



NICARAGUA NETWORK NICARAGUA MONITOR

December 2009 # 162 30 Years of Solidarity with the Nicaraguan People

NICCA Supports Small Farmers

By Diana Bohn and Suzanne Baker
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NICCA (Nicaragua Center for Community Action), based in Berkeley, California, just celebrated its 21st birthday, having begun in October 1988. One of our first events was a benefit to raise money for victims of Hurricane Joan. Our *NICCA Bulletin*, with news and political analysis, was an important source of information on the situation in Nicaragua for ten years. NICCA also sponsored Spanish language classes for a number of years and promoted work brigades until 1995. Our first brigade of 30 people helped build a school in the village of Pio Doce in 1989, working with the village School Committee and sharing many experiences with community members, especially the astounding 10th anniversary of the Triumph of the Revolution on July 19. Experiencing the sense of people's empowerment and the excitement generated by the Revolution was unforgettable.

After 1990, NICCA began to work with the National Union of Farmers and Ranchers (UNAG) in the Matagalpa region at the instigation of well-known solidarity activist and Nicaragua resident, Circles Robinson. We organized a number of brigades to work with UNAG's Farmer to Farmer program, which promotes sustainable agriculture, and have continued to raise funds to support UNAG's many important activities.

José Solorzano, the director of UNAG-Matagalpa, reports annually on how NICCA funds are spent. While NICCA has never been able to send huge amounts of money, José has always emphasized that our steady contributions over the years, when many other international funding agencies stopped working in

Nicaragua, have been extremely important and have been maximized, often invested in revolving funds.

Sixty agricultural cooperatives in the San Ramon area are working with UNAG and at least ten of these have used some of the money that NICCA has sent to buy seven small farms of 5 manzanas (one manzana equals 1.7 acres), as well as land for two schools, a preschool, and a community center.



Farmer Victorino Rivas is a leader in the community of Las Mesas and active in the Campesino a Campesino Program. He is shown here with his family and their garden with flowers, bananas and shade grown coffee.

In 2008 UNAG invested NICCA funds toward the purchase of seeds and plants for 85 families in Rancho Grande near Waslala and in beginning a Farmer to Farmer program in an even more remote community, Caño Los Martinez, in the far northeastern part of the Department of Matagalpa.

Daysi Granados is a promoter for the Farmer to Farmer program and resident at the Ramon Garcia Cooperative (near San Ramon), where NICCA brigades went twice in the early nineties. She writes, "We as *campesinos* want to know and understand in the simplest way the effects of the world crisis and...at the same time to recognize what strategies we can put into practice to counteract this crisis..."

Daysi notes that on a world level

previous strategies did not work and that much of the *campesino* world continues to face the same problems, such as a lack of seeds and low agricultural prices. But, not for those in the *Farmer to Farmer* program, who have learned to save seeds and not rely

on international agricultural and chemical companies. "We know that if we do not produce sufficient food, there will be no health, education, or other necessities... We have been here at Ramon Garcia for 19 years. We started out with nothing but the desire for a better life and with the

See NICCA, p. 5.

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Promoting Cooperatives, Growing Food!

Interview with Pedro Haslam

Interview and translation by Karla Jacobs [Pedro Haslam is the President of the Institute of Rural Development (IDR) and President of the Nicaraguan Federation of Agro Industrial Cooperatives (FENIAGRO) which is one of the biggest organizations of cooperatives in Nicaragua representing over 27,000 small farming families. You can read the full interview at www.tortillaconsal.com/]

Karla Jacobs: Perhaps you can talk a bit about the experience of the cooperative sector during the 16 years of neoliberal governments between 1990 and 2006.

Pedro Haslam: One must refer to the country's history because it wasn't just a coincidence that during the revolution led by the FSLN in the 1980s over 3,000 farming cooperatives were formed. And one must remember that that social journey was only made possible as a result of the Sandinista land reform during which over 2.5 million manzanas [4.25 million acres] of land were given to farmers organized in cooperatives. The Sandinista land reform, I would say, was the most representative land reform project in the world in terms of the percentage of the population benefited and the percentage of the nation's land involved.

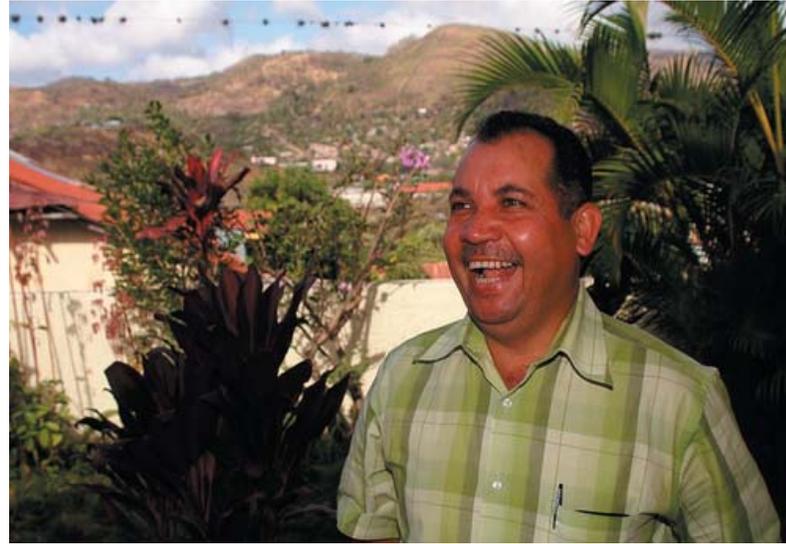
KJ: Tell me about the process you mention that the FSLN government is promoting to reactivate and incentivate the cooperative sector.

PH: Like I said before, one has to take Nicaraguan history into account. We shouldn't forget that Sandino considered cooperative organization to be "the appropriate social response to the country's economy [in the quest] for the

well-being of Nicaraguan families."

In 1934, when Sandino disarmed, or when the peace agreements were signed because he never disarmed, he organized the first great cooperative [in Nicaragua] called the Central of Río Coco.

It is no coincidence that a month after Sandino was murdered Somoza's guard attacked and disarticulated the Río Coco



Pedro Haslam notes: "When I say that we are working to reinstate people's dignity what I mean is that the government knows that people feel good if they are producing their own food."

cooperative.

In a declaration issued in the 1960s the Sandinista Front also proclaimed cooperative organization as a social model to be aspired to by farmers and workers. So it's not a coincidence that the FSLN government today acknowledges the importance the cooperative sector has within a social economy.

So during the 1980s the cooperative sector entered the economy, and despite the war of aggression, the cooperatives

came to produce an important percentage not just of overall national food production but also of agricultural exports.

Neoliberalism obliged us to redesign the cooperative model

During the years of neoliberalism in Nicaragua it was really tough. We were confronted by a full-blown offensive from the neoliberal system which started to be installed in 1990 with Doña Violeta [Chamorro's] government. This offensive obliged us to rethink and redesign the organizational model in the cooperative sector.

The cooperatives that survived, that resisted

neoliberalism, had to convert to an agro-exportation model producing coffee, sesame, dairy products etc. What the cooperatives that survived did was produce food for the families involved with the cooperative, perhaps sell a little if there was any left over, and then dedicate the rest of their time to the production of exportable products.

During those 16 years more than 50% of the land given to *campesinos* by the FSLN in the 80s was taken away, sold or usurped. So, the government programs of technical assistance, technology transfer, and seed production disappeared. At the same time the National [Development] Bank and the other financial institutions aimed at supporting the rural sector also disappeared and the commercial banking sector was established. Simultaneously, the political, legal and administrative conditions were created to encourage the installation of multi-nationals in Nicaragua.

So the group of cooperative organizations that were able to convert to a more managerial model, developing technical and market

See Cooperatives, 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.

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Alliance for Global Justice at Vigil: Shut the SOA Down Now!

By Jamie Way

For almost two decades, activists have made their way to the gates of Fort Benning, Georgia, where the U.S. government continues to train Latin American soldiers in harsh military tactics. Last month, Alliance for Global Justice (of which the Nicaragua Network is a member project) joined thousands of protestors from around the U.S. and Latin America to voice their outrage at the despicable training that takes place just within the fort's walls.

The combat training school, once held in Panama and known as the School of the Americas, has made its home in Fort Benning, Georgia, since 1984. Under its new name, the "Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation," the U.S. maintains its shameful policy, continuing to train those who will likely go on to destabilize Latin America through military coups and oppressive military tactics. The school has come under heavy criticism for the harsh tactics it has historically promoted, including torture, extortion, blackmail and the targeting of civilian populations. These tactics beg the question of why U.S. tax payers' money is being used to promote undemocratic policies in Latin America through the School of the Americas.

In order to contest the notorious school's controversial mission, School of the Americas Watch (SOAW) organizes an annual vigil. The somber event marks the anniversary of the 1989 massacre of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her teenage daughter in El Salvador. This gruesome slaughter, among many others, was perpetrated by Latin American soldiers that were SOA graduates. Participants pay their respect to victims of SOA graduates, by holding a solemn ceremony on the third day of the vigil, reciting the names of those that have been lost while marching through the area.

To sign a petition asking Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega to withdraw Nicaraguan officers from the SOA, visit the Nicanet web page at www.nicanet.org and scroll down!

For the fourth consecutive year, the Alliance for Global Justice joined with thousands of concerned activists in hopes

of closing the "School of Assassins." Despite rain, and the high cost of travel for participation, the group insists that the event was worth the trek. Not only was the experience fruitful in that it provided a way to speak out against the oppressive teachings of the School of the Americas, but also in that it provided an opportunity to meet with like-minded activists.

"The SOAW vigil is the largest annual

assistance due their land reforms policies in the 1980s. James Jordan, of Alliance for Global Justice, held two workshops on Colombian issues. His workshop "The War on Colombian Farmers," presented the case that U.S. actions in Colombia are not truly aimed at fighting terror or drugs, but instead at clearing rural farmers from their land and opening the way to transnational mining, energy and



Chuck Kaufman said: "The SOAW vigil is the largest annual gathering of Latin America solidarity activists. It's like a reunion." Photo: Linda Panetta

gathering of Latin America solidarity activists. In one way it is like a reunion of Central America solidarity activists," explained Chuck Kaufman of the Alliance for Global Justice. "But, the SOAW vigil is more than just a reunion. At least half of those who attend are college students and young people. The SOAW vigil gives us a way to reach new people with our information and organizing tools."

The three day event provides a great forum for activists committed to creating a just U.S. policy toward the region more generally. Throughout the weekend, workshops and plenary sessions are held, and groups often host tables with information discussing their focus issues.

Alliance for Global Justice hosted three workshops this year. Kaufman held a workshop entitled "Let Nicaragua Live," discussing the U.S. foreign aid "property waiver" regime that currently threatens Nicaragua's access to U.S. foreign

agribusiness companies.

"I prepared for 25 people for my workshop and was astounded to have 75 attend, filling all the chairs and most of the floor space," Kaufman explained. "It was one of the most fun workshops I've ever given because the participants peppered me with questions, the discussion was high quality, and I wasn't able to even get through all my material."

Additionally, Alliance for Global Justice staff had a table where they provided information on their projects and asked for signatures on two petitions. One featured petition focused on the conditions at La Tramacua, a prison in Colombia where a number of political prisoners, including a concentration of women political prisoners are held. The petition calls for an investigation of the U.S. Bureau of Prisons' role in restructuring and advising all of Colombia's maximum security prisons. Alliance for Global Justice also successfully gathered over 150 signatures

See SOA, p. 5.

On Presidents and Precedents: Implications of the Honduran Coup

By Joseph Shansky

[This article was originally published by *Upside Down World* on Dec. 10, 2009.]

Obama was elected partly because of his promise to a large Hispanic constituency to give both new attention and new respect to Latin America. Judging from the US role in the military coup in Honduras, he must think that one of the two is enough.

For those who closely followed the coup and its aftermath, a tiny fear sat in the back of our minds. Eventually it was confirmed. As the State Department position shifted from condemning to condoning the illegal government, the outline of a bigger picture became clear. If this violent takeover were really to be approved by the US, it would mark a frightening new focus on the region.

In late June, Honduran President Manuel Zelaya was kidnapped by the military and forced out of the country. For the next five months, an illegitimate government, headed by Congressional leader Roberto Micheletti, suppressed the outrage of many Honduran citizens against this regime through a number of violent means including murder, torture, and detention of citizens.

Throughout this time, the US response to these allegations was silence.

Even though it was impossible for a free or fair election to take place under these circumstances, the US endorsed what is internationally recognized as a fraud. After months of stumbling through embarrassing press conferences dominated by contradictory statements, doublespeak, and back-pedaling, the US appeared firmly committed to helping overthrow democratic order by blessing the Honduran elections as the way out. It has deliberately chosen sides in the battle between the popular struggle for social justice in Latin America and the assured continuation of its own economic interests with the election of coup-supporting conservatives like Porfirio Lobo.

A Regional Divide

Throughout the coup, Zelaya had overwhelming verbal support from the majority of his counterparts in the region.

Upon his bold return to Honduras in late September, Brazil's President Lula

opened the doors of his Tegucigalpa embassy to shelter the president, journalists, and supporters as his "guests". That was the moment that things might have turned around for those fighting for his restoration. The populace had grown weary of struggling since late June



Honduran woman graphically shows that her basic rights have been violated by the coup government.

demanding Zelaya's reinstatement and protesting peacefully against the violations of so many basic rights. Zelaya's homecoming was a move which energized them once again. But thanks to endless delay tactics on the part of US officials, his position in the embassy soon grew to resemble less that of a president than a prisoner.

Additionally, the US position may have drawn a line in the sand among other Latin American governments.

Over the past 5 months, of all Latin American countries, only Columbia, Peru and Panama (all strong US allies and economic dependents) rejected Zelaya's status as the rightful leader of Honduras. But since the elections, others seem to be falling into line behind the US. El Salvador's newly-elected FMLN President Funes agreed with the US line, stating that the elections will "end the crisis and lead to a unity government, the restoration of constitutional order and reconciliation in the brother country". Now even Brazil appears to be adjusting its stance.

"There is a new situation," Brazil's Chief of Staff Dilma Rousseff said recently. "There was an election. That process will be taken into account. We cannot turn a blind eye to the coup, but

we can also not turn a blind eye to the election."

At a Special Meeting of the Organization of American States (OAS) on December 4, conflicting views were clear. US Ambassador Carmen Lomellin confirmed the US position to recognize

the election results regardless: "The TSE and the Honduran people conducted remarkably free, fair and transparent elections."

Costa Rican Ambassador Jose Enrique Castillo Barrientes concurred: "Any position against the elections means crushing the solution."

However, Bolivian Ambassador Jose Pinelo vehemently disagreed: "Under no circumstances will my government accept this objective. Recognizing a government formed like this means recognizing coup plotters."

Election Day – Violence and Abstention

The Nov. 29 election passed with predictable results. For most Hondurans, Election Day in Honduras was never seen as a turning point. Rather, it followed a familiar rhetoric that democracy can be always gained, or restored, in the ballot box. That this simple action could clean up the violent elimination of democratic order is a profound lie.

On the contrary, it provided opportunity for an escalation of abuse under the guise of protection. This is nothing new for Honduran citizens. Armed forces dispersed throughout the country to ensure a climate of fear and intimidation leading up to and

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NICCA, from p. 1.

good news that we would be the owners of our land. This was a cattle farm—only pasture. The people who wanted to live here camped out under plastic while we built our houses. We 70 families organized ourselves to become a cooperative and got to know UNAG. NICCA brought two brigades here to work in terracing the bean and corn fields and to construct a milking barn for our dairy project.”

During the Violeta Chamorro and Arnaldo Aleman regimes, there were 12 years of legal struggle for the land, but the cooperative ultimately won its land title in court. Now the community has a school, electricity, wells with pumps, and the area is lush with shade and fruit trees, crops, and flowers. Daisy says, “Good people from the outside see our progress. This support strengthens us and makes us want to continue forward in our struggles.”

UNAG is well represented in the current government. UNAG Matagalpa is working in the government’s Zero Hunger program providing seeds and training through its Farmer to Farmer program. Recipients who receive seeds and tools from the Production Package are also instructed in how to build silos to store seeds and grains and in how to organize their agricultural holdings for better results. The Production Package is geared especially for single mothers, with the goal of reaching 10-15 thousand women per year up to 60,000, so that they can produce food for their families. UNAG is also working with farmers to improve the genetic pool for cattle in order to improve cattle production and exports.

The UNAG program also includes:

- Training individual farmers and furthering technical skills of UNAG promoters, agronomists, and other technical advisers.
- Formation of and technical support for agricultural cooperatives.
- Supporting women’s rural empowerment and small economic projects.
- Cooperative ventures with municipalities, regional organizations, and international groups to further rural socio-economic activities
- Co-sponsoring projects to empower and further job training and leadership skills for rural youth.
- Helping organize an annual rural fair, where local farmers from 23 communities promote and sell their quality organic products.

SOA, from p. 3..

for the SOAW-Nicaragua Network petition to Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega, asking him to withdraw his country from participation in the School of the Americas.



Rain did not mar the enthusiasm of the marchers demanding the closing of the SOA. Photo: Linda Panetta.

In addition to meeting activists with similar causes, the event also provided the opportunity for dialogue. Groups from a variety of ideological perspectives were present at the event, creating an interesting

UNAG also campaigns against genetically engineered seeds and for the rescue of indigenous seeds and construction of seed banks. As a result, the Mayor’s office of the town of San Ramon’s has decreed that the municipality should be GMO-free.

In recent years NICCA has also been supporting Grupo Moes of Estelí, which works with marginalized women. These include those whose spouses have emigrated to Costa Rica to find work, other single heads of households, and sex workers. The group focuses on human rights, health, gender violence, and education. It also conducts craft workshops to teach skills for making marketable items such as dolls, piñatas, and jewelry.

Grupo MOES writes, “We are working against maltreatment and sexual exploitation. We know that there have been 38 women and 12 children, including adolescents, from Estelí who have been kidnapped and are being exploited in other countries. Grupo MOES has asked for financial help to hold a Departmental

chance to discuss important issues. Due to the diversity of those present, the workshops generated the possibility for forming strategic alliances and discovering points of agreement amongst activists.

“It led to a very fruitful interchange from a variety of perspectives,” Jordan stated about a workshop he held. “There were those there who were clearly in support of the armed rebellion in Colombia and there were those there who were very much pacifists, and opposed to any kind of violence. There were liberal Democrats, anarchists, religiously motivated activists and various kinds of Marxists. It was very useful and telling to see the very important common ground that emerged. All present seemed to agree that central to a resolution of the war in Colombia are two important components: ending US aid to Colombia in support of this war; and opening a process of dialogue for a just peace, versus the military-only solution favored by the US government and Colombia’s Uribe Administration”

(Jordan and Kaufman are both available to speak on the above mentioned issues as workshops or lectures, for a recommended \$500 honorarium, plus any additional travel costs incurred. Please contact them at info@afgj.org.)

forum with families of the victims, as well as the Police and such agencies as the Commission on Women, the Minister of the Family, the Commission on Childhood, Women against Violence, and members of the Network of Migrants. Two hundred people have been invited to this event.

The needs are great, but the rewards of solidarity have been and continue to be even greater. If you are able to contribute a tax deductible donation to any of these projects through NICCA, you can send a check made out to ICAS/NICCA to NICCA, P.O. Box 1004, Berkeley, CA 94701 or write nicca@igc.org for more information. Also, visit UNAG’s beautiful website www.unag.org.ni/matagalpa and click on “Galerias de fotos” to see some of the people and projects that they and NICCA are helping. See also: [Campesino a Campesino: Voices from Latin America’s Farmer to Farmer Movement for Sustainable Agriculture](#), by Eric Holt-Giménez, Food First Books, http://www.foodfirst.org/en/store/book/Campesino_a_Campesino .

Cooperatives, from p. 2.

administration capacities, dedicated themselves to resisting the offensive of the multinationals. The group of cooperatives that was able to re-establish itself within the neoliberal model acted as the spearhead for the survival of the cooperative sector. A number of cooperatives demobilized completely during that period, while many others abandoned cooperative activity but didn't disappear altogether. You could say they went into hibernation. And that sector of cooperatives is the one which is regaining dynamism today.

Statistics about the cooperative sector

KJ: You said at the beginning of your answer that in the 1980s more than 3,000 cooperatives were formed. Is there a statistic that tells us how many survived during those 16 years?

PH: In the 1980s the majority of cooperatives that were formed were rural cooperatives. [When it took power in 2007] the FSLN government composed a list of existing cooperatives. This list calculated just over 1,000 cooperatives including certain other expressions of integration like unions, centrals and federations.

And today, after nearly three years of the Sandinista government there are just over 3,000 active cooperatives in Nicaragua thanks to the process promoted by the government to form new cooperatives and reactivate hibernating cooperatives. Roughly 70% of existing cooperatives are rural, agricultural cooperatives.

ALBA has created a great space for cooperatives

For example, in the Rural Credit Fund [Caja Rural Nacional (CARUNA)], priority is given to cooperative organizations. Over 400 rural cooperatives are aided as part of the ALBA-CARUNA program. In the last registration we did, we listed nearly 1,500 cooperatives assisted as part of government programs, and that doesn't include the transportation cooperatives through which the government subsidy of public transportation is channeled.

In Nicaragua there is great political will and a comprehensive process is in place to ensure that all these programs are channeled through local cooperative organizations. For example in the case of exports to ALBA countries, the government has opened a great space for

cooperative organizations.

And now we have a new mechanism to help make these programs as relevant to local demands as possible - the Departmental Production Councils. These councils are made up of public institutions linked to production plus local organizations that represent the producers in each department.



Seventy percent of the 3,000 cooperatives in Nicaragua are agricultural cooperatives. Photo: Kathy Hoyt

Credit programs, ENABAS [the State Basic Food Company] purchases, purchases for ALBA programs, etc., will all be channeled through these Production Councils. Comandante Daniel [Ortega] has always said that the cooperatives must progress, that they must establish their own direct relationships in order to benefit from the concept and the practice of fair trade which is the other great element of this process.

The institutionalization of Fair Trade

Many of the cooperatives in Nicaragua are involved in an international process called "fair trade" which is based on solidarity between groups of consumers and cooperatives in our countries. And now that Nicaragua is a member of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) the practice of fair trade is no longer an isolated event in Nicaragua. Today thanks to ALBA the concept and practice of ALBA has been institutionalized. This means that there are better opportunities for the producer with better prices and simultaneously non speculative prices for consumers. Seen from a strategic perspective, this is very important.

Mitigating the effects of climate change in rural Nicaragua

KJ: I would like to talk a bit about the drought caused by El Niño which affected different parts of the country during the last few months of the rainy season. What specific effects does the Rural Agricultural Public Sector (SPAR) anticipate during the next few months in the areas affected by the drought?

PH: To talk about the drought or El Niño is to talk about another of the crises that exist in the world - the crisis caused by climate change. And the first thing I want to clarify about climate change is that it is a crisis that was not provoked by countries like Nicaragua, but that we are very negatively affected by it. The same applies to the financial crisis,

the energy crisis, the food crisis. All these crises originate in the "developed" countries.

With regards to the climate crisis we are severely affected in Nicaragua. Today there is a geographical division in Nicaragua that didn't used to exist - now we have dry zones and humid zones which we didn't used to have. We are affected almost every year now by hurricanes, droughts. Our soil has been degraded.

Currently, the SPAR, is working on these issues. We recognize that certain areas have been affected by less intense rainfall during the second crop cycle (*siembra de postrera*). So right now our plan is to intensify sowing for the third crop cycle (*siembra de apante*) in those areas where a third crop is possible like the Caribbean Coast, and [the departments of] Nueva Guinea, and Río San Juan. President Daniel has mandated that seed production activity be intensified as part of a contingency plan in order to ensure the availability of seeds for the first crop cycle (*siembra de primera*) of next year.

KJ: Is that because it is assumed that farmers whose crops failed during the second crop cycle of this year won't have

See Cooperatives, p. 7.

Cooperatives, from p. 6.

seeds to sow next year?

PH: Yes. What farmers normally do is save seed from one cycle to sow for the next cycle. So when one crop cycle fails many farmers are left without seeds.

There is a large organized effort by the government to guarantee seed production during the first cycle for the second cycle, during the second cycle for the third cycle and during the third cycle for the first cycle of the next year.

We want to support people in such a way that they can produce their own food

Why did I start by talking about production? Because one of the main objectives of this government is to recuperate people's dignity. Dignity is one of our ancestral and revolutionary values. We have said that what we should do is support farmers so they can produce their own food, and so they can have some left over to sell in order to cover the cost of other things they need which cannot be produced by working the land.

We have been in meetings with the FAO [the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization], with the World Food Program, with the World Bank, with all the organizations that work on the issue of food security in order to coordinate all the different efforts that the government is directing.

Contingency plans, not emergency plans

But at the same time it is necessary to say that we are not in an emergency situation as many have tried to make out. There is no famine in the country. We must be clear on this point: the drought caused by El Niño is not provoking a lack of food in the country. We are working on contingency plans to prevent an emergency situation. We are working to avoid the need for food handouts. However, if a situation should arise where a certain community or set of communities experiences a lack of food and the only solution is food handouts, then the government would do that. This government would not let anybody die of hunger.

But it is important to emphasize that there is no famine in Nicaragua. What there *has* been is a media campaign aimed at creating the impression that there is an emergency in the country. And that campaign is aimed to a certain extent to influence domestic opinion, but more than anything it aims to influence international

opinion. The objective is to create the impression that the FSLN government is an inoperable government, that it is insensitive to social problems.

The IDR has mitigation projects in affected areas

The Institute for Rural Development is carrying out what we call a family project in 33 municipalities which have been identified as the worst hit by the drought. For example we are working in Boaco and Chontales where we have a project that aims to create more jobs in rural areas with backyard production among other things. We have also been facilitating community wells.

And in Nicaragua we have food reserves. The country has not only the food reserves in ENABAS where there are more than three months worth of reserves. But we should remember that the reserves small farmers and other producers have at home or on their farm, those all form part of the national food reserves. Because the vast majority of farmers and producers keep as much corn and beans as they can for the year.

We don't want to create more dependency among the population

The issue of food handouts is very

delicate for the government because we don't want to create more dependency of the population on programs or institutions. When I say that we are working to reinstate people's dignity what I mean is that the government knows that people feel good if they are producing their own food. The important thing is that it is their productive base which will guarantee, if tomorrow the World Food Program doesn't turn up, that they can produce their own food.

The crisis provoked by climate change isn't just going to affect us once. Like I said earlier, the cycles are increasingly short. So we need to get these communities producing food. We need to help people generate life in their communities. It's not that we have all the resources we need to solve everyone's problems but at least we are working to solve specific problems in specific areas.

I always say to people, "Thank God that the FSLN is in government, and that Daniel Ortega is at the front of that government." Because in these times of crisis I don't dare to think what sort of a situation we would be in if we had a neoliberal government.

Progressive Trade Bill Needs Your Support!

Both the Senate and the House have a progressive new trade bill before them. The bill is gathering momentum, and in the House it already has 131 co-sponsors!

Senator Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and Representative Michael Michaud (D-ME) have sponsored bills in the Senate (S. 2821) and the House (H.R. 3012) respectively. Many articles in the bill answer our concerns about the impact of DR-CAFTA on the poor majorities in Central America. There would still remain work to be done to tear down the current model and build a better one, but these bills are a serious beginning!

The TRADE Act would apply to all future agreements, and would also mandate a reopening of NAFTA, CAFTA and other trade agreements to put them into compliance with the act. Under the TRADE Act there would be no Fast Track procedures (up-down vote with no amendments) in the Congress. The Congress would have to be consulted before and during the negotiations of an agreement.

With relation to farmers, the new bill says that any trade agreement must "protect the right of each country that is a party to the trade agreement to prevent dumping of agricultural commodities at below the cost of production." This gives countries the power to counteract the unfair competition of U.S.-subsidized agricultural products.

Read more about the TRADE Act at www.nicanet.org.

In order to take advantage of this momentum, we must act now. Please contact your Senators and Representative to tell them that you support fundamental change in U.S. trade policy! The Capitol Switchboard number is (202) 224-3121.

Tell your Senators and Representative that:

"I support the progressive trade bills (H.R. 3012 or S. 2821) that are now before Congress. I believe it is necessary to renegotiate past unfair trade policies, and to promote the needs of real people here and in other countries through our new trade policies. As one of your constituents, I urge you to support this bill."

Honduras, from p. 4.

especially on Election Day. As of Nov. 29, not only were national independent media banned from the airwaves, but as Laura Carlsen, the director of the Americas Program, recently reported, even international journalists became subject to vicious harassment and threatening to the point of fearing for their lives.

Most of the violence was kept out outside of the capital on election day, but the repression was intense in smaller towns and especially in the second largest city, San Pedro Sula. Micheletti's claim that an additional 30,000 armed forces for this particular week was for the citizens' "protection" is absurd. Reports of all kinds of abuses by police and military poured in from human rights delegations and journalists stationed all around Honduras that day. A Real News video clearly shows police officers deliberately smashing windows of cars, beating protesters with batons in the street, and hitting journalists who dared to do their job.

Again, these tactics were for the most part not unique to that day. They were consistent with the regime's behavior throughout the coup and represented the usual degree of violence against its own citizens.

Amnesty International has now called for an independent investigation into all human rights violations since the coup, including "killings following excessive use of force, arbitrary arrests of demonstrators by police and military, indiscriminate and unnecessary use of tear gas, ill treatment of detainees in custody, violence against women, and harassment of activists, journalists, lawyers and judges."

Amnesty continues: "Lobo has announced that he wants political amnesty for all parties involved in the coup, effectively requesting that all of the above violations, still unacknowledged, now also go unpunished by their perpetrators. If this was to happen, it would represent the final elimination of almost all legal processes in Honduras since Zelaya's ousting."

While the coup government claims to have seen the highest electoral turnout in Honduran history, the National Front against the Coup (or Frente) claims the lowest. They cite an enormous victory in their much-promoted nonparticipation, claiming that 65-70 percent stayed away from the polls.

On the other hand, the coup government

claimed a 62 percent turnout. However, a new investigation by Jesse Freeston of the Real News has revealed that this figure, which was distributed and repeated by almost every major media outlet in the world, appears to have been an arbitrary creation by one of the heads of the Supreme Tribunal Electoral (TSE). According to TSE's own numbers, in reality less than half of the country voted that day.

Both the regime and the Resistance know the importance of keeping their supporters energized beyond the elections.



On June 29, the day after he was overthrown in a military coup, President Manuel Zelaya (left) met with other Latin American presidents at a summit of the Bolivarian Alliance for Our Americas (ALBA) in Managua. Left to right, Zelaya, Daniel Ortega, Hugo Chavez and Rafael Correa.

Some of the international community (led by CNN headlines that evening boasting "high turnout" and saying the day was "calm and without incident") are inclined to accept the idea that the elections are a healthy step forward. To believe that they are a clean break from the recent troubles is a convenient but dangerous assertion.

A New Precedent

By most accounts, the coup was a surprising success for its leaders and backers. It now sets an alarming example that military coups can be sustained with backing of the world's leading power. But many Latin American leaders are warning of a dangerous model.

"What is at stake is whether we validate or not a new methodology of coups d'état," said Argentine Foreign Minister Jorge Taiana at the recent Ibero-American Summit. His Cuban counterpart, Bruno Rodriguez, agreed: "To recognize the spurious government emerging from these illegitimate elections will betray principles of peace, democracy and justice."

Fidel Castro wrote in a recent editorial: "I hold the view that before Obama completes his term, there will be from six to eight right-wing governments in Latin America that will be allies of the empire."

It's not an outrageous prediction. Threatening signs are appearing all over the region. In Columbia, the United States just signed an agreement to expand its military presence by building new bases, igniting a feud between the US ally and Venezuela. In Paraguay, coup rumors were stirred when leftist president Fernando Lugo fired top military officials last

month. In Guatemala, Obama's fellow Nobel Peace laureate, indigenous activist Rigoberta Menchu, warned of plans amongst the Bolivian oligarchy against President Evo Morales.

However, on the same day of the fraudulent Honduran elections, Uruguayans selected José Mujica, a leftist and former guerilla, as president. And in Bolivia, Evo Morales just won another term in a landslide victory. The tide has not yet turned.

Most disturbing is that even amongst US officials there is now no dispute that what happened in Honduras was a military coup d'état. When I met with US Ambassador Hugo Llorens in Tegucigalpa in August, he was able to reluctantly confirm this when pressed. In his first State Department briefing on the day after the elections, Arturo Valenzuela, the new Assistant Secretary for the US Bureau of Hemispheric Affairs, described what took place as a "military coup" twice, marking

See Honduras, p. 9.

Honduras, from p. 8.

the first time US officials have officially admitted this.

The Constituent Assembly and the Future

Those who've been fighting against the regime and against the elections have done so primarily for the return of legal order to Honduras. The Honduran Resistance, which formed in response to Zelaya's expulsion, became a social movement no one could have predicted. In many ways, the level of repression by the regime throughout the coup was a direct response to the surprising force of the Resistance movement. It is also a testament to the movement's strength.

While some right-wing forces are doubtlessly watching to see how far Micheletti and his cohorts can get, others are taking notes from the Resistance in preparation for what comes next. The demands of the people are not limited to the restitution of President Zelaya. They

want to ensure all Hondurans that the systemic injustices they've lived under for so long will be one day turned around. Their ultimate goal is a new Constitution for Honduras.

The project they seek to implement is a large one, and is designed to follow a successful model already in place in Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador. It will not be easy. The constituent assembly (*constituyente*) is an effort to rewrite the outdated Honduran constitution with new cultural, economic, and social reforms. After Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez proved it was possible to gain mass support for the idea in 1999, Bolivia adopted a new constitution in 2007. The following year, the people of Ecuador approved a draft constitution which guaranteed among other radical ideas, "free education through university and social security benefits for stay-at-home mothers" and "inalienable natural rights."

Likewise, Manuel Zelaya proposed

reforms for Honduras which focused on land re-distribution, an increase in the minimum wage, and new rights for women and the poor. It was partly because these ideas were so popular with economically-disadvantaged Hondurans that he was overthrown. But his supporters are moving on with an eye to the future.

Now Resistance leaders have called for the people of Honduras to "close that chapter" of their struggle. They are turning their focus to the constituent assembly and to the 2013 elections.

It's uncertain what form their action will take. But they are still riding the momentum of their struggle. Emboldened by almost unanimous international support, Hondurans are now re-awakened to just how fragile a democracy can be.

[Editor's note: To join the newly formed National Committee in Solidarity with the People of Honduras, visit http://salsa.democracyinaction.org/o/531/t/10071/petition.jsp?petition_KEY=2153.]

The Month In Review

November 3-December 22, 2009

Politics

More than half of Nicaraguans recognize the efforts of the government of President Daniel Ortega to improve health services and education in the country but do not see progress in other areas. This is according to an M&R Consultants poll of 1,600 Nicaraguans conducted between Nov. 27 and Dec. 5 in all 16 departments and the two autonomous regions. Only four in ten people approved of the overall performance of the Ortega government but 52.1% thought that the quality of and access to education had improved and 51% said that health services were better in the nation's hospitals and health centers.

The Sandinista Party (FSLN) continues to be the largest party with 32.3% identifying themselves as Sandinistas; 12.1% identified with the Constitutional Liberal Party (PLC), while 6.4% were followers of the "Let's Go with Eduardo" Movement (MVE) of Eduardo Montealegre, and 1.7% supported the Sandinista Renovation Movement (MRS) while only 0.4% support the National Liberal Alliance (ALN). No party preference was claimed by 46.8%, down substantially from September, when 54.1% said they were independents. All of the major parties grew in the percentage of people who identified with them with the PLC growing the most: from 8.5% to

12.1%. The number who identified with the FSLN grew by 2%.

A high 65.1% disapproved of the performance of the National Assembly while only 13.9% approved. A similar number, 62.7%, were of the opinion that the Supreme Court responded to political interests. A 78.9% majority thought the law should be changed to mandate that a candidate win 50% plus one in the popular vote to be elected president on the first round. And 62.7% disapproved of the performance of the magistrates of the Supreme Electoral Council while 58.6% said they believed the municipal elections of 2008 were not transparent.

In other news, Attorney General Hernan Estrada announced that his office has resolved 52 more claims by U.S. citizens for property compensation since July 2009 and has received a letter of recognition from U.S. Ambassador Robert Callahan. Estrada said that the government had resolved 43 cases and the U.S. recognized that in nine other cases the claimants had no right to compensation for a total of 52. He noted that these cases came under Article 527 of the U.S. Foreign Assistance Act of 1994-5. [This article said that U.S. aid must be cut off to any country that had confiscated or nationalized property belonging to a U.S. citizen until compensation was made or unless the U.S.

president granted a waiver. The article has been interpreted to apply retroactively to Nicaraguans who became U.S. citizens



Hernan Estrada announced that the government had resolved more property cases.

after their property was confiscated by the Sandinista revolution in the 1980s. Each July since the law was passed the US has granted a waiver based on progress made in resolving property claims.]

Estrada also announced that the government has given property titles to just over 55,000 families in the less than three years it has been in power, many more than the number issued by the three previous administrations over 16 years. He said that the number of US citizens compensated for property totaled 300 in three years of Sandinista government.

The Nicaraguan government said
See Month, p. 10.

Month, from p. 9.

on Nov. 2 that it would not declare US Ambassador Robert Callahan persona non grata, but his continued tenure would depend on “his political behavior” according to a statement by Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Manuel Coronel. Callahan angered many Sandinistas when he called the decision of the Supreme Court to remove term limits for president and mayors, “unlawful, hurried, and secret.” On Oct. 29, the government had released a communiqué calling Callahan’s statements “interventionist” and “unacceptable.” Government supporters demonstrated at the Central American University (UCA), at the National Assembly, and in front of the US Embassy Oct. 30-31, demanding Callahan’s ouster. While Coronel described commercial and military relations with the United States as “good,” he called Callahan’s remarks “a political blunder from one who does not measure his words.”

In mid-November four members of the Liberal International (LI) [the world federation of Liberal Parties] generated controversy during a three day visit to Nicaragua. Besides calling for Liberal Party unity for the 2011 presidential election, LI President Johannes van Baalen praised Honduran coup leader Roberto Micheletti and announced that LI named him one of their vice-presidents. Van Baalen also met with the military high command where he felt them out about the possibility of a coup against President Ortega. Ortega said, “[Van Baalen] held a meeting with the high command of the Nicaraguan Army on the pretext of congratulating them on the 30th anniversary of their founding but when he was in the meeting he wanted to know if the Nicaraguan Army had the same attitude as that of the Honduran army. However, he found, instead, that they were patriotic.” The Nicaraguan government asked him to leave the country.

News reports revealed that van Baalen, a Dutch member of the European Parliament, was forced by public opinion to withdraw his 1998 candidacy for the Dutch parliament because he had belonged to a neo-Nazi student group and expressed admiration for Adolf Hitler.

President Daniel Ortega and Police Commissioner Aminta Granera received praise from all sides after dual marches by opposition supporters and Sandinista government supporters on Nov. 21

proceeded without violence on separate routes and at different times. There had been fears that there would be violence in Managua, as there had been two weeks earlier in some cities where Sandinista supporters and opponents clashed on the anniversary of the 2008 municipal elections.

Marcos Carmona, leader of the Permanent Commission on Human Rights, said, “The call that President Ortega made the day before the march for his sympathizers to march in peace and his saying that he was going to control his partisans ... avoided a blood bath.” Cirilo Otero, president of the Center for Environmental Policy Initiatives, said, “It seems to me to be an institutional success because the police force had the



Johannes van Baalen came to Nicaragua to try to unite the Liberal Parties and to sound the Army out about a coup against Daniel Ortega.

opportunity to show that it continues to be the institution that takes care of internal order in the country just as the constitution says.” Estimates of crowd sizes differed but it was obvious that the Sandinista demonstration was at least several times larger than the opposition march.

In mid-November Amnesty International (AI) released a statement expressing concern about the delay by the Supreme Court in announcing a decision on an appeal of the law criminalizing therapeutic abortion which was brought by civil society organizations. “We are very concerned at the lack of certainty and that the Court continues to delay its ruling,” said the statement quoting AI’s Deputy Director of the Americas Program, **Economy and Poverty Reduction**

Rafael Paniagua, general manager of ALBA of Nicaragua, S.A. (ALBANISA), which supervises many of the projects of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) in Nicaragua, reported that the nine ALBA projects in Nicaragua have benefited more than 3.97 million people and generated directly or

indirectly 134,000 jobs. In two years ALBA has added 290 megawatts of daily electricity generation, 57 % of the country’s needs, which ended the daily blackouts in the country. That was followed by four more electricity producing plants.

“ALBA has done what has not been done in Nicaragua in a century,” Paniagua said, adding, “ALBA has produced results and that’s why they throw stones at us.” He went on to list the subsidy to public transportation noting, “The price [of a Managua bus ride] should be between US\$0.30 and US\$0.35,” but is only US\$0.13. Two million passengers daily benefit from this subsidy. “The aid from ALBA does get to the people,” he stated. He was reacting to reports by the conservative newspaper La Prensa which claimed that ALBA has only benefitted President Daniel Ortega and his inner circle of economic interests.

Antonio Jose Contreras, vice-president of ALBA Foods of Nicaragua (ALBALINISA), noted that more than 22,000 small and medium scale farmers have benefited by the export of their products worth more than US\$123 million to Venezuela. These products, including 16,000 tons of meat, more than 3,000 tons of black beans, more than 15,000 tons of milk, 6,000 head of cattle, and 5,673 tons of coffee during the previous 18 months. The National Rice Program purchased for export US\$6.9 million in rice. For next year, ALBA companies expect to invest around US\$130 million in two milk processing plants (one in Chontales and the other in Matagalpa), two industrial slaughter houses and a plant to produce corn flour.

On December 10, President Daniel Ortega inaugurated the second stage of the San Jacinto-Tizate geothermal project in Telica, Leon, which will generate 46 megawatts of electricity in 2011 and 72 megawatts the following year. The first stage of the project, which currently produces 10 megawatts of electricity, cost US\$57 million while the second phase will cost US\$92 million. Ortega explained that Nicaragua has increased its electricity generation capacity by 150 megawatts since he assumed the presidency in 2007. Another 70 megawatts will come on-line in January followed by another 40 megawatts in April for a total of 260 megawatts, half again as much as the 520

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Month, from p. 10.

megawatts being produced when he came into office.

On Dec. 4, the Central Bank released a report on Nicaragua's economy for the year up to the end of November. According to the report, exports declined by 9.3% compared to the previous period in 2008, down to US\$1.192 billion. Central Bank President Antenor Rosales said that the lower figure was the result of a drop in Free Trade Zone exports as well as a drop in remittances sent to family members by Nicaraguans working abroad. The government office on exports (CETREX) released figures showing export volume in metric tons had risen, but that a drop in prices for shell fish, beans, beef, peanuts, and dairy products had meant lower export earnings.

Nicaragua's top agricultural exports continued to be coffee, beef, peanuts, sugar, and beans with some analysts expecting beef to pass coffee this year in value. With gold at US\$1,100 oz., Nicaragua's gold mines have produced 4.85 metric tons of gold this year with earnings of US\$88.5 million. Exports from factories in the country's Free Trade Zones dropped by 7% to US\$807 million, showing a slight improvement recently with a total of 72,000 workers employed in the sector. (Nicaragua's exports in 2008 had risen by 24% above 2007, one of the highest increases in 30 years.) Remittances fell from US\$680 million to US\$638 million for the first 11 months of 2009, a decline of 6.3%. On the positive side, international currency reserves reached the historical high of US\$1.462 billion.

Those living in extreme poverty have decreased from 35.7% of the population in 2005 to 28.5% in 2009, a decrease of 7.2%. The methodology applied to study the index of extreme poverty measured "unsatisfied basic needs" such as overcrowded housing, lack of basic services, low education, inadequate housing and economic dependency. Extreme poverty was reduced by 4.9% in Managua and 5.2% in other urban areas, but the major decrease in extreme poverty took place in rural areas where the reduction was 9.9%. Rodriguez said the decrease in extreme poverty is attributable to the social programs of the Sandinista government since January 2007. He cited as examples, Zero Usury, Zero Hunger, Plan Roofing, free education, and others.

The International Monetary Fund

(IMF) has approved the second and third revisions of the government's economic program which will permit the immediate release of US\$36 million in loans for 2009 general budget support. The IMF approval will also release funds from other financial institutions such as the World



Sugar cane workers suffer from high levels of Chronic Renal Insufficiency (CRI). Photo: Mike Elliott

Bank and Inter-American Development Bank totaling at least US\$88 million. The release of funds came after opposition parties in the National Assembly ended a boycott and approved both the national budget for 2010 and the tax reform bill. Central Bank President Antenor Rosales said that the IMF approval demonstrates the responsibility and seriousness with which the Sandinista government has dealt with the macroeconomic stability of the country.

In other news, the National Committee of Sugar Producers (CNPA) attacked a bill presented to the National Assembly to address high levels of Chronic Renal Insufficiency (CRI) in the areas where sugar cane is grown in Nicaragua. The Committee said that sugar growers and processors do not accept any relationship between the sugar industry and CRI. The bill they oppose is the result of nine months work by the National Multi-Sector Commission established by the National Assembly to address the problem. It studied the preliminary results of a study by the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua (UNAN-Leon) on the causes of CRI which showed that agricultural activity, principally the growing of sugar cane but also of bananas and peanuts,

had a direct relationship to the kidney disease suffered by the workers and by the population living near the plantations.

The law if passed would regulate the use of agrochemicals, working conditions, workplace safety and hygiene. It would also address the use of contractors and sub-contractors who provide workers for the plantations and thus supposedly provide a degree of separation between the owners and the workers and limit legal responsibility.

The CNPA, representing the sugar companies, reacted immediately with paid ads in the principal daily newspapers saying that the companies provided an "excellent health system to protect workers and their families." The ads said the companies maintained "vigorous business responsibility practices in which protection of the environment occupies a fundamental place."

For nine months, a group of former sugar workers from the San Antonio Sugar Mill, supported by the International Union of Food and Agricultural Workers (UITA), has been attempting to engage officials of Nicaragua Sugar Estates in dialogue about possible compensation for their condition with no progress. Meanwhile over 3,500 workers out of an estimated 8,000 ill workers have died.

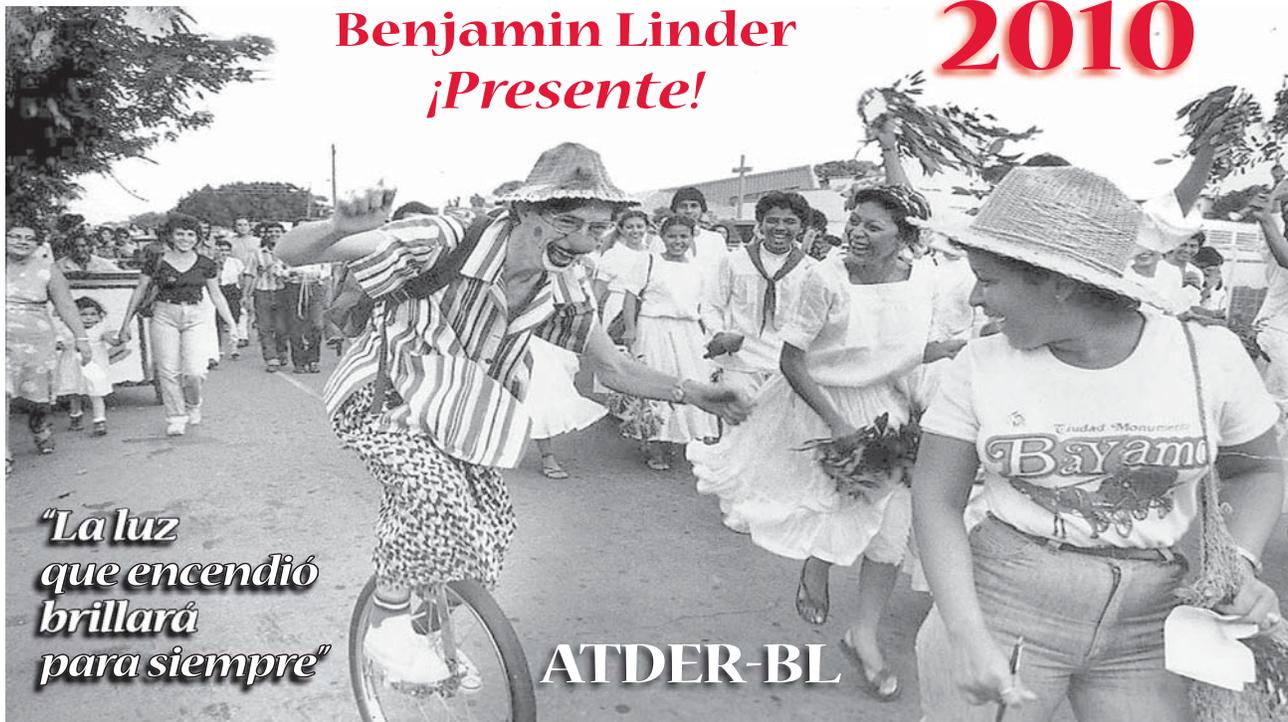
Atlantic Coast

Residents of the village of Walpasiksa in the North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN) ambushed a naval patrol on Dec. 8 killing two senior officers and wounding five sailors. The naval patrol boats had come to investigate reports that a Colombian airplane carrying a ton of cocaine had crashed in the area the week before. On Dec. 10 military and police returned to the area, arrested 17 people and impounded US\$177, 960. Rumors flew that there were millions more in the hands of traffickers who fled from the authorities.

The Army believes that several indigenous communities are collaborating with Colombian traffickers and Nicaraguan criminals. He said that this was the first time foreign traffickers had provided locals with arms for them to use against Nicaraguan authorities. Police raided and took possession of four Managua properties of a Colombian citizen known in Nicaragua as Alberto Ruiz Cano who authorities accused of being the leader behind the Dec. 8 ambush.

Benjamin Linder ¡Presente!

2010



*"La luz
que encendió
brillará
para siempre"*

ATDER-BL

ENERO

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