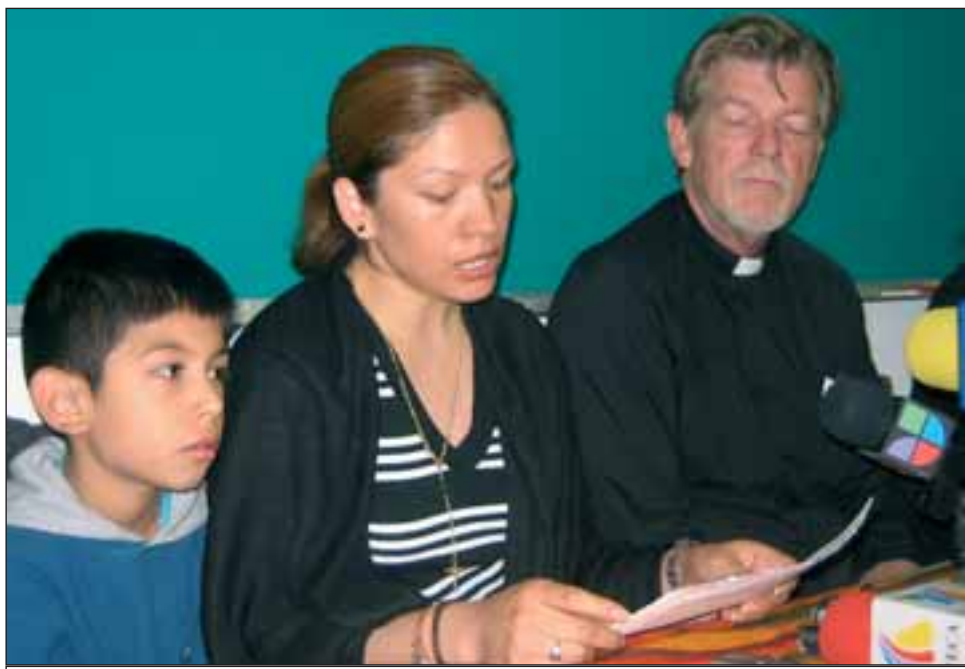


- 1 **MEXICO**
"We are all Elvira"
- 2 **PERU**
García to release prisoner list
- 3 **GUATEMALA**
Most vulnerable communities threatened by dam
- 5 **CENTRAL AMERICA**
Social inclusion is the challenge
- 6 **HONDURAS**
Deportations rise, remittances fall
- 7 **PARAGUAY**
No pesticide laws
- 8 **PERU**
Environment in limbo
- 9 **THE BAHAMAS**
Activists stand up for rights (for all)
- 11 **TURKS & CAICOS**
Cold indifference to loss of life
- 12 **LATIN AMERICA**
Leaders discuss inequality



Elvira Arellano (center) has become an icon for immigrants' rights.

LORRAINE ORLANDI

MEXICO

Lorraine Orlandi in Mexico City

"We are all Elvira"

One Mexican-born mother takes her fight for immigration reform to Washington.

Since being deported from the United States in August, a single mother with her US-born son has waged her struggle for US immigration reform from her Mexican homeland.

Elvira Arellano, 32, rallied followers on both sides of the border when she took refuge last year inside a Chicago church to stay with her 8-year-old son, Saúl, a US-born citizen and her only child. She was finally deported from Los Angeles on Aug. 19 and has become a potent and poignant voice for US-based families being torn apart when undocumented loved ones are deported. She began a liquids-only hunger strike on Nov. 17 to pressure Mexican authorities to lobby for US immigration reform.

"I am not a terrorist," Arellano told reporters in Mexico City in August. "We went looking for work in a country that wasn't ours, but we are not criminals. What is the crime in wanting a better future for our families?"

Barred for 20 years from returning to the United States, Arellano led protests in September in Tijuana, across the US border from San Diego. Meanwhile, her son traveled to Washington with their family pastor to attend Congressional hearings on reforms to legalize the status of an estimated 12 million undocumented migrant workers.

Saúl is shy in front of news cameras, but he walked at the head of a march on the capital, representing an estimated 4 to 5 million US-citizen children threatened with having one or both parents deported.

Arellano lived for years in the shadows like most illegal immigrants, but her high-profile deportation made her a flashpoint in a complex and emotional debate over US immigration reform. A devout Christian, she has galvanized a movement of church leaders, immigrant rights groups and lawmakers in both countries who want a humane solution to what they call a faulty and unjust US immigration system.

"We are all Elvira," is their rallying cry.

"Thousands of families are being destroyed and the lives that were won with hard work in the United States are being thrown away like garbage," the Rev. Walter Coleman, Arellano's pastor in Chicago, said while visiting her in Mexico. "Elvira has become their voice, and we need her, and we need Saúl."

But those who support strict enforcement of immigration laws call Arellano a criminal.

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"I don't think because she comes here and has a child that she somehow deserves to be treated any different from anybody else who has broken the law. What part of illegal don't people understand?" said US Rep. Brian P. Bilbray, a California Republican who heads the Immigration Reform Caucus and won his seat in 2006 largely on a campaign for stronger border controls.

Arellano was arrested in 2002 and convicted of using a fake Social Security number while working cleaning planes at Chicago's O'Hare airport.

She was ordered to surrender to officials in August 2006, but instead took refuge in the Adalberto United Methodist Church in Chicago. She stayed there until she went to Los Angeles to demonstrate for immigration reform. She was deported, and her son later joined her in Mexico. He appears by her side at press conferences.

The Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency deported more than 220,000 illegal immigrants in the first 10 months of this fiscal year. Border officials argue that illegal immigrants like Arellano put their own families at risk.

"She willfully violated US immigration laws and is now facing the consequences of those illegal actions," said Lauren Mack, a spokeswoman for Immigration and Customs Enforcement in San Diego. "It's something we deal with on a daily basis, and it's sad because US citizen children face the consequences of their parents' decision to enter the country illegally or stay here illegally. We as an agency don't separate families. It's the consequence of the parents' illegal activity."

Many of those forcibly returned are single mothers like Arellano, who must choose between leaving their US-born children with family or friends or taking them back to impoverished countries like Mexico, where opportunities for education are fewer and economic expectations lower.

That dilemma turned Arellano into an activist, although she never set out to be a symbol when she crossed the border illegally in 1997 at the age of 22.

"We will never give up on his rights as a US citizen in the United States and his right as a human being to have his mother with him," she said of Saúl.

Marta Sánchez, who with Arellano and other activists founded the Mesoamerican Migrant Movement in Mexico City in August to work for US immigration reform, said women alone often face harsh conditions both as illegal immigrants and back home. "The children have never been in Mexico; their lives are in the US."

Major US industries, from farms to hospitals to hotels, depend on undocumented migrant workers, and President George W. Bush has backed legislation to create a guest-worker program and legalize the status of such immigrants. But amid complaints that the administration has failed to enforce existing laws, the government has begun cracking down on illegal immigrants and employers who hire them. □

PERU

Latinamerica Press

García to release prisoner list

President's proposal to reveal identities of former prisoners on terrorism charges enrages human rights community.

President Alan García's recent announcement that he will reveal the names of 1,800 people who were imprisoned on terrorism charges but later freed has outraged Peruvian human rights advocates and drawn disapproval from some of the country's top legal experts.

On Nov. 19, García said that he would publish the list of individuals "who were dedicated to the most tremendous crime ever committed in our homeland."

Some of the ex-prisoners finished serving their terms, some were not charged and released, and others were absolved of terrorism charges in court, but García made no distinction between them.

"I'm going to give the country the list of the 1,800 terrorists so everyone knows who their neighbors are," García said in a ceremony in Lima, referring to the entire group as "terrorists" even though some were found not guilty. "Many of these 1,800 liberated prisoners who committed murder and destruction in the country are again pushing their sinister plans and mobilizing other social sectors."

He did not go into more detail, or later differentiate between the ex-prisoners.

"They risk demonizing citizens who were recognized as innocent in the country and abroad," complained Francisco Soberón, director of Peruvian human rights organization, APRODEH.

"The list that Alan García is going to publish will endanger those of us who were in prison, even those people who have completed their sentences," said Edgar Rivadeneyra, president of the Lima-based Asociación Reflexión de Inocentes Liberados, an advocacy group representing some 5,000 individuals who were wrongly imprisoned during Peru's crackdown on leftist insurgency. He says it would mean that not only the individual but his or her whole family would be stigmatized.

Rivadeneyra was wrongly imprisoned on terrorism charges in April 1992, the same

Region at a glance

- 2 BRAZIL
Warning labels for transgenics
- 3 CUBA
New victory in the UN
- 4 PARAGUAY
Law against forced disappearances
- 5 PERU
Unpunished crime
- 9 URUGUAY
Former dictator on trial

BRAZIL

Warning labels for transgenics.

A judicial sentence on Nov. 12 requires all manufacturers of products that contain transgenics will now have to use a warning label with the symbol "T".

Federal Judge Isa Tânia Barão Pessoa da Costa determined that even products containing less than 1 percent of genetically-modified material must apply the warning label. Before the ruling, the requirement was only in place for those products containing more than 1 percent.

For Paulo Pacini, legal coordinator of the Consumer Defense Institute, the former 1 percent-limit for transgenics to be publicized is contrary to the Consumer Defense Code that states consumers have "the right to full and unrestricted information on the product that he or she is going to consume."

He added that the Brazilian population consumes transgenic products without knowing it and that the government is resistant to accept judges' decisions due to considerable pressure on the food industry.

"If it is necessary to spend loads of money so that the consumer receives the information he or she has a legal right to, the industry will have to run with that cost," said Pacini. —RADIOAGÊNCIA NOTÍCIAS DO PLANALTO.

CUBA

New victory in the UN. The Cuban government considers “a historic victory” the elimination on Nov. 16 of the United Nations (UN) human rights mandate against Cuba, which included the naming of a special rapporteur to investigate the human rights situation of the island.

The Commission of Social and Economic Affairs of the UN General Assembly approved a resolution presented by Cuba, 168 votes in favor and 7 against (Australia, Canada, Israel, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Palau and United States).

The Cuban Foreign Ministry announced that “the decision constitutes a devastating blow to the imperial intentions of the [US President George W.] Bush administration against Cuba”.

The UN Human Rights Council — which replaced the Human Rights Commission last year — eliminated in June the mandate of Christine Chanet, the personal representative for Cuba in the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. Cuba never permitted Chanet’s visit since it considered her naming “selective and discriminatory”.

This decision follows the tune of the UN General Assembly’s disapproval on Oct. 30, for the sixth consecutive year, of the embargo imposed by the United States on Cuba since 1962. —LP.

month then-President Alberto Fujimori (1990-2000) closed Congress in his so-called “self-coup.” Rivadeneyra was pardoned and freed in 2001 after suffering almost a decade of torture and psychological abuse in prison.

García’s announcement came less than a month after two separate attacks on police along a major cocaine-trafficking route in the southern Andes. On Nov. 1, an armed group stormed the town of Ocobamba, killing one police officer and destroying the police station. Two weeks later four police officers were ambushed and killed in Peru’s highland jungle. The government blamed the attack on the Shining Path.

The Maoist rebel group’s standoff with the Peruvian government — and in a small part between the state and the Marxist Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement — between 1980 and 2000 left more than 69,000 people dead, according to a 2003 truth commission report, and is still a highly contentious issue within the country, particularly with the recent extradition and upcoming trial of Fujimori, whose controversial crackdown on the insurgency caused massive human rights violations activists and others say.

The Shining Path had been largely dismantled by the early 1990s, but some Peruvian officials say some remaining Shining Path members now protect drug-traffickers.

“It can’t be that they get out of jail only to be stirring up trouble again, radicalizing protests, forming terrorist cells,” said García.

His words were infuriating to Rivadeneyra, who says that García is trying to dump responsibility for street demonstrations against his government — which reached their peak around García’s first anniversary in office in July (*LP*, Aug. 22, 2007) — on the ex-prisoners, many of whom “support the country” and are working men and women.

Yehude Simon, current president of the Lambayeque department and Rivadeneyra’s co-defendant, told the *Peru21* daily: “The president will have to differentiate between those who are subversives with those who are innocent... A person who has already been in prison has the right to remake his or her life. If a person is doing something wrong, let him or her be arrested and if he or she has a criminal past, give him or her a double sentence. But if he or she is doing nothing bad, why would they limit his or her rights?”

Judge Pablo Talavera, president of Peru’s special anti-terrorism chamber, who tried Shining Path founder Abimael Guzmán, says the measure will impede these former prisoners’ ability to be reinserted into society, especially in the workplace.

He added that García’s claim that the measure would help combat terrorism is illogical.

“It would have no effect at all on those who have taken up arms again, since one assumes they’re in hiding,” he said.

Peru’s ombudswoman, Beatriz Merino, said that some of the ex-prisoners could take legal action against the state if their names are published.

“If they are innocent, if they were absolved or have finished their sentences and reintegrated into society, they could sue the state if it publishes their names,” she said.

An Ad-Hoc commission and the governments of former Presidents Valentín Paniagua (2000-2001) and Alejandro Toledo (2001-2006) pardoned some 760 people, and another 850 were absolved and freed between 2003 and 2005, Merino says, referring to the almost 1,600 innocent ex-prisoners on García’s list.

“We will go before the Inter-American Human Rights Commission, because they can’t persecute us like that,” Rivadeneyra warned if one of his association’s members appears on the list.

For Rivadeneyra, García is using this as a smokescreen to distract Peruvians from the fact that he is not fulfilling his campaign promise to spread Peru’s wealth — the country’s economy grew a record 8 percent last year.

He also notes that the timing falls just as Peruvian state prosecutors are preparing to try Fujimori on human rights charges on Dec. 10 for the death squad massacres of alleged Shining Path members in Barrios Altos and La Cantuta in 1991 and 1992, respectively, and two counts of kidnapping.

Prosecutors allege the Colina Group, a military death squad that carried out the murders, had Fujimori’s approval. He faces 30 years if convicted. □

GUATEMALA

Louisa Reynolds in Guatemala City

Most vulnerable communities threatened by dam

Ixil communities demand greater benefits from new hydroelectric dam.

The heart of the Guatemalan jungle, in the highland department of Quiché, is dotted with tiny indigenous villages. This area, known as the Ixil triangle, is one of the most beautiful but also one of the poorest and most isolated parts of the country.

During Guatemala’s 36-year civil war, this remote location became an ideal

hiding place for many guerrilla groups and the scene of vicious skirmishes between the guerrilla forces and the army, with the indigenous population caught in the middle.

A stone cross by the Xalbal river bank, near the village of Chel, is a stark reminder of the Ixil triangle's tragic past. Indigenous villages in the area suffered some of the worst massacres committed during the conflict — 263 massacres were committed against residents of Quiche as a result of the state's brutal genocidal policy that came to be known as the "Scorched Earth" campaign during the first half of the 1980s. In Chel, a few miles away from the Xalbal River, 96 people, including women and children, were rounded up in the local church, bludgeoned to death and thrown into the river.

Today, the Ixil people live in extreme poverty with no electricity, no access to potable water and lack basic services such as schools and health centers. When work began on a large hydroelectric dam on the Xalbal River bank in the municipality of San Gaspar Chajul in late 2006, some 40 local villages hoped they would finally have access to an affordable electricity service. However, they were soon disappointed when it became known that the new dam would supply Quetzaltenango, Guatemala's second largest city, while the Ixil triangle would remain in the dark.

For most villages in the area, the closest electrical generator is located in the municipality of Sacapulas, around 50 kilometers away, and the service provided is poor, highly overpriced and does not cover over 20 villages beyond the town of Chajul.

Mesa Regional Ixil, a civil society umbrella group that brings together 36 indigenous organizations, says it is ironic that the electricity produced by the Xacbal hydroelectric dam will be transported all the way to Quetzaltenango, when the villages surrounding the dam lack this basic service. "We're not against the hydroelectric dam per se. The service is needed. But it's contradictory that we won't feel the benefits," says Ixil community leader Francisco Velasco Marroquín.

Indigenous leaders have asked Hidro Xacbal, the company that manages the hydroelectric dam, to build a generator in Chajul so that all the villages in the Ixil triangle have access to affordable electricity. However, Hidro Xacbal has refused, arguing that it would not be financially viable for the company to provide electricity for dozens of remote villages dotted all over the Ixil triangle.

Hidro Xacbal CEO, Erwin Hernández, argues that the government and not a private corporation should be responsible for the provision of electricity in the Ixil triangle. A few years ago, the government launched a Rural Electrification Program that aimed to provide electricity for all villages in rural Guatemala. However, progress has been slow and many indigenous areas have yet to see any benefits.

The fact that the dam is being built on land that has been at the center of an acrimonious dispute between *campesino* villages and a wealthy land-owning family, has also stirred up long-standing grievances within the Ixil community.

The hydroelectric dam was the brainchild of the Arenas Menes family, owners of the coffee producing farm known as La Perla, in San Gaspar Chajul. With a growing demand for electric energy threatening to outstrip the available supply by 2008, hydroelectricity, considered an alternative, cleaner form but one that actually requires fuel to run became a lucrative business and in 2001, the Arenas Menes family carried out an environmental impact study necessary for the construction of a hydroelectric dam next to the Xacbal River.

Realizing that a century-old land dispute with nearby *campesino* villages would be a major obstacle for the project to go ahead, the owners of La Perla decided to sell part of the farm to Hidro Xacbal, SA, in 2004. Nevertheless, neighboring Ixil villages still demand that the conflict over the boundaries of La Perla be resolved.

In 1896, La Perla had an area of 990 hectares (2,445 acres) but over the years, the Arenas Menes family began to encroach on community-owned lands and according to the Presidential Commission for the Resolution of Land Disputes, the farm now has an extension of 2,790 hectares (6,891 acres).

This figure underestimates the true size of La Perla, which is closer to 5,850 hectares (14,500 acres). In contrast, the average family in the neighboring villages barely owns around 0.5 hectares (nearly 1.24 acres) of land.

According to the Guatemalan land registry, around 2,219 hectares (5,481 acres) of La Perla ought to belong to the Sotzil and Ixil villages. This means that the 405 indigenous families living in Ixil should own 3.5 hectares (8.6 acres) of land and 195 Sotzil families should own over 4.1 hectares (10 acres). However, indigenous communities cannot even use the land that is rightfully theirs according to official records. In May this year, the National Coordinator of Indigenous and *Campesino* Organizations said: "The dam is being built on land that was stolen from our communities. The company is trying to bribe people by giving them land but the land where the dam is being built was stolen from our ancestors," which shows that this unresolved land dispute is still a highly contentious issue.

On June 15, the government invited Ixil leaders and Hidro Xacbal representatives to attend a meeting, hoping to reach a consensus between the two parties.

A week later, the government postponed the meeting "until further notice." The Ixil people and their representatives now fear that their grievances will be simply forgotten yet again. □

PARAGUAY

Law against forced disappearances. On Nov. 15 the Paraguayan Deputy Chamber unanimously approved the Law of Protection of All Persons against Force Disappearances.

For the Paraguayan Association of Relatives of Detained-Disappeared and Murdered, the law — presented last March and which will hopefully be approved by the Senate with the same terms — "will contribute to adapting Paraguay to the political time that we are living in, through an investigation of the atrocities committed in the dictatorship [of Alfredo Stroessner (1954-89)] as was begun by the Truth and Justice Commission."

The Truth and Justice Commission — created in order to investigate human rights violations both during the Stroessner regime and those committed later by the state until Oct. 6, 2003 — is investigating 400 cases of disappearances. The Association estimates that between 3,000 and 4,000 people were murdered during the dictatorship.

In a press release, the association says that the law's approval "is a clear message to society and the international community, of the Paraguayan state recognition of the existence of state terrorism in the recent past, of the will to [find] truth and corresponding penalty."

The norm states that "all persons who involuntarily disappeared from their home or place of residence, without notice of their whereabouts, on or before Feb. 3, 1989 [date of Stroessner's ouster] will be declared absent by forced disappearance". —LP.

Social inclusion is the challenge

Isthmus reports high economic growth rates, while inequality and poverty remain.

Central America continues to struggle with a contradiction: despite increasing economic growth, poverty, inequality, and marginalization persist.

According to a recent ECLAC report, economic growth in Central America reached 6.1 percent in 2006 — its highest growth rate in 14 years — compared to just 4.5 percent in 2005. This is the second highest growth rate since 1992 (when growth was 6.6 percent, and the second highest in 30 years).

ECLAC reports that an expansive cycle of economic growth — tightly linked to the US economy - has extended to four years. Nevertheless, in an earlier study ECLAC predicted that economic growth will soon slow.

From 2007 to 2008, economic growth will grind to 4 percent, the study claims, due to lagging growth in the US, contracting internal demand, and a more restrictive monetary policy.

More than half of the 40 million Central Americans live in poverty and suffer some kind of social exclusion or marginalization.

Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua, and are three of the poorest countries in the hemisphere. Guatemala — the isthmus nation with the biggest population (13 million inhabitants) and the strongest economy (US\$2, 535 gross domestic product per capita) — is home to nearly 7 million people living in poverty and 2 million living in extreme poverty.

More than a million children there suffer from malnutrition and almost a quarter of the population is illiterate. Guatemala's mostly indigenous population is disproportionately poor and marginalized

Almost 60 percent of those living in poverty are indigenous, and 72 percent of those living in extreme poverty are indigenous.

Sixty-three per cent of Honduras' seven million citizens live in poverty. The indigenous population is extremely marginalized with several of the nation's eight indigenous groups facing of extinction, including the Tawahka, Tolupanes and Pech peoples.

The official illiteracy rate in Honduras is between 20 percent and 24 percent and is far worse in rural than urban areas — 80 percent of the rural population is illiterate.

Nicaragua has one of the lowest standards of living in all of Latin America. With a population of 5 million and per capita gross domestic product at \$955, 61 percent of Nicaraguans live in poverty and 15 percent in extreme poverty.

Nicaraguan foreign minister Samuel Santos recently told the press that one third of the nation's population is illiterate and that about 500 thousand children do not attend school. He also noted that during the 1980's, under the first Sandinista government (1979-90), Nicaragua made a "significant educational leap" — 60,000 young volunteers worked to "reduce illiteracy from 50.3 percent to 12.9 percent of the population in only six months."

But illiteracy has spiked since then, something that Santos attributed to the "selfish, neo-liberal policies" of the various governments ruling Nicaragua in the 16 years before the Sandinistas returned to power in 2007. According to the report, "a new constitutional and legal framework that recognizes collective as well as individual rights is absolutely essential" the report says.

He added that with the Cuban literacy program *Yo sí puedo* ("Yes, I can"), Nicaragua hopes to teach about 800,000 people how to read between 2007 and 2009 (*LP, June 13, 2007*).

El Salvador has a population of 5.7 million and a GDP per capita of \$2,469. According to official statistics, 30.7 percent of the population lives in poverty and 21.2 percent lives in extreme poverty. The illiteracy rate for Salvadorans aged between 15 and 24 is 6 percent - for adults between 25 and 59 it is 16 percent.

Costa Rica is by far one of the most developed countries in all of Latin America. With a population of 4 million, the GDP per capita is \$4,634. The poverty rate is below 20 percent and the extreme poverty rate is about 5 percent. The illiteracy rate is 4 percent.

On Nov. 1, the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) released the report "Outsiders? The Changing Patterns of Exclusion in Latin America and the Caribbean", the 2008 edition of the bank's Economic and Social Progress Report which also concludes that Latin America is the most unequal regions in the world.

According to the report, "a new constitutional and legal framework that recognizes collective as well as individual rights is absolutely essential."

IADB President Luis Alberto Moreno said that "achieving social inclusion will not only require resource transfers and affirmative action, but also — and most importantly — require that governments change the way in which they make decisions, allocate resources, and execute policies." □

PERU

Unpunished crime. The Peruvian Press Council railed against a court sentence in the eastern region of Ucayali that acquitted on Nov. 14 "for lack of evidence" the mayor of province Coronel Portillo, Luis Valdez Villacorta, and the former judge of the Ucayali Superior Court, Solio Ramírez Garay. Both were tried as the intellectual authors of the murder of journalist Alberto Rivera Fernández on Apr. 21, 2004.

The court sentenced the author of the crime, Alberto Fabasi, to 35 years in prison and his accomplice, Alex Panero, to 20 years. Fabasi must also pay a civil reparation of US\$33,000.

According to the council, "before dying, journalist Alberto Rivera reported on links between mayor Luis Valdez Villacorta with drug-trafficking and accused him of attempted murder. It causes profound astonishment that the court argues a lack of evidence while ignoring these reports and the statements from the involved persons who were sentenced to severe jail penalties which reveal the existence of a plan hatched by the mayor."

The case has been appealed and will be heard by the Supreme Court. —LP.



CAROLINA S. RIVERA

Hondurans are deported from the United States with only the clothes they have on.

HONDURAS

Carolina S. Rivera in Tegucigalpa

Deportations rise, remittances fall

More than 30,000 deportees from the United States will return to the country this year.

After 10 years of living illegally in the United States, María ISaúla Martínez was deported on Nov. 5 on the so-called “white plane” used to transport deportees from the United States, carrying only a small plastic bag containing a shirt, a toothbrush and deodorant.

“I don’t carry anything and my children have stayed there. I had to leave them because they’re legal, but I’m going to try to return because I am not going to leave my kids abandoned, and I have to continue working to send dollars here to Honduras,” said Martínez with damp eyes and notable exhaustion.

That morning, on the same flight, another 120 Hondurans returned to their home country, the majority of them deported after many years of residing in the United States. At least 10 percent were captured on the border between the United States and Mexico when trying to enter US territory.

With this flight, the number of those deported by plane alone between January and the first week of November reached 27,000. This number does not include the more than 200 people who return weekly from Guatemala on the so-called “emigrant route”, among whom are children as young as four years old, according to the nation’s Foreign Ministry.

Valdete Willman, of the Scalabrinian Sisters, said that 19 injured Hondurans arrived in the “white plane” this year, and 10 who had amputated limbs, as well as the bodies of 141 people who died in the desert or in trains as they struggled to reach the “American Dream.”

Willman, who directs the Returned Migrant Attention Center in the Toncontín international airport, has seen the number of deportations increase during 2007. In 2006, 24,643 people were returned by plane while the projection for this year is 32,000 deportees.

For the political opposition, the increase in deportations could be interpreted as a US government response to President Manuel Zelaya’s recent closeness to presidents Daniel Ortega from Nicaragua and Hugo Chávez from Venezuela.

“We believe that President Manuel Zelaya’s visits and talks with leaders who challenge the United States could be the reason for the increase in deportations, especially of those Hondurans who have already lived and worked various years in the country,” said Dep. Marvin Ponce, of the Democratic Unification party.

In response, the US ambassador to Honduras, Charles Ford, asserted that “there

“...My children have stayed there. I had to leave them because they’re legal, but I’m going to try to return.”

— María Isaula Martínez

are more deportations because there are more Hondurans who decide to go illegally.”

Martínez was part of the 53 percent of Honduran emigrants who help financially their families in the country's rural areas. According to the National Census, the more than 400,000 Hondurans who live in the United States send more than US\$2 billion home annually.

Almost 9 percent of the Honduran households that receive these remittances report having no other income, and are thus completely dependent on their relatives in the United States. Likewise, 92.5 percent of Hondurans who reside abroad belong to the economically active population, and almost half of recent emigrants are between the ages of 20 to 29.

Martínez's 70-year-old mother, who resides in the Cedros district in the central department of Francisco Morazán, has stopped receiving the \$100 monthly that her daughter sent. The same happened to thousands of Hondurans whose relatives have been deported this year. For the authorities of the Central Bank of Honduras (BCH), however, this will not affect the weak Honduran economy.

The president of the bank, Gabriela Núñez, states that there will be a decrease in income expected from remittances this year — which constitutes 28.2 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP), according to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (*LP, May 2, 2007*) — but not due to deportations, but to the economic improvement that many Hondurans in the country report, making it unnecessary for them to request money from their family members abroad.

For Núñez, the signing of the Dominican Republic-Central America Free Trade Agreement with the United States has brought economic growth, evident in the job opportunities generated by the construction industry in housing projects, malls and private institutions.

Núñez confirmed that the increase in the GDP could reach 7 percent, one percent greater than in 2006.

“We have observed that when the GDP grows, emigrants send less money to their relatives in Honduras. Furthermore, inflation levels have been stable during the whole year at 6 percent; this is also favorable,” she comments.

Economist and former presidential candidate of the Innovation and Unity party, Martín Barahona, does not share Núñez's opinion.

“Although there is a 6.5 percent economic improvement reported in the country, the migration of Hondurans is always increasing as this does not greatly overcome the poverty situation that every six out of 10 Hondurans live in; the damage of the massive deportations in sending money is noticeable.”

For Barahona, not having reached the prediction expected by the BCH of \$3 billion in remittances for 2007, but rather \$2.6 billion, is principally caused by the tightening of migration measures and the corresponding increase in deportations.

An additional reason why Hondurans have reduced their dollar transfers, adds Núñez, is based on the real estate bust in the United States.

“You can't deny that it is one of the areas that generate more sources of employment for Central Americans,” she says. □

PARAGUAY

Gustavo Torres in Asuncion

No pesticide laws

Rural communities lack protection against toxic fumigations.

The impact of agrochemicals on human health has surfaced once again in Paraguay with the death of three-year-old Jesús Giménez.

On Oct. 17, Roberto Giménez reported his son's death to the Public Ministry, and said it was a direct result of the fumigations of the canola plantations near his home in the southern part of the Alto Parana department, bordering Brazil. The child died on Aug. 13 reportedly due to causes related to the application of agrochemicals in the area.

Even though soy is the principal product for exportation in the country, the canola plantations are prospering in the outskirts the Leopoldo Perrier community. Paraguayans rent the lands to Brazilian settlers who farm this oil product, which is used to make biofuel.

“In school, the little ones faint from the smell, women suffer miscarriages, and fish, pigs and other animals are dying,” Giménez confirmed.

The serious social and environmental problems generated by the massive use of agrochemicals in zones very near communities and *campesino* settlements are public knowledge. The chemicals affect the communities' health and even put their lives at risk (*LP, May 21, 2003*).

On Sept. 6, Parliament voted down the so-called Pesticide, Agrototoxin and Fertilizer Bill, which would have applied at least a minimum legislative framework to the use of agrochemicals. The measure has given carte blanche to the big transnational companies who make these products.

“By rejecting this bill, they are preserving the immunity of the agribusiness which



Residents protest pesticide use.

“In school, the little ones faint from the smell.”

— Roberto Giménez

keeps devastating the land and affecting the population's health," environmentalist Víctor Benítez said. "In Paraguay, we need a pesticide law. All that we have is a phytosanitary law approved in 1992, but it only deals with plants — plague and disease control — without keeping in mind human health or environment; so it's an incomplete law."

The height of the soy planting season began in late October, and children and adults are already suffering its consequences.

"The big soy farmers apply up to eight different products in each season. To begin the cultivation they use a two-liter dose of herbicides, which leads us to estimate that more than 4 million liters of glyphosate (1 million gallons) are applied at the beginning of cultivation alone," he adds.

Glyphosate — or Roundup Ready — is an herbicide developed by the multinational Monsanto. Research conducted by the Department of Biochemical Sciences at the national University of Rosario, in Argentina, determined that glyphosate is responsible for various sicknesses and must not be applied less than 1,000 meters (3,281 feet) from any site where human activities take place (*LP*, March 21, 2007).

According to Paraguayan doctor and researcher Joel Filártiga, glyphosate is carcinogenic and produces — in both animals and humans — skin and ocular irritation, nausea, pulmonary edema, decreased blood pressure, various allergic reactions, abdominal pain, massive loss of gastrointestinal liquids, kidney damage, arrhythmias, destruction of red blood cells and loss of consciousness.

For *campesino* and environmental organizations, the approval of the pesticide law would have been a decisive issue for a country that cultivates more than 2.5 million hectares (nearly 6.2 million acres) of transgenic soy and is the fourth exporter of this product worldwide, behind the United States, Brazil and Argentina.

Annually, more than 20 million liters (5.2 million gallons) of agrochemicals are poured onto Paraguayan land, causing diseases, blindness, child deformation, as well as the death of children, *campesinos*, indigenous persons, and the destruction of flora and fauna.

"The rejection of the Pesticide, Agrototoxin and Fertilizer Law is one more battle within this huge fight against soy companies. The *campesino* organizations initiated this process four years ago, shortly after the death of child Silvino Talavera in 2003 due to agrototoxin fumigations," says Ulises Lovera, of the nongovernmental organization Alter Vida.

"Our organization has fought for an alternative to the use of pesticides and reported cases of intoxication for 22 years. Since 2005 we have accompanied the initiative of Permanent Popular Plenary (*Plenaria Popular Permanente*), which includes *campesino* organizations with technical help from the Center of Research and Study for Rural Law and Agrarian Reform, part of the Catholic University Our Lady of Asunción (UCA)," he adds.

A recent study conducted by the Coordinating Office of Pesticide Vigilance and Control, of the Health Ministry, affirmed that the use of these products can cause death or serious and chronic impacts on the human body. They say that from 50 severe intoxication cases registered in 2004, the number has jumped to 450 currently.

Businesswoman Claudia Ruser, member of the Soy, Cereal, and Oil Product Producers Association, a business group, recently affirmed to the press that the *campesino* organizations of the Alto Parana — the primary soy producing region in the country — "are on the point of war against soy companies."

The response of the Association of Alto Paraná Farmers and its leader, Tomás Zayas, was a hasty call to *campesinos* to mobilize against the Brazilian soy companies "who do not respect the protection strips nor the health of the inhabitants."

"The war that [Ruser] mentions was actually initiated by them quite awhile ago, but it's a chemical war against our people and we have the right to defend ourselves," warns Zayas. □

PERU

Ramiro Escobar in Lima

Environment in limbo

Current government lacks defined policies and has deactivated several projects.

In a controversial journalistic venture, Peruvian President Alan García published an article on Oct. 28 entitled "The Orchard Dog Syndrome" in *El Comercio*, Peru's most influential and widely read. The article proposes a global policy design greatly marked by its utter lack of environmental institutionalism, calling mining companies' destruction to the environment "an issue of last century."

In reference to the current government's disregard for environmental protection, Mariano Castro, former executive secretary of the National Council for Environment, or CONAM, says, "There is a problem with orientation and management." According to Castro, who held the position until mid-2006, a costly series of environmental protection initiatives has been tossed aside.

One of them involved approval by the Primer Minister's office of various regulations

statistics spotlight

LATIN AMERICA/ THE CARIBBEAN

Cuba ahead in closing gender gap. According to the Global Gender Gap Index 2007 published by the World Economic Forum on Nov. 8, four out of 15 countries that have closed their gender gaps in education and 17 of 35 countries that have closed the gender gap in health are in Latin America and the Caribbean. Cuba, which was included in the annual ranking for the first time, has replaced Colombia with the best score in the region.

The index measures the gender gap in four critical areas: economic participation and opportunities (salaries, levels of participation and access to skilled job positions); academic achievement (access to basic and higher education); political power (representation in decision-making institution); and health and survival (relationship between life expectancy and gender).

This year 128 countries were evaluated, 20 in Latin America and the Caribbean. —*LP*

LATIN AMERICA/ THE CARIBBEAN Gender Gap Index 2007

Country	Ranking	Score*
Cuba	22	0.7169
Colombia	24	0.7090
Costa Rica	28	0.7014
Panama	38	0.6954
Jamaica	39	0.6925
Ecuador	44	0.6881
El Salvador	48	0.6853
Venezuela	55	0.6797
Dominican Rep.	65	0.6705
Honduras	68	0.6661
Paraguay	69	0.6659
Brazil	74	0.6637
Peru	75	0.6624
Uruguay	78	0.6608
Bolivia	80	0.6574
Chile	86	0.6482
Nicaragua	90	0.6458
Mexico	93	0.6441
Belize	94	0.6426
Guatemala	106	0.6144

* 0.00=inequality, 1.00=equality
Source: World Economic Forum

URUGUAY

Former dictator on trial. On Nov. 12, district attorney Mirtha Guianze requested the arrest of former dictator Gregorio Álvarez (1981-85) for his participation in forced disappearances.

Álvarez, along with former navy officers Jorge Trócoli and Juan Carlos Lacerbeau, are accused of having participated in the clandestine transfer from Argentina of 40 political prisoners in 1978, who since then have been missing.

Although the former dictator now says he cannot remember the transfers, during his time as commander of the Uruguayan army between 1978 and 1979 he signed a resolution which, in addition to assuming responsibility for giving the first order in activities against human rights, impeded revising acts committed by his subordinates "during the war against subversion."

According to the Uruguayan Penal Code — reformed last year according to the Statute of Rome, instrument of the International Criminal Court — the crime of forced disappearance is punishable by 25 years in prison and has no statute of limitations when the whereabouts of the victim is unknown.

Álvarez, 82 years old, will not be permitted house arrest as crimes against humanity do not allow that benefit. —LP.

that would give more weight to the General Environment Law, passed in October 2005. The pending norms deal with air quality, studies of environmental impact and the maximum contamination permissible.

The law also addressed the exploitation of natural resources, one of President García's fetishes. Isabel Calle, lawyer with the Peruvian Society of Environmental Law, explained that 15 percent of the Peruvian Amazon was designated for oil investment in 2004. Today, this percentage has grown to 68 percent.

"CONAM has been weakened and there are no clear rules for investment," she added.

Even some investments in protected areas—zones that, in accordance with Peruvian legislation, the state commits to conservation — are granted without first consulting the National Institute of Natural Resources (INRENA), the institution responsible for protecting biodiversity.

An example of this is the attempt to cut out 209,000 hectares (516,450 acres) from the National Park Bahuaja Sonene, located in the southern Amazonian department of Madre de Dios, for oil exploration.

The site is considered by the National Geographic Society as one of the seven most emblematic national reserves in the world, but even so, in September the Primer Minister's office presented a bill to "modify the delimitation" of the park.

Luis Alfaro, head of INRENA's Protected Natural Areas office, sent an official letter to the authorities and the legal office of the Agricultural Ministry, objecting the proposal. The response was his firing.

Also last September, García sent a bill, classified as urgent, to Congress claiming 22 mining projects "of national interest". Among them was the Río Blanco project, located in the northern department of Piura, which that same month had been in the eye of a social storm.

Concerned about the environmental risk that the site will cause, in addition to the illegality of the concession, inhabitants of the zone participated in a Sept. 17 unofficial plebiscite in which more than 90 percent of the voters rejected the mining company's presence (*LP*, Oct. 3, 2007).

After the president's wrath over the referendum, a dialogue began. But while the parties negotiated, the "national interest" projects were advanced by the government from another front.

"The government does not understand that environmental rights, just as civil and political rights, have been globalized," said Doris Balvín, of the Civil Labor Association and member of the Red Muqui, an umbrella group of organizations that follow up with mining and environmental issues.

Although the proposal has been archived in Parliament, it's not impossible for it to be recycled and enforced by the president.

Also on the scene is the US-based Blacksmith Institute in the central highland city of La Oroya, which, for the second consecutive year, the think tank listed as one of the world's 10 most polluted cities (*LP*, March 8, 2006).

All the bureaucratic chaos that CONAM is submerged in implies the resignation of the best specialists, a surprising lack of leadership as the environmental authority and a minimal interest in projects related to important issues like climate change.

"Sometimes some ministries call by phone and ask about an issue," indicated a source from CONAM that asked to remain unidentified.

Additionally, the government has a surplus of environmental agencies. There are at least 35, distributed in ministries and other entities, apart from CONAM and INRENA. But there is no central authority that coordinates all of them in order to form a coherent policy.

In light of this, the possibility of creating an Environmental Ministry or an Autonomous Environmental Authority — the proposal raised by the press and civil society — seems distant, despite its necessity in a country with as much biodiversity as Peru. Calle maintains that during the past government the institutionalism for an environmental authority was being created, but now the conditions are different and "the state has forgotten the role it must play."

The name is not so important, the three people interviewed coincide. What's important is that the environmental agency isn't irrelevant or fuzzy and that it has political weight and a seat in the Ministers' Council. "We do not have even an environmental agenda. That's pretty serious," says Castro. □

THE BAHAMAS

Charles Arthur in Nassau

Activists stand up for rights (for all)

New coalition takes on archipelago's little-talked about issues.

A new human rights coalition in the Bahamas is causing a stir by speaking up about an issue not usually discussed in this island archipelago of some 340,000 people: discrimination.

The Bahamas Human Rights Network (BHRN), an umbrella group of human rights and other non-governmental organizations has publicized the difficulties experienced by

immigrants from Haiti, supported the campaign for a cable television channel for homosexuals, and voiced concerns about the violations of the rights of Rastafarians.

The organization is now challenging the recently-elected Free National Movement (FNM) government to take action to protect the rights of all those living in the Bahamas. In the May election, the FNM unseated the Progressive Liberal Party winning 23 of the 41 seats.

Elsworth Johnson, who is a legal aid attorney at the Eugene Dupuch Law School in the Bahamian capital, Nassau, is the acting head of the BHRN. He recently said: "The woman who is being trafficked or the child who is being trafficked through the Bahamas has their rights. Children who are being abused, they have their rights. Women who have to hide in the Bahamas today so that they can get away from abusive men, they have their rights."

The network formed in December 2006, and its first campaign highlighted the plight of Haitians living in the Bahamas. The network set out to provide some practical help to those whose rights were being violated. Members translated and published literature informing Haitians and Bahamians of Haitian descent about their legal rights regarding their immigration status, and offer legal assistance to Haitians whose rights have been violated.

According to unofficial estimates, as much as a quarter of the population are Haitians or of Haitian descent, making them the largest and most visible ethnic minority. Anti-Haitian prejudice and resentment toward continued immigration from Haiti is common. Members of the Haitian community complain that they are discriminated against in the job market, and that immigration officials routinely violate their rights during raids targeting alleged illegal immigrants.

Johnson adds that immigration authorities give immigrants of Haitian parentage a difficult time when applying for citizenship. "The government authorities are required to act reasonably and fairly. The treatment of some of these people can't be said to be reasonable and fair."

The BHRN acknowledges that it is poverty and lack of prospects in Haiti that drives the migration from that country towards the Bahamas, and in April the organization issued a statement calling upon the Bahamian government to exercise its international influence on the Inter-American Development Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and other lenders to immediately and completely cancel Haiti's debts to their respective institutions.

"Debt relief is very important for Haiti because the Haitian people are in dire need of basic infrastructure and security so that they can begin down the road to a stable and sustaining economic model," said Tamico Gilbert, a leading BHRN activist. It is a basic human right to have a fair chance at receiving an education, health care and a life that is free from the fear of everyday violence that is rooted in economic and political strife."

The BHRN has also recently taken on another cause, and has spoken out in favor of equal treatment for homosexuals. In October, the network publicly supported the campaign for a special channel for homosexuals as part of the Cable Bahamas service. The Rainbow Alliance of the Bahamas, an advocacy group for the gay community, and a BHRN member, initiated the call for a gay channel earlier this year. The Rainbow Alliance believes that there are thousands of homosexuals in the Bahamas, but that the overwhelming majority of them have not revealed their sexuality and are often afraid of the repercussions if they do.

The BHRN's pro-gay stance has been criticized by the Bahamas Christian Council (BCC). The BCC opposes the idea of gay channel, and a spokesperson for the BCC described homosexuality as a "sin", stating that "We ought to stay away from all channels falsely glamorizing the homosexual 'death style'."

In an interview with the local newspaper The Nassau Guardian in early October, Rainbow Alliance spokesperson, Erin Green said: "It's only lately that groups like the Bahamas Christian Council are now openly expressing their hatred towards gays". She called the BCC a group of "misguided" clergymen.

"We don't understand the big dilemma. These persons are contributing members in our community," said the BHRN's Johnson in response to the uproar. "The [Bahamian] Constitution provides for persons to associate and disassociate, for freedom of expression, and freedom of religion. Not everybody in the community has to believe the same thing or act in a certain way."

The BHRN is also concerned about the rights of Rastafarians to enjoy freedom of religion. An estimated 20,000 Bahamians adhere to the Rastafarian religion, and thousands of them registered to vote for the first time in advance of the May election, potentially making them a force to be reckoned with.

At a demonstration of hundreds of Rastas in Rawson Square, Nassau, at the end of February, Derek Ambadark Thompson, told a local newspaper that the Rasta community wanted the government to act immediately to enfranchise Bahamian Rastas. He said, "Give Rastas equal rights for everything so we could get jobs for our youths, jobs for our girls and boys, so we can do things, [so] that Rastas can look good, because we are tired of suffering."

Rastafarians claim discrimination by the authorities, citing obligatory haircuts, police harassment, and unequal treatment of Rastafarian schoolchildren. "We see it as inhumane for someone to say because you are of a certain religious sect, you can't come into our private schools," Johnson said. □

inbrief

- More than 600,000 abortions are performed in **Argentina** each year, according to the head of the Intensive Care Unit of the Sardá Maternity clinic in Buenos Aires, José Luis Golubicki. Of every 100,000 women who have an abortion, between 350 and 400 die in the operating room. Most of these women are poor and do not have access to specialized obstetrician services.

- The deforestation of the Amazon in **Brazil** has increased 8 percent between June and September in comparison with the same period in 2006, according to a Special Rapporteur from the United Nations for the Right to Food, Jean Ziegler. One of the causes is the grand-scale expansion of soy and sugar cane plantations for the production of biofuels.

- Losses caused by Hurricane Noel in **Cuba** are estimated at US\$128 million. A total of 21,987 houses were damaged, as well as 13,169 kilometers (nearly 8,200 miles) of roadways. Railways, sewers and bridges also suffered serious damage, as did electrical and communication lines.

- Between January and September 22,000 acts of aggression against women were reported in **Peru**, according to the Ministry of Women and Social Development. One in every 10 adult women is the victim of sexual violence, while four of every 10 girls and adolescents are abused by family members.

- The Senate of **Uruguay** approved on Nov. 14 a law that recognizes and obliges the state to promote and guarantee the existence of communal radio and television media, giving them a third of the frequencies available on AM, FM radio and open television to have greater diversity in media ownership.

“Everyone needs to remember that most of the buildings on this island were built with Haitian hands.”

— Ronald Gardiner

TURKS & CAICOS

Charles Arthur in Nassau, the Bahamas

Cold indifference to loss of life

Deadly incidents plague Haitians' path to a better life.

Concern is growing about the treatment of Haitian migrants arriving in the Turks and Caicos Islands. This group of seven tiny islands, located off the southern end of the Bahamas chain and just 90 miles north of Haiti, is a British territory, with limited self-government.

Once an economically insignificant corner of the former British Empire, the Turks and Caicos Islands or TCI, as the territory is known, has developed dramatically over the last few years. The principal impetus to its fast-growing economy has been tourism, and the TCI is now a favorite holiday destination for the rich and famous from all over the world.

At the same time, the population has massively increased, up from 20,000 in 2001, to 35,000 in 2007. Approximately 12,000 inhabitants have “Belonger” status and enjoy rights as officially registered citizens, such as being able to vote in general elections. The rest, the “Non-Belongers”, are divided between several thousand wealthy ex-patriots, mainly from the United States, Canada and the UK, and approximately 20,000 immigrants, mainly from Haiti.

Over the last two decades, there has been a steady flow of Haitian immigrants, who travel by small wooden-hulled sail-boats, known as sloops. They come in search of economic opportunities unavailable at home. For the TCI, the Haitians have been a crucial source of cheap labor, an essential component of the territory's rapid economic rise. They have helped build, maintain and service the luxury hotels and private villas that line the islands' beach fronts.

As Ronald Gardiner, a Haitian-born businessman who is now registered as a “Belonger” and lives on the most heavily-populated island, Providenciales, remarked, “Everyone needs to remember that most of the buildings on this island were built with Haitian hands.”

But the rapidly swelling Haitian component of the ‘Non-Belonger’ population is alarming the TCI authorities. In recent years, the immigration rules have been changed in an effort to stop the Haitian community from establishing itself. Children of Haitian immigrants have been barred from attending schools, and deportations without the right of appeal have become increasingly frequent.

In May, a sloop carrying around 150 would-be immigrants from Haiti was intercepted by the TCI police just five minutes away from the coast of Providenciales. In disputed circumstances, the sloop capsized, throwing all those on board into the sea. Seventy-eight people were rescued. The rest drowned or were eaten alive by sharks.

Survivors described how the TCI police vessel forced the sloop to stop and attempted to tow it out to sea. The unstable vessel turned over almost immediately.

The tragedy outraged rights groups in Haiti. The Port-au-Prince-based Lawyers' Committee for the Respect of Human Rights called on the Haitian government to insist on an independent enquiry, suggesting that the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, and the International Red Cross, form a commission to investigate what happened.

An investigation was carried out, but not by an international or independent commission. The British government's Marine Accident Investigation Bureau dispatched a team to the TCI and in August it eventually issued a report. While attempting to exonerate the TCI authorities, the report was forced to conclude that a “stability analysis of the sloop indicates that with 125 passengers on deck, it would have negligible stability and the slightest of triggers would have caused capsizing. It would appear that the sloop capsized while under tow... The problem of Haitian sloops with poor stability carrying migrants was well-known in the region and among members of the TCI marine police unit. However, no instructions or operating procedures for mitigating the risk of capsizing when interdicting these vessels had been issued to the police launch crews.”

The TCI authorities had nothing to say about the tragic loss of life, other than statements repeating that “the boat was suspected of containing illegal migrants and, in line with standard practice, the police boat took the sloop in tow.”

The response indicated that the TCI authorities viewed the sloop tragedy as little more than an example of the possible dangers of attempting to enter the country illegally. This sense was reinforced in July when, instead of issuing new instructions to the police launch crews, the authorities passed legislation prohibiting all wooden-hulled vessels weighing less than 100 metric tons from coming into the TCI.

Just a few months later there was another deadly incident. In mid-September, the legislation was applied when two sloops from Haiti were intercepted, and all the 250 people on board were detained at the South Dock Detention Center in Providenciales. That night, three men died and five others became seriously ill, all suffering from suspected dehydration. The centre was only designed to accommodate about 80 people.

The official response again indicated a cold indifference to the loss of Haitian lives. Galmo Williams, minister of Home Affairs and Public Safety, told the *Turks and Caicos Weekly News*, “As long as Haiti has the problems they have, they will seek to leave the

country and come to the Turks and Caicos Islands. It's unfortunate that during the course of this week we have had to deal with several Haitian sloops. At the end of the day, regrettably there were some deaths that occurred. Haitian nationals are putting themselves at risk. They put our security personnel at risk, and impose a serious financial burden on the Turks and Caicos Islands." □

LATIN AMERICA

Latinamerica Press

Leaders discuss inequality

Two simultaneous summits address social cohesion and integration.

While Latin America enjoys its highest level of economic growth on record, it is still the world's most unequal region, where large sectors of the population lack basic health care, education, housing, water, sanitation and decent work.

In the closing remarks of the seventeenth Ibero-American Summit — held in Santiago Nov. 8-10 — Chilean President Michelle Bachelet stressed the importance of guaranteeing social rights, "which we will achieve through progressive development of social protection systems."

"For the first time we have been able to recognize ourselves and take on a focus on public policies that asserts that the state must guarantee its citizens' access to social rights," said the president.

The Declaration of Santiago, signed by all Ibero-American leaders, highlights the need to "ensure lasting economic growth that guarantees sustainable human development in order to implement policies and programs for that purpose" and aims for "progress toward increasing levels of inclusion, justice, protection, social assistance and solidarity."

Participants agreed to deal with asymmetry and injustice in international economic and commercial relations, in order to increase the international trade to improve employment levels and the social inclusion in the Ibero-American area.

They called for the eradication of all types of discrimination, to preserve cultural diversity, to foment interculturality and enrich Ibero-American cultural heritage. They declared 2008 "the Ibero-American year against all forms of discrimination."

An important and concrete step has been the subscription of the Multilateral Social Security Convention that will permit the development of "systems of integrated social protection with universal coverage," which will have public financing and will benefit "all peoples in the region without barriers or exclusions."

Also held in Santiago was the Summit for Friendship and Integration of Ibero-American Peoples — a meeting of social organizations to share visions and proposals and create solidarity networks.

More than 250 speakers participated in 60 thematic roundtables at the University of Arts and Social Sciences. Participants discussed integration, politics, socio-environmental conflicts, employment, economics, education, human rights, justice, gender discrimination, youth and indigenous populations. Some 10,000 people attended the event, with closing ceremony participation from presidents Evo Morales of Bolivia, Rafael Correa of Ecuador, Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua and Hugo Chávez of Venezuela as well as Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage.

The roundtable of Social and Environmental Justice agreed to demand "that the development model does not depend on the exploitation of communities, especially those most vulnerable who are dependent on the environment for their subsistence."

"We reaffirm our option of people's diplomacy and we will insist that governments make integration and the wellbeing of our communities the priority," signaled organizers in a public declaration at the event's conclusion. □

"We will insist that governments make integration and the wellbeing of our communities the priority."

— Summit for Friendship and Integration of Ibero-American Peoples



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