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GUILLERMO SECURERA

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**Executive director:** Raquel Gargatte Loarte

**Editor-in-chief:** Elsa Chanduví Jaña  
([echanduv@noticiasaliadas.org](mailto:echanduv@noticiasaliadas.org))

**Editors:** Cecilia Remón Arnáiz, Leslie Josephs

**Graphics editor:** William Chico Colugna  
**Printed by:** Ediciones Atenea E.I.R.L.  
Jr. Carlos Gonzales 252, Lima 32, Peru.  
(511) 452 4239

**Comunicaciones Aliadas**  
Jr. Olavegoya 1868, Lima 11, Peru.  
(511) 265 9014 Fax: (511) 265 9186  
[postmaster@noticiasaliadas.org](mailto:postmaster@noticiasaliadas.org)  
[www.latinamericapress.org](http://www.latinamericapress.org)  
[www.noticiasaliadas.org](http://www.noticiasaliadas.org) (in Spanish)

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For information about our products and services, please contact our Marketing Manager, Patricia Díaz at [pdiaz@noticiasaliadas.org](mailto:pdiaz@noticiasaliadas.org)

## GUATEMALA

Louisa Reynolds in Guatemala City

# What went wrong

## Elections yield disappointing results for Rigoberta Menchú.

On the eve of the elections Nobel Peace laureate Rigoberta Menchú, was highly critical of the polls which placed her in sixth place out of the 14 candidates running for president.

"Those who conduct the polls are racist and they've ignored us", said Menchú as she dished out bowls of hot soup for the crowd of journalists assembled at her house in a residential suburb on the outskirts of Guatemala City.

Menchú was confident that the polls, which showed her slipping from fourth to sixth place since she announced her intention to run for president in March (*LP*, May 30, 2007), were wrong. However, Sept. 9 yielded disappointing results for the indigenous activist.

Social democrat Álvaro Colom, of the National Unity of Hope party, or UNE, won the first round by a narrow 4.6 percent margin and will now face Otto Pérez Molina, of the far-right Patriot Patriot party in a second round to be held on Nov. 4.

Rigoberta Menchú's party Encuentro por Guatemala trailed behind in seventh place with just over 3 percent of the vote. Even in Menchú's native town of Uspantan, in the central Quiché highlands, only 268 out of 11,730 voters chose her for president.

So what went wrong? The indigenous activist herself has refused to speak to the press since the election results were officially announced on Sept. 10 and it is not yet known whether she will give up her political ambitions.

Her running mate, vice-presidential candidate Luis Fernando Montenegro, believes that Guatemala was not ready to be ruled by an indigenous woman and that sexist and racist stereotypes still prevail: "The country refuses to change. We gave it our best shot and we'll keep on trying", he said.

According to indigenous anthropologist Irmalicia Velásquez Nimatuj, Menchú's center-left position was simply too vague and failed to garner support from grassroots indigenous organizations. Menchú's indigenous platform, Winaq, made up of prominent Mayan intellectuals who have already served under previous administrations, was running in tandem with a newly created and ladino — non-indigenous — dominated party, Encuentro por Guatemala, which stands mostly for government transparency.

Velásquez Nimatuj believes that in this arranged marriage between the Winaq and Encuentro por Guatemala, radical proposals, such as agrarian reform, were diluted and as such the party's message was unconvincing for dispossessed indigenous Guatemalans in rural areas. "Winaq was unable to put forward a proposal with a strong Mayan component that talked about inequality, exclusion and land tenure", she said.

When Menchú announced she would run for president, many believed that as an indigenous candidate, she would attract widespread support from indigenous and *campesino* organizations. However, Menchú's lack of support at a grassroots level became clear during the closing plenary of the Third Continental Summit of Indigenous people on March 31. Winaq supporters asked the indigenous organizations present at the summit to approve a motion in support of Menchú's presidential ambitions, which was overwhelmingly rejected.

After the summit, many of the country's leading grassroots movements, such as the National Coordinator of Campesino Organizations and the National Front Labor Union openly rejected the Nobel Peace laureate.

Political analyst Julio Ligorria points out that by running with a ladino businessman as vice presidential candidate, Menchú was sending out mixed messages. Was she fighting on behalf of the rural poor or was a ladino middle-class party simply cashing in on her prestige as a Nobel Prize winner?

When she decided to run for president Menchú was courted by two parties: Encuentro por Guatemala and the former guerrillas turned political party, the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity. She turned down the latter fearing that she would be labeled as a "radical" but by running with Encuentro por Guatemala she alienated grassroots indigenous organizations and social movements.

Mayan Kiche' leader and former mayor of Quetzaltenango, Rigoberto Quemé, believes that an alliance with any party placed Winaq at a disadvantage from the start:

"Joining a party is like being a guest in someone's house: at any time they can throw you out", he said.

Some indigenous leaders, such as Quemé, argue that Menchú's fate would not have been so different had she chosen a different party. Due to the prevalence of deeply embedded racist prejudice, most ladino parties, even those on the left, are unwilling to see indigenous leaders in positions of power.

However, others are more optimistic and believe Menchú will make a comeback in the 2012 elections. As the first indigenous woman to run for president, the Nobel Peace Prize winner injected a breath of fresh air into a lackluster campaign marred by violence and smear campaigns.

Whereas Colom and Pérez Molina delivered inflammatory speeches and tried to score cheap points against each other, Menchú talked about building a new and more inclusive nation in which indigenous and non-indigenous Guatemalans enjoy the same rights. But with few resources to publicize her campaign, Encuentro por Guatemala could hardly compete with front-runners, which spent millions of quetzals on lavish campaigns and mass rallies in which the freebies flowed.

When Menchú announced her decision to run for president in March this year, she made it clear that her goal as a newcomer to the political arena is to win the next elections in 2012. As a trial run, coming seventh out of a list of 14 candidates with a nascent party is a respectable result. □

## PARAGUAY

Gustavo Torres in Asunción

# Defending Guaraní

## Indigenous language is confined by the state.

Some 90 percent of the 5.7 million Paraguayans speak or understand Guaraní, but this pre-Columbian language has traditionally stood at the margins of this country's society.

Even though Guaraní, or *Avañe'ê* — meaning "Language of Man" — has been the official language, along with Spanish, of Paraguay since 1992, the state in practice works in Spanish only, a flagrant constitutional violation.

Media work wholly in Spanish, as do municipal governments, even those where the entire population speaks only Guaraní. Government documents are generally written in Spanish. Identity cards are worse, however: they are printed in Spanish and English.

"The Paraguayan state is organized around 7 percent of the population that only speaks Spanish, ignoring 27 percent that only speaks Guaraní," said Miguel Ángel Verón, a Guaraní specialist and director of the Yvy Marê'y Foundation and leader of the Movement of Jekutyprã Educators, meaning "solidarity" in Guaraní.



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## LATIN AMERICA

**A debt payment fast.** On Sept. 6, personalities around the world began a 40-day global fast demanding the cancellation of foreign debt for the world's poorest countries.

"We want to give testimony, call international conscience, reflect, ask for policies for the poorest and for the redistribution of wealth because only then will we succeed in make democracy real," said Argentine Nobel Peace Prize winner Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, one of the participants.

The protest is part of the Week of Global Action against Debt, which will be held Oct. 14-21. The event is promoted by Jubilee South, a network of more than 85 organizations from 40 countries in Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa and Asia-Pacific region. Founded in 1999, the organization fights for the cancellation of debt for the world's poorest countries. —*IPS*.



## PERU

**Protection for isolated communities.** The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights issued two resolutions in August urging the Peruvian government to protect Amazonian indigenous groups living in voluntary isolation in the departments of Cusco, Loreto and Ucayali.

Alberto Pizango Chota, president of the Inter-Ethnic Development Association of the Peruvian Amazon, informed that his organization pushed for these resolutions to defend the peoples living in that region.

The first, issued Aug. 7, told the Peruvian government to “guarantee the life, personal integrity and health of the indigenous peoples in voluntary isolation or first contact,” in the Cusco and Ucayali departments.

The other resolution, issued a week later, asks the Peruvian government to protect the peoples living in Peru’s northeastern jungle department of Loreto and inform about the impacts of oil drilling there.

These resolutions “should serve as a warning to central government officials, ministries, regional governments ... that any oversight of the protection of voluntary isolation and first contact peoples will be seriously observed by supranational judicial bodies,” said Pizango. —LP.

In September 1992, Paraguay’s Congress passed a law guaranteeing that both Guaraní and Spanish would be taught in the country’s public schools.

But Verón says that the state has shown a clear “boycott” of the language since of the 20,000 schools in the country, he says only eight teach in Guaraní, which should be taught in “10,000 schools minimum, considering the number of Guaraní boys and girls that enter the system.”

For Ramiro Domínguez, a member of the National Bilingual Commission, dictating classes in Spanish to students in rural areas who speak and think in Guaraní is a form of discrimination in the educational system. Teachers become translators so that the students can interpret the lessons in Spanish because of a lack of printed teaching materials in Guaraní. He says it is a major problem that must be resolved by for the Education and Culture Ministry.

Domínguez says there have been some improvements, however.

“Many things have changed in favor of the language, which has gained a space in the citizenry’s conscience.”

David Galeano, director of the Guaraní Language and Culture Association, said that “compared with 20 years ago, there are many Guaraní teachers and licensed professionals, and [the language] is taught in numerous universities.”

Over the last 100 years, Guaraní-speakers suffered from all sorts of verbal insults, Galeano says. They were disrespectfully called “guarango” or “rude”, “campesino,” “Indian” or “juruky’a,” meaning “dirty mouth” in Guaraní.

“Others were physically beaten, slapped in the face, forced to walk around the schoolyard saying “I won’t speak Guaraní anymore,” kneeling in rough salt, or sometimes having the degrading experience of taking a lower grade just for speaking Guaraní,” Galeano said.

Before the Colonial Period, Guaraní was the dominant language of vast areas of the Atlantic coast of South America, from the Caribbean Sea to River Plate.

Guaraní is currently spoken between 7 million and 12 million people, not only in Paraguay but along the Argentine coast, in cities like Santa Fe, Rosario, Buenos Aires and La Plata, a result of constant migration to urban centers. It can also be heard in Brazilian cities of Rio Grande do Sul, Parana and Santa Catarina; and Santa Cruz de la Sierra in Bolivia, and some parts of Uruguay.

Thanks to the efforts of educational and cultural institutions, Paraguayan social organizations and international support, the authorities of the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) recently decided to make Guaraní “one of the languages” of the trade bloc (LP, Jan. 24, 2007).

But some, like Galeano, say that it is an empty gesture if the language is not treated as an official language. MERCOSUR’s resolutions, for example, are not translated into Guaraní.

He says that when the trade bloc was founded, “Paraguay had only one official language — Spanish — as did Argentina and Uruguay, which is the reason the official languages of MERCOSUR were Spanish and Portuguese. Only in 1992, did the Guaraní become the official language of Paraguay with Spanish after a new constitution was written.”

Presidential candidate for the ruling *Colorado* Party, Blanca Ovelar de Duarte, when being the education minister in July handed President Nicanor Duarte Frutos a language bill. The proposal, which was backed by the National Bilingual Commission and the Civil Society Workshop, has not yet been presented to lawmakers, outlaws language-based discrimination, and establishes that laws must be printed in both Guaraní and Spanish.

The bill also implements the constitutional mandates of declaring Spanish and Guaraní the official languages and teaching to students in their native tongues. □

## COSTA RICA

George Rodríguez in San José

# Fighting child exploitation

## Government launches plan to fight against child trafficking.

Child exploitation in Costa Rica has become so common that both the public and private sector have joined together to fight the trend.

There are some 100 crossing points on Costa Rica’s northern and southern borders that are unwatched, allowing the trafficking of minors to continue unabated. Four in 10 people who cross the 330-kilometer (206-mile) southern border with Panama and the 309-kilometer border with Nicaragua, are minors. Some of the victims trafficked across the border are as young as 12 years old, according to the International Organization for Migration.

In Central America, the trafficking of minors is a lucrative, illegal industry that gener-

ates an estimated US\$17 billion a year, according to the nongovernmental organization Paniamor Foundation, which promotes minors' rights in Costa Rica.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) defines trafficking as the "refers to the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation."

In Costa Rica's case, most victims are sent to the country's many tourist centers, mainly along the Pacific Coast in Jaco and Tamarindo beaches, highly popular with foreign tourists.

María Teresa Guillén, who coordinates Paniamor, the northern border post of Peñas Blancas some 311 kilometers northeast of the capital, "requires greater control" to stop the trafficking of minors.

According to the ILO, border areas tend to be high-risk zones for the trafficking of minors for sexual and work exploitation. Border area trafficking is present in all regions, the organization says, and demonstrate the economic disparities between bordering countries. The attractiveness of an economy or tourism industry increases the demand and determines the trafficking routes.

Vittoria Cortemiglia, an Italian citizen and expert with the United Nations, says that the trafficking of minors is part of "organized criminal networks."

"It's not one or two criminals that exploit one or two girls, but instead, organized groups, into which enters, undoubtedly, the corruption factor, whose components include the manufacturing of false passports," Cortemiglia said. "As a part of the fight against an extremely complex phenomenon, corruption has to be fought, in Costa Rica in particular."

In this sense, Cortemiglia notes that illegal adoption is a crime that is an facilitating instrument for the trafficking of minors, and that it also generates big earnings for the criminals involved.

"The trafficking of people, for criminals, is even easier because there is less risk that they will be detected," said Cortemiglia. "The penalties are normally lower in comparison with penalties for the trafficking of drugs or weapons."

To fight this crime, the Paniamor Foundation and the Italy-based United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute, organized a training workshop for judges, prosecutors and high-ranking officials of Costa Rica's General Migration Office, on how to combat the trend.

The ILO says that human trafficking's main objective is exploitation. "This exploitation includes, as a minimum, prostitution, or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor, slavery, servitude, or the organ extraction," it said.

On July 18, an anti-child sex trafficking law went into effect that criminalized the production and possession of child pornography. It also established that relationships of power would be taken into consideration in abuse cases.

But President Óscar Arias warned that this was not enough. He said Costa Rican citizens needed a "profound conviction" to share responsibility in the fight against child sex abuse.

"Signing this law is not enough," Arias said as he approved the law. "It must be complemented with the understanding that it's not enough to fight against child sex exploitation because it only happens under dysfunctional conditions at the heart of our society."

Dep. Ana Elena Chacón, of the opposition Social Christian Unity Party and one of the main backers of the law said what needs to change is a "permissive society" that has allowed the abuse to occur "for years."

"We need a country where there is a such a level of justice that no child is found in a condition so vulnerable so as to be trapped by these organized mobs that are tied to drug-trafficking," said Chacón. "We shouldn't forget that our country has been promoted on the Internet as a sex tourism destination." □

## CUBA

Lucila Horta in Havana

# Debating the future

## Many Cubans start eyeing economic and social change.

One year after the interim government of Raúl Castro took office, possible changes to the socio-economic model are in the front seat. The government is now debating the future of Cuban socialism as its people are eyeing improvements to their quality of life.

In June, the government conducted an exhaustive analysis to identify the major

## ECUADOR

**ICSID rejects Oxy claim.** The World Bank's International Center for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) ruled Aug. 20 against US oil company Occidental Petroleum Corp, which was seeking precautionary measures against the Ecuadorian government.

In May 2006, Ecuador's government cancelled Oxy's operating contract and handed over its concession to state-run Petroecuador, after the company violated its contract by selling 40 percent of its activities to the Canadian EnCana company without government authorization in 2000 (*LP*, May 31, 2006).

The California-based oil company immediately presented a suit before the ICSID against Ecuador — South America's fifth largest oil producer — for kicking the company out of the country. Oxy denies the allegations.

The oil company was seeking a joint supervision of Block 15, where it operated, US\$350 million a year from Ecuador's government to finance operations there and a barring on selling it to a third party. —*LP*.



MARTA SOLO

Cuba's two currencies creates disparities for its citizens.

## PARAGUAY

**Oviedo free.** After serving three years in a military prison, former Gen. Lino Oviedo was freed Sept. 6.

Oviedo was serving a 10-year sentence for a coup attempt in 1996 against then-President Juan Carlos Wasmosy (1993-98). A military court released him on parole, claiming that he had served more than half of his sentence since he was detained for four years in Brazil, where he fled in 1999 before returning to Paraguay in 2004.

Oviedo, leader of the National Unity of Ethical Citizens party, intends to run for president in next year's election, pending the approval of Paraguay's electoral court. —LP.

problems, through municipal assemblies. The island's 169 local government bodies organized open meetings in work and educational centers.

Among the issues debated were corruption and crime, above all those linked to the population's basic service sector as well as food — above all the inability to increase agricultural production — lower consumer prices and a reduction of imports (*LP*, Jan. 24, 2007).

Between April and June of this year, the government allotted just over US\$1 million that various state companies owed to small-scale, private farmers (*LP*, March 7, 2007).

In August, the government increased by as much as 250 percent what the government pays these dairy and meat producers in an effort to increase production. These farmers can only sell to the state, which controls the prices when the goods are sold to the Cuban public.

Plans for increased housing construction (*LP*, May 16, 2007), repairs of schools and hospitals, rehabilitation of aging water grids, new health care equipment, youth clubs, new technology, which were already underway, have faced some setbacks, but they continue.

The government opened province-wide and municipal television stations, notes Vice President Carlos Lage, adding optimistically that the government constructed new food production factories, increased the rations of rice, grains and eggs and raised salaries and pensions.

Raúl Castro has questioned some government officials who have refused such changes during a speech on July 26, the anniversary of the attack of the Moncada Barricks in 1953, an attempt to topple dictator Fulgencio Batista.

"We are aware that salaries are clearly insufficient to satisfy all needs, what practically leaves the point of ensuring a socialist principle that everyone supports according to his abilities and receives according to his job. This caused manifestations of social indiscipline and tolerance that once entrenched becomes very difficult to eradicate," he said.

He said that "structural changes" are needed. "Also needed is the recovery of national production and the need to incorporate new measures that eliminate imports or create new possibilities for exports."

Now a citizens' debate is part of the mix, as the government takes stock of the criticisms, urgent needs and other proposals.

Various academics agree that for the economy to develop well there needs to be system changes, such as excessive centralization. Many also urge the government to create cooperatives for services industries and small-scale industry.

For philosopher and political analyst Isabel Monal, "the social ownership of the production means is not working. One of the difficulties of the workers is that they don't feel that they own their means of production."

Another analyst, Aurelio Alonso, said that "the socialist state has to maintain a regulatory function, it must be an investor, and also the owner of natural resources, the big public services, but also it must legitimize a mixed economy that does not only include foreign investment, but also national."

Small service sector business do not necessarily need to be a part of the state, for example.

Professor Pedro Campos is skeptical. He says that big government investments can fall through the cracks through bureaucracy and inefficiency. But he proposes eliminating one of the two currencies circulating: the Cuban peso and the convertible Cuban peso, which is equivalent to the US dollar. He adds that the state must better organize agriculture by handing over the unused land to "*campesino* groups that are interested in forming cooperatives" and "the full liberalization of the internal market for all agricultural products."

Ramón de la Cruz Ochoa, a lawyer, says that the "double circulation of currency or the difference between the salaries and cost of living continues to be very pronounced." He says that problems deriving from the government's lax attitude on these administrative issues will only propagate workers' indiscipline.

Elíades Consuegra, a boiler repairman, said: "Raúl didn't say what's new, what they're doing or what they're going to do, but it's encouraging to know that there is a conscience that changes are needed." □

## BOLIVIA

Martin Garat in La Paz

# HIV/AIDS on the rise

**Medical personnel warn lack of information and prejudices can worsen epidemic.**

"Because of a lack of information, there are still many prejudices against the Human Immunodeficiency Virus," said Juan Monroy, president of the La Paz-based Más Vida group. "People still think you can contract the virus like you get a cold. Sometimes, families fumigate their houses or burn clothes when they find out one of their family members has HIV."

Four years ago, doctors told Monroy that he is HIV-positive, and he has experienced significant prejudices.

"Many think that AIDS only affects homosexuals and sex workers. People don't understand that carriers of the virus can be heterosexuals and have a family," said Monroy, a divorced father.

Más Vida counsels some 32 HIV-positive Bolivians on how to live a normal life, despite their disease.

"The fundamental thing is that they accept that they are HIV carriers," Monroy said. "Sometimes they have felt the need to find someone guilty, and there are those who even spread the disease on purpose."

The Bolivian media do not pay much attention to HIV/AIDS. According to official figures, there are only 2,394 cases of HIV in the country. But, according to a United Nations study, there are an estimated 18,000 HIV-positive Bolivians, meaning that only one in seven carriers know that he or she has the virus.

The disease is not concentrated anymore in affecting high-risk groups, and has become more mainstream, affecting the heterosexual population.

"Even though many of our patients are homosexual men, one in three is a woman. They're generally married and haven't had another partner aside from their husband, who was unfaithful to them," says Dr. Rosa Vargas, a Health Ministry official.

The center she heads provides psychological counseling, medical attention and anti-retroviral medication to control the disease. The care is free for the 340 patients it attends.

"The patients with HIV are very special because of the stigmatization they are subjected to. They tend to interpret the most innocent gesture as a form of aggression. They need a lot of psychological help, to the point where we have thought about offering them psychiatric help. Sometimes they feel persecuted or are convinced that the people look at them and think they're sick," said Vargas.

To stop the disease from spreading, HIV-positive individuals have to inform their past sex partners.

"Patients react in different ways when we tell them that they have to tell their old partners. Some bring their partners so they can be tested. Others refuse to tell the, because they think they don't want to know that they're infected. That impedes us from preventing more cases," she added.

Vargas says that *machismo* is an important factor in the spread of HIV in Bolivia.

"*Machismo* is very common in our society. Many men don't like to use condoms, and when they don't want to use them, women don't insist."

Infidelity, tied to *machismo*, is another risk factor. "Men have relations with HIV-positive lovers and they later infect their wives, who end up passing the disease to their children. It is also common that single men have different women," Vargas said. She explained that bus or truck drivers that travel through different provinces of the country have different partners in different towns and bring the disease to rural areas."

Dr. David Segurondo, who heads the Health Ministry's HIV/AIDS and sexually-transmitted diseases program in La Paz, said that in order to stop HIV, ministry officials provide information to different population sectors, including sex workers, the army, the police, prison interns and young people.

The program also offers these groups free testing to detect new cases early. It also offers the HIV tests to those who have tested positive to other venereal diseases as well as to pregnant women.

"Sadly, sometimes they don't want to take the test. There is a certain degree of resistance because it's a delicate subject," says Segurondo.

A lack of resources is a big challenge when it comes to informing the population about the disease. In few cases the program gets to rural areas, so the staff at health centers in these areas are trained, which then inform the local population.

Segurondo says that sexual education needs to be offered to schoolchildren so that the disease does not spread further. "But the parents object. Some even demand that teachers who explain how and why to use a condom be fired. In western Bolivia, the people are more closed and don't speak with their children about sexuality; especially with girls," he said.

Segurondo has witnessed a slight change in young parents. "They're a little bit more



Juan Monroy

"The patients with HIV tend to interpret the most innocent gesture as a form of aggression. They need a lot of psychological help."

— Dr. Rosa Vargas

“I think in some sectors of society, I was able to break the theory of the two demons.”

— Ana Rita Vagliati

open and can talk about sexuality with their children, though this is not enough. And if adolescents don't receive information about sexuality and contraceptives in their homes, the state has to take on that responsibility,” he said.

One of the most worrying things Segurondo observed is an increase in condylomatos, trichomoniasis and gonorrhea. “The spreading of venereal disease is an indicator of the risk of an HIV infection. It's a time bomb.” □

## ARGENTINA

Pablo Waisberg in Buenos Aires

# In a name, a new life

**Daughter of dictatorship-era human rights repressor changes her last name to break from her father's past.**

In March 2005, Ana Rita Pretti solicited a name change. She asked Argentine authorities to remove her paternal last name from all official documentation, motivated by “public dishonor by my father to the last name.”

In April of this year, Ana Rita was granted the request to use only her mother's last name, Vagliati, making her the first child to change her name because of dictatorship-era human rights violations committed by a parent.

Her father, Valentín Milton Pretti, was one of the lieutenants of Ramón Camps, Buenos Aires police's chief during the dictatorship (1976-83). He was also an accomplice of Miguel Etchecolatz, the city's deputy police chief, who was sentenced to life in prison in September 2006 for genocide and is suspected of being the intellectual author of the disappearance of Jorge Julio López, a key witness in the case. López was seen for the last time one day before the sentence was read. He had been scheduled to testify (*LP*, Oct. 18, 2006).



Ana Rita Vagliati changed her last name to distance herself from her father, a dictatorship-era repressor.

During the dictatorship, Pretti operated in at least four clandestine detention centers. Among the operations he participated in was the kidnapping and disappearance of six secondary school students in 1976. The students, between 16 and 18 years old, were demanding a lower public transportation rate for students.

“He told me he killed them,” Ana Rita said.

Ana Rita, the only daughter of four children, is the only child in the family who has decided to change her last name. Her father died in April 2005, shortly after she had begun the process to change her name to her mother's last name, Juana Vagliati, who is also deceased.

Even though she has told her story many times, something changes in her when she has to explain why she took this decision. Her eyes stop smiling and her face gets hard and she says, “The most comfortable position was the one my father took, justifying everything he did with the ‘theory of the two evils,’ she said, referring to the indiscrimi-

nate repression of the state in response to guerrilla groups. "But I felt that I had to break from that. I felt that I had to put on the table that my old man was also a product of the state that used terrorism."

She says her eldest brother "denies everything." The next one "doesn't want to talk about it," but that she does discuss the issue with her youngest brother. "I think it has a lot to do with family identity. They identify more with my father. Clearly, they're Pretti's and I'm a Vagliati," she said.

But the process was far from simple. It took her many years of psychotherapy. The first books about Marxism she found were in her father's library, which were taken off victims as "war booty." She was a student leader at National University of Lomas de Zamora in the social sciences department.

Ana Rita is currently working on several projects in poor neighborhoods in Buenos Aires where unemployment and drug addiction are rampant.

Among the times she has told her family history, one time was before her university friends. They listened as she told them about her life and her father, as if she was trying to cleanse herself, get rid of old ghosts, justify a heritage that she was given by chance. She told her story again and again. Two years ago, she did the same, in front of cameras and microphones. It was then that she announced her decision.

"Many of the residents in the neighborhood where I did social work found out about my story on television and when they saw me, they came up to me and hugged me. It was very emotional. The mother of one co-worker, who was born during the Holocaust, called me on the telephone and we cried together. I think in some sectors of society, I was able to break the theory of the two evils." □

## GUATEMALA

Louisa Reynolds in Guatemala City

# Killer's paradise

## Femicides on the rise, more brutal than ever.

Indiana Barrios Recinos, 27, had just dropped off her two young children at school and was getting into her car when she was shot four times in the head by her ex-husband Rodrigo Maldonado, with whom she was fighting a custody battle in court. The murder occurred in Guatemala City's zone 11, a middle-class residential district.

Two hours later, on the same day, Aug. 10, a woman's body was found in Loma Alta, a small village in San Juan Sacatepéquez, about two hours away from Guatemala City. The woman, aged between 18 and 20, had been murdered with a sharp instrument and a message that read "this is what happens for extorting money from people" had been written on her stomach in pen.

This young woman, possibly a youth gang member, was never identified and her body bag was simply tagged XX and buried in a communal grave.

Femicide is reaching epidemic proportions in some Central American countries, particularly Guatemala and El Salvador (*LP, April 19, 2006*). The statistics are chilling: between 2002 and 2006, 1,398 women were murdered in Guatemala, according to the National Police. So far this year, 271 women and 35 girls have been murdered this year in Guatemala and despite campaigns led by women's groups and human rights organizations, the spiral of violence is worsening.

The authorities often try to play down the scale of the problem, arguing that these murders are part of the wider problem of increasing gang violence throughout the region, which affects society as a whole, not just women. But women's groups say it is not just the increase in the number of murders that have occurred, but the viciousness with which these women have been killed.

According to a study by the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office in 2006 based on murder cases reported by the national media 80 percent of men are killed by firearms, which do not imply physical contact between murderer and victim. By contrast, 69 percent of women are killed by firearms with the rest being killed through direct forms of violence such as stabbing, kicking and punching, evidence of the killer's intention to assert his physical superiority over his victim, also expressed through different forms of torture such as rape and genital mutilation.

In Guatemala and El Salvador, the countries with the highest femicide rate, the violent killing of women has coincided with the increase of gang violence. Turf wars between rival gangs often result in the killing of women associated with gang members, as the gangster's partner is seen as the property of her boyfriend and therefore a legitimate target for attack. Raping and killing a gangster's partner is seen as comparable to trashing his car or property.

When the violent murder of women occurs within the home, the murder is usually the result of many years of physical and psychological abuse against her. In both cases, women's groups and human rights organizations stress the fact that the root cause of

## statistics spotlight

### LATIN AMERICA/ CARIBBEAN

**Exports better if with added value.** Even though the region has experienced significant economic growth in recent years thanks to high oil and mineral prices, the exportation of raw materials does not guarantee a stable growth rate, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean warned recently.

"The economic boom in Latin America and the Caribbean that has been triggered by these favorable international conditions represents an opportunity for the region to lay the foundations for sustained medium-term growth by making investments in infrastructure, innovation and human capital that can add greater value and knowledge to exports and help create more stable conditions for growth and progress towards greater equity," said the report "Latin America and the Caribbean in the World Economy 2006: Trends 2007." —*LP.*

### LATIN AMERICA/ CARIBBEAN Export growth 2003-2006 (Annual export increases in percentages)

Country	Price	Volume
Venezuela	32.0	7.1
Chile	28.9	9.3
Peru	21.5	13.8
Ecuador	17.4	7.4
Colombia	17.4	6.5
Bolivia	15.3	12.7
Brazil	10.6	12.9
Mexico	8.0	6.0
Guatemala	6.6	5.7
Uruguay	6.3	14.4
Argentina	5.9	9.6
Honduras	5.5	5.2
Paraguay	4.9	5.5
El Salvador	4.7	1.9
Haiti	4.5	11.7
Costa Rica	3.8	6.6
Nicaragua	3.0	16.0
Dominican Rep.	2.5	2.4
Panama	1.7	11.1

Source: ECLAC

## MEXICO

### Television stations lose battle.

The Mexican Senate Sept. 12 approved a reform that will prevent electronic media from receiving millions of dollars that they had been paid for electoral campaigns.

The laws, which now face approval of the lower chamber, establish that political parties that receive public funding cannot contract publicity directly.

The funds received for campaign advertising would be administered under the Federal Electoral Institute.

The reform also proposes banning any business group from hiring electronic spaces for political opinions during election campaigns.

Local media say that these reforms would threaten them economically and attack freedom of expression. The lawmakers said that the measures would only be applied during national election campaign every three years for a period no longer than three months during campaigns.

During the 2006 election campaign, close to 80 percent of the more than US\$324 million of public funds that political parties spent went to the media. There were 757,545 spots, most on Mexican television giants Televisa and TV Azteca. —IPS.

violence against women can be found in a patriarchal social structure that still regards women as second-class citizens who are inferior to men.

The prevalence of sexist attitudes has resulted in discriminatory Penal Codes that fail to impose adequate sentences for the various crimes associated with violence against women. For instance, a law stating that no charges would be pressed against a man accused of rape if he chose to marry his victim, was only repealed in late 2005.

In some countries, such as Mexico, where the murder of women in the Northern city of Ciudad Juárez attracted considerable media coverage and became the subject of many campaigns from international human rights organizations, a new law has recognized femicide as a distinct crime from murder, as it carries the aggravating factor of sexual violence motivated by misogyny (*LP, March 21, 2007*).

The law was approved by the Mexican Congress owing to a forceful campaign led by lawmaker Marcela Lagarde, of the Party of the Democratic Revolution. Mexican law also seeks that Congress is made of up at least 30 percent women.

Guatemalan Rep. Nineth Montenegro, head of the Congressional Commission on Women's Issues, argues that it is unlikely this will occur in Guatemala, where only 9 percent of the Congress is female, in the near future. "Women in Congress don't have a gender perspective. Even if we had 100 women in Congress, nothing would change," she said.

As well as discriminatory laws, sexism has also resulted in a skewed budget that assigns derisory sums to women's institutions created to tackle domestic violence and discrimination. There are several government-sponsored women's organizations in Guatemala that deal mainly with equal access to employment and domestic violence. But they are assigned a paltry 0.25 percent of the budget, which can be seen as evidence that the authorities have set up these organizations as a PR exercise in order to pay lip service to gender equality.

Human rights organizations have strongly criticized the sensationalist and superficial way in which the media has reported the growing number of femicides in the region, which creates stereotypes and stigmatizes the victims.

According to the Guatemalan Human Rights Ombudsman, the media tends to give gang related killings greater coverage, presenting turf wars between rival gangs as the only rather than one of the causes behind the killings.

Coverage of these killings often includes remarks such as "the victim was wearing a low-cut top and a short skirt," implying that that the victims of these crimes are "loose women" and that women should stay at home and dress modestly to avoid being the target of violence. □

## JAMAICA

Inter Press Service

# The electorate said "no"

## Jamaican voters reject country's first female prime minister's election bid.

Portia Simpson Miller, the first woman to head a government in Jamaica, had appealed to voters to affirm her mandate by re-electing the People's National Party, which she led into a general election on Sept. 3 for the first time.

They refused, and as Bruce Golding, 58, took office as the new prime minister Sept. 11, ending 18 years of political wilderness for the Jamaica Labor Party, the populist Simpson Miller, 62, will no doubt be contemplating her future in Jamaican politics.

The Jamaica Labor Party won 33 of the 60 seats contested in the general election that observers, including those from the Caribbean Community and the Organization of American States (OAS), said had adequately reflected the will of the population even though the campaign had been plagued by violence — though not on the scale of the 1980 poll when more than 800 people were killed.

Both parties blamed each other for the violence, which at one stage threatened the cancellation of voting in some constituencies.

In the 2002 general election under the leadership of PJ Patterson, the People's National Party retained power for an unprecedented fourth term, with an eight-seat majority and a 5 percent-lead. In 2006, Simpson Miller replaced the outgoing Patterson in an internal party vote.

This time round, the margin of victory was so tiny that the Jamaica Labor Party had a lead of 50.1 percent to 49.7 percent secured by the People's National Party.

The results were so close that Simpson Miller refused to concede defeat on the night the preliminary results were announced.

"This election is too close to call. There are a number of seats the [People's National Party] will be taking action against. We are not going to standby and allow people to use criminals to decide the future of Jamaica," she added.

"If we had any doubt that Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller was not fit for the job, we no longer do. Her ungracious speech ... after her party's defeat at the polls was shocking, to say the least," the *Jamaica Observer* newspaper said in an editorial.

"Conceding defeat, especially after a bruising contest, is the patriotic duty of great leaders," it said.

Simpson Miller took one full week to concede that her party had indeed lost.

In extending congratulations to Golding, she told supporters she would continue "to work hard to ensure the protection of the rights of all our people, particularly of our children and the poor".

Political analyst Peter Wickham said that observers had "misunderstood the high level of support for Simpson Miller and believed it was a reflection of support for her style and perhaps that she would be permitted to conduct her politics nationally in a way similar to the more parochial level at which she operated." Wickham said that while many Jamaicans were fascinated by the idea of a woman prime minister, "this did not mean she would be measured by standards that were any different from those applicable to the men previously in that post."

Many commentators say Golding may have won the election based on the debate between the two leaders, a first for Jamaican politics. Most analysts had scored Golding as outperforming Simpson Miller in his grasp of national issues and the presentation of his party's message.

Pollster Bill Johnson said he believed that voters were "looking for a reason why they should vote for the People's National Party, whereas the Jamaica Labor Party has given a reason, albeit not a strong one, of the need for a change."

Simpson Miller, who made history by becoming the country's first female prime minister in 2006, enjoyed popular support among Jamaicans, especially the working class, and her charisma and long-time advocacy on behalf of the poor made her a loveable figure.

Golding, on the other hand, was viewed as being bright, if not warm and charismatic. But towards the end of the campaign his approval ratings climbed, with at least one poll putting him ahead of Simpson Miller as the leader more favored to run the country at this time.

Political commentator Paul Ashley acknowledged that the stakes in the election were very high, with the loser facing the real prospect of political oblivion.

Election Day was "the most important day for both leaders because it seems to me that the loser will ride off into the sunset," Ashley said of both Simpson Miller and Golding, who were leading their respective parties into a general election for the first time.

Political commentators had long argued that Simpson Miller faced a difficult task in uniting the party she took over from PJ Patterson in a bitter presidential election last year and Ashley had also wondered whether the People's National Party would have been able to go into the elections putting "party first instead of personalities."

During the campaign, Golding accused the ruling party of failing to effectively manage the affairs of the country over the past 18 years. He said that since 1989, with the exception of the first two years, Jamaica had never experienced as much as three percent economic growth for two consecutive years, and that the country had accumulated some 460,000 unemployed.

He also noted that the murder rate had increased from 413 in 1988 to 1,500 today, and many children were leaving school without being able to read or write.

"We cannot continue to operate like this. We can do better than this," he said. □

## URUGUAY

Raúl Zibechi for the Americas Program\*

# "Urban landless"

## Mutual-aid housing cooperatives confront government.

Following almost four decades of struggle for urban land to build their houses, mutual-aid housing cooperatives confront the progressive government of President Tabaré Vázquez, which has criminalized occupations and bogged down loans.

In April, the Parliament approved a law that sets three-month to three-year jail terms for squatters. The surprise is that the ruling party, the *Frente Amplio*, supported the new law, although Housing Minister Mariano Arana said he was against what the majority-party deputies had decided.

In June, the courts put five cooperative activists in prison for occupying a lot in the beach destination *Punta del Este*. This might be a preview of a new attitude on the part of the government.

"We are facing people who know how to rule and know how to strike at unions," says

## inbrief

- If the current rate of deforestation in **Brazil** continues, the country's Amazon rain forest will disappear completely by 2080, the governmental National Institute of Amazon Research warned in late August.

- US counter-drug and counter-subversive aid to **Colombia** under Plan Colombia was reduced by 10 percent. US\$500 million has been earmarked for the 2007-2008 fiscal year. Between 2000 and 2005, the US government allotted \$4 billion to the Plan.

- According to the United Nations Development Program Office in **Ecuador**, in the first half of 2007 there were 1,151 new cases of HIV infections. Most of the cases were adults between 25 and 29 years of age, workers and unemployed.

- Workers began widening the **Panama** Canal on Sept. 3, a US\$5-billion project that will conclude in 2014, when the waterway celebrates its 100th birthday.

- The World Bank's International Center for Settlement of Investment Disputes ruled Sept. 5 for the second time in favor of **Peru** in a case brought by the Chilean company Lucchetti. The firm was seeking US\$150 million in damages after Peru revoked its license and shuttered its factory on a nature reserve in Lima.

“During the two years of a leftist government we have had to stage occupations in order to get land.”

— Daniel de Souza

secretary general of the Federation of Mutual-Aid Housing Cooperatives, or FUCVAM, Daniel de Souza.

The Housing Ministry drew up Cooperative Regulations that were harshly criticized by the Federation. The ministry’s objective is to organize and improve the system to open access to credit, and this way, be able to better plan the adequate use of resources. The new regulations say that housing cooperatives could request State funding only during the Cooperative Project Applications that take place once a year.

According to architect Benjamin Nahoum, a FUCVAM adviser, the new regulations “could represent a serious obstacle for the development of the cooperative system.”

“The final result is perverse,” because a cooperative invests at least two to three years in the entire process. Therefore, “it can’t be subject to winning or losing a contest” whose rules are not made clear at the outset.

The organization was born in 1970, during a time of growing social movements in Uruguay. After over three decades of struggle, what is happening to them now under the leftwing government seems disconcerting. “This is not a spontaneous issue. These leaders are not new; the people in the Housing Ministry have been ruling Montevideo for almost 20 years,” de Souza said.

The movement for housing construction through cooperatives and mutual-aid is a modality where a group of families (from 10 to 200) form associated groups that work democratically. They fight to obtain land, occupy or purchase it with state or nongovernmental organization financing, and then put up their homes using family labor.

Men and women work on equal terms to build the homes, putting in the same number of work-hours. Together they promote the process of design and construction making decisions in assemblies, and then they manage the housing complex. The landlord is the cooperative, the families have rights to usage but cannot sell without authorization from the collective.

Cooperative members build all the homes without knowing who will occupy each one. The day of the inauguration, there is a drawing, and each family occupies the one they draw. Women participate at each step of the process, including construction, and this marks a difference from other social movements.

FUCVAM also has a training school and an industrial plant that provides cooperatives with material. Egalitarian participation in work, assembly attendance, and economic support are mandatory for all associates.

Cooperative neighborhoods are mostly at the edge of cities. Many cooperative groups have child-care, health clinics, and shopping centers self-run by the neighbors themselves. The movement also has 22 libraries and 17 gyms in Montevideo neighborhoods.

The nearly 500 housing cooperatives under FUCVAM are the result of three great waves of land-struggle that led to the construction of over 20,000 homes. From 1970 to 1972, more than 40 percent of state housing resources went into financing the cooperatives.

The Federation was created on May 24, 1970 at the inauguration of the first cooperative, on the small Isla Mala inland community. During this period, a great number of cooperatives were created by the unions. Housing projects went up—in some cases over 800 dwellings at a time. Some 150 cooperatives were born and FUCVAM extended to practically the entire country.

The movement’s second leap forward was in 1989. It was an election year and pressure for housing had been put off by the 1973-85 dictatorship, to the extent that in the early part of the decade there was a mushrooming of illegal urban settlements where homeless and rural immigrants lived. That July, after a massive assembly, four cooperatives occupied three lots. In November Tabaré Vázquez won the elections in Montevideo and created a “land portfolio” fund, and negotiations with the cooperative movement began.

Over the following years, some 250 cooperatives gained access to land, and many began building houses. It was a decade characterized by frequent mobilizations, most noteworthy the occupation of the Ministry of Housing and the Ministry of the Economy. These movements involved construction by some 2,000 families in 30 cooperatives.

The third drive came last year, under the incumbent government. Housing pressure, after a decade of structural adjustments and the crisis of 2002, was reflected in the creation of a hundred cooperative groups struggling for getting land. To break the impasse they decided, in October 2006, to occupy a piece of land owned by the state railway company that had been abandoned for 40 years. In negotiations they obtained 20 lots where 40 cooperatives settled.

“We still have 30 cooperatives without land,” says the Federation. In almost 40 years the movement has built houses for over 22,000 families whereas some 4,000 hope to access land to begin the legalization process.

“What a coincidence, there had never been a problem with the land portfolio and during the two years of a leftist government we have had to stage occupations in order to get land,” Souza points out.

Since 1989 there had been no occupations. They feel that under the new legislation they will be unable to occupy lands, and access to loans for construction will be increasingly slower. □

\* Program at the Center for International Policy

# Major advance for indigenous rights

## UN declares respect for autonomy, self-rule and ancestral lands of indigenous groups.

After 22 years of fierce debate, the United Nations General Assembly approved Sept. 13 the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which will help protect some 370 million indigenous people in the world.

The declaration, which was pushed by indigenous leaders particularly from Guatemala, Mexico and Peru, was approved with 143 votes in favor, and four against from Australia, Canada, the United States and New Zealand, as well as 11 abstentions, including Colombia.

The 46-article declaration establishes a framework for the respect of indigenous peoples' rights, including self-rule, autonomy, land ownership, access to natural resources on lands they have traditionally held or used, and that the state provide these peoples with legal support to back their claim to these lands.

Also recognized are the rights to education, health care and employment, while strengthening indigenous culture and traditions in order to find a formula for development, according to their needs and aspirations.

Latin American indigenous leaders cheered the declaration's approval.

"This is a great step in the indigenous peoples' struggle," said Bolivian President Evo Morales. "The right they've always had, but were denied, will now be broadly granted."

Chilean Mapuche leader Aucan Wilcaman said that "international law has taken an important step in the recognition of collective rights."

The United Nations said that even though the declaration is non-binding, it "prohibits discrimination against indigenous peoples and promotes their full and effective participation in all matters that concern them."

In a statement, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called the decision a "victory" for indigenous communities around the world.

"A historic moment when UN member states and indigenous peoples have reconciled with their painful histories and are resolved to move forward together on the path of human rights, justice and development for all," he said in a statement.

He urged governments and civil society to immediately incorporate indigenous issues in their human rights and development agenda, and to create policies and programs on all levels of government to "ensure that the vision behind the declaration becomes a reality."

According to the World Bank, 10 percent of the some 550 million Latin Americans are indigenous, and are among the region's poorest and most marginalized sectors (*LP*, June 1, 2005).

In Bolivia and Guatemala, where more than half of the population is poor, this figure rises to 75 percent among indigenous citizens, the World Bank says. In Ecuador, 96 percent of the indigenous population in rural areas is poor, and in Mexico, extreme poverty is 4.5 percentage points higher in indigenous municipalities compared with non-indigenous ones. In Peru, indigenous households comprise half of the poor households.

Nils Kastberg, director of the United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF, said in a statement that while regional instruments are important, they are insufficient if they are not accompanied by a strong political will for public policies that do not discriminate, legislative reforms and budget proposals that end the exclusion that affects millions of indigenous peoples throughout the world.

He noted that "for the majority of indigenous, social and economic indicators are even lower than national averages, which affects the development of their peoples."

"We will do everything we can to make this declaration a reality," he concluded. □

"This is a great step in the indigenous peoples' struggle. The right they've always had, but were denied, will now be broadly granted."

— Evo Morales