-south alliance are blossoming, from joint television endeavors, such as TELESUR, to joint economic endeavors such as ALBA and PETROSUR, to major joint political endeavors such as the Union of South American Nations, or UNASUR.

Aware of new moment of sovereignty arising in Latin America, Fr. Roy

Bourgeois invited me to join him in visiting Latin American countries that are sending troops to the SOA. Over the past 2 years, we have visited 15 countries, meeting with 5 presidents, numerous social movements and most of the continent's defense ministers.

Our visits have led to the announcements on the part of 5 countries of their withdrawal from SOA. Uruguay was the first to follow Venezuela's lead. When we met with Uruguay's Defense Minister, Azucena Berruti, a former human rights lawyer, we shared about our concerns for the SOA. Her response was



*At the gates of the SOA at Fort Benning, Georgia, left to right: Marilyn Langlois,; Hector Ariztízabal, Pierre Labossierre, and Marino Córdoba. Photo: Jennifer Murray*

"You don't need to tell us this. We have lived this out." Uruguay experienced the highest per capita number of political prisoners during the dictatorships supported by the US. The next day she announced to the press that Uruguay would no longer send troops to the "terrorífica" School of the Americas.

In Argentina we were received by another woman Defense Minister, Nilda Garre. Her husband was one of the 30,000 disappeared under the watch of two dictators who were SOA graduates. Once again, there was little need to explain why we were concerned with the SOA. The minister congratulated us for the strength of our movement and committed to withdrawing all Argentine troops from the SOA.

In Bolivia we were received at 5 a.m. by President Evo Morales, who personally went in search of tea for us. He listened carefully to our concerns about the SOA and our request that Bolivia withdraw. While it took over a year to make the decision, when Bolivia finally declared its withdrawal from the SOA it came in the form of a personal letter on the part of President Evo Morales to the directors of SOA/WHINSEC. It left no doubt that

terrible legacy of the SOA in Bolivia - from the devastating dictatorships of Banzer and Garcia Meza to recent massacres in El Alto, was a chapter that had ended.

The most recent country to announce its withdrawal from the SOA was Costa Rica where we met with President Oscar Arias. He invited his Security Minister to join us at the meeting. Upon answering our request to withdraw Costa Rican police from the SOA, with "Of course," he then ordered his minister to follow through. Within weeks of our visit, however, the US ambassador moved in to try to change

this decision, inviting the minister to WHINSEC and to re-consider sending police there. Our allies in Costa Rica are trying to follow up and keep Arias honest in his promise.

In recent months we visited President Rafael Correa in Ecuador and President Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua. Both expressed support for our movement and promised an answer to our request in the coming months. In a week we will head to Paraguay and then Chile to bring this same request to these two governments.

From November 21-23<sup>rd</sup> students, grandmothers, nuns, rabbis, atheists, artists, old and young will gather in Columbus, Georgia. We will come from all 50 states in the US and from many other points in the Americas. We will gather at the gates of Ft. Benning, home to the SOA to say "*¡No más! No more!*" We will remember those whose lives were erased by soldiers training on the other side and hope that their memories may fill us with hope for a new moment.

It is time to close this door and open another. Hope arises from the South, and invites us to take a fresh look. Come to Georgia this November, to close an old door and open a new one.

## Ortega Gov't., from p. 2.

“pact” between him and former president Arnoldo Aleman, the disgraced founder of the conservative, populist Constitutional Liberal Party (PLC). Their pact was to share the nodes of government power and to promote the FSLN and PLC as the only parties with strong enough bases to win elections. Opponents of the pact within Sandinismo believed it to be immoral and undemocratic and proponents saw it as the only way that the out-of-power Sandinista party could protect some of the gains of the revolution.

The Nicaragua Network, the only US solidarity group which worked exclusively through official FSLN government channels during

the revolutionary years of the 1980s, declined to make a choice between the parties of Sandinismo and instead launched an aggressive campaign to expose and oppose US government meddling in the 2006 presidential election, as we had done during previous elections. US Ambassador Paul Trivelli admitted to a delegation I led in June 2006 that he had at least \$12 million to spend on the election. The US-favored candidate was banker Eduardo Montealegre. The MRS participated in poll watcher trainings paid for by the US-government funded National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and US Agency for International Development (USAID), the primary agencies of US efforts to elect Washington’s favored candidates in other countries’ elections.

MRS standard bearer, Herty Lewites, died in the midst of the campaign and was replaced by Edmundo Jarquin who had spent the years when the FSLN was out of power in Washington as a top official at the neoliberal Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). His candidacy weakened the MRS bid to be an alternative to both the Liberal Party’s slavish devotion to the “Washington Consensus” of neoliberal policies and the FSLN’s authoritarianism.

On election day, the only place the MRS won any significant share of the vote was

in the capital city of Managua where it won 200,000 votes. The MRS won five seats in the 90 seat National Assembly. Two of its elected candidates immediately defected to the FSLN leaving just three members of the MRS bench in the national legislature – two from the socialist revolutionary faction, Monica Baltodano and Victor Hugo Tinoco, and one social democrat, businessman Enrique Saenz.

There have since been several splits and merges among right-wing benches in the National Assembly, but that hasn’t affected the overall balance of power which requires some right-wing votes for the minority Ortega government to pass any legislation. The three member MRS bench cannot provide the margin of victory for any of the larger parties.

The high emotions generated within Sandinismo by the electoral campaign did not abate with Ortega’s election as president with 38% of the vote. Neither the MRS and its allies in the non-governmental organizations, nor Ortega’s FSLN reached out an olive branch to the other after the votes were counted. Indeed, the presidential sash had barely settled on Ortega’s shoulders before the Civil Coordinator, a network of some 300 NGOs, was accusing him of accumulating dictatorial powers and objecting to the powerful role as government spokeswoman to which he assigned his wife, Rosario Murillo. Ortega, for his part, seemed to think the hands of time had turned backward erasing the previous 17 years and giving him a chance to lead a continuation of the Sandinista revolutionary government, this time without also having to fight the US-backed contra war.

While the FSLN has been able to reconcile with Catholic Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo and large segments of the contra leadership, it has been unable to reconcile with dissident Sandinistas, and leaders do not appear to be open to rapprochement even if it were offered. This has placed the international solidarity movement, including the Nicaragua

Network, in an increasingly untenable position. Our own historical relationships have been more with the socialist revolutionaries than with the political pragmatists in Ortega’s camp, the so-called *Danielistas*.

Nevertheless, we have found much to praise in the Ortega government initiatives focused on poverty reduction and Latin American integration. Yet, we aren’t *Danielista* enough for the FSLN and our praise for the government initiatives we see as positive has earned us the distrust of our erstwhile friends. There are few and lonely voices in Nicaragua calling for reconciliation within Sandinismo. For this reason we focus primarily, as we always have, on providing information about Nicaragua to the US solidarity movement and on working to change US government policies that affect Nicaragua.

We have become increasingly disturbed and saddened by the escalating “war” within Sandinismo. Neither side is blameless. We condemned the recent violent break-up by Sandinista forces of an opposition march which included the MRS and some formerly Sandinista NGOs in the city of Leon. We also condemned an MRS banner and poster that appeared to call for the assassination of Ortega.

I personally can understand the motivation of Leon’s Sandinista rank-and-file who met the marchers with clubs and stones. They lost their government in 1990 due to direct and massive intervention in the electoral process by the United States and by the accumulated weight of the US-directed contra war. They played by the democratic rule book and gave up power. This was followed by 17 years of economic misery that was in many ways more difficult to endure than the shooting war had been. So many Nicaraguans gave their lives, their health, and their youth to throw off the yoke of dictatorship and US imperialism, only to see their gains taken away from them. They are determined not to let it happen again.

At least one of the groups that organized the march on Leon, the Movement for Nicaragua, was created and funded by the International Republican Institute (IRI), one of the core groups of the NED. During my June 2006 delegation, the IRI representative we met with bragged, “We created the Movement for Nicaragua.” While state-sponsored political violence

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*Victor Hugo Tinoco was expelled from the Sandinista Party when he supported Herty Lewites for the party's presidential nomination. Photo: El Nuevo Diario*

## Ortena Gov't., from p. 6.

can never be countenanced because in most of the world it is progressive forces that suffer, it is not impossible to understand the motivations of the Sandinista rank-and-file.

For those of us who care deeply about Nicaragua and who feel guilt for the misery and indignities visited upon that poor country by the US government for generations, part of the problem is that the opposition to the Ortega government from within Sandinismo offers no recognizable political program other than its visceral hatred for Ortega. At the same time, the NGOs that were formed by Sandinistas after the 1990 electoral defeat to work to preserve the gains of the Sandinista revolution from below, seem to have forgotten that they formed in the first place to maintain programs which had been the



Monica Baltodano is one of the leaders in the Movement to Rescue Sandinismo. Photo: Giorgio Trucchio.

responsibility of the government.

Granted that the Ortega government should and could have shown more sensitivity and appreciation for the 17 years of labor by these activists, and could have collaborated better with organizations with long experience working with small farmers, but the NGO community should and could have shown more recognition that their missions are, in many cases, again the responsibility of a government that is committed to the welfare of the poor majority.

Alas, too many of them, I believe, have grown comfortable over the years thanks to their European funding and are now fighting over turf rather than principles. Others have clearly been co-opted, or at least drawn suspicion upon themselves by taking money from USAID and NED, the tools of US democracy manipulation strategy. However, a fishing expedition by the Ortega government against NGOs has

thrown its net too widely and has gathered up legitimate critics, with unassailable reputations, such as the Center for International Studies founded by 1980s Foreign Ministry spokesperson Alejandro Bendaña, and the Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights (CENIDH) founded by Vilma Nuñez, who risked her life to promote human rights during the Somoza dictatorship. NGOs such as CIS and CENIDH should not be lumped in with those whose ties to the US government it is entirely legitimate to investigate.

On the political front, I am baffled by the MRS actions in the National Assembly. The MRS pact with forces closest to the US government agenda is at least as odious as Ortega's pact with Aleman. In Ortega's case he actually gained influence through the division of political spoils with Aleman. The MRS, with a base that barely extends beyond intellectuals, has gained nothing while giving international credibility to those who grovel at Washington's feet. That is certainly not what they fought the dictatorship and the contras to achieve.

Daniel Ortega is a deeply flawed individual who is leading a government that is accomplishing truly remarkable things for the poor majority given that Nicaragua is still the second poorest

country in the hemisphere and has been battered by increased oil and food prices practically since his first day in office. Is he leading a revolutionary government that is picking up where it left off in 1990? Well, maybe where it left off, but certainly not where it began when it reflected the hopes and aspirations of much of the world. But his government is acting out liberation theology's "preferential option for the poor," and his foreign policy is contributing to Latin American integration and the creation of a multi-polar world. Both are worthy of international solidarity support.

If there are opportunities for international solidarity to help our sisters and brothers within Sandinismo to reconcile and work together for the good of humanity, we should do so. But, we should also recognize that there are few opportunities, especially for those of us from the center of the Empire, to play such a role. In the meantime, we should continue to acknowledge and act upon our historical obligation to make reparations for past US government crimes against Nicaragua and support Nicaragua's efforts to defend its sovereignty and right to self determination. It is frustrating, but that's how I see our role in this current moment in history.

## Nicaragua Monitor Returns to Monthly Issues Keep up on the latest news from Nicaragua and the US Nicaragua Solidarity Movement

Beginning with this issue, the electronic version of the Nicaragua Monitor will be FREE and distributed more widely – and, in January 2009, it will return to its previous monthly frequency!

It will still be possible to receive a paper edition, but that is much more labor intensive for our small staff, and printing and postage costs keep going up. So, we strongly encourage you to print your personal copy from the electronic version if you don't want to read it on-line in full color.

To receive a printed copy by postal service, you MUST return the renewal form when you receive it. The subscription price for the paper edition is \$30/year. To switch to the electronic version, just send your email to [Nicanet@AFGJ.org](mailto:Nicanet@AFGJ.org) with Monitor Subscription in the subject line.

Dues-paying committees are entitled to 5 or 10 print copies, although again we would encourage you to print the exact number you need from the internet rather than ask us to mail it to you. Dues for 2009 are a suggested \$60 and more is welcome! We hope you appreciate the work of the Nicaragua Network as we approach our 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary in Feb. 2009. Your committee membership is an important signal that you value the information and organizing work that we do. If your group is currently a Nicanet member, you will receive a notice when your membership has expired. If your group wants to join, write [nicanet@AFGJ.org](mailto:nicanet@AFGJ.org) for a membership form.

If you have questions about your subscription or about committee membership, call Kathy Hoyt at our West Coast office at (619) 423-2909.

In solidarity, Katherine Hoyt and Chuck Kaufman. National Co-Coordinator

### Genesis, from p. 3.

receive a salary, those sweat equity hours will be given a dollar value which will become each members' investment into the co-op – a sum that they will get back when they leave the co-op or retire. “I hope to be a great businesswoman...to be an owner in our own business, to give employment to people who need it, to have a salary with dignity that meets our needs,” says Lacayo.



*Jubilee House purchased a used cotton gin from El Salvador and set it up next to the spin plant construction. Photo: JHC-CDCA*

The walls on the building are now up, and the construction on the factory is nearing completion: the spin plant only lacks a floor, roof and electrical installation. The construction has been financed through the JHC-CDCA's revolving loan fund. There is a grace period until the co-op is producing, then the initial loans will accrue 6% annual interest (commercial banks in Nicaragua charge 18-25%). The JHC-CDCA makes loans as monies designated to the revolving loan fund come in to the JHC-CDCA. To date there are not enough funds to finish the construction.

“Right now we're lacking as much as \$80,000 to finish the factory,” says Mike Woodard, one of the founders of the JHC-CDCA. With inflation in Nicaragua at 25%, the total cost will depend on how fast the construction happens. “But we're confident those funds will come in as they have been throughout this process – in small donations from individuals and groups – and we still hope to have the building completed by the end of November.”

Meanwhile, the JHC-CDCA and Genesis together are seeking financing to buy used spinning equipment at an estimated cost of \$300,000. “We hope to be able to finance the machinery purchase through locating a socially responsible loan at a low interest rate,” says Woodard.

Genesis member María Auxiliadora Hernández grew up in Chichigalpa in western Nicaragua, and her family survived by picking cotton. They were forced to relocate to Ciudad Sandino in 1985 because the big cotton plantations were closing and there was no work. So it is fitting that the spinning cooperative that Hernández is now building will give people in Chichigalpa and throughout western Nicaragua job opportunities in the production of organic cotton.

Once the Genesis spinning co-op is in production – hopefully by early 2009 – they will need a supply of organic cotton to spin into yarn. For the past two years, JHC-CDCA has been working to guarantee that supply. Using its contacts and 15 years' experience in organic production, the JHC-CDCA is now pioneering a movement to reactivate

organic cotton production in Nicaragua.

Cotton, for decades one of the country's primary exports, fell into decline at the end of the 1980s. Traditionally cotton was farmed as a mono-crop in huge tracts of land, attracting the boll weevil and other pests which were combated using enormous volumes of pesticides. As the pests grew resistant to the pesticides, more applications of the chemicals were required until some farmers were putting as many as 50 applications on one year's crop. This meant huge expense and risk for farmers and that, combined with a down-turn in international cotton prices, lead to the decline of cotton production in Nicaragua. In the year 2006 no cotton was produced on a commercial scale in the country.

As the second-most chemically laden crop in the world, conventionally grown cotton consumes 25% of all insecticides and more than 10% of all pesticides used in the world.

“If you're wearing a conventional cotton t-shirt right now, 1/3 of a pound of pesticides and fertilizers were used to produce the cotton in your shirt,” explains Woodard. Growing eco-consciousness among consumers is one of the reasons that the market for organic cotton products is expanding so quickly “The organic cotton market is growing at roughly 20%

per year, and demands a price premium that is a better deal for farmers, ginners, spinners, knitters and sewers all along the way,” says Woodard.

Last year the JHC-CDCA enlisted 57 organic farmers to plant organic cotton, and with good results: there were no pest problems and the farmers produced 185,000 pounds of organic cotton.

“The organic cotton is grown in small areas of no more than 45 acres, which helps with pest control,” explains Raúl Machín, an agronomist with COPROEXNIC, the organic products marketing co-op of the JHC-CDCA's cotton project. “Organic cotton cultivation also builds healthy soil through crop rotation – in the case of our farmers usually with organic peanuts or sesame – and controls weeds through hand cultivation instead of herbicides.”

One setback in this year's project was that Nicaragua had no working cotton gin, so the JHC-CDCA purchased a used gin from El Salvador and has set it up next to the Genesis spin plant construction.

“Ginning is the process that separates the cotton fiber from the seed and then bales the fiber. This must be done before the cotton can be sold commercially,” explains Machín. COPROEXNIC is currently running the cotton gin, and expects to expand the gin based on demand, within three years. At that point, the gin will be sold to its workers who will form a cooperative.



*Zulema del Carmen Casco*

themselves and their families.

At 65, Zulma del Carmen Casco is one of the oldest members of the Genesis cooperative. “I have never learned to read or write,” says Casco, “but it's one of my goals.” Casco grew up in León, in western Nicaragua, where her father grew cotton and sesame. “We have been through very tough times, but thanks to God, the JHC-CDCA and ourselves, we have made it through.”



## Autonomy, from p. 4.

unflinching advocates for autonomy or critics of the central government, as these same regional leaders had been in the past. It is in their own self interest, in terms of protecting their job, that they praise the central government and its policies.

Most central government institutions remain heavily focused on the Pacific and center of the country, even in the areas of forestry, fishing and mining, the key extractive economies of the Autonomous Region and a significant source of income for national coffers. There is a paucity of state personnel in central headquarters that focus on the Autonomous Regions and insufficient personnel with skeletal budgets in most government institutions located in the east. For example, the Ministry of the Environment utilizes approximately ninety percent of its resources in central headquarters in Managua. Nonetheless, there are sixteen protected areas, including the largest in the country, located in the Autonomous Regions. Fifteen of these protected areas receive little if any state support, while the massive Bosawas Biosphere Reserve relies heavily on foreign sponsorship.

The current president has increased the funding granted for some governmental programs from the previous administration of Enrique Bolaños—who has been cited by many as leaving the Autonomous Regions in a state of abandonment. Under Daniel Ortega the budget for road maintenance between the center of the country and the RAAN increased by 300%. Yet, in spite of increased investment, the condition of the roads in the region is still deplorable, although partially as a result of impact of Hurricane Felix in September of 2007. Funding for regional health care also increased under the current administration, with supplemental funding added to the original budget following the hurricane.

Although the disaster of Hurricane Felix brought more national and international funding to the RAAN, which received the brunt of the storm, this is a perfect example of the current restrictions on regional administration resulting from budgetary shortfalls. Officials estimate that less than thirty percent of the aid received had been distributed to affected communities by August of 2008 because the regional government did not have the funds to pay for expensive transportation to the remote communities. Many people

in the region perceive this poor delivery rate as reflecting a lack of attention on the part of the regional government. During the past year there has been rising tension in the RAAN due to people's frustration with the management of disaster relief, in some cases caused by insufficient resources, but in other cases created by



*Left to right, European Union representative Alain Peigné, Yatama leader Brooklyn Rivera and RAAN governor Reynaldo Francis attend event. Photo: Mary Finley-Brook*

the corruption of aid distributors or the misuse of power and resources on the part of municipal officials using material aid to woo votes in an election year.

The Autonomous Regions experience a high number of natural disasters, most often hurricanes, tropical storms and floods. Two massive hurricanes have directly struck the Autonomous Regions in two decades: Joan (1988, Category 4) and Felix (2007, Category 5). Although Hurricane Mitch's (1998, Category 5) eye hit Honduras, the damage to Nicaragua was significant. Natural disasters are one reason that the Autonomous Regions maintain a significant incidence of extreme poverty, although the largest causes of poverty have been multinational corporations' historical exploitation of workers and resources in the zone and the central government's treatment of the region as an internal colony. The poorest municipalities in Nicaragua are located in the RAAN—and the country has been documented as the second poorest in the Western Hemisphere, only surpassed in

hardship by Haiti.

While it can be argued that the international donors' focus on the region is necessary and appropriate, particularly after natural disasters, it has created a physical and psychological dependence on outside assistance. Short-term emergency assistance, such as food, does not contribute to autonomy, and an argument can be made that it leaves regional institutions beholden to donors and occupied with the administration and transportation of material aid, an activity guaranteed to cause contention given the inability to meet everyone's needs or assure equity.

However, in some cases, longer-term foreign support may contribute to the advance of political autonomy. For example the UNDP finances institutional strengthening and modernization in the regional government. Support from the Swiss, Canadian, Danish and German governments supports programs in education, health care, cultural revival, and environmental protection. These donors have made efforts to promote aid that is culturally sensitive and empowering to local populations.

In contrast, some international aid agencies work through the central government to provide assistance to the Autonomous Regions. Finance organized through the central government often comes in the form of infrastructural improvements, such as the transportation network funded by the Inter-American Development Bank. A prominent current proposal for infrastructural improvement in the RAAN is Venezuelan financing for a new port. The current facility had been literally falling apart for years and sustained additional damage during Hurricane Felix. Former administrations had planned to pass the port authority to private hands as a means to finance the necessary repairs.

Many foreign aid agencies work through non-governmental organizations (NGOs). A prime example is USAID's work through Rainforest Alliance, which focuses on establishing markets for the commercialization of coffee and wood and the development of ecotourism. The forestry programs are most advanced in the RAAN; however, regional officials are concerned donor programs focused on market development do not sufficiently create integral community development.

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## Autonomy, from p. 9.

Communities continue to be dependent, as in the past, on exploiting natural resources for external markets. Furthermore, in many indigenous communities, lumber marketing has created social conflict. A portion of the population is against the sale of communal or common-property resources, especially at prices they perceive to be low given the value of the lumber on national and international markets.

Foreign donors and lumber extraction companies tend to keep the Regional Government's Secretary of Environment and Natural Resources minimally informed, although any harvest plan needs written permission from this institution. Regional leaders have a plan for sustainable forestry, including a 'green' revolving fund for community reforestation plus training and materials to add value to raw lumber through processing and finishing. Officials are also working on a proposal involving payment for environmental services. Nevertheless, regional programs for sustainable forestry are progressing slowly, partially because many donors continue work through the central government or NGOs, while lumber companies make deals directly with communities, often offering poor prices. Bypassing regional institutions may thus encourage exploitation and inefficiency.

The Autonomous Regions have a relatively small population, only 13% of people of the nation, although there was an unprecedented 4.8% percent increase in population levels in the RAAN from 1995 to 2005. However, in addition to covering about half of the national territory, the Autonomous Regions, are important due to natural resource potential and geographic location, leading to vested interests on the part of politicians in the capital city. These regions host most of Nicaragua's remaining forestry resources and include more than 500 kilometers of coastline along the Caribbean Sea, resplendent with marine resources and biodiverse mangrove swamps, islands, and cays. Gold mining has a long history in the zone and there are plans to extract petroleum from Nicaragua's section of the intercontinental platform. For centuries there have been proposals to build a transportation canal rivaling the Panama Canal across Nicaragua. Canal plans emitted during the past decade, including by the current administration, involve a massive deep sea port on the Caribbean shore.

The inclusion of regional officials as one set of stakeholders in natural resource and development planning is a far cry from co-governance, particularly since it often occurs after plans have been formulated in Managua. As regional administrative capacities develop, officials

promote sensitivity to cultural, ecological and economic differences. More and more regional programs are fostering multi-ethnic participation in integral community development. These were core reasons that the Autonomy Statute was created more than two decades ago.

The multiethnic populations of Nicaragua's east continue to struggle for self-governance and some sectors increasingly pressure the regional government to demand more independence. Meanwhile, regional officials, even those representing ethnic parties with a history of rebellion, feel forced to cooperate with Managua and to negotiate compromises in order to maneuver in the national political landscape. In spite of achievements in the institutionalization of autonomy, there is growing dissatisfaction in the region, as evidenced through levels of absenteeism of over 50% in the last two regional elections in 2002 and 2006, which is up significantly from the level of 20% in the first regional election held in 1990. Without substantive changes to the current political and economic structure of autonomy, the regional government is at risk of becoming just another level of state bureaucracy, albeit one that is slightly more in touch with multiethnic perspectives and local needs than the national government.

## Holiday Gifts from Nicaragua! Solentiname Art Reprints!

The Alianza para Solidaridad de Solentiname has museum quality reprints of original Solentiname paintings available for sale for your holiday gift giving! In addition there are 20 original paintings for sale as well, along with balsa carvings, and one of a kind sculptures. Most prints are available in small (\$45.00), medium (\$75.00) and large (\$90.00) reproductions, as well as boxed set of 8 Note Cards (\$27.95).



### *Self Portrait of My Solentiname* (left):

Jeysell Madrigal Arellano is a third generation painter, granddaughter of the Arellano studio. She is inspired by the islands, and you can find in her work her taste for detail.

Write to [ssa@solentiname.org](mailto:ssa@solentiname.org) or call (802) 549-5004 or visit [www.solentiname.org](http://www.solentiname.org) for information on sales of art. The Alianza is a collaborative partnership with the people of Solentiname to promote social and economic justice.



*El Viejo del Monte* (above): Rodolfo Arellano is from the first generation of painters and is generally considered the patriarch of Solentiname painters. The legend of *El Viejo del Monte* (the old man of the forest) is one of the archipelago's most enduring folktales.

# The News from Nicaragua

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## Nov. 9 Municipal Elections Approach

Oct. 5 marked the official beginning of the 2008 municipal election campaign. But even before that official start, the campaign was marked by violence, both physical and verbal. On Sept. 20, people identifying themselves as Sandinistas prevented an opposition march and rally from taking place in the city of Leon.



*Sandinista groups battle police in Leon. They prevented an opposition march from taking place. Photo: La Prensa.*

Attacks on opposition demonstrators wounded five people; many more were bruised and battered. FSLN historic combatant, Benito Quiroz, told La Primerisima Radio that the Sandinistas would not permit groups which would sell out the country to march in the city. "We are acting within our rights; it is our duty; they are not going to take the revolution away so easily," Quiroz said, adding "Leon is FSLN territory."

The opposition march was organized by the Democratic Coalition of the West including the Movement for Nicaragua, which was created and funded by the US International Republican Institute of the National Endowment for Democracy.

The Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights (CENIDH) called the incidents "a form of criminal intimidation." CENIDH called on President Daniel Ortega to demand that his supporters guarantee the free exercise of political rights, called on the National Police to take all necessary measures to prevent further violence, and called on the Nicaraguan public to avoid actions that "could put in danger the precarious coexistence of our population."

The Nicaragua Network condemns the violence in Leon and joins in CENIDH's

call for an end to officially sanctioned political violence. The Nicaragua Network also calls on the Bush regime to stop funding opposition political groups in Nicaragua which only has the effect of further polarizing Nicaraguan politics. US money also delegitimizes government opponents who haven't been corrupted by taking US government money along with those who do. In July the Nicaragua Network called on the Sandinista

Renovation Movement (MRS) to disavow a banner appearing to call for the assassination of President Daniel Ortega. We are deeply saddened by the level of animosity between people who were sisters and brothers in the war for national liberation and the US-backed contra war. We call on the Ortega government to take actions to defend human rights norms

and to do its part to decrease political polarization and to reconcile with its former *compañeros* and *compañeras*.

## Government Cracks Down on NGOs

On Oct. 11, National Police and a prosecutor with a court order entered the Center for Communications Research (CINCO) and seized documents and computers in an investigation of the NGO's use of international funding. CINCO is headed by Carlos Fernando Chamorro, editor of the Sandinista newspaper *Barricada* in the 1980s. Evidently the Minister of Government asked for information about the NGOs activities such as passing funds from Oxfam-Great Britain through CINCO to the Autonomous Women's Movement (MAM).

On Oct. 10, the authorities searched the offices of the Autonomous Women's Movement and seized documents. MAM leaders say that their network is not registered as a non-governmental organization because it is a social movement with hundreds of women. Patricia Orozco, a MAM leader, said that the search of the group's office was political persecution of the feminist movement because of its continuing

campaign against the criminalization of therapeutic abortion passed in 2006 and reaffirmed by the current Sandinista government in 2007. MAM officially endorsed the Sandinista Renovation Movement candidates in the 2006 presidential and national assembly elections.

Special Prosecutor Armando Juarez said on Oct. 13 that he had established that CINCO had transferred important sums of money to MAM and other NGOs with "clear political goals." He said that CINCO had paid for T-shirts for a march against the government of President Daniel Ortega with the words, "Democracy, yes! Dictatorship, no!" as well as money for at least one press conference for the MRS political party.

Juarez said that smaller sums were spent on "campaigns to promote abortion." He reiterated the absurd claim made by other government officials that anyone who advocates the interruption of a pregnancy or lobbies for repeal of the law is in violation of the new Penal Code. He stated that these and other transfers of money from CINCO to other groups, but especially to MAM, were in violation of the mission CINCO laid out when it applied for recognition as a non-governmental organization working in the area of communications.

Other organizations for which the special prosecutor has obtained search warrants are the Civil Coordinator, the Nicaraguan Network of Community Commerce, Venancia Group of Matagalpa, the Nicaraguan Network of Municipal Women and the Syd Forum, a Swedish development organization.

This latest turn of events is complex and elements of it are disturbing. Any country regulates the activities of its NGO's and has the right to audit them to determine compliance with the law. But, as happened with the Nicaragua Network in the 1980s, audits can be conducted for political reasons and the Ortega government's attempts to criminalize lobbying to overturn the more than 100-year-old right to have an abortion if needed to save the life or health of the mother is indefensible. On the other hand, the US strategy to roll back the advances of progressive governments in Latin America is to

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## News, from p. 11.

invest heavily in NGOs and other civil opposition groups. The Movement for Nicaragua, for instance, was created and funded by the International Republican Institute (IRI) according to an IRI spokesperson. The IRI and the other core groups of the National Endowment for Democracy launder money by giving it to groups which then give it to other groups, exactly like what is being investigated in the case of CINCO. It is the toxic presence of US government money and money from a few right wing NGOs from other countries in Nicaragua that justifies the Ortega government's efforts to determine the funding sources of the NGOs and social movements. What is not justified is to go after NGOs because they are lobbying on behalf of women's lives and health.

### Other Political News

On August 26, Judge David Rojas revived a case of slander against internationally recognized Nicaraguan poet Father Ernesto Cardenal and ordered him to pay a fine of about US\$1,000. The accusation of slander came from Immanuel Zerger, the owner of Solentiname Tours, who with his wife Nubia Arcia, has been involved in a dispute of many years with Cardenal over management of a hotel in the Solentiname Archipelago in Lake Cocibolca (Nicaragua) that belongs to the Development Association of Solentiname.

In 2005, Cardenal was absolved by a lower court. However, Judge Rojas in August of this year reversed the previous judge's decision ordering Cardenal to pay a fine or face a penalty. Cardenal replied in a public letter that the revival of the case, on which he said the statute of limitations had run out, was a purely political reaction to declarations he made in Paraguay when attending the inauguration of President Fernando Lugo. Cardenal did not pay and a new judge, Ronaldo Moran, issued a ruling on Sept. 3 upholding the US\$1,000 fine and ordering that Cardenal's bank accounts be frozen until he paid.

Cardenal, one of the best known living poets in the Spanish language, was Minister of Culture in the first government of Daniel Ortega (1979-1990) but he broke with Ortega over how he was running the Sandinista Party after 1990. Nicaraguan and international intellectuals immediately came forward in support of Cardenal.

Portuguese Nobel Literature Prize winner

Jose Saramago wrote a letter of solidarity with Cardenal which was signed by over 50 poets and writers from the Western Hemisphere and Spain.

### Rains Cause Damage

After 24 days of uninterrupted heavy rainfall, the sun broke through on Oct. 19 and citizens were given a much needed respite. Nine of 31 shelters were deactivated and the rest were expected to close down in the next few days. However, the government still maintained



*A family approaches safety after fleeing their home in high water. The rains lasted 24 days and killed 17. Photo: La Prensa.*

a red alert for Leon and Chinandega, yellow for San Juan de Limay and green (a low level of alert) for the rest of the country. The municipality of Managua reported 65 kilometers of streets destroyed within the city and 16 kilometers of roads destroyed in the outskirts. A total of 17 people died as a result of the storms.

### Economic News

The high cost of coffee production and roads in disrepair, combined with falling prices, are creating a possible crisis in the coffee sector this year according to Jose Angel Buitrago, president of the Nicaraguan Association of Exporters (EXCAN). The international price for coffee closed on Oct. 8 at US\$116.90 per hundred pounds, down from US\$144.26 in August, a 17.7% drop in price. It currently costs about US\$110 to produce a hundredweight of coffee. Buitrago said that in spite of the low sale price, coffee growers would be forced to hire coffee pickers or lose their crops. The harvest begins in November.

On Sept. 24, Minister of Labor Jeannette Chavez announced that the government was unilaterally raising the minimum wage by 18% given that negotiators from government, business

and labor union sectors could not come to an agreement. Under the new rules, workers in the free trade zones receive a minimum of US\$121 per month or US\$0.50 per hour; farm workers, US\$71 per month or US\$0.30 per hour; construction workers, US\$166 per month or US\$0.70 per hour; domestic workers, US\$104 per month or US\$0.43 per hour.

### Government Programs

In November sugar workers may realize their long delayed hope of receiving the

ownership shares in several sugar processing plants that they were promised 16 years ago when the companies were privatized. Cesar Mairena of the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman announced that, on November 26, officials and former cane workers would sit down to work out the terms of

the deal. Right-wing governments had not followed through on promises made in 1992.

The government is also working to privatize the EMEMSA metals factory into the hands of the workers. The factory makes plows, rakes, cultivators, and other metal items including containers to store water or gasoline. The government has helped the workers acquire US\$75,000 to purchase equipment and raw materials and has negotiated work contracts with state run and private institutions. It has also renegotiated the company's debts.

The Ministry of Farming and Forestry gave 90 poor families in San Rafael del Sur and 32 in Ciudad Sandino Food Production Packages as part of the Zero Hunger Program. The San Rafael families received 81 pregnant cows and 900 hens and roosters while the Ciudad Sandino families received 32 pregnant cows and 350 hens and roosters. (The families will receive pregnant sows in a few weeks.) The packages include construction materials for cages for the birds and shelters for the pigs, and each has a value of about US\$1,300 of which the recipient family pays back 20% into a fund which the organized participants administer.