



NICARAGUA NETWORK NICARAGUA MONITOR

November 2009 # 161 30 Years of Solidarity with the Nicaraguan People

Nicanet Regional Meeting **Nicaragua Still Draws Solidarity**

By Chuck Kaufman

The Oct. 16-18, 2009 Nicaragua Network regional conference in Baltimore, MD, brought together over 50 Nicaragua solidarity activists from Maine to Georgia and west to Chicago. Hosted by the Casa Baltimore/Limay sister city committee, the conference featured Nicaraguan Ambassador Magda Enriquez; the grandson of Augusto C. Sandino, Walter Castillo Sandino; a delegation from San Juan de Limay, Nicaragua; and Nicaragua's most famous reggae singer/songwriter, Philip Montalban from Bluefields.

The meeting was held in the Baltimore office of ACORN in solidarity with the nation's largest, most effective poor people's organization which has been under withering assault by Fox News and right-wing forces. Feedback from participants was universally enthusiastic about the quality of the presentations and discussion at the conference.

Ambassador Enriquez, who served as senior assistant to Fr. Miguel D'Escoto in his role as President of the 63rd session of the UN General Assembly which ended in September, detailed the many initiatives, successes and challenges of Fr. D'Escoto's use of the UN "bully pulpit" to restore balance in the UN which has seen power consolidated in the Security Council at the expense of the General Assembly. Enriquez said, "Fr. Miguel firmly believes politics is the art of the possible, but he dreams of the impossible, and tries to do both."

Enriquez said that the global financial crisis forced them to concentrate on economic issues because it is the Global South that always pays the price for the economic mistakes of the rich countries. She said the G-8 and the G-20 aren't going to admit that they caused the problem.

D'Escoto pushed the concept of the Group of 192, which is the membership of the UN, as the appropriate place to set world economic policies. As a result of the economic conference called by D'Escoto in June, a team of economic experts has



*Ambassador Magda Enriques and Angelica Gonzalez from San Juan de Limay.
Photo: Dave Schott*

continued as part of the General Assembly structure even after his tenure in the presidency ended.

Enriquez said that reforming the political governance of the UN was an even greater challenge where the UN President receives no salary or housing and has an office budget of only \$260,000. She said that the countries on the Security Council believe that they run the world. Efforts to reform the membership of the Security Council to reflect today's world, rather than the world that existed at the close of WWII, have not gone anywhere over many years. Under D'Escoto's presidency they held 32 intergovernmental working group meetings on reforming the Security Council. They did not resolve the many intractable problems but succeeded in winning agreement that the meetings would continue under the same leadership so that, unlike previous efforts, they will not start over from scratch with the new UN President.

She noted that Fr. Miguel involved himself in many global issues including women, Israel-Palestine, human trafficking, and education of children; he even was on the plane with deposed Honduran President Zelaya when his first attempt to return to Honduras was thwarted by the Honduran military blocking the airport runway.

Asked if D'Escoto's term as UN General Assembly President had enhanced the image of the FSLN in Nicaragua, Enriquez responded, "No. Around the world, yes, but in Nicaragua the press is controlled by the opposition. If we do ten things, eight of them good and two not so good, the bad will get big coverage and the good will be ignored."

In the next plenary session, Nicanet National Co-Coordinator Chuck Kaufman gave a short history of the Nicaragua Network and appealed for committees to become dues-paying members as a symbol of their desire to have a national network. He noted that Nicaragua Network is nearly 31 years old and called that a "remarkable accomplishment." He noted that Nicanet will undergo its first major staff transition in a number of years with the January semi-retirement of fellow Co-Coordinator Katherine Hoyt and said it is coming in the "worst economic crisis we have faced" as a network. "What your priorities are for us will be very important as we consider how to divide up essential tasks because we cannot replace Kathy with a full-time staffer at the present time."

Kaufman also reiterated Nicaragua Network's position not to involve itself in internal debates within Sandinismo. "Those issues are for Nicaraguans, and Nicaraguans alone to resolve," he said. He noted that our responsibility is to prevent "our government's intervention"

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in Nicaragua.

Kaufman spent most of his presentation explaining the new Nicaragua Network campaign to get Nicaragua out from under the US requirement that it resolve property claims by US citizens whose property was confiscated during the 1980's. Failure to do so would trigger a US law requiring a cut-off of aid. The majority of claims that have not already been resolved are those from criminals including the Somoza family and high-ranking officers of the brutal National Guard. "Not even the preceding right-wing governments were willing to resolve those," he said.

Kaufman said that removing the threat of cutoffs of aid and multilateral loans would require either a change in US law or a declaration by the Obama administration that Nicaragua has met its "obligations" under the law. "Whatever route we take," Kaufman said, "it will require that hundreds or thousands of people call, write, and email their elected representatives and the State Department, and for that we need your strong support."

Edwin M. Corea, a lawyer in San Juan de Limay and member of the delegation visiting Baltimore followed Kaufman and thanked the Nicaragua Network for its solidarity and Casa Baltimore/Limay for its 24 years sistering with his home town. Corea delivered a spirited defense of the FSLN government of President Daniel Ortega. He said, "The revolution is

defending solidarity but protecting against outside groups that are trying to impose models that have nothing to do with us; our history and culture."

Corea talked about participatory democracy as seen from Limay, which has a Sandinista mayor. He said that sixteen communities in Limay have a Council of Citizen Power (CPC) which represents the needs of the community to



Jubilee USA's Melinda St. Louis explains the Jubilee Trade Act and anti-Culture Fund legislation before Congress. Photo: Marek Bennett

the mayor's office. "Who knows better about the problems of the community than the people themselves?" he asked. Responding to a question, he said that where there is not a Sandinista mayor, there aren't CPCs.

He cited the many poverty reduction and development programs of the Sandinista government such as Houses for the People, Streets for the People, free healthcare and education, Zero Hunger, Zero Usury, and titling of property. He said, "Many people can't take advantage

of government programs because they can't prove ownership." He is working on a local commission to find the documents and legalize property ownership. He said that in Limay, the only organization they can count on without regard to legalized property is Casa Baltimore/Limay.

One of the participants remarked, "In Nicaragua they are trying to do what was done in Cuba, but in a democratic manner.

That's incredible."

The conference then broke into three workshops. Jennifer Atlee, of the Quixote Center's Quest for Peace, discussed the Honduras coup as an example of the US and right-wing push-back against progress for social and economic justice in Latin America, and what we all can do to support grassroots democratic movements. Another workshop, led by Maria Gabriela Aldana from Maryland Institute College of Art, surveyed "new media" including web pages, blogs, and

social networking as a way to reach new people and expand our work. She also provided resources on video making and editing. Hugo Lam, a Nicaraguan water and forestation expert currently working for Baltimore City, conducted the third workshop, discussing water projects in the US and Nicaragua.

The final plenary of the day was led by Melinda St. Louis, deputy director of Jubilee USA. St. Louis began her career as an organizer with the Campaign for Labor Rights, which along with the Nicaragua Network is part of the Alliance for Global Justice. She noted that Nicaragua Network was among the original US groups to work for debt relief for the Global South and is a member of Jubilee USA's 75-organization alliance.

St. Louis called our attention to the fact that we were meeting during the Oct. 16-18 global "Stand-Up, Take Action, End Poverty Now" actions to demand that governments meet the Millennium Development Goals to eradicate extreme poverty. She led participants in the pledge which allowed us to become part of a new Guinness World Record as the largest

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Evolution of the Neoliberal Crusade in the Amazon

By Jamie Way

[Jamie Way is Research Coordinator at the Alliance for Global Justice.]

Despite the repeal of Peruvian President Alan Garcia's controversial executive decrees, it appears as though the Amazon is still very much for sale. Earlier this year, violent demonstrations erupted over Garcia's decrees that attempted to open

Peru to foreign (read: extractive) investment in accordance with its free trade agreement with the U.S. In Bagua, located in the Northern Peruvian Amazon, the official death toll is said to have reached 33, (10 civilians and 23 police officers). Other accounts, however, claim that up to 40 indigenous civilians were killed.

Although the violence has receded, at least for the time being, the larger underlying issues are far from resolved. Moreover, the neoliberal move to take advantage of indigenous resources is evolving into more complex, and at times even seemingly benevolent, forms.

Neoliberalism in the Amazon

Outside of Pucallpa, south of where the violent demonstrations erupted, Shipibo indigenous leaders are finding themselves pressed by the same issues as their Northern counterparts. PeruPetro, the country's hydrocarbon licensing agency, is pursuing an aggressive policy in the region by directly contacting community leaders in hopes that they will provide written permission to explore, and later exploit, the oil-yielding potential of their land. I became aware of this when working on a development project in the Amazon with a U.S.-based NGO, Village Earth, from Aug. 18 – Sept. 10, 2009.

This land, which is located within an oil block with rights belonging to PetroVietnam, could also become the focus of a number of other extractive industries. Although it has not yet become a pressing matter for the Shipibo, many of Garcia's decrees were not only aimed at encouraging oil development in the Amazon, but also pertained to a diverse variety of natural resource development, including forestry, water, irrigation and

mining.

And it seems as though Garcia's wish, and that of many of his predecessors, is becoming a reality. Big Oil is currently big business in the Amazon. "Whereas in 2004, only 13% was slated for oil and gas development, in 2006, approximately 73% of the Peruvian Amazon was under contract for either exploration or



Indigenous people struggle to preserve their Amazon ancestral homeland from foreign exploitation.

production purposes. Today it is near 80%. Significantly, 58 of the 64 blocks that have been leased to oil companies are located on lands that are legally titled to indigenous peoples and 14 blocks overlap natural reserves that are inhabited by indigenous peoples living in voluntary isolation," wrote George Stetson in an as yet unpublished paper.

Proponents of neo-liberal "market" policies, which appear to be on a constant rampage to commodify every last inch of the planet, have happily encouraged the "opening" of the Amazon to foreign investment. Peruvian proponents of such policies, including President Garcia, have argued that such investment is the way to "modernize" the Amazon and make it productive. Anyone who impedes such noble "progress" is seen as selfish and a traitor.

In fact, as if Garcia's disdain and disrespect for the Native people of his

country were not obvious enough through his classification of them as "second class citizens," Garcia proceeded to compare them to a gardener's dog. Depicting the population as irrational and selfish, he claimed that, like a gardener's dog, they do not eat from the garden, but they will also prevent others from eating. Thus, according to Garcia and his allies,

indigenous people must stop impeding "progress".

Evolution of the Discourse

Beyond Garcia's blatantly racist application of neoliberal policies, a much more clever and well-articulated argument in favor of the crusade for neoliberalism is becoming paramount in national discussions. While Garcia's lack of sophistication has made his argument easy to pick apart, leading Peruvian economist, Hernando De Soto, has framed his push toward neoliberalism in a much more favorable light.

Instead of blatantly embedding his argument in Garcia's racist discourse, De Soto has cleverly co-opted the language of leftist intellectuals. Instead of focusing on the "backwards" culture of

indigenous groups, like Garcia has, De Soto argues that in order to fully allow the native population to participate in the capitalist economy, laws must be applied uniformly to them. While on the surface this argument seems like a logical move toward equality, it is important to note that in the context of many Amazonian tribes, it is perhaps even more dangerous than Garcia's decrees.

Under a worldview that orders the world in terms of a "developed-undeveloped" dichotomy, Hernando De Soto has made it his goal to discover why the capitalist system has worked so well in the Western world (an interesting assertion in and of itself), and so poorly in the rest of the world. His work concludes that capital is successfully generated through legally recognized individual land ownership and consequently one's ability to leverage his or her resources for credit.

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While his recommendation of legally allotting individual land may be desirable in squatter villages without land titles, it could have dire consequences for native populations, many of which already hold titles to their land.

Contrary to De Soto's vision, however, most indigenous groups hold their land under common title and many even choose to hold and work the land in a communal format. For De Soto, this communal land is unproductive, because individuals are unable to use it to produce more capital without the permission of the entire community. What he so often fails to discuss, however, is that in risking your land for credit, you can potentially lose it. Thus, it becomes evident that with private interests salivating at the chance of getting their hands on a piece of the Amazon, it is likely that communities would be greatly disturbed by one or two individuals being forced to default on their loans.

By individualizing and privatizing indigenous land, extractive industry would be able to apply a new version of their divide-and-conquer tactics, as indigenous groups would have little legal ground to stand on when opposing the sale of the neighbor's land to an oil company. If even very few individuals in desperate situations could be bought off, the entire community could be at risk of being destroyed through the impacts of the extractive industries.

Ironically, one of De Soto's predominant arguments is that the norms of the wealthy and the poor must be melded and incorporated into law. However, his policy makes no exception or variation in the case of indigenous groups with long histories of engrained societal norms and very distinct cultures. Instead, his one-size-fits-all policy has become a cornerstone for moving the Amazon toward the wonders of the capitalist world.

Cleverly framing his suggestions as a move toward affording the indigenous population the rights that the rest of the country already has, he acts as though he is supporting equality. In reality, while his work claims to incorporate indigenous culture, it only does so to the extent that they are able to be successful capitalists. It is vital, then, that the indigenous population moves away from its communal use of land, and instead adopts the rules of the West. This, he argues, will

allow them to follow in the foot steps of first world progress.

He fails to discuss the effect leveraging a house for credit has had on the U.S. market, and additionally takes no note of the historical implications of individualization and privatization of U.S. Native American lands had on their culture. By omitting the horrific historical implications that land privatization and individualization has had on Native Americans, De Soto creates a policy that is unable (or unwilling) to foresee a number of problematic outcomes of his work. The Academic-Political Connection

All of De Soto's arguments would be well and fine if they remained sequestered in the academic world. Unfortunately for indigenous groups in the Amazon, this is not the case. De Soto and his organization, the Institute for Liberty and Democracy, have the ear of many a world leader. Garcia is amongst those with whom De Soto has developed a relationship. This is only logical. While Garcia and De Soto verbalize a differential amount of respect for indigenous culture, their policies are like opposite sides of the same coin.

Garcia's decrees work to open the Amazon to foreign investment and promote free trade. In Garcia's mind, this would appear to eliminate the greedy native people of his country. De Soto, on the other hand, shows a bit more compassion (and may in fact be acting with good intentions, be they misdirected). He does not want to eliminate indigenous people; he merely wants to eliminate any aspect of their culture that does not allow them to be successful capitalists.

Thus, De Soto's suggested policies will allow indigenous land to become the tool for deciding the success of each individual indigenous person. If they are successful capitalists, they will be able to maintain their land. If not, they will lose it to the external interests that Garcia supports. It is evident then that their seemingly distinct policies blend nicely together to form (what, upon enacting a similar policy with Native Americans, Theodore Roosevelt called) "a great pulverizing engine to break up the tribal mass."

So while Shipibo communities and their counterparts sit under a tenuous calm in the Amazon, it is important to note the lurking danger of not just Garcia, but his academic equivalent. Currently, De Soto is sending his researchers into Shipibo communities to extract information about

their titling system. He has released effective propaganda videos and is clearly positioning himself as central to the Peruvian Amazon debate.

Therefore, while his work may appear more benevolent at first glance, it is essential that activist and the indigenous population be cognizant of the fact that his arguments are potentially even more dangerous than the words of Garcia. If unnecessary bloodshed is to be avoided and the fight to protect the Amazon is to be won, it appears that it must be fought on both the academic and political front.

For more information about community based development training, fair trade, and programs in Peru, Guatemala, South Dakota and other areas, please visit Village Earth's webpage at www.villageearth.org.

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mobilization of human beings in recorded history --173,045,325 citizens gathered at over 3,000 events in more than 120 countries, an increase of about 57 million people over last year's action.

St. Louis said that the Millennium Development Goals are "pretty lame in terms of the changes we want to see, but are an important institutional framework" and that most of the world isn't even meeting these minimal goals. She noted that 2007 statistics for Nicaragua were that 45.1% lived on less than \$1/day and that 75-80% lived on less than \$2/day. She mentioned that she travelled there recently and was astounded at how expensive food prices are. "They are magicians to live on that," she said. "Survival is an act of resistance."

She said that the G-20 promised \$50 billion to meet the Millennium Development Goals when they met in April. They had delivered half by the September meeting in Pittsburgh. "But almost 100% is in the form of new loans. We are just talking about creating a new debt crisis," St. Louis said adding that there was no mention of the \$50 billion in the September meeting.

She did say that the movement for debt relief has made limited but real policy changes. She said, "When we went to the IMF in the 1990s and linked poverty to debt, they said, 'That's crazy, they owe us money. Debt cancellation is impossible.'" She noted that by 1999 the multilateral lending institutions were

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forced to recognize the link and set up the Heavily Indebted, Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative, flawed as it was. In 2005, the G-8 acknowledged the link between poverty and debt and promised 100% debt relief to 43 countries. She added, however, that \$100 million per day still flows from South to North for debt payments.

St. Louis said that Nicaragua, the 10th country to meet the HIPC requirements for debt cancellation, shows both the benefits and the flaws of the HIPC model. In 2004 the World Bank and IMF cancelled Nicaragua's multilateral debt and the Paris Club of rich countries followed suit with their bilateral debt thus dropping Nicaragua's debt from \$6.7 billion to \$2.4 billion and freeing money for poverty reduction programs. However, Nicaragua still pays \$100 million a year in debt service and conditions on new loans still require wage caps and structural adjustment conditions.

She said that Jubilee is working to pressure the Obama administration in 2010 to announce a New Deal on Debt. They want Obama to expand debt cancellation and to change loan conditions as well as to conduct "debt audits" to determine which loans are "odious debt" used to support dictatorships or for corruption or failed projects that should never have received a loan.

She asked the group's support for two bills in Congress. The first is the Jubilee Act for debt cancellation. "It doesn't do everything," she said, "but it is the most progressive bill in the world and it has bipartisan support." It passed the House with a two-thirds vote last year but an Oklahoma Senator prevented it from being voted on in the Senate. It is being reintroduced this year.

The second bill for which she asked support is the Stop Vulture Funds Act. Hedge funds bought, at reduced prices, debt that had been loaned to poor countries and which they couldn't pay. Some of Nicaragua's debt, for instance, was bought for five cents to the dollar. When countries receive debt cancellation, these hedge funds sue to recover the full value of the debt they hold, arguing that now the countries can afford to pay. The proposed law would prevent them pursuing from their claims in US courts.

Saturday evening conference participants and the public enjoyed



Walter Castillo Sandino (r), Gen. Augusto C. Sandino's youngest grandson, with interpreter Mark Chalkley. Photo: Dave Schott

a spirited concert at Johns Hopkins University by Nicaragua's premiere reggae singer/songwriter Philip Montalban. Montalban performed in Miskito, Spanish, and English before the dancing, clapping, toe tapping crowd.

Sunday morning and over the lunch hour, participants were mesmerized by the presentation of Walter Castillo Sandino, youngest grandchild of the "General of Free Men," Augusto Cesar Sandino. We were fortunate that a technology glitch in the morning session prevented Castillo from showing his 300 slides, many with never before published photos of Sandino, because the problem was solved by lunch time and virtually the entire group of participants ate their lunch while viewing the slides and listening to another hour about the remarkable leader from whom the Sandinistas took their name.

Castillo pointed out that in not one of the hundreds of pictures of Sandino is there one in which he is smiling. He had a hard early life as the out-of-wedlock son of a rich man in Niquinomo. His mother was sent to prison when he was nine and he accompanied her where he was brutalized and where he had to deliver his stillborn brother. When he was 10 his mother abandoned him. He walked the streets of Niquinomo publicly demanding that his father claim him. He caused his father to weep and to take him home – as a servant. At a young age he became manager of all his father's properties. After killing a man who cheated him in business, he went into exile, eventually becoming relatively wealthy as manager

of an American company in Mexico, where he learned about imperialism. He returned to Nicaragua with his money and discovered that Nicaragua, under the occupation of US Marines, had not changed. As Castillo said, "Nicaraguan lives were worth less than the lives of dogs to the American occupiers."

When he went to northern Nicaragua to fight the Americans with his first 29 followers, Castillo said his grandfather invested \$5,000 of his own money, a time at which an ounce of gold cost \$20. "Now we see people calling themselves Sandinistas taking money out of the cause," Castillo said.

"Who wrote the most about Sandino in the 1980s?" Castillo asked. "Sergio Ramirez. Where is he now? In the opposition. Now the revolution knows who are the true Sandinistas," according to Castillo.

Castillo praised the Bolivarian Alliance for the People of Our Americas (ALBA) and noted that the ALBA countries were meeting that weekend to replace what Sandino called "the cursed dollar which has only brought suffering to our people" with a new currency called the Sucre. He said that Hugo Chavez and Evo Morales have taken Sandino's theories and turned them into practice.

Castillo said that Sandino is known throughout the world. When Mao's Red Army entered Peking, they were carrying a banner of Sandino. He said the Vietnamese struggling against the US occupation of their country knew well Sandino's words. Castillo said his grandfather was crazy, "crazy with love." He said, "In 1930 you had to be crazy to fight against the greatest empire in the world and believe you could win. But history has proved him right. One people, one flag. It's just a matter of time," Castillo said in closing.

Sunday's second plenary was a presentation about immigration/emigration by Gustavo Andrade, organizing director of Casa de Maryland, and San Juan de Limay resident Angelica Gonzalez. Andrade said, "I carry a lot of anger, because if you are not angry, you're not paying attention." He said there is no more important work right now than immigrant rights in the US. He said that there are millions and millions of immigrants here. "That's a lot of power," he said. "They don't need our help; they

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need us to get out of the way.” He called guest worker proposals a “non-starter” because any program that ties a worker’s right to stay in the country to an employer is a recipe for exploitation and abuse.

Andrade said that with Obama and the Democrats in control of Congress, “you’d think we could make something happen, but we can’t,” citing the administration’s preoccupation with health care reform and the financial crisis. He said that Congressman Luis Gutierrez has the best immigration reform bill, describing it as “the most progressive bill we could hope to pass.”

Andrade warned that the Tea Party people are already gearing up for the immigration fight. He said, “We need to be as passionate as they are. Passion trumps intelligence every time on the TV screen.” He said he personally has made a decision not to let their shouting go unanswered and said that even if the television image is just us shouting back at them, that is an improvement over ceding the television coverage to them alone.

The second speaker in the session, Angelica Gonzalez, told the story of emigration based on her experience in San Juan de Limay. She said, “It starts when the migrant leaves their family. They sell everything they have and often borrow money they cannot repay.” For a long time the family has no contact and doesn’t know if they are dead or alive. If they do get to the US and get a job, they usually buy a piece of property back home. “But in this economy, when they lose their job in the United States, they have to sell their property to pay for their day to day survival.” She also said that for the children left behind by the migrant parent, the money they send home is a mixed blessing. “It allows them to buy things like tennis shoes and a cell phone, but then others in the community say, ‘Oh, he thinks he’s a gringo.’” When the parent returns home, they discover they’ve “lost” their children. Couples split up because of the strain of separation.

Gonzalez said that many people from the Limay area now are migrating to Panama and El Salvador. It is hard to get jobs in Costa Rica and the cost of going to the US is \$10,000 and putting your life at risk.

The next plenary, discussing problems of solidarity work, revolved around two issues. First whether the reform to the tax

law Nicaragua is currently considering will have an impact on solidarity aid. A lot of discussion involved whether the Nicaragua Network should ask legislators for any special consideration



Nicaraguan reggae singer Philip Montalban gets an assist at Saturday evening’s concert from Maria Gabriela Aldana who led a workshop on “new media” earlier in the day. Photo: Dave Schott

concerning solidarity aid. For every point that was raised, the group realized that universalizing it to include proselytizing churches and other so-called solidarity groups, would make it something we couldn’t recommend. In the end we decided that the Nicaragua Network should simply inform Nicaraguan legislators of the history of solidarity aid and ask them to take our contribution into consideration. Walter Castillo said that our worry was unfounded. “The government depends on solidarity aid,” he said. “They are not going to tax you.”

The second issue was weighing the relative merits of carrying humanitarian aid down to Nicaragua as opposed to buying the materials there. Nearly every group participating in the conference had spent time locally considering this issue. A majority of the groups present have a policy of “buying Nicaraguan” in order to stimulate the local economy. Some participants said they buy in Nicaragua if the materials are not more expensive than in the US and others noted that some things like books are available in the US or Mexico but not in Nicaragua. The group agreed that this is an issue that needs to be thought through by all groups providing solidarity aid.

The final plenary dealt with how groups within Nicanet can work more closely together and what their priorities are for the national office in light of Kathy Hoyt’s retirement.

The Nicaragua Monitor received a lot of praise, but at the same time participants

felt that it could be bimonthly or even quarterly if it is too much work for staff to keep it monthly. Some suggested that new technology could permit the elimination of a regular publication schedule and that articles could be posted to the web page continuously or delivered through an RSS feed.

Regarding the Nicanet web page, it was suggested that groups could link to it from their Facebook pages and vice versa and that Nicanet could help them sell fair trade products through its secure donations page. Some felt that a Nicaragua discussion listserv would be useful. Kaufman appealed for volunteer help for Nicanet’s web page and it was suggested that we run an ad in Idealist.org for someone who will do it to improve their resume. Two people volunteered some tech help. A recommendation was also made that Nicanet include some technical “how tos” on its web site for setting up a web page, blog, Facebook, etc.

The Nicaragua Hotline was universally felt to be the most useful information provided for local groups by the national office. One participant said, “After I open emails from my relatives, the hotline is the first thing I read.”

Many other ideas for working together were introduced in the discussion including combatting US visa denials of Nicaraguan speakers. Charlie Delaney-Megeso spoke about the situation of the Miskito people of the Caribbean Coast and their struggle for independence and the importance of promoting equal rights and peaceful dialogue. Other ideas for joint action were closing the School of the Americas, immigration reform, the Trade Reform Act, mining, and foreigners buying up Nicaraguan property. Steve Edinger from Los Angeles advocated for Revolution Revival concerts to raise money for Nicaragua and El Salvador.

A West Coast regional meeting of Nicanet is being planned for this winter.

**Visit the
Nicaragua
Network web
page at [www.
nicanet.org](http://www.nicanet.org).**

Henniker-San Ramon Sister Community Using Comics to Build Understanding

One year ago, in the Autumn of 2008, the Henniker-San Ramon Sister Community Project began to use a new tool to build cultural bridges of friendship and understanding between the children of New Hampshire and Nicaragua: comic books. The Henniker-San Ramón Comics Exchange now facilitates comics-based



Henniker, NH, students draw comics to share with students in San Ramon, Nicaragua

cultural exchange between students and families in the sister communities of Henniker, New Hampshire, and San Ramón, Nicaragua. Participants work together to produce original comic books about their communities, self-publish and translate the comics, and share them with each other, with their community members, and with their peers in their sister community. The program also encourages and supports educational delegations, and provides professional networking opportunities between educators, librarians, and artists working in the communities.

The process begins with a workshop for participants in the sister communities. Individual students then begin their drawing and writing projects in collaboration with teachers. The comics are economically reproduced and copied and then read at family/community events. The students work on translating their work so that the comics are bilingual and they are then exchanged between participating schools in Henniker and San Ramon. The program aims to train teachers in using comics techniques in their classrooms, and conducting independent exchanges between schools. The home-made comics portray similarities and differences

between participating communities and cultures, leading participants to a better understanding of both local and global solidarity and community.

Henniker native Marek Bennett started the workshops through his school-based Comics Workshop programs. Each student's comic tells a unique story about the community of Henniker or of San Ramon. "Anybody can do comics," says Bennett. "You don't need lots of money or a studio. You don't even need any experience!" "The stories these kids can tell will reach across cultures and languages to make real, human contact," Bennett predicts. Bennett has been a member of two separate Henniker-San Ramon delegations in the past. He currently teaches comics all over New England, plus music and Spanish at the Hopkinton Independent School,

and draws the award-winning comic strip, "Mimi's Doughnuts" for New England newspapers.

The Henniker-San Ramon Sister Community Project has facilitated social justice and humanitarian aid projects between Henniker and San Ramon since



1993. Past projects include drinking water projects, hurricane relief construction brigades, funding for elementary schools and childcare centers, and training for public school teachers in San Ramon. The group raises funds by selling fair-trade Nicaraguan coffee beans in Henniker.

In Fall 2008, after the Henniker students drew their comics, Spanish language

students from nearby John Stark Regional High School assisted in translating them into Spanish. The group then shared the comics with the town of Henniker in January 2009 at a public reading attended also by a visiting teen delegation from San Ramón and nearby Matagalpa. The Nicaraguan and New Hampshire students drew some bilingual comics together, and the Nicaraguan students presented photo slideshows and folk dances from their communities before touring the town of Henniker, decked out in parkas and snow boots.



San Ramon students learn comic drawing techniques.

Then, over the course of two weeks in February, 2009, Bennett and others from Henniker visited six different rural and village schools in San Ramón and worked with around 150 students. Students created pages of comics about local labor, folk tales, important safety and justice issues, and their "pasatiempos" (favorite hobbies and activities), to share with their sister community. Each student received a mini-comic created by a young artist from Henniker as part of the international comics exchange. The project is now compiling and translating over 120 pages of comics from the students of San Ramón to make them available to students in Henniker.

For more information: On the Henniker-San Ramon Comics Exchange: <http://www.marekbennett.com/comicsworkshop/> On the Henniker-San Ramon Sister Community Project: <http://hennikersanramon.org> Henniker-San Ramon contact person is Sally Auer at info@hennikersanramon.org

Month In Review

Oct. 6-27, 2009

Politics

On Oct. 19, the Constitutional Panel of Nicaragua's Supreme Court ruled in favor of a petition by President Daniel Ortega and 105 Sandinista mayors that a constitutional provision banning consecutive reelection violates their rights. Ortega successfully followed in the steps of Costa Rican President Oscar Arias who won an appeal to the Constitutional Panel of his country's Supreme Court allowing him to run for reelection on the same grounds that the constitution could not "limit fundamental rights."

Ortega and the FSLN mayors resorted to the Supreme Court when on Oct. 16, the Supreme Electoral Council denied their appeal. The Court's Constitutional Panel quickly ruled on the case amid complaints by Constitutional Liberal Party justices that they had not received sufficient notice. Justice Francisco Rosales, who presides over the Constitutional Panel, and Justice Rafael Solis said that the ruling is final for the appellants but will be submitted to the full court so it will apply to all office holders. Roberto Rivas, president of the Supreme Electoral Council, said the Council would follow the Court's ruling and that there was no further appeal possible.

Protest from the opposition was immediate and loud. Former Eduardo Montealegre, leader of the Liberal Party faction closest to the US, said the decision was "a coup d'état" and called on the Organization of American States (OAS) and the United Nations to intervene. Dora Maria Tellez, a leader in the Sandinista Renovation Movement, said that the Sandinista justices had committed a serious crime and should be in jail. Former President Arnoldo Aleman said the Supreme Court had been "assaulted" by the Sandinista justices who issued the judgment.

Ortega told a television audience on Oct. 20, "I will say to those people that they should calm down and not drown in a glass of water. To solve this we have the 2011 elections. What are they afraid of?" On Oct. 24 at a gathering in Chinandega, Ortega said that the Sandinista program cannot be carried out in five years and

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Nicaraguan Night

by George L. Pauk MD

(Memories of a magical night in Jinotega, 2001)

Purísima, dark night, swirling breezes, and starry sky. Circulo de Amigas sleeps after another day of constant attention to and from the beautiful pairs of mothers and daughters. Mornings light to evenings dusk sees the pairs come to the doors for their assignments and support. They are dressed in clean and neat dresses. The daughters are in their best dress and appear as miniature belles in period dress of some decade past. Their smiles and shy replies are wonderful rewards and they follow us with steady eyes. Certainly they are small goddesses appearing here in the midst of economic poverty.

Circulo de Amigas staff and friends gather and cheer each other. Fanny and her husband have planned a treat for us. We walk into the evening, down the uneven gravel and dirt road, toward town. Cheerfully and surrounded by an outpouring of good cheer, we follow the direction of the crowd. We are now growing accustomed to the nearly constant crack and boom of fire crackers and aerial explosions. We are filled with the energy of the festive people of Jinotega. Everywhere we are met with nods, smiles, handshakes, and the customary adios, adios, adios....a greeting and a respectful thought.

Purísima is a special day and night. It seems very appropriate for the Circulo de Amigas. The mothers and daughters have a special relationship which is easily translated to the religious feeling of the day and night. Their kinship and friendship is an ancient universal band. December 7 is the eve of Purísima, the greatest Roman Catholic feast day in Nicaragua. Families joyfully walk the streets in the evening and night to visit homes and altars all over town. The altars are erected with statues, lace, flowers, candles, and paintings to honor Mary and her Immaculate Conception. Those families that put up altars in their homes give little gifts such as candy, fruit, and toys. The crowd sings special songs in return.

We are welcomed as special guests and ushered to the front of the crowd. Fanny's husband and artist, Hugo, has painted a magnificent Jubilee mural in this home. This is hospitality, friendship and Nicaraguan good will. Later, on the way back to Circulo de Amigas we walk in the warm night and see the bright stars above. We reflect on our own religious and other beliefs. Economic poverty is certainly not cultural poverty.

Colombian Prison Hell Made in the USA

by James Jordan

The Campaign for Labor Rights is very concerned about reports we have been receiving from Colombia's La Tramacua Penitentiary in Valledupar, department of César. Conditions there are deplorable, and they got that way with the collusion and collaboration of the United States government. The US Federal Bureau of Prisons acts as a consultant to Colombia's network of maximum security prisons. Among these, the prison at Valledupar -- La Tramacua -- has earned particular distinction and infamy for its harsh and inhumane conditions. The US Federal Bureau of Prisons not only acts as an advisor for La Tramacua, but also has overseen construction there.

How are conditions at La Tramacua? Writing in Colombia's El Mundo-- a corporate, daily newspaper out of Medellín, Tatiana Cárdenas reported on August 13, 2009 that: "The inmates lack the minimum sanitary conditions; there is no water, the place is constantly surrounded with excrement from the same prisoners who, not having sanitary services to use, throw bags [of their waste] outside the prison and the lower floors.

In order to have water for drinking, bathing, washing clothes and the activities that require it, the inmates resort to filling containers and carrying them away tied to belts, this procedure done during the 10 minutes in which water arrives at the jail, although due to the low pressure on the upper floors, they do not have the opportunity to stock up the supply. At the beginning of this year, one convict died in an accident carrying the water.

'The smell you sense from before arriving is a stench that makes one feel sick. The flies are everywhere and the heat is unbearable,' remembers Catalina [recalling a visit to her husband, an inmate at La Tramacua]....

The same as the men, they [the women prisoners] suffer the greater part of the day lying on the floor, since the cement benches are not sufficient for all, trying to negotiate an inclement temperature of 37 degree Centigrade [98.6 Fahrenheit], without water most of the time...."

In September, the Campaign for Labor Rights received an alert from the women political prisoners of La Tramacua, telling how in desperation over prison conditions, the prisoner Alexandra Correa



La Tramacua Prison construction was overseen by the US Federal Bureau of Prisons

had hanged herself. Correa had been held in solitary confinement for 19 months, separated from her companion and partner, Tatiana Pinzon. Both she and Alexandra had threatened to kill themselves. The Human Rights Representative, Esmeralda Echeverry, reported the women's suicide threats to Colombia's Director for the National Institute of Penitentiaries and Jails (INPEC by its Spanish initials), Dr. Teresa Moya Suta, who responded, "Let her kill herself -- I will assume responsibility". Two days later, Correa did.

The week after, Col. Carlos Alberto Barraga, the second in charge of INPEC, visited Pinzon in prison, where she fell to her knees, begging to be taken from Valledupar. Barraga laughed in her face. Since then, because of public pressure, Pinzon has been moved to a prison closer to her family. However, Echeverry, who went public about these events in order to apply that pressure, was subsequently fired from her position. The current Human Rights Representative for the women prisoners has been threatened not to make public declarations about the penitentiary.

The women prisoners represent only about one per cent of the population at La Tramacua, but receive no consideration or treatment specific to their status as women. The Ninth Tower, where the women are jailed, was built to confine Anyibe "Sonia" Rojas, the FARC leader who was extradited to the United States and is now serving time in a US prison. In order to justify jailing her in a men's prison, women were, without warning, rounded up in the early hours of the morning and brought to La Tramacua from across Colombia, without respect to

what their sentences were for, nor even if they had yet been convicted of a crime. Women being held for violent crimes are held side by side with women awaiting trial, who, in many cases, do not even know for what they have been charged.

The conditions at La Tramacua are another reminder to those of us in the United States that repression and war in Colombia are sponsored by the US government, from Bureau of Prisons oversight and advice for abusive prisons like La Tramacua to the billions of dollars given to the Colombian military and plans for the US to take over seven bases there.

We are asking friends and supporters of the Campaign for Labor Rights to call and email their Representatives in Congress to demand:

- * an investigation into the role the US Federal Bureau of Prisons has played as an advisor to La Tramacua and all Colombia's maximum security prisons;

- * her or his personal intervention with both the US Bureau of Prisons and the Colombian government to call for an end to the deplorable conditions at La Tramacua and to demand immediate prisoner access to potable water and to sanitary toilets throughout the day;

- * her or his personal intervention to demand an end to the harassment and threats toward the prisoners' Human Rights Representatives.

Your representative may not know anything about conditions at La Tramacua. We suggest that, in addition to making the above demands, that you send them this article. Please let CLR know about your contacts with members of Congress by emailing James@AFGJ.org.

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the people should have the right to decide if they want it to continue for another period. He said, "They were in power for 16 years and imposed their system of savage capitalism so the people have even more of a right to have continuity in a government that defends and promotes solidarity." Minister of Education Miguel de Castilla said of the Court's ruling, "I am satisfied because we feel that the plans of the Ministry of Education are not just for five years. We are working on a ten year plan and we will fight for there to be ten years of Sandinista government to rebuild the whole field of education."

About eight opposition youth hit Supreme Court Justice Francisco Rosales in the face with eggs as he entered a local television station. Young opposition activists brought a toilet to the sidewalk in front of the Court to show their "repudiation" of the ruling. Luisa Molina of the Civil Coordinator said that member organizations are meeting with the diplomatic corps and analyzing all avenues available "to reject this ignominious decision." She said that after analyzing the situation, "We will call on the people of Nicaragua to take to the streets, which belong to the people; we cannot be the prisoners of one political class." She said that the Supreme Court Justices should be removed from office. It is interesting that before she called on the Nicaraguan people she called on foreign diplomats.

Deputy Agustin Jarquin, representing a party allied with the Sandinistas, said, "At the beginning of the year we had something similar, but the reverse, when a Liberal group [of Justices] produced a ruling dropping charges against Arnoldo Aleman and there was a great commotion. Now the Sandinista side produces this situation." He added, "We need to get to the bottom of this and bring Nicaraguans together again to strengthen the country's institutions. We (the deputies) are partly responsible because we elected these justices based on party affiliation."

Foreign reaction was mixed. A US State Department spokesperson said, "We are concerned about reports from Nicaragua that there have been legal maneuvers that could make it more difficult for the Nicaraguan population to consider in an open and transparent manner the possibility of presidential reelection." Sen. John Kerry, Chair of

the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said, "The manipulation by the president of Nicaragua of the Supreme Court this week to avoid constitutional limitations on his government has an air of the authoritarianism of the past."

Director of the Council of Hemispheric Affairs Larry Birns said that international



U.S. Ambassador Callahan called the Supreme Court decision "illegal."

concern tended to be "selective" depending on who was seeking reelection, noting that there would likely be little noise if President Lula da Silva of Brazil would want to run for a third term. The US has not criticized Arias nor Colombian President Alvaro Uribe who is changing the constitution for a second time to allow him to run for a third term. The nine governments of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) gave their "total" support to the "democratic institutions of the sister republic of Nicaragua" in a statement released on Oct. 20.

An M&R Poll released before the courts's ruling indicated that over 50% of the population of Nicaragua supported government policies on health care and education. However, La Prensa, which published the poll results, gave no number and did not give figures on public opinion about other government programs. La Prensa did report that most prominent government and opposition political figures were held in low esteem according to the poll.

M&R said that in terms of political party identification, 32.8% of respondents declared themselves Sandinistas; 14.4% Liberals and 50.3% said that they had no party. The percentage of respondents who believe that President Daniel Ortega is democratic and following the law was 38.9% and the percentage who believe his government is seeking unity and reconciliation among Nicaraguans was

39.1%. These figures are virtually identical to the vote percentage Ortega received in 2007 when he won with a plurality in a four way race.

The person with the highest approval rating was National Police Commissioner Aminta Granera at 84.7%, followed by Head of the Army General Omar Halleslevens with 75.6%. Other figures with high approval ratings were former President Violeta Chamorro (72%), Managua Archbishop Leopoldo Brenes (71.4%), and former Sandinista Mayor of Managua Dionisio Marenco (62.5%). Another recent president of Nicaragua, Arnoldo Aleman, held the highest disapproval rating with 60.3%. He was followed by First Lady and head of the Council of Citizenship and Communications Rosario Murillo with 53.6%, President Daniel Ortega with 49.5%, and former Liberal presidential candidate Eduardo Montealegre with 48.7% negative ratings. When asked who were the leaders of the political opposition in Nicaragua, 32.6% answered "no one," 26% said Aleman, and 24.9% said Montealegre.

In a later poll, 39.2% said they would "mobilize against the reelection of Ortega," 56.4% would not.

On Sept. 30, Esteli Bishop Abelardo Mata abandoned his clerical duties to host a political meeting between former President Arnoldo Aleman, head of the PLC, and Eduardo Montealegre, who leads an ever shifting alliance of anti-Aleman Liberals. It was part of Mata's continuing attempt to bring Liberal party factions together in unity against the governing Sandinista Party (FSLN). After the meeting the two men gave separate statements, not seen as a positive sign by the local media.

Miskito Independence/Autonomy

Mateo Collins, of the Indigenous Committee for Caribbean Coast Defense, said that the Wihta Tara (leader) of the independence movement in the North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN), Hector Williams, wants a dialogue with President Daniel Ortega and not with local governor Reynaldo Francis, National Assembly Deputy Brooklyn Rivera, or with Fisheries Institute director Steadman Fagoth, all of whom they view as corrupt. Collins said that the region's Ecumenical Council, with members from the Catholic and Moravian Churches among others, could serve as a mediator.

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Susan Marley, a resident of Waspam and a member of the Indigenous Committee, said that the reason for the social convulsion in Bilwi/Puerto Cabezas is the looting of the natural resources of the region and the incapacity and corruption of the regional officials who have made the autonomy project fail. Berenice Sanders blamed government tear gas for the heart attack death of an Ornes Warman, 75, during a protest march on Oct. 19. However, family members of Warman blamed organizers of the separatist movement. Daughter Maria Elena Warman said, "The Whita Tara promised my father to double his pension, and even give it to him in dollars" if he would join the protests. Warman's niece, Karla Warman, said the leaders were taking advantage of the ignorance and humility of the elderly people,

raising a false banner of independence that doesn't have support among the people of Bilwi.

On Oct. 23, the day before United Nations Day on October 24, separatist movement leaders appealed to the representatives of the UN to mediate. According to Oscar Hodgson, legal advisor to the movement, the decision to declare independence was based on the UN declaration of indigenous rights. However, Walter Lacayo, spokesman for the UN office in Managua, said that the UN cannot mediate if it does not receive a request from both parties and it has received no request from the Ortega government.

Also on Oct. 23, there were celebrations in Bilwi and in Bluefields of the 22nd anniversary of the Atlantic Coast Autonomy Law. The Bilwi celebration, which was almost cancelled, included a program in the local gym attended by government officials and a parade with floats and marching bands. Carlos Aleman, president of the RAAN Regional Council, recognized that many young people on the Coast are unaware of the rights that they enjoy under the Law. He said that forums are planned in conjunction with the Education Ministry on land demarcation,

the environment, health and education.

RAAN leader Steadman Fagoth, head of the National Institute of Fisheries, said that the government had offered to assist the independence movement leaders in formulating proposals for changes to the Autonomy Law, passed in 1987. However, the independence movement has accused Fagoth himself of corruption and refuses to talk with him. Head of the Army Omar Halleslevens said that no extra troops have been moved to the RAAN. He stated that it was the Police who had the responsibility



Aerial view of the Miskito region.

in these cases, adding that this type of situation should not be resolved by force but by discussion "through verbal interaction between people and in this case between the different ethnic groups and the authorities."

Meanwhile, Lumberto Campbell, political secretary of the Sandinista Party (FSLN) for the Atlantic Coast, said that after the municipal elections of March 2010, the government will work to deepen the autonomy process in the communities there. He said that under the Ortega government, the residents of the Coast were seeing the benefits of autonomy. He said, "Now, things have to have the approval of the communal, territorial and regional governments and there is an attitude of recognition of the historic rights of the people of the Coast to govern themselves." He added that there have been improvements in roads, bridges and electricity, loans to fishermen, programs for small farmers under the Zero Hunger Program and the issuing of communal property titles to indigenous communities.

Tax Reform

The tax reform measure now under consideration by the National Assembly could tax remittances that Nicaraguans send home to the families in Nicaragua

according to economist Adolfo Acevedo. He said that over the past decade, family remittances have totaled approximately US\$800 million each year, which amounts to 50% of the total foreign exchange entering from Nicaragua's exports. According to the Central Bank, Nicaragua received US\$390.2 million in the first half of 2009, a drop of 4.4% from last year.

Walmarto Gutierrez, Sandinista Deputy and chair of the Economic Committee of the National Assembly said, "We are not going to tax family remittances; we're not going to put even one cordoba of tax on family remittances;... It's the government's official position not to affect family remittances." But he added there are businesses which make significant international financial transfers of several thousand dollars twice a month as if they were family remittances and these will be taxed. He stated that it was necessary to define what is meant by family remittances. When a worker sends US\$400 each month to his or her family in Nicaragua, that is a family remittance. But, when someone sends several thousand dollars twice a month, that is a capital investment.

At the same time Gilberto Alcocer, president of the Nicaraguan Council of Micro, Small and Medium Sized Businesses (Conimipyme), said that the tax reform bill as currently written would worsen the situation of the medium sized businesses in his organization at a time when the international economic crisis has caused sales to fall by an estimated 40%. He said that "If the tax reform is applied in its current form, it will have the direct result of reduced employment and some business will have to close temporarily or definitively."

Gutierrez explained to a meeting of merchants' associations that neither small nor medium sized grocery stores would be affected by a tax increase under the reform measure. An owner of a small store or market stall has only to show that he or she has purchased from a wholesaler who has paid the required value added tax to be exonerated from that amount of their tax. The immense majority of small merchants who are under the simplified fixed quota regime will not be affected by the tax reform, he said, adding that the goal of the measure is to increase payments by the large importers who earn millions under the fixed quota system. And peddlers,

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small business owners over 60, and the owners of the smallest groceries will be exempt from the fixed quota payments altogether.

Gustavo Porras, an FSLN deputy in the National Assembly and head of the FNT, said, "This is the moment when the business sectors need to do their part." He added, "The workers have always been against the policies of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), but when we have an agreement that doesn't affect the pensions of the retired people, and that doesn't put more tax on 90% of salaried folks, for us that's an achievement and



Sick former banana workers, camped in Managua, are further than ever from justice as US judge strikes down US\$98 judgement against Dole Foods.

that's why we support these reforms." He said that he expected the business sector to support the reforms because approval by the IMF and the release of US\$90 million depends on it. The bill needs 47 votes to pass. The FSLN has 38 so another 9 votes will have to come from other parties.

On Oct. 13, the National Assembly passed the final necessary changes to the 2009 national budget with the 38 votes of the Sandinista Party (FSLN), five from the Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance (ALN), and five from the National Unity Bench (BUN). Gutierrez explained that the government has reduced the budget three times this year for a total reduction of US\$137 million of which US\$85 million has been in capital improvements and US\$69 million in day to day expenditures.

Legal

A US federal judge ruled that Dole Foods does not have to pay a US\$98 million judgment to 150 former banana workers suffering from being exposed to the pesticide Nemagon on Dole banana plantations in Nicaragua in the 1970s. Judge Paul Huck, in a Miami court,

vacated a 2005 award by a Nicaraguan court, ruling that that court did not have jurisdiction and the law applied did not conform to international standards. Judge Hick accepted Dole's argument that the 2001 Nicaraguan law, under which the award was issued, was not impartial and favored the workers. Since 2002 Nicaraguan courts have issued judgments against Dole and the pesticide manufacturers totaling US\$2 billion.

In early October, shortly before a Los Angeles court was scheduled to rule, Dole Foods dropped its defamation lawsuit against Swedish filmmaker Fredrik Gertten over a documentary film which

the company claimed contained falsehoods which harmed the US food giant. "It's a really positive development. It's thanks to the support we've received," Gertten told the press.

The film exposes the havoc wreaked on workers' health by the chemical DBCP, primarily in the form of the

pesticide Nemagon, which was used freely in the Dole Foods banana plantations of Western Nicaragua in the 1960s and 70s, even after its use had been prohibited in the United States. It claims that thousands of workers have been affected, with the damage they suffered often transmitted to their children and even their grandchildren. Examples are: sterility in both women and men, birth deformities and other defects, skin rashes, headaches, dizziness, distorted vision, and even some cancers.

In other legal news, Nicaraguan Ombudsman for Human Rights, Omar Cabezas, confirmed Oct. 12 that he had formally requested that the Nicaraguan Supreme Court overturn the current law that declares all abortion illegal, even therapeutic abortion, which only applies in cases of extreme hardship and particularly when the mother's own life is in danger from her pregnancy. Cabezas revealed that he had used the occasion of a recent forum on human rights which brought together the national police and various state institutions to approach Supreme

Court President Justice Francisco Rosales in order to put the case to him directly and to request that the matter of the formal appeal be dealt with as quickly as possible.

Economy

Coffee producers are optimistic that the harvest, which begins in October will end a difficult year for the industry during which the price remained stable but production dropped considerably. Amilcar Navarro, president of the Nicaraguan Union of Coffee Growers (UNICAFE) stated that coffee exports this year closed at 1.4 million hundredweights (100 lbs). This was well below the 2 million hundredweights exported the previous year. Coffee producer and National Assembly Deputy for the Constitutional Liberal Party, Freddy Torres, predicted that this year's exports would hit 1.8 million hundredweights bringing the country more than US\$200 million in foreign exchange. In addition to the hope for an increased harvest is the hope that international coffee futures prices will rise. Last week futures for March 2010 were selling for US\$141/hundredweight.

Coffee producers have a new option for sales thanks to the growing internal market for coffee. There are no accurate figures on internal consumption but it is estimated at 15% of production. There is increased interest among young people in new coffee drinks such as iced coffee.

The lack of rain is severely impacting food crops according to National Federation of Cooperatives (FENACOOOP) President Sinforiano Cáceres. Among other strategies, FENACOOOP urged the government to promote the production of drought-resistant seeds, to support the development of irrigation, and to help resolve the credit problems of the "Won't Pay" movement, small farmers enmeshed in insupportable debt to commercial micro-lenders. Above all, he stressed the vital importance of "harvesting water" – collecting rain runoff in the last few weeks of the rainy season, storing it in underground cisterns "or by whatever means," and making it available for careful irrigating in the dry months ahead.

Cáceres said that FENACOOOP and other experts were predicting a 25 – 30% drop in corn production with beans similarly affected. "Twenty per cent of the rice crop has already been written off," he warned. FENACOOOP has a membership of 620 cooperatives throughout Nicaragua, representing some 40,000 families.