



Fernando Lugo (right) gives a press conference after winning the presidency.

PARAGUAY

Gustavo Torres in Asuncion

Leftist bishop wins presidency

Former bishop Fernando Lugo breaks Colorado Party's 61-year rule.

Opposition candidate Fernando Lugo made Paraguayan history on April 20. The former Catholic bishop handedly won the presidency, breaking 61 years of uninterrupted rule by the conservative Colorado Party, defeating ruling party candidate Blanca Ovelar and former Gen. Lino Oviedo.

Lugo represents the Patriotic Alliance for Change, a grouping of nine opposition parties, including his runningmate's party, the Authentic Radical Liberal Party (PLRA). Voters elected the black sheep of the ballot, since Oviedo was a former Colorado leader.

The Superior Electoral Court said Lugo won with close to 41 percent of the vote, topping Ovelar who won 30.7 percent. Oviedo trailed in third place with 22 percent. More than sixty-five percent of the population voted, one of the highest voter turnouts in Paraguayan history.

The head of the Organization of American States' electoral mission, former Colombian Foreign Minister María Emma Mejía, noted that voting was extremely peaceful.

But Lugo and his supporters had vehemently denounced a dirty, smear campaign against the former bishop by outgoing President Nicanor Duarte Frutos, with

the distribution of images in which Lugo appears supposedly as an ally of Colombian guerrillas. Claims also surfaced that Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez financially supported Lugo's campaign.

Lugo's backers celebrate

But once the results were released, thousands of people, mostly youths, party members and social movement members took to the streets, waving Paraguayan flags, giving the capital, Asuncion a carnival-like atmosphere.

"You are to blame for the joy that the Paraguayan people are experiencing today," Lugo told his supporters in his first press conference since the official results were announced. "Paraguay will not simply be remembered for corruption and poverty, but instead, for its honesty."

Amid chants of "Se siente, se siente, Lugo presidente," — "You feel it, you feel it, Lugo will be president," — the president elect addressed a rally of 80,000 in the capital who filled the city's plaza to celebrate the party's win.

"The victory belongs to the Paraguayan people who trusted in change and today have made that a reality. Today we have entered the history of the country and we want to renew our commitment with the people," said Lugo.

Lugo, who begins his five-year term on Aug. 15, has promised economic growth with social equality, sweeping land reform, an overhaul of the country's institutions. He says he will fight against corruption, ensure an independent judicial system and the country's energy sovereignty, and instate a national emergency plan to deal with urgent social problems.

Even if Lugo will inherit stable macroeconomic indicators, on the microeconomic side "the daily reality is different," says political analyst Víctor Barone. "The population is entrenched in the worst economic crisis. His first big challenge will be governing." Barone says that Lugo is inheriting an administration run completely by Colorado Party members, including officials and public sector employees.

Lugo's challenges

For Barone, the major challenge Lugo faces in his first year as president is to go after government corruption. His second year should focus on social projects. He must devote his third year to meet some electoral promises.

"The former bishop has created high expectations for change in the population," Barone said. "It's something that was expressed in the general election: winning in strongholds of the governing party."

For professor Nilda García, what is happening in the country and even within her own family is historic, where members have traditionally voted for the Colorado Party.

"Starting today, we no longer vote for the Colorado Party. Today we have to think with our heads and not with our hearts because we were thinking incorrectly. As a teacher I can say with certainty that education has become completely party-controlled," she said.

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"The opinion of the majority is that everyone is looking for change. That change is Fernando Lugo, who at least is the one who gives us the most hope. The others already have long records [of rejecting change]," she added.

But Lugo will have difficulties in Congress, where he lacks a majority and his center-left alliance will be represented by more conservative-leaning lawmakers. His main strength is the right-wing PLRA, his runningmate Federico Franco's party. *Colorado* party members will have a majority in both houses and are expected to form an alliance with members of pro-Oviedo parties.

EL SALVADOR

Raúl Gutiérrez in San Salvador

Solidarity Network program insufficient

Government subsidies fail to reduce poverty that plagues 35 percent of the population.

"Social work won't complement anything, but instead will be the base of everything," said President Antonio Saca when he began his term in June 2004, after announcing he would combat poverty head on. But economists and civil society representatives charge that this promise "is not reflected in the social public investment" and that the programs implemented will not get many out of poverty.

Specialists also estimate that the Solidarity Network program, a fundamental pillar in Saca's social strategy, "is not sustainable" since the funds are meager and depend greatly on international donations and loans.

Since October 2005, the Solidarity Network has given monthly subsidies between US\$15 and \$20 to qualifying families, according to the number of children they have, in exchange for sending their children to primary school and accompanying their youngest children to health centers, while introducing potable water services and electricity in these communities.

Cecilia Gallardo, commissioned by the executive branch for the Social Area, explained that unlike other programs, the Solidarity Network does not just distribute financial aid, but "seeks to break the vicious cycle of poverty, reducing shortages and providing opportunities."

In the program's first two phases, between October 2005 and February 2008, the government invested \$49 million between aid and basic infrastructure, benefiting 50,000 families in the 47 poorest municipalities (out of 100) in the country. For December 2009, a total of 100,000 homes in 100 municipalities are expected to benefit, costing \$200 million.

Mario Paniagua, director of the Intersectorial Association for Economic Development and Social Progress, said that while the Solidarity Network is positive, it's "completely insufficient," adding that the way to combat poverty "is not with subsidies," but with sustain-

Lugo is the first Catholic Church bishop to be elected president of a country. While he says he is no longer practicing, he will never lose his rank of bishop, according to the Paraguayan Episcopal Conference (CEP).

Nevertheless, it was not yet clear whether Pope Benedict XVI will recognize Lugo as president.

Mons. Ignacio Gogorza, president of the CEP, said that if the pope does accept him and Lugo wants to return to the Church in 2013, he will have to take a time of penance and reflection. If he does not accept, Lugo will be a suspended bishop for the rest of his life. □

able economic growth, the creation of jobs and allocation of resources to social areas.

"As long as no jobs are created, no program to combat poverty will be successful," warned Paniagua, who is also coordinator of the El Salvador chapter of the interna-

tional organization Social Watch. "These plans do not address the root of the problem."

Appeasing acts

The United Nations Development Program report, "Path to the fulfillment of the Millennium Development Goals in El Salvador," based on official statistics, indicates that in 2005 extreme and relative poverty affected 35 percent of the population, though data from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in 2004 revealed that of the 5.9 million Salvadorans, 40.4 percent of the households were poor and 15.6 percent were extremely poor.

Jeanette Alvarado, director of the Maquilishuat Foundation, dedicated to promoting extensive healthcare, believes that President Saca's promise has dwindled.

"What's said is not reflected in the amounts destined for social investment," Alvarado complained. "There is no state social policy to reduce poverty; there are appeasing acts."

According to ECLAC's Latin America Social Panorama 2007 report, of the 21 countries analyzed in the region, El Salvador has the lowest public social spending between 2004 and 2005, with just 5.6 percent of the gross domestic product.

Government data estimates a 6 percent unemployment rate, which is hard to believe for social activists who claim that between 300 and 500 Salvadorans emigrate every day, principally to the United States, in search for work opportunities and better salaries.

Official statistics indicate that the 2.9 million Salvadorans who live abroad sent \$3.6 billion in remittances in 2007, amounting to 18 percent of the gross domestic product.

Food costs on the rise

Carlos Acevedo, UNDP economist, acknowledged the Solidarity Network's effort to take families out of extreme poverty, but warned that an increase in the cost of a basic food basket will negatively impact the government program.

"This does not mean that the Solidarity Network is not effective," Acevedo clarified. "If

CHILE

Lake dries up. Lake Cachet 2, in Chilean Patagonia, lost 200 billion liters of water between April 6 and 7, almost completely drying up, and experts say global warming is to blame.

The Scientific Study Center in the southern city of Valdivia told the press that high temperatures during the austral summer caused the lake to receive to much more glacier runoff than normal. After the swell, the water then began to filter out in through a tunnel in the base of the Colonia glacier, which forms one of the lake's walls.

Scientists at the center said that the force and density of the water made the glacier break off and then create an enormous tunnel almost 8 kilometers (5 miles) long. The water then spilled out of the lake and into the nearby Baker River in the southern Aysen region. Experts first noticed it when the waters of the Baker River rose dramatically.

The lake is in the eastern side of the Northern Ice Field and is the second lake in a year to disappear in the region. In 2007, the Tempnos lake also dried up within a matter of days. —LP.

ARGENTINA

Legal women trafficking?

Women's rights groups that fought hard for a new law to crack down on trafficking in persons in Argentina are opposed to the legislation that was finally passed by Congress after years of debate because it requires victims over the age of 18 to prove that they did not give their consent to be sexually exploited.

The law was approved in the lower chamber of Congress on April 9 and has already passed in the Senate.

According to the No to Trafficking in Women Network, some 500 missing women in Argentina are presumed to have fallen prey to forced prostitution rings. In some cases they were kidnapped, but the majority were lured in by promises of well-paid jobs or other forms of deception.

The penal code now establishes prison sentences of three to six years for those convicted of participating in the entrapment, recruitment, transportation or reception of people for the purposes of sexual or labor exploitation or organ harvesting. If the victim is younger than 13, the maximum sentence climbs to 15 years.

But the new legislation also states that in the case of victims over the age of 18, the state or the victims themselves must prove that they were recruited by means of deception, fraud, violence, threat, intimidation, coercion or abuse of authority.

"This law is a setback, because it creates the idea that there is illegitimate trafficking that is penalized and legitimate trafficking in which the victims supposedly give their consent to be prostituted," said Marta Fontenla, a feminist lawyer with the Women's Association for Work and Studies. "But we believe that no one can consent to their own exploitation." —*IPS*.

the beneficiaries of the 47 municipalities," however, "leave their condition of extreme poverty, this would barely decrease the national rate by 1.2 percent."

International organizations such as the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and United Nations have recognized that the international increase in the price of food will cause a multiple-year setback in the fight against poverty and have forewarned that millions of people around the world will suffer from hunger.

The reason behind the increase in prices, according to specialists, is that land is increasingly dedicated to the production of grains for biofuels (*LP*, April 23, 2007) and that China and India have increased their demand for products.

BOLIVIA

Martin Garat in La Paz

Tension mounts with regional autonomy vote

Santa Cruz goes to the polls to pressure the central government.

The eastern department of Santa Cruz goes to the polls on May 4 to decide on its "autonomy statutes" in a regional referendum. Pro-autonomy sectors are proposing deep separations from the central government, in protest of the new constitution decentralization scheme, written by an assembly dominated by the ruling Movement to Socialism party, or MAS.

"The MAS opposed the autonomies from the beginning. So they don't have the right to impose their idea of decentralization. The MAS does not know Santa Cruz's productive system, which is the most successful in the country. Each department has the right to determine for itself what and how much it wants to decentralize, because it is the one that knows its own abilities," said Dep. Pablo Klinsky, from Santa Cruz, a member of the right-wing opposition Podemos party.

Last December, the "Pre-Autonomy Assembly," composed of Santa Cruz politicians and civic leaders wrote an autonomy proposal that calls for greater independence from the central government than La Paz wanted.

At the heart of the debate is land reform. The MAS wants to appropriate swathes of land held by large land owners of Santa Cruz and give them to small-scale farmers.

Klinsky defends Santa Cruz's agricultural model, as the most developed in the country.

"This like previous governments managed the land distribution with political criteria, and they've done it poorly," he said. "The officials in charge of the issue don't know anything

The Salvadoran Foundation for Economic and Social Development (FUSADES) informed at the beginning of April that the increase in prices would generate an "expansion of the number of poor and an intensification of the poverty that already exists."

The FUSADES report, using official data, shows that between January 2007 and January 2008, the cost of the basic food basket increased 8.8 percent in cities and a "shocking" 22.1 percent in rural areas, where the majority of households in extreme poverty are located.

Meanwhile, each member of the families benefited by the Solidarity Network will continue receiving \$0.10 daily, which isn't enough "to even alleviate the precarious situation these families live in," objected Paniagua. □

about agricultural production and they want to damage Santa Cruz's economy so we don't loom over the government."

Altiplano migrants

Luciano Menchaca is one of the many *altiplánicos* — residents of Bolivia's vast, impoverished highland plain — who emigrated to eastern Bolivia, seeking economy prosperity. Menchaca, who lives off of small-scale agriculture and is now a substitute deputy for the MAS, says that the Santa Cruz elite uses the autonomy issue to defend itself before the central government.

The draft autonomy statutes "does not belong to the people of Santa Cruz but the politicians and the large business owners. They want to protect their economic interests and their land. They never asked for autonomy when they governed the country. Now they're doing it because they can't stand that an indigenous person like Evo Morales is in the government palace," said Menchaca, an indigenous Quechua *campesino*.

He added, though, that he doesn't oppose the concept of administrative decentralization and that the problem is about "who" is going to manage regional power.

"It would be good to decentralize so that decisions are made closer to us and that we don't have to travel all the way to La Paz to make certain transactions. But we don't trust that the people will do it well. They are going to give themselves good salaries, and generous bonuses," he said.

Even though the referendum lacks constitutional backing and the approval of the National Electoral Court, Klinsky says that it is legitimate.

"The Constitution says that power ema-

ECUADOR

Military reshuffle. President Rafael Correa shuffled his military leadership on April 10 after he accused the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) from infiltrating the country's armed forces.

Correa replaced three armed forces commanders and the police chief, and named former Presidential Secretary Javier Ponce to head the Defense Ministry, replacing Wellington Sandoval. Correa claimed he was the "last to know" that an Ecuadorian citizen, Franklin Aisalla, who was killed in a Colombian military raid on a rebel camp in the Ecuadorian jungle, had ties to Colombia's largest guerrilla group.

Colombia's March 1 raid on the camp killed a top commander of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, and 24 others (*LP, March 19, 2008*).

Correa alleged that Ecuador's military intelligence officials were providing information directly to the CIA, which then in turn, shared the information with Colombia.

"If that Ecuadorian was involved with any illicit activity, he should have been tried under the country's laws, not by sending killer bombs to kill him on Ecuadorian soil," Correa said. "The issue here is not whether he was a guerrilla. He was an Ecuadorian killed on his homeland's soil by foreign forces and that is unacceptable." —*LP*.

nates from the people and their elected authorities," he said. The department's governor, an elected official, is one of the most adamant advocates for autonomy. "The results will be valid."

But the ruling party says that the vote is illegal.

"The plebiscite is unconstitutional. The results have no importance. Those who want autonomy scare the people so they go and vote. When they have strikes and hold rallies, they send youths, armed with clubs to force people to close their businesses and participate in the protests. The business owners and landholders send out their pawns," Menchaca said.

For political analyst Jimena Costa, the debate over whether the referendum is legal or not is useless now.

"The government uses two strategies to achieve its objectives. The first is the formal path, following the rules of democracy. But when that doesn't work anymore, the government acts in an authoritarian way. Since the government doesn't respect the rules of the game, the other players don't either, including the sectors that demand autonomy. What is important now is legitimacy, not legality," he said.

Opposing processes

Costa, looking at the issue historically,

GUATEMALA

Louisa Reynolds in Guatemala City

Congress approves law against femicide

In "killers' paradise," a legal framework is passed to fight women killings.

On April 5, 16-year-old Carmen del Rosario Aguirre and her friend Yesenia Adaly Pérez Arévalo, 17, went to the local market of La Parroquia. Both girls came from the village of Rincón de la Peña, in the municipality of Palencia, about 30 kilometers (19 miles) from Guatemala City.

Six hours later the two girls had failed to return home and their families began to worry. "We hadn't heard any news from them so we began to call them. Carmen didn't pick up the phone until 5:30 p.m. I was scared when I heard her voice because she said that she didn't know what had happened and that they were with two men," says Yesenia Adaly's sister, Evelyn.

Fearing the worst, the two girls' families and neighbors began a frantic search, combing streets and nearby woodlands. The following day, the bodies of the two teenagers were found in a ditch in the nearby village of Canalitos. Carmen and Yesenia Adaly had

says there are two processes that cross here.

"On one hand is indigenous inclusion. It's a process dating back before the MAS, but it has become an important part of its discourse. On the other hand is administrative decentralization, which the government opposes because it doesn't want to give up power. The challenge is how to make sure both processes meet," she said.

Faced with a possible approval of the autonomy statutes in Santa Cruz, the MAS scheduled the national referendum for the new charter for the same day, May 4. The text was approved late last year (*LP, Dec. 12, 2007*). But because of the rampant inflation and the political crisis, the vote has been postponed.

Costa says that both the draft constitution and autonomy statutes need to be renegotiated and revised.

"Both documents are inviable. The MAS' constitution tries to impose an indigenous and Andean vision in the country. The Santa Cruz statute transfers issues of national interest, such as land, to regional government. I don't believe that the statute has been written to be applied. The idea is to obtain a strong popular backing at the voting stations to later negotiate decentralization with the government again," she said. □

been raped and shot in the face. The police believe they were abducted, drugged, raped and murdered after they refused to have sex with the two men.

Common scenario

Stories like these have become commonplace in Guatemala, dubbed "a killer's paradise" where 590 women were murdered in 2007 alone. The same weekend that Carmen and Yesenia Adaly were abducted and killed, five women were murdered in different parts of the country and so far this year 113 women have been brutally slain.

While the family members of Carmen and Yesenia Adaly mourned the teenagers' deaths, around 200 people bearing banners that read "So what are *you* doing to stop the violence?" held a demonstration outside Guatemala City's cathedral urging Congress to approve the Law Against Femicide and Other Forms of Violence Against Women."

On April 9, amid intense lobbying from women's groups and human rights organizations, Congress finally approved the law. The new law establishes 25-50 year prison sentences for gender-based crimes, three- to 10-year sentences for physical and psychological abuse and two- to eight-year sentences for "economic violence", which includes denying women the right to work or denying them access to property.

The law was approved by 112 out of 158 members of Congress amid jubilant cries from demonstrators who had assembled



ANDREA CARRILLO, LA CUERDA

Activists are satisfied with new law, so that there is "not one more minute of violence against women."

"We now have a legal framework that we can use to defend our rights. The new law is a starting point for our struggle."

— Fabiola Ortiz

outside Parliament bearing banners and white cardboard coffins as a sign of mourning for the hundreds of women who have been brutally killed in Guatemala.

After the law was approved, Congressman Pedro Palma Lau, a former guerrilla combatant and member of the ruling National Unity of Hope party (UNE), said: "The law pays homage to all the Guatemalan women who have been martyrs and victims of violence."

Women's rights activists have welcomed the approval of the law. According to Lorena Robles, of Sector de Mujeres, an umbrella organization that brings together more than 20 different women's groups that campaign for a wide range of issues including femicide, domestic violence, access to contraception and discrimination in the workplace, the law was approved in a rare show of unity among Guatemala's 19 congresswomen, who set aside ideological differences to campaign for a law that will benefit all Guatemalan women regardless of their economic or ethnic background.

Overall, women's rights activists are satisfied with the new law and regard it as an important step towards eradicating gender discrimination, misogyny and violence against women. "We now have a legal framework that we can use to defend our rights. The new law is a starting point for our struggle," says Fabiola Ortiz, of the National Coordinator for the Prevention of Domestic and Gender Based Violence, or CONAPREVI, an organization that brings together various government agencies and civil society groups working to eradicate violence against women.

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Shelters needed

Ortiz points out that as well as establishing penalties for those who violate women's rights, the law also includes the creation of shelters for women suffering from domestic violence. So far, CONAPREVI has set up three shelters in the departments of Coban, Rabinal and Suchitepequez. The new law states that the government must invest in setting up new shelters and refurbishing existing

shelters that have been forced to close down due to a lack of resources. Although a yearly amount was not established the law stipulates that the government must invest an initial US\$1 million to get the project up and running.

Activists agree that it will take many years for such deeply entrenched attitudes to change.

Last year, former Interior Minister Adela de Torrebiarte, granted CONAPREVI Q8 million (\$1,058,000) to finance the shelters program. Sonia Escobedo, of the Presidential Secretariat for Women's Issues (SEPREM), says that with this budget, CONAPREVI aims to open shelters in six of the country's 22 departments during the course of the year: Guatemala, Escuintla, Alta Verapaz, Baja Verapaz, Suchitepequez and Quetzaltenango.

However, there is a demand for these services in other departments such as Huehuetenango, Chiquimula, Jutiapa and Peten, that will have to wait for CONAPREVI to receive its next budget allocation in 2009. In the long-term, says Escobedo, the aim is to have a shelter in every municipality in order to make these services available to all women, including those who live in remote rural areas.

This year, in response to intense lobbying from women's rights organizations, the government increased CONAPREVI's budget from Q1.5 million (US\$198,000) to Q12 million (US\$1.5 million). The new law states that the government must provide CONAPREVI with adequate funding to meet the basic needs of Guatemalan women, although it does not establish a fixed percentage.

For women's organizations this has been an important victory, as the law not only imposes heavy sanctions for violence against women but offers an integral approach to the problem and acknowledges the importance of prevention and programs designed to help women who suffer domestic abuse.

Studies on femicide and violence against women in Guatemala have pointed to a number of root causes including the country's 36-year-long civil war during which the rape and torture of indigenous women was routinely practiced and encouraged by the armed forces and gang violence, as women are often killed during turf wars between rival gangs.

Feminist intellectuals stress, however, that these are symptoms of an underlying cause: the prevalence of sexism and patriarchal traits in Guatemalan society. A recent investigation by feminist researchers Alba Estela Maldonado Guevara, Myra Iliana Muralles Batista and Violeta Delgado Lacayo, titled "Femicide in Guatemala. Crimes Against Humanity" emphasizes this point.

"The ideological superstructure of patriarchy has used social institutions to perpetuate the subordination of women within the family nucleus and society at large. Within this patriarchal structure, women are considered men's property, be it a father, husband, brother or even a son. Thus, women's life is determined by the decisions of others who can impose their will on women as they see fit, even through violence, which is seen as socially acceptable". □

MEXICO

Two journalists killed. Teresa Bautista Merino and Felicitas Martínez Sánchez, radio journalists from the La Voz Que Rompe El Silencio — "The Voice That Breaks the Silence" — community radio station in the southern state of Oaxaca, were killed in an ambush on April 7.

Mexican authorities suspect that powerful drug-trafficking gangs that operate in the state and have journalists and officials as targets, were to blame.

Bautista Merino, 24, and Martínez Sánchez, 21, were posthumously awarded the 2007 National Journalism Prize for community service, a prize awarded by the Citizen's Council, an umbrella group of educational institutions and civil associations.

"Killing journalists is a heinous crime which harms the whole of society as it undermines the democratic right of citizens to hold informed debate and make informed political choices," said Koïchiro Matsuura, director of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO, in condemning these two killings. —LP.



ORLANDO RANGEL

Colombia could lose all of its natural forests by 2100 because of deforestation.

COLOMBIA

Susan Abad in Bogota

Rampant deforesting curbed

Thanks to the Constitutional Court, native forests are safe... for now.

"The greatest deforester is not coca, but rather the very government that legalizes deforestation, naming illegal settlers owners of the land."

— Orlando Rangel

The potential liberation of kidnapped persons by Colombia guerrillas at the beginning of the year (*LP*, Feb. 6, 2008) caused news on the Constitutional Court to pass unnoticed when a law that put native forests at risk was declared unconstitutional.

On Jan. 23, the Constitutional Court declared the Forest Law of 2006 unconstitutional for "having omitted in its expedition the requisite of consulting indigenous and tribal communities, as stated in Article 6 of Convention 169 in the International Labor Organization (ILO).

Indeed, this 53-article law was not discussed with the indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities who are collectively owners of between 43 and 53 million hectares (106 and 131 million acres) that comprise the greater part of the 65 million hectares (161 million acres) Colombia is estimated to have in natural forests, but for experts this political decision really saved Colombia's native forests.

Attorney General Edgardo Maya had already warned about the serious consequences that the Forest Law would bring to the Colombian ecosystem because "it revokes norms established in 1959 on the creation of national parks that protect water-producing glaciers and hydrographic basins in [Colombia], considered one of the greatest water potentials in the world."

Motive: Timber exploitation

In turn, Senator Jorge Enrique Robledo, of the Independent Democratic Pole party, hit the nail on the head when he stressed that the principal purpose of the law was to exploit timber: "The project does not intend to do anything besides handing over management of forest reserves and natural forests to multinational loggers, introducing elements today

outside of relevant legislation, such as the concession and association to manage forest areas, which it puts in reach of the multinational companies' financial interests," Robledo said before Congress.

But the law's inability to be enforced not only saved the native forests, but also managed to put the tremendous crisis — which forests have been suffering for decades — back on the table.

"The greatest deforester is not coca, but rather the very government that legalizes deforestation, naming illegal settlers owners of the land," claimed Professor Orlando Rangel of the Natural Sciences Institute in the National University of Colombia.

"The country's deforestation rate, according to government statistics, for illicit cultivation is approximately 3,000 hectares (7,410 acres) annually. The other cause of deforestation is the yearly introduction of 320,000 hectares (790,400 acres) of new land to agriculture and the annual use of 257,000 hectares (617,500 acres) of native forest for wood. This means 580,000 hectares (1,432,600 acres) are deforested each year," Rangel claims, according to his own calculations.

"The most serious issue," he adds, "is that Colombia does not have a natural vegetation map and we are always talking based on what we suppose exists. We urgently need a cartographic map."

In addition, guerrillas, drug-traffickers and most of all, Colombian paramilitary have developed an "agrarian counter-reform" and have usurped some 4 million hectares (9.9 million acres) of land. According to the United Nations, a million hectares (2.5 million acres) of these stolen lands belong to indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, which triggers fears that a law not taking this phenomenon into consideration could legalize lands that were obtained illegally.

Another issue that must be considered is the government's fervent desire to turn Colombia into a biofuel producer, as reflected in President Álvaro Uribe's "dream" to cover 6 million hectares (14.8 million acres) with African palm.

Uribe has said on other occasions that Colombia's cold lands "can cause the agricultural front to grow enormously and there is land for everything. There is land to increase food production and land to produce biofuels."

Another law

The day after the court's decision was made known, Agricultural Minister Andrés Felipe Arias presented to Congress a new project called the Commercial Reforestation Law, which specifies in its first article that natural forests, lands included in indigenous reserves and the Afro-Colombians' collective territories are not to be included.

Diego Lozano, director of the ministry's Forest Fund, explained that the new law only refers to reforestation forests and leaves natural forests in the hands of the Environmental, Housing and Territorial Development Ministry.

Lozano assured that the creation of reforestable forests will be done on lands devoted now to livestock.

Lozano also said that there are already three large groups of investors waiting. "The first ones are the pension funds that last year we developed a program for, representing 10 percent of forest plantations. The second group is comprised of foreign investors in Brazil, Chile, the United States, and thirdly, private investors."

"We have a state program called 2019 that

aspires to have by that year 1.4 million hectares (3.5 million acres) reforested, of which 1 million (2.5 million acres) would aimed at being self-sufficient in internal consumption and 400,000 (988,000 acres) to be exported," he said.

The optimistic projection contrasts with Rangel's, who assures that if urgent measures are not taken, Colombia will lost all of its natural forests by the year 2100. □

CUBA

Lucila Horta in Havana

Winds of change

Government seeks to revitalize production sectors and move stagnant money.

Remigio Galarraga is a *campesino* farmer in the Pinar del Rio province. He cultivates 13 hectares (32 acres) and says he used to face hurdles to expanding as a producer, due to state restrictions in marketing produce. But now he sells directly to the state and on the open market.

A month after President Raúl Castro took office on Feb. 24 (*LP, March 5, 2008*), the government officially announced that municipal farming delegations will no longer be merely bearers of complaints and will become an active player in decision making and resource assignment.

Vice Minister of Agriculture Alcides López said in March that these delegations will have more decentralized power, including the distribution of land, credits and seeds without approval from higher governmental authorities.

Castro insisted that food production is a national security issue.

Another change is the opening in four provinces of farming tool stores, which now sell items previously distributed only by the government.

In mid-2007 the government increased the price of milk from 1 to 2.50 pesos, and on January added 0.2 convertible pesos — the national currency that replaced the US dollar in 1994, equivalent to 24 regular pesos — to allow producers to purchase supplies. The prices of coconut, cacao, tobacco, coffee and potatoes increased and similar hikes are expected for other foods, and the state will give funds to revamp or buy new machinery for the farming industry.

"It's worth it with these prices," says Aracelio Gámez, in his farm in Guira de Melena, in the province of Havana, where he grows mostly potatoes. "I'm thinking about asking for more land," he said, adding that if he earns more he could pay for employees to work a larger area of land. Now, only members of his family farmed the land.

Working toward food security

The state-run farming industry did have

eras of abundances until the 1990s financial crisis, when unowned plots of land were given to 350,000 people, who along with 225,000 private land-owners, either independent or organized into cooperatives, who had received land since the 1959 land reform, now hold 35 percent of Cuba's arable land and produce 60 percent of the island's food (*LP, March 7, 2007*).

In order to broaden this initiative, rapid changes were needed. Lugo Fonte, president of the National Small-Scale Farmers' Association, or ANAP, said that a future law will outline the "massive distribution" of idle land — half of Cuba's farmland is idle or underutilized. He also referred to a Land Control Center, a government agency that would regulate the new measures.

Raúl Chirino, an ANAP official, says that these actions are seeking for the country to become self-sufficient because international food prices leave it with no other choice. Eighty percent of the country's food is imported, most of which is sold to the population after being subsidized by the state. Cuba imports some US\$1.5 billion a year in food from the United States, France, China, Brazil and other countries. But Cuban officials say that amount will increase an additional \$300 million this year because of higher prices.

Hotels and appliances

Cubans can now stay at hotels that since the mid-1990s were reserved only for tourists, with the exception of newlyweds, who could pay for rooms in the national currency. The least expensive rooms cost around 50 convertible pesos per night, and even so there has been a flood of reservations at five-star hotels. Hotel managers say that there are thousands of reservations already for summer as vacationing Cubans enjoy a service they have not enjoyed for at least a decade.

Also, housewares have gone back on sale after they had been taken off the market because they consumed too much electricity. In shops that sold in foreign currency there always was a high demand for both cheap and luxury refrigerators and ovens, furniture and other household items. But now items such as microwaves, freezers and motorcycles have piqued an immediate interest in a sector that can afford them.

Consumers now form long lines to purchase cellular telephones. To open a line costs 110 convertible pesos without paying for the equipment. Before, Cubans subcontracted phones from foreigners or they were given them from their jobs.

"I'm thinking about asking for more land".

— Aracelio Gámez

The new changes will not benefit the entire population equally, but rather they highlight the differences in class that have been developing since the use of the dollar was authorized in 1994 and the convertible peso began to be used as a part of salaries in some sectors: tourism, telecommunications, the

nickel industry and mixed companies.

According to Omar Everleny, deputy director of the Center for Economic Studies at La Havana University, there are some 200 million convertible Cuban pesos circulating in the country, and 21 billion pesos, besides the foreign currency sent by Cubans living abroad. □

BOLIVIA/BRAZIL

Andrés Megó in Lima

Madeira River dams

Hydroelectric projects in Brazilian Amazon spark concern over cross-border environmental impacts.

“The consequences of the dams in the Madeira River will add to the process that has been destroying the Amazon for decades,” said Bolivian public health specialist Pablo Villegas, researcher in the Bolivian Forum on Environment and Development (FOBOMADE, for its initials in Spanish).

However, according to environmentalists’ predictions, the impact made by the Madeira River Hydroelectric Complex will be the greatest ever caused by an infrastructure project — giving all the more reason for alarm.

Madeira is the one of the most plentiful rivers in the Amazon basin, second only to the Amazon River, of which is a tributary. It starts where the Beni and Mamore Rivers unite in Bolivia and flows toward the north, following the border between Bolivia and Brazil, entering Brazilian territory through the Rondônia and Amazonas states. The river transports half of the basin’s sediments and drains into one of the regions with greatest physical and biological diversity in the world, shared by three countries: Bolivia, Brazil and Peru.

The dam project forms part of the Initiative for the Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South America (IIRSA) (*LP, April 16, 2008*) and is located in Brazil in the city of Porto Vel-

ho and surrounding areas, close to the border with Bolivia.

The project’s original design includes two large dams in the Madeira River in Brazilian territory, another in shared waters and a fourth in Bolivian territory, in the Beni River. However, Brazilian companies failed in their attempt to obtain permission from the Bolivian government to carry out studies in Bolivian territory. An intense debate sparked, based on the impact the dams will have beyond the Brazilian border and into Bolivia, which kindled tension between the two countries. Brazil opted to continue with the project on its own territory.

The contract for the construction of the San Antonio dam has already been given to the consortium headed by state company Furnas and construction giant Odebrecht. The works are set to begin this year. Meanwhile, bidding for the other Brazilian dam, Jirau, will begin in May.

In addition to harnessing hydroelectric power, the dams will also attempt to make the Madeira River navigable, allowing for the logistic inter-connection of the Madre de Dios (Peru), Pando (Bolivia) and Rondônia (Brazil) regions.

Patricia Molina, national coordinator of FOBOMADE, said in her study “The Madera River Complex within the framework of Bolivia’s energy policies” that “the navigation component would be carried out through building locks, which will allow the navigation of more than 4,000 kilometers [2,500 miles] of river waterways above the dams in order to transport goods from Brazil to the ports of Peru.”

“Precaution principle”

According to a letter in 2007 addressed to the Brazilian authorities by environmental organizations from all over the world, based on official and independent studies, “there is a large possibility that Bolivia could suffer floods

PERU

Journalists’ killers convicted. Juan Hurtado Vásquez was sentenced to 27 years in prison on April 17 after he was found guilty of being the intellectual author of the March 2007 killing of radio journalist Miguel Pérez Julca, in the northwestern city of Jaen. The judge also ordered him to pay damages of close to US\$13,000 to Pérez Julca’s family.

Nazario Coronel Ramírez, known as “Chamaya,” received a 19-year sentence for driving the motorbike from which Pérez Julca was shot. Sabino Sánchez Ayala, the alleged gunman, is still at-large.

The international Committee to Protect Journalists cheered the decision as “a step forward in the fight against impunity in the murder of journalists throughout the Americas.”

Pérez Julca ran the program “El Informativo del Pueblo” on station Radio Éxitos and had denounced corruption allegations involving local authorities, including Hurtado’s girlfriend, Loyola Sampértégui Campos, director of the Center for the Promotion of Children’s, Adolescents’ and Women’s Rights, an institution he questioned for reportedly using donations from the German government to finance Jaen’s current mayor’s electoral campaign. —*LP*.

“No agreement is necessary with Bolivia [...] since the two dams are on Brazilian territory.”

— Silas Rondeau

in the Pando province; loss of freshwater fauna and serious impacts on fish populations above the Madeira, as well as the proliferation of malaria outbreaks.”

In light of these dangerous threats, the Bolivian authorities have urged for Brazil to apply the “precaution principle,” backed by various treaties signed by both countries to ensure that there will be no cross-border impacts. But Brazil hasn’t slowed down.

In January 2007, Silas Rondeau, former Mines and Energy Minister in Brazil, told press that “no agreement is necessary with Bolivia [...] since the two dams are on Brazilian territory.”

On the other hand, as Villegas describes in one of his articles, “the dams will imply geopolitical problems. Ninety five percent of Bolivian waters drain through the Madeira. The dams will put these waters under Brazilian control, which hints at an unsettling geopolitical perspective.”

President Evo Morales’ government has not been flexible in negotiations with Brazil in authorizing studies for dams in Bolivian territory. Despite offers from Brazilian president, Luis Inácio Lula da Silva — including access to Atlantic ports and soft credit for agriculture — in February 2007 Morales applied a decree approved by president of the interim government Eduardo Rodríguez Veltzé in October 2005 which suspends the distribution of licenses for hydroelectric works in the Madeira River while there are no reliable studies.

“The Brazilian State has an urgent need for Bolivia to advance in the implementation of hydroelectric works, due to the cross-border impacts that will force them to establish

a bilateral agreement for managing them,” Molina affirmed in her study “The project of hydroelectric exploitation and navigability of the Madeira River in the IIRSA framework and globalization context.”

Need for energy

The construction of hydroelectric dams responds to common interests between Lula’s government and private Brazilian companies. For the state, it means satisfying the urgent need for electric energy in its industrial cities, facilitating the exportation of its soy production to Pacific ports through waterways in the Madeira and reinforcing its geopolitical influence in South America. For companies, dam construction constitutes a business valued at more than US\$8 billion, in addition to control over the distribution of 6,400 MW that the Jirau and San Antonio dams would generate.

However, the process of granting environmental licenses has been characterized by its rush and has been a target of strong criticism in Brazil. In March 2007, experts from the Brazilian Institute of Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (IBAMA) refused to grant the preliminary license to the project, pointing at faults in the Environmental Impact Study produced by Furnas/Odebrecht, the same companies who will build the dams.

IBAMA determined the need for other studies that include, among other aspects, the cross-border impacts. However, the IBAMA board of directors was replaced in April 2007 and its new members, basing their argument in additional studies, conceded the license three months later. □

ARGENTINA

Interview with Ramiro Ortega, son of Triple A victim

“One part of the state had become a parapolice apparatus”

Ramiro Ortega Gómez was 8 years old when his father was gunned down on Av. 9 de Julio, in central Buenos Aires. July 31, 1974, the day national Dep. Rodolfo Ortega Peña, a lawyer who defended political prisoners, was killed, is remembered as the day that the Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance, or Triple A, a notorious parapolice organization, first showed its face. It was formed during the second government of Juan Domingo Perón (1946-55 and 1973-74) and that of his widow President María Estela Martínez de Perón (1974-76) to root out allegedly leftist subversives from the country.

The group developed the repressive measures used later by the military dictatorship that began on March 24, 1976 with the overthrow of Martínez de Perón (LP, April 4, 2007).

Thirty-four years passed since Ortega Peña’s family was able to see the extradition from

Spain on March 19 of former police officer Rodolfo Almirón, one of those accused of directly participating in the crime. Almirón was close aide of the Triple A top leader José López Rega and bodyguard of Martínez de Perón.

LATINAMERICA PRESS correspondent **Pablo Waisberg** spoke with Ortega, the current Argentina’s Human Rights Secretary about the Triple A’s crimes and the role of justice.

What does it mean that the Triple A’s crimes, which were committed during a constitutional government, have been declared “crimes against humanity” by the Argentine judiciary?

From a legal point of view, it’s important because it opens a chapter that has been closed for quite a time, which is to continue trying those directly responsible for the structure of the Triple A. It’s also important from an

statistics spotlight

LATIN AMERICA

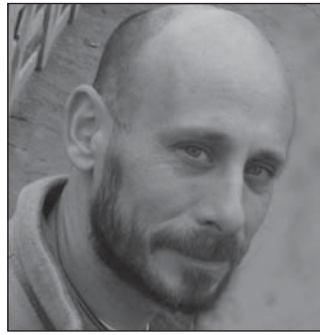
The ghost of inflation. The Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) called rising inflation across Latin America “worrying” at its annual meeting.

In Bolivia, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Venezuela, the consumer price index passed the double digits last year, and in Colombia and Uruguay “internal demand pressure has driven inflation rates close to or above the targets established by the central banks,” said the IADB’s annual report presented to the annual assembly April 4-8 in Miami, adding that “in many other countries, the price of food is rising at an alarming rate.” —LP.

LATIN AMERICA 2007 Inflation rates

Country	%
Venezuela	22.5
Nicaragua	16.9
Bolivia	11.7
Costa Rica	10.8
Honduras	8.9
Guatemala	8.7
Argentina	8.5
Uruguay	8.5
Chile	7.8
Paraguay	6.0
Colombia	5.7
Brazil	4.5
El Salvador	4.2
Peru	3.9
Mexico	3.8
Ecuador	3.3

Source: Inter Press Service with official figures.



Ramiro Ortega Gómez

“There are a lot of people who haven’t spoken and now they’re starting to talk.”

ideological point of view that they be declared crimes against humanity because it contributes to the idea that the government proposes as “memory, truth and justice.” I understand that this has been proposed in the sense that there is no divorce between the state and society, and what that does is interpret what a large part of society demands: that without justice it is impossible to deep Argentina’s democratic process.

It has the same legal status as the crimes committed during the last dictatorship (1976-83). What does that mean?

What we were able to demonstrate in the case we are bringing forward is that there was a part of the state that became a parapolice apparatus. It was not the entire state. It wasn’t state terrorism during the last democratic government [which began with Perón and continued after his death in July 1974 by Martínez de Perón]. There was a parapolice and paramilitary structure, with an arm in the unions that operated under the wing of [then Social Welfare Minister José] López Rega and that was financed by the Social Welfare Ministry. This is demonstrated in the Ortega Peña case — part of the big Triple A trial — and we understand that was Judge Norberto Oyarbide based on to call these ones as crimes against humanity.

structure of the [Justicialista Party] has nothing to do with showing that these men are killers, that they were death commandos with more than 2,000 murders in two and a half years [between 1974 and 1976]. So we have to be able to separate the legal trial, which involves the imprisonment of murderers and part of the beginning of genocide in Argentina, with a historic debate of Peronism and the policies that were implemented during the last government before the dictatorship.

Is Almirón the only one responsible for the murder of Ortega Peña?

No, there are others. To try Almirón and participate in the trial will allow us to see the contributions done by testimonies that allowed for the process to the Triple A’s structure to move forward. There are a lot of people who haven’t spoken and now they’re starting to talk. In any case, there is no need to create great expectations yet. The Triple A’s structure was always more difficult [to investigate] than the structure of state terrorism [during the dictatorship] when there were people in command and levels of responsibility. Active police officers, inactive police officers, union members and soldiers participated in the Triple A, and they weren’t part of a structure officially. □

inbrief

- According to Health Ministry statistics, every 10 hours in **Brazil**, a child between the ages of four and 14 is killed. In 2007, 662 children were killed from violence, the ministry said.

- US citizen Lestat Claudio de Orleans, sentenced to 30 years in prison without parole for the deadly bombings of two hotels in La Paz, **Bolivia** in 2006, committed suicide in his prison cell.

- Cases of discrimination against sexual minorities in **Chile** increased 16 percent last year, according to the Homosexual Integration and Liberation Movement, a non-governmental organization. There were 57 reports of discrimination against sexual minorities in 2007 and four people were killed because of their sexual orientation that year.

- The number of bribes paid in **Mexico** for the use of public services reached 197 million cases last year, totaling US\$2.5 billion, accord-

What are the repercussions of this on Peronism as a movement and within the ruling Justicialist Party in terms of party structure?

I understand that it generates conflict and a still painful discussion that had not been closed because the last stage of Perón and the armed organizations has not been debated deeply yet. Undoubtedly, this leads one to understand that the political debate within Peronism, outside of Peronism and within the

structure of the [Justicialista Party] has nothing to do with showing that these men are killers, that they were death commandos with more than 2,000 murders in two and a half years [between 1974 and 1976]. So we have to be able to separate the legal trial, which involves the imprisonment of murderers and part of the beginning of genocide in Argentina, with a historic debate of Peronism and the policies that were implemented during the last government before the dictatorship.

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ing to the organization Transparencia Mexicana.

- The Supreme Court of **Peru** on April 15 upheld a ruling sentencing former President Alberto Fujimori (1990-2000) to six years in prison for the illegal search of the apartment of Trinidad Becerra, the wife of his former intelligence adviser, Vladimiro Montesinos. Fujimori was charged with ordering his assistant to act as a state prosecutor to confiscate suitcases and videos belonging to Montesinos.

Overdue crime legislation

As fear of rising crime takes hold, lawmakers grapple with what laws can stop it.

A fear of crime runs high among the Costa Rican population. High crime has led to a generalized sense of insecurity, mainly in the capital and surrounding areas where more than half the approximate 4.3 million in this Central American nation, once known for its peacefulness and safety, live.

On March 25, the local daily *La Nación* published poll results showing 20 percent of those interviewed saying that "crime and violence" are the country's main problems. This revealed a surge from the 11 percent who felt this way in August of last year.

According to government figures, between 1990 and 2006, the murder and assault rate per 100,000 thousand people rose from 135 to 295 cases. Thefts soared around 700 percent in the period, while drug related crime went up about 280 percent, physical assault doubled, and homicides grew by around half.

Cell phone theft is one of the most common crimes in Costa Rica. The state-run Costa Rican Electricity Institute, which runs the telecommunications monopoly, recently reported that during the 2005-2007 period some 402,500 units were stolen, and violence used by robbers claimed 20 lives. In view of the problem, Vice President and Justice Minister Laura Chinchilla submitted on March 11 an Integral Citizen Safety Bill to the Special Committee on Security that was recently established by the Legislative Assembly.

The bill combines essential contents of more than 40 other bills covering this field which have been shelved in some cases for as long as four years in Congress.

"If we talk about organized crime, this bill is deeply repressive", warned Chinchilla, a former security minister and congresswoman.

It is so "in the sense that it effectively provides judicial and police authorities more efficient, faster instruments to do their job," and "we're keeping prevention in the fields we need to," she explained.

The 123-page initiative covers topics such as victim and witness rights and protection, organized crime, firearm violence prevention, strengthening of city and neighborhood security, immigration regulations to improve citizen safety.

The bill covers fields such as organized crime, victim and witness protection, weapons control. It also aims at having judges working night shifts in order to immediately deal with situations such as robbery on the street, which is not the case now. Another ele-

ment changes present legislation, which considers robbery involving items below 250,000 colones (some US\$510) not a crime but an offense. In this case the idea is to raise the limit to a figure which is one of the elements to be debated.

Chinchilla hopes the bill is passed this year, hopefully within the next three to six months.

The day after the bill was submitted to Congress, Presidential Minister Rodrigo Arias said the outlook was "a war to the death."

Reviving old ideas

Meanwhile, lawyer and former Security Minister (1994-1996) Juan Diego Castro is promoting a bill aimed at strengthening the struggle for citizen safety which was submitted to Congress more than a year ago but was shelved.

Castro is presently trying to call for a referendum on this bill which seeks "to allow us to jail those who rob and who murder our children, to allow us to jail and punish those who carry weapons with no permit in their cars."

"Politicians can't demand more dead from civil society," he emphasized.

From her point of view, Roxana Rojas, mother of a teenager recently slain during the theft of his cell phone, has stated that "if I had to choose between a teacher and a military to run the Security Ministry I would choose the latter."

Rojas thus referred to the presidential appointment of Janina del Vecchio, a Maths teacher, a former Ambassador and a former Congresswoman to head of the ministry.

Meanwhile, the Costa Rican newspaper *La República* feels efforts to combat the crime hitting Costa Rica must include repression, until now missing, as well as prevention, and called for action in both directions.

According to the daily, "work must urgently be started to carry out what is needed, which must cover the repression that is missing so criminals stop roaming our streets," and "all else that is deemed necessary to stop the crime wave."

It is also necessary "to urgently develop a wide and intensive action plan aimed at prevention" as well as "to use all the energy and the resources in the task of really restoring peace in Costa Rica," it stated.

Differentiating between crimes

However, Costa Rican political scientist Jorge Vargas, the citizen safety crisis is "a complex problem and with many ides to it," since "one thing is drug trafficking, another thing is common crime, domestic violence or violence in highways."

"So it's wrong to think the issue is reduced to a clash between 'crime and honest citizens,'" and "a cool head must be kept in order to act," because citizen safety is much too important for us to go wrong."

Vargas believes that along with tough measures "we should open a national dialogue on the issue, with political parties, authorities, organizations, citizens, and experts in order to lay the foundations for a State policy aimed at long-term citizen safety." □

"We should open a national dialogue on the issue, with political parties, authorities, organizations, citizens, and experts."

— Jorge Vargas

PERU

Joining Hands Peru

Peruvian smelter loses environmental certification

Religious community calls for compliance.

One of the largest metal smelters in the hemisphere, owned by US company Doe Run Peru and located in central city La Oroya, lost its environmental certification in a highly unusual move taken on March 11 by the company's third-party auditors, TUV Rheinland — the same German auditor that approved the smelter two years ago.

According to OK International, Earthjustice and the Inter-American Association for Environmental Defense (AIDA) — non-profit groups that work to protect public health from industrial pollutants and to provide legal aid in environmental cases, often dealing with the extraction of natural resources — TUV Rheinland cited non-compliance with Peruvian environmental laws and the lack of adequate pollution controls as its rationale for revoking certification.

When Doe Run Peru obtained environmental certification in 2006 by TUV Rheinland, it called the document an "internationally recognized symbol of a company's dedication to superior quality, customer satisfaction and continuous improvement" on its website.

However, last year Doe Run paid more than US\$230,000 in fines for infractions on environmental laws.

A number of studies conducted by the government, as well as international health experts, have shown that almost all of the children living in the area surrounding Doe Run's smelter have high levels of lead in their bodies.

In fact, an investigation carried out by the Health Ministry in 2004 found that 99.9 percent of 788 children younger than 6 years in La Oroya Antigua, the urban area closest to the smelt-

er, had blood lead levels higher than the 10 micrograms per deciliter permitted by the World Health Organization, which experts claim is even too high for children (*LP*, Mar. 8, 2006).

Moral and ethical reasons

The Regional Roundtable on Environment in the Junin department, a coalition of Peruvian religious leaders and grass roots activists, are pushing the company to protect La Oroya's residents and its environment for moral and ethical reasons. It also seeks greater financial openness since profits may be used to complete the necessary environmental improvements.

"The care for life and the environment is of unavoidable urgency for every person and community. Humanity has been entrusted with the environment, which is an inheritance given by God as a common home that we should care for and protect," said Monsignor Pedro Barreto, Archbishop of Huancaayo and president of the Junin Roundtable on Environment, which is pressing the company to comply with environmental standards.

In 2006, the Peruvian government granted the company an additional three-and-one-half-year extension to fulfill the obligations of its ten year-old environmental operations agreement, until October 2009.

"Revoking the certification should send a strong message to Doe Run that they have much more work to do," said Anna Cederstav, staff scientist with AIDA and Earthjustice and author of the book, *La Oroya Cannot Wait*. "Nevertheless, we are still concerned that, if paid enough, another certifying body will agree to provide Doe Run with a similar certification."

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States has requested that the Peruvian government implement urgent measures to halt violations against the health of the citizens of La Oroya.

Elias Szczytnicki, regional director of Religions for Peace in Lima, said the religious community's efforts to bring the company into environmental compliance is not aimed at hurting profits, but improving operations. "This is not good news," he said of the decertification. "This is bad news for us. Our interest is not to hurt the business. This news demonstrates that the health of the people continues running a great risk."

"The ideal news," he added, "would be that the company receives several environmental certificates so that the people could live healthy lives." □

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