

Report

BRAZIL: Death of Democracy

By Hector Perla Jr., Senior Research Fellow, Laura Sholtz and Liliana Muscarela, Research Associates at the Council on Hemispheric Affairs (COHA)

Ed. Note: Perla was the guest speaker at the September 25 Annual Dinner of the Task Force on the Americas

In a historic vote on August 31, Brazil’s democratically elected President Dilma Rousseff was formally ousted by the Brazilian Senate, surpassing the required two-thirds majority with 61 votes in favor and 20 votes against. The controversial impeachment formalizes the provisional government of former Vice President Michel Temer and his *Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro* (Brazilian Democratic Movement Party, PMDB), bringing an end to 13 years of governance by Rousseff’s own *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Worker’s Party, PT). This decision not only signifies a drastic change in Brazil’s government, but it also has major implications for the country’s near-term future. Allegations of corruption continue to hang over Temer’s interim administration, including leaked audio recordings that suggest that Rousseff’s ouster was politically manipulated to halt the charges against congressmen from Temer’s cabinet and party. Rousseff’s impeachment is a devastating blow to Brazil’s democracy, constituting a “soft coup”—an undemocratic process of regime change tainted by political malfeasance, selective justice, and a non-electoral transfer of power cloaked in the guise of the rule of law.

Interim President Temer and former speaker of the House of Representatives Eduardo Cunha are recognized as the primary instigators of Rousseff’s suspension in May of this year. While the two have been accused of various acts of fiscal and electoral corruption, the spotlight has been focused primarily on Rousseff’s alleged fiscal



Hector Perla spoke in San Rafael, CA to an enthusiastic crowd gathered to support the Task Force on the Americas
Photo: Jim Geraghty, www.CMCM.tv

mismanagement. Following Rousseff’s impeachment, Temer was sworn in as Brazil’s president and, barring a Supreme Court intervention, receives immunity from further investigation of any crimes that took place before he assumed the presidency.

Temer will likely remain in office until the end of 2018. The next presidential elections are scheduled for October 2018 and a new president would take office January 1, 2019. However, with growing discontent from actors along the entire political spectrum, including senators and constituents from Temer’s own PMDB, there has been a good deal of speculation that his presidency may not endure. Another impeachment, while a remote possibility, is not unthinkable, especially given the lack of support within Temer’s own party and the potential that new allegations of corruption may be brought against him. At that point, the Supreme Court could choose to suspend Temer’s presidential immunity and allow for

the initiation of impeachment proceedings against him.

If Temer were to suffer impeachment before the end of 2016, the Brazilian Constitution requires that new national elections be

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called within 90 days. Otherwise, if he were to be removed after January 1, 2017, indirect elections within the Brazilian Congress would decide which current senator would assume the position. Considering recent strategies by the PMDB, such technicalities could easily be exploited by the Temer administration, further highlighting the murky nature of recent events and calling into question the legitimacy of Brazilian democracy.

Rousseff's ouster sets a negative precedent for the country in two ways. On the one hand, it institutionalizes the political abuse of power by politicians seeking to avoid corruption charges. On the other, it shamefully obscures the underlying motive for removing the PT from office: a desire to return to conservative rule and neoliberalism. Both of these strategies subvert the democracy that Brazil has worked hard to uphold.

First, the installation of a new administration with weak democratic standards does not bode well for Brazil, especially given the corruption that has traditionally pervaded its government. The PMDB saw an opportunity to evade charges against its leaders while simultaneously gaining the presidency—an accomplishment that has eluded them at the voting booth for more than 20 years. All they had to do was turn on Rousseff, their electoral coalition partner. Thus, PMDB's leaders led the impeachment of the president, even though an independent federal prosecutor found that she had not violated any fiscal laws. This practice, known as *pedaladas fiscais*, or "accounting tricks," has been recently employed by more than a dozen state governors without legal repercussions. Meanwhile, Temer has been convicted of electoral fraud and accused of other acts of corruption, but by assuming

the presidency he evades existing investigations, such as *Operação Lava Jato*, that would have proven his guilt or his innocence. Such hypocrisy and double standards seriously impugn the legitimacy of the impeachment process and the entire democratic institution.

Temer's interim government almost immediately implemented a far more conservative agenda than the Rousseff Administration with neoliberal ideals that seemed to have been waiting in the wings for an opportunity to be reinstated. Among his first actions was the naming of an all-white, male cabinet, several of whom were under investigation for corruption at the time of their appointment. Additionally, as a cost-cutting measure, Temer eliminated the ministries of culture, agrarian development, science and technology, women, racial equality, and human rights (although some were since reinstated due to popular pressure). Furthermore, the interim administration wasted no time in rolling back the hallmark of the PT's government: social programs and policies that Rousseff had fought hard to continue. Temer immediately slashed funding for programs that benefit the rural and urban poor, women, afro-descendants, the LGBTQ community, and indigenous people. These changes augur how Temer will govern now that he has been sworn into office. His radical departure from the policies of the platform under which he was elected as Rousseff's vice president lends further credence to the claim that her ouster is the result of a political witch-hunt rather than a legitimate impeachment process for a criminal offense as required by the Constitution.

It is undoubtable that the non-electoral and undemocratic ouster of Brazil's first female president constitutes a perilous democratic regression for South America's largest nation. In fact, the process constitutes a "soft coup" against the Rousseff presidency and a political attack against the PT. Conservative parties came together to secure what they had been unable to achieve through popular elections: a presidential victory over the PT. By circumventing the electoral process, the impeachment strikes a huge blow to the country's democracy, especially given the advances it has made since the impunity typical of the military government (1964-1985).

The PT is not going to accept Dilma's

ouster without a fight. On its Twitter page Wednesday afternoon, it posted a letter from the *Frente Brasil Popular* (People's Brazilian Front), which is a coalition of trade unions, progressive and social movement organizations, and political parties. In the letter, the Front promised that, "Our struggle against the coup government and its program of rolling back our achievements will be relentless." Protests against the proceedings, which have been ongoing since the impeachment process began, have been increasing and are also likely to intensify in the coming days.

The ramifications of Rousseff's impeachment are not limited to Brazil. The reverberations throughout the Western Hemisphere, where progressive governments are on the defensive against similar right-wing attacks, began immediately when Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela recalled their ambassadors from Brasília. Progressive governments of the region see Brazil as the latest example of the epidemic of "soft coups" that have brought down Pink Tide governments that came to power through democratic elections. Increasingly, right-wing forces opposed to progressive governments and discontent with their social and economic programs—but unable to defeat them in popular elections—have turned to judicial and institutional processes to roll back the left's hold on executive office.

Despite the rhetorical anti-corruption façade that characterized the impeachment proceedings, President Rousseff's ouster was actually a careful orchestration designed to exploit recent public discontent with her administration's handling of the economy. Temer is nearly as unpopular as was Rousseff, yet he and the PMDB were able to channel common grievances and direct them against President Rousseff in order to capitalize on them politically. Moving forward, Brazil is in the hands of a Trojan Horse government—one that has presented itself as one of the few hopes for democracy while subverting the very institutions that the term represents. The Council on Hemispheric Affairs (COHA) stands with Rousseff and echoes the statement she made while on trial: "Today, I only fear the death of democracy."

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Delegation Visits with Labor in Ciudad Juarez

By Carol Moeller Costa, TFA Board Member

Ed. Note: *Participating groups of the Alliance for Social and Economic Justice include the Bay Area Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador, Global Exchange, Marin Task Force on the Americas, San Francisco Living Wage Coalition, School of the Americas Watch West, and Trabajo Cultural Caminante.*

Although *maquiladoras* have existed in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico since 1965, it wasn't until after NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement between Canada, the US and Mexico in 1994, that their number grew by leaps and bounds. Today in Ciudad Juarez there are some 300 large multinational manufacturing operations that import material and equipment on a duty-free, tariff-free basis for assembly and processing and then export the final product. They enjoy a plenitude of cheap labor to do the work. Many of the laborers have been pushed from all over Mexico to the border and to the *maquiladoras* by NAFTA itself because of its ravaging of Mexican agriculture, especially small farmers of corn. Farmers everywhere have been unable to compete with the price of the imported US subsidized corn and have had to leave their land in search of a way to survive for themselves and their families. Their desperation is exacerbated by the militarization of the border, and a repressive US immigration system which forces migrants to accept low paid factory jobs.

A delegation organized by the San Francisco Living Wage Coalition recently visited Ciudad Juarez to better understand the conditions for workers in the *maquiladoras*. Since the *maquiladora* system has played an essential role under NAFTA, we were interested in examining it from the perspective of what possibly might happen if the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) passes. We spent four days listening to workers, two very active labor lawyers, and other professionals concerned with the welfare of the children in Juarez and with the general conditions of life there.

We found that the minimum wage is now 73 pesos a day, or \$3.93 USD at the current exchange rate of 18.61 pesos to the dollar. There are higher minimum wages for 59 professional categories, but in many *maquiladoras* the starting wage for an assembler is the mini-

imum wage. A round trip bus ride to work costs 14 pesos, a soda costs 24 pesos, a sandwich 25, a kilo of the cheapest beans costs 18 pesos, without mentioning any other necessities. People survive by working two shifts and/or seven days a week. The wages have changed very little over the years and for some workers remain the same forever no matter how long they are in the *maquiladora*. One woman's main complaint was that she has been in the same position with the same wage for ten years while watching other workers arrive and then move upwards to higher pay, leaving her behind. It seems that there are many irregularities like this regarding wages, including many cases of favoritism and bribery.

According to not only the women but also the men, sexual harassment is rampant. If workers respond favorably, they are rewarded and if they don't, they are punished by losing their vacation time, their present shift, or their promised bonus. Any network for filing complaints is non-functional because the supervisors and managers are all within the same corrupt system. On the other hand, supervisors and managers can be rewarded for saving money. Consequently, they do things like cutting off the air conditioning during hot afternoons under laminated metal roofs. We heard examples of workers not being informed about the toxic substances with which they must work and not being provided with adequate protection.

The owners of the *maquiladoras* are absent and inaccessible. They always advise the managers ahead of time when coming to visit and thus everything is in good order and everyone is at their best behavior to receive them. Workers are punished if they try to have any kind of communication with the higher-ups. For example, a worker was fired because he was singing during the inspection. In summary, within these enormous workhouses there is no system provided from above to protect the rights of workers.

When workers attempt to organize to form a union, they are severely castigated by the *maquiladora*. People 'spreading the word' lose their job or get moved to an inconvenient



Members of delegation meet with some workers and their lawyer. Photo: Carol Costa

shift. We heard examples of pregnant women changed to a shift where they had to lift a heavy object, parents being put on the same shift so that they cannot care for their children, the 'bad apples' being placed in areas called 'Hell' with very strict supervisors. Although the right to organize is in the Mexican constitution, the Mexican government acts against the formation of independent unions and will only accept what are called 'white' unions, which are top down, charge dues, and are literally non-representative. Very few *maquiladoras* have any union at all, although there are constant struggles to establish them.

We spent time with José Luis Flores, Executive Secretary of *La Red por los Derechos de la Infancia*, or the Network for the Rights of Children in Ciudad Juarez. He painted a very sad picture of the lives and futures of the children of the *maquiladora* workers. According to him, more than 40 thousand children live in homes where the average income is the minimum wage and there is a devastating lack of facilities for children provided by civil society. There are not enough daycare centers, schools or parks. Children are cared for by a variety of family members or even locked up in their home alone while their parents are at work. Mothers sleep a daily average of four to five hours and consequently are exhausted and short-tempered. Children are growing up without communication or stability. They are suffer-

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COLOMBIA: A Thought on Peace

By Alice Loaiza, Task Force board, *Marcha Patriótica*, she lived in Colombia for 30 years

Ed. Note: *After four years of negotiations in Havana, Cuba, with the help of the governments of Cuba, Venezuela, Chile and Norway, a peace agreement ended half a century of civil war between the popular revolutionary forces of the FARC-EP and a series of repressive US-backed Colombian governments*

PEACE is the word everybody is mobilizing for right now in Colombia. After a close loss in the plebiscite on October 2, 2016, massive numbers of people have gone to the streets across Colombia to demand that the Peace Accord be honored in spite of the electoral loss. It seems that everyone took the plebiscite for granted, not thinking there was any chance of its losing. Election apathy in general is great in Colombia, and it wasn't any different in this plebiscite. Who was not apathetic was the extreme right, because of all that they will lose with peace.

Colombia has an electoral system which has passed the government back and forth between two reactionary parties for years, only seeming to be democratic. It defends its oligarchy against popular social movements with repression. The US has understood that this "stable government" is perfect for neoliberalism and it has invested more in Colombia than almost any country in the world. It has become an important strategic site for the spread and defense of neoliberalism in the Americas. Colombian elites love the US because they have become rich on a permanent internal war backed and financed by the US through Plan Colombia, which has brought to Colombia a huge army, police force, seven US military bases, the war on drugs and much more.

Should this war end, much of this would change. A new popular and broad people's party would emerge to question the political power of Colombia's ruling class. The military and police would be reduced and the role of the US military in Colombia would come under scrutiny. It would no longer be necessary to maintain large military units in peasant communities. The Accord states that coca

will no longer be grown because the government will subsidize food crops as replacements. Thousands of peasants will return to the land from which they were displaced. Paramilitary armies will be terminated and peasants will reap the benefits of the first land reform in Colombian history.

For a country built on constant conflict, it seems like an almost impossible task to turn it onto the road to peace. It is a country divided. The armed resistance for years has proposed peace talks, but when the government understood 'peace talks' to mean peace with social justice, it has always backed out. Many factions of the government know that a peace agreement will give political power to the people. It will also stop the massive corruption. It will question paramilitary power within the government, the wealth made from the war, and the



Closing ceremony of peace accords on Sept. 26; Colombia's Pres. Santos and FARC commander Rodrigo Londoño Echeverri come together with host Pres. Raul Castro.

cozy arrangements with the US.

The wealthiest of Colombians have nothing to gain from this Accord. They have lived in gated communities, insulated from the violence. They travel to their mecca Miami for fun and know nothing about the suffering of the majority of the Colombian people. But now that they see their wealth and position threatened, they

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ing from lack of attention, lack of formation, maltreatment and sexual abuse. What kind of adults will they be? Ciudad Juarez is a center for drug and human trafficking. Will their generation be rife with members of gangs?

Ideally, trade should improve human rights conditions by increasing open exchanges of information and values. This has definitely not

are willing to do anything to defeat the Accord. Of course, former Colombian president Álvaro Uribe and his minions are leading the effort to keep the war going. After all, the war is what assures them of their lifestyle and privilege.

To defeat the Accord, the right frightened the population into voting NO in the plebiscite, saying that the evil guerillas would take over the country, the real criminals would never be jailed, the family would be destroyed by "homosexuals" and "feminists" in power, and that the peace process would be incredibly expensive, therefore increasing taxes. But the great majority of people in Colombia are poor and would benefit by the end of the decades-long war.

People have mobilized since the defeat of the Accord on October 2, insisting that peace in Colombia must go forward. Many have realized that they were manipulated into vot-

ing NO and are now changing their opinions. Thousands are marching and the ELN (the second, smaller guerilla group) is also entering into peace talks with the government. The door is heavy but it is opening and people have taken ownership of the process. The FARC-EP will not take up arms again: they say their only arms are their words.

Many things will change in Colombia, given a mass movement. The Colombian media try to present the war as the fault of the guerillas, but the war was always the creation of the Colombian oligarchy and the US. Most of the Human Rights violations

have been perpetrated by the Colombian military and the Paramilitary, armed and advised by the US. Millions have been displaced and disappeared. There is great determination among the Colombian people not to return to war. They see the peace process resolving social problems that have reduced the quality of life for most Colombians. ●

occurred under NAFTA. The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) would provide even more power to the multinational corporations that are seemingly concerned only with profit. Two projected members of the TPP, Vietnam and Malaysia, have minimum wages even lower than Mexico. Under the TPP the prevailing conditions that ignore human rights in Ciudad Juarez clearly have the potential of becoming worse. ●

Soft Coup Threatens El Salvador

By Roger Stoll, Task Force on the Americas, Nov. 2, 2016

El Salvador's President Salvador Sánchez Cerén, of the leftist party Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), is in danger of being ousted in a "soft coup" by the Salvadoran right in collaboration with the United States.

The immediate threat comes in a recent decision by El Salvador's Constitutional Court (a division of the Supreme Court) overturning the amnesty negotiated in the 1992 Peace Accords. The Accords ended 12 years of civil war between the popular leftist guerrilla forces of the FMLN and the US-backed rightist Salvadoran government. President Sánchez Cerén himself was a commanding general in the FMLN from 1984 until the signing of the Accords. Were he prosecuted now for his participation in the war, he could be removed from office.

The amnesty established by the 1992 accords is essential to any such peace agreement, since the dispute over the legitimacy of government or rebel forces is the essence of the conflict. In the case of El Salvador, both sides agreed to continue the political contest through electoral rather than military means. It is difficult to imagine any such peace agreement without an amnesty provision.

Coups "hard" and "soft" are familiar weapons of US foreign policy, and the US has collaborated in countless coups against governments throughout Latin America and the Caribbean for at least a century. Honduras, Brazil, Paraguay, Haiti and Venezuela provide only the most recent examples.

A country is at risk of a US-backed coup whenever it seeks to pursue a relatively non-neoliberal economic policy or development path, or an independent foreign policy. The

US perceives such efforts as inimical to its regional political, economic and military hegemony. In the case of a country with a small economy and little geo-political significance the threat is considered indirect — a "bad example," as Noam Chomsky has explained. Once the coup is effected the offending progressive policies of the ousted government are reversed as quickly as possible.

In the 21st century the US seems to be perfecting the "soft coup" (aka "technical coup," "parliamentary coup," or "constitutionnal coup"). A "soft coup" is "an undemocratic process of regime change tainted by political malfeasance, selective justice, and a non-electoral transfer of power cloaked in the guise of the rule of law." (see Brazil, Death of Democracy, p.1)

For example, in Paraguay in 2012 leftist President Fernando Lugo was removed in an impeachment-like proceeding considered illegitimate by Paraguay's neighbors. In Brazil this year, an impeachment proceeding removed President Dilma Roussef of the leftist Worker's Party based on charges that did not constitute a crime. Both events were immediately and officially blessed by the US, though denounced widely elsewhere. (Distinguish the "harder" coups in Honduras (2009) and Haiti (2004), where the respective presidents were seized at gunpoint and spirited out of the country.)

The origins of the feared coup in El Salvador and the roots of the Constitutional Court decision itself date back to 2008, the eve of the 2009 election of President Mauricio Funes and then-Vice President Cerén running on the FMLN ticket. Anticipating a Funes/FMLN victory (the first FMLN presidential victory), the Salvadoran right and its leading ARENA party, in collaboration with the US, came up

with a "Plan B." They would quickly vote on Supreme Court judges while the right retained its legislative majority. The plan succeeded and since then the right has controlled four of the five judges of the Constitutional Court, which has repeatedly undermined the FMLN government.

Initially the government under President Funes instituted remarkably progressive policies, including improved access by the poor to health and education services, election reforms making voting much more ac-

cessible, and investigations of multi-million dollar corruption scandals from earlier right-wing administrations. But since 2014, with the election of President Cerén, the Court has blocked various FMLN-supported laws, including: a motor-vehicle tax used for aiding traffic accident victims; legislation incentivizing payment of back taxes owed the government; a one percent minimum income tax, \$900 million (USD) in bonds to fund social and other programs. The Court also ignored the authority of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal and imposed significant changes in election procedures just before the 2015 midterm elections, targeting FMLN electoral strength and causing confusion among voters, which the right-wing-dominated press blamed on the FMLN government. The effect has been to defund and discredit the government, blocking the very social programs it was elected to promote.

In addition, El Salvador's new Attorney General Douglas Meléndez, who came to office just this year, has acted in a bizarrely partisan manner, in open cooperation with the wishes of the US Ambassador to El Salvador, Jean Manes. For example, Attorney General Meléndez has ignored 152 cases of corruption investigated under the Funes administration concerning past (rightist) administrations. At the same time, Meléndez is publicly and sensationally pursuing a dubious and un-charged corruption claim against Funes himself.

Meléndez also cooperated closely with Ambassador Manes in efforts to prosecute El Salvador's current Ambassador to Germany, General Atilio Benítez, for arms trafficking while working as Minister and Vice Minister of Defense. Ambassador Manes personally called and met with Assembly members to pressure them into reversing their initial decision not to consider Attorney General Meléndez' request for the removal of Benítez' diplomatic immunity, a prerequisite to prosecution.

And now the government faces its most serious threat with the recent court decision removing the negotiated amnesty of the Peace Accords.

Soft coups have escaped the outcry that greets traditional coups, but they should not. We must support the people of Latin America and the Caribbean in their resistance to these pseudo-legal assaults on their democracy, sovereignty, social welfare and dignity.

Sources: *Hilary Goodfriend*, www.thenation.com, 8/8/2015; www.CISPES.org, 9/14/16



Salvadoran President Sanchez Cerén

Identities of Students at SOA Can Stay Secret

By Linda Cooper and James Hodge, authors of "Disturbing the Peace: The Story of Father Roy Bourgeois and the Movement to Close the School of the Americas." The article was edited for length.

In a major setback to the public's right to know "what their government is up to," a federal appeals court has ruled that the Pentagon can keep secret the identities of foreign soldiers trained at a controversial combat school at Fort Benning, GA.

By a 2-1 margin, the US Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit overturned a lower court ruling that had ordered the Pentagon to release the names of soldiers and instructors at the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC), formerly known as the School of the Americas (SOA). Some graduates of the US Army School have been implicated in torture, assassinations and overthrowing democratic governments. What's at stake is the public's ability to know if its tax dollars are funding the training of human rights abusers.

The appeals court's Sept. 30, 2016 ruling stems from a 2011 Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) lawsuit brought by two SOA Watch members, Theresa Cameranesi and the late Judy Liteky. Their request for the graduates' names had been granted by federal district court Judge Phyllis Hamilton. It was overturned by Circuit Judges Sandra Ikuta and Andrew Kleinfeld.

However, Circuit Justice Paul Watford wrote a strongly worded dissenting opinion, agreeing with the lower court's decision to uphold the public's right to know "what their government is up to. Now the public must simply take the government's word for it that the reform measures mandated by Congress have been effective."

Congressman Jim McGovern (D-Mass.), who has tried repeatedly to cut the school's funding, said that he was "very disappointed" by the ruling. "Many people don't get how serious this court decision is," said Roy Bourgeois, former Maryknoll priest who founded SOA Watch in 1990 after school graduates were linked to the murders of six Jesuit priests in El Salvador.

The majority ruling, written by Ikuta, concludes that the US public's right to know pales beside the unwarranted invasion of privacy of the foreign soldiers and instructors, given the

Pentagon contention that disclosure "could give rise to harassment, stigma, or violence."

In his dissenting opinion, Watford noted that the Pentagon had presented no evidence that any of the "60,000 individuals whose names have been publicly released has ever been the target of harassment or violence" based on their having attended WHINSEC/ SOA.

Further, he wrote, there is no evidence as to why the Pentagon suddenly changed its



policy in 2005 to refuse to release the names. "It would be one thing if the Department of Defense had informed us that its risk assessment changed in 2005 because a foreign student or instructor had been targeted for harassment or violence due to his affiliation with the Institute."

According to Bourgeois, WHINSEC stopped releasing names in 2005 after SOA Watch found damaging information that WHINSEC had enrolled well-known human rights abusers. One of those was Salvadoran Col. Francisco del Cid Diaz, implicated in the 1983 Las Hojas massacre of civilians, killed at point-blank range in the forehead or behind the ear, after they were dragged from their homes, bound, and beaten.

Both the State and Defense Departments in the 1980s vetted and approved a select group of graduates to be entered into the school's Hall of Fame, including two former dictators, Bolivian Gen. Hugo Banzer, Honduran Gen. Policarpo Paz, and Honduran Gen. Humberto Regalado Hernández, who was accused of giving protection to Colombian drug traffickers.

While the school first came under fire when 19 Salvadoran graduates were linked to the 1989 Jesuit massacre, "that incident was not an

anomaly," Watford wrote. "After the Army began releasing the names of former SOA students and instructors in 1994 as a result of FOIA requests, human rights activists linked the school's attendees to a host of notorious crimes," he wrote, "including the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero, the execution of four American churchwomen, and the massacre of hundreds of civilians in the village of El Mozote," along with the beheading of an American innkeeper by a Guatemalan colonel who had attended SOA just six months before. Watford also cited graduates like Salvadoran death-squad leader Roberto D'Aubuisson; Panamanian dictator and drug-trafficker Manuel Noriega; and Argentine "dirty war" dictators Roberto Viola and Leopoldo Galtieri.

In an argument against disclosure, Ikuta, writing for the majority, suggests that the public can rely on members of Congress who get the names of WHINSEC students and instructors in a classified format. But San Francisco attorney Duffy Carolan, who represents the SOA Watch plaintiffs, said the public would have no way of knowing whether Congress is doing anything with the names. "Historically, Congress has relied on organizations like Amnesty International and SOA Watch to sift through government documents and investigate human rights violations. Congress doesn't really do it or have the means to do it.... It's why we have a Freedom of Information Act."

The government, she added, doesn't want "these records released because SOA Watch has provided an astounding amount of public scrutiny over the school to the point that Congress nearly closed it down. The Pentagon doesn't want that again." Carolan said there are ongoing discussions to decide the next legal step. One option is to petition the 9th Circuit to have the latest ruling reviewed by a larger panel of appeals court judges.

Bourgeois said the fight will go on. "We've had to fight to get these names from the beginning," he said. "They want to hide behind a wall of secrecy because when you're involved in torture, disappearances and executions, the truth is going to cause you some serious problems. While WHINSEC claims to be transparent, without releasing the names, there is no transparency."

Source: *National Catholic Reporter*, October 11, 2016

HONDURAS: On the Ground with USAID

By Laura S. Jung, Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR)

Earlier this year, I traveled to Honduras to better understand how funding for the Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) and for the Alliance for Prosperity Plan (APP) is being spent and accounted for by its implementers. Nearly half of the \$750 million that the US government is channeling to the APP in fiscal year 2016 is specifically allocated to CARSI. These are historic levels of funding to the region, unparalleled since the early 1990s when the US was involved in Central America's internal armed conflicts. Numerous reports indicate that military and police-perpetrated human rights abuses have increased since the creation of CARSI and there is no real evidence that CARSI has yielded even minimal results.

In fact, very little is known about the efficacy or impact of these programs at all, despite the hundreds of millions of dollars being spent. On September 7, I co-authored a report published by the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR) that shows that the only publicly available impact assessment study of a CARSI program, published in 2014 by Vanderbilt University's Latin America Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), doesn't conclusively demonstrate, as the study claims, that the CARSI program has had positive results.

The specific CARSI program that the LAPOP study assesses is a community-based violence and crime prevention program that is implemented by the US Agency for International Aid (USAID) and its partners in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Panama. In late 2014 a USAID official told Congress that "We have evidence that these kinds of programs are working, and evidence is crucial so we can build on what really works." Since there is no hard evidence that the CARSI/USAID program is working, I decided to have a closer look at the program on the ground in Honduras, a country I have worked in for over a decade.

In mid-August, I went on a ride-along with a USAID staff member in the Democracy and Governance program. In a chauffeured, new model Chevy Tahoe, I rode to the Comayagüela barrio, about a 20-minute ride outside of downtown Tegucigalpa. When we arrived, my escort rolled down the win-

dows and took off his sunglasses, explaining that this helped people in the neighborhood see and trust them. Comayagüela, he informed me, is the most dangerous neighborhood in Tegucigalpa and we were driving into a territory heavily controlled and monitored by rival gangs, primarily the MS-13 and the *Dieciocho* (18), both of which originated in Los Angeles and then spread to Central America with the help of the US government's deportation policies. The outreach center we were going to tour is located at the invisible gang border. That's why, he told me, USAID and Creative Associates, a private, for-profit development contractor, are trying to build another outreach center on the other side of this neighborhood, so the kids who can't cross the gang borders still have access to an outreach center.

The outreach center is beautiful, situated on the terrace of a local Catholic church that donated the space for the project. It is clearly a new building, the white and blue paint still fresh and glowing in the morning sun. Latin Pop music is playing at dance party volume in the outdoor recreation area where volunteers in yellow *Por Mi Barrio* t-shirts are milling about, and a few youth in school uniforms are also wandering around. A petite woman walks out to meet us, the director and only paid employee of the outreach center. I am shown all around the shiny building—although I am candidly told by the Creative Associates representative who works directly with the outreach center on programming that it is the only outreach center that looks like this. The other buildings are much more humble he tells me, and most do not have paid staff.

I dutifully nod while the young, overworked *directora* shows us the recreation room, the classrooms (where children were writing in their "values" workbooks), and the public gym where they have weight machines and hold Zumba classes. The director explains that they've established the gym as a way to make money to support the outreach center—people pay for Zumba classes and trainers and instructors *volunteer* their time to teach them. This structure begs many questions: if this is one of the key strategies by which USAID and the APP programs claim they are supplanting and disrupting violence and gang activity, then why is there not more

paid staff, and why is the outreach center not better funded? Where is the \$346 million going? But there is no time to ask this question; there are more rooms to see.

My USAID escort and the Creative Associates staffer have repeatedly tried to reassure me, "the center makes such a big difference." And tell me how great it is for the kids to have a safe place to come and play and learn. Of the latter I have no doubt. Having spent over a decade in Honduras, where it is estimated that 20 percent of the population has experienced severe trauma, I know the value of recreation and safe spaces for young Hondurans, but is this project really reducing violence and crime in the neighborhood?

Once in the room that houses the director's desk and some paperwork and classroom space where some first-aid and very basic community nursing is taught by yet *another volunteer*, it is finally time to ask a question. I keep it very simple. I want to know how the center, and USAID and Creative Associates—the agency funding this project and the implementing partner, respectively—are determining the impact of the outreach center on violence and gang activity in the community. Do people get jobs with the training they receive? Is there any monitoring and evaluation or reports that show the effects of this outreach center program on violence and crime and gang activity? For example, are centers like this one tracking whether youth return to the street, whether they find employment (which assumes it's available and in 2014 unemployment for youth under 30 in Honduras was as high as 41 percent), and whether they join or leave gangs?

The director's eyes go wide and her lips tighten in a grimace, bracing for the potential of another burdensome bureaucratic responsibility to manage alone. Unfazed, my upbeat escort tells me, unequivocally and without a hint of irony that they "do not have monitoring and evaluation," but that they "hope to have some in the next couple of years or so." These programs are among the most extensively funded foreign security and development since the war-time era in the region. The State Department, USAID, and other CARSI implementers are under scrutiny to *demonstrate* efficacy, and not only are there no re-

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Urgent Appeal for the Haiti Emergency Relief Fund

On October 4, Hurricane Matthew slammed into Haiti, killing well over 1000 people and leaving hundreds of thousands without shelter or food. The hurricane has devastated the cities of Les Cayes, Jeremie, and many villages in the Southwestern part of the country, destroying crops and livestock and reversing the gains in food production made by women's agricultural cooperatives and other local farmers. With massive flooding has come a deadly spike in water-borne diseases, particularly cholera (brought to Haiti by UN troops), which has already reached epidemic proportions.

While the situation in Haiti has mostly faded from the pages of the world media, the catastrophic conditions faced by the Haitian people have only gotten worse. The hurricane hit Haiti just days before the October 9th presidential elections were due to take place. People had worked very hard for over a year, risking their lives to demand free and fair elections after the 2015 electoral results were declared fraudulent. Elections have now been postponed until late November. Popular organizations in Haiti are hard at work trying to ensure that families and communities can survive and rebuild, and that when the new election takes place, each and every vote is counted.

We urge all friends of Haiti donate as much as they can to the Haiti Emergency Relief Fund (HERF). Donations will go directly to grassroots organizations in Haiti that are saving lives by helping people on the ground access water, food and shelter, and reconstructing their lives. Unlike the big NGOs, many of which were accused of profiteering from the billions donated by a generous public after the earthquake, HERF pays no wages and takes no cut. Volunteers do all the work, and all the money we collect goes directly to those who need it, starting with women—the primary caregivers in every community.

HERF supports:

The Aristide Foundation for Democracy has organized mobile health clinics for those impacted by the hurricane and the expanding cholera epidemic and has helped send “Caravans of Dignity and Solidarity” into Les Cayes and smaller towns in the Southern Department, as well as Jeremie and the Grand’Anse Department. In those areas, Haitian grassroots activists have distributed food, water, water purification kits, hygiene and sanitation kits, roofing and building supplies.

Women’s Agricultural Cooperatives and a network of Women’s Organizations in the Les Cayes-Aquin area have distributed food, drinking water, and water purification tablets, tarps and supplies for emergency roof repairs. They have also organized numerous work teams to clear local roads.

Radio Timoun, based within the Aristide Foundation, and other local independent radio stations who have received support from HERF, have provided consistent and needed information throughout the crisis, including giving the poorest communities in Haiti needed updates about where and when to access solidarity brigades that have come to their areas with supplies and food.

Schools and women’s organizations in the Port-au-Prince area have organized support campaigns and caravans to the hardest hit sections of Les Cayes, Camp-Perrin, St. Louis du Sud, and rural areas of Grand’Anse.

One of the major effects of the hurricane has been to wipe out food production in the Southern peninsula. This has led to famine in that area. Funds are helping to provide local activists in Les Cayes with the ability to feed hot meals to 500 children several days per week through mid-November.

Please donate on line at: www.haitiemergencyrelief.org

Or Send Checks To: Haiti Emergency Relief Fund (c/o East Bay Sanctuary Covenant, 2362 Bancroft Way, Berkeley, California 94704)

Honduras, continued from page 8

ports or evidence to date, but there aren't even *mechanisms* for monitoring and evaluation. *How do they know the programs are working?* Without a systematic evaluation there is simply no way to know.

I found one report that the Honduran Youth Alliance (AJH), USAID, and Creative Associates produced in January of 2014. It includes a few quotes from youth who were apparently in the *Por Mi Barrio* program in La Ceiba at the time, but no program details

and no assessments. It is a long brochure with poignant quotes from pre-teens that are intended to pull heartstrings. It also includes the methodology and objectives for implementing the *Por Mi Barrio* program, which is nice, but it's not evidence that the programs are working nor does it include evaluation mechanisms. However, since the initiation of the first *Por Mi Barrio* outreach center in 2009, there are no data or statistics that show that the Outreach Centers are meeting the objectives of CARS and APP initiatives.

There is no doubt that there is a strident

public relations campaign to make it seem as though the CARS/USAID program has merit and deserves more funding even when there is no publicly available evidence to support such claims. This should be concerning to US lawmakers and their US constituents, not only because incredible amounts of taxpayer funds are being directed toward Central America, but also because that assistance may be doing more harm than good.

Source: *Americas Blog, CEPR, Sept 26, 2016*

US Special Operations in Latin America

By Sarah Kinoshian and Adam Isaacson.
Washington Office on Latin America
(WOLA)

Ed. Note: *The article was excerpted and edited for length.*

The US military's most elite forces have been increasing their deployments across the globe, and Latin America and the Caribbean are no exception. But as Special Operations Forces activity grows, information about their actions is shrinking.

Special Operations Forces-Army Green Berets, Navy SEALs, and other highly trained units carry out missions from man-hunts in the Middle East to intelligence-gathering in Mali, to support for raids on gang members in El Salvador. With civil affairs and psychological operations among their chief missions, their purpose is as political as it is military.

According to documents obtained by WOLA through the Freedom of Information Act, the number of Special Operations Forces training missions to Latin America tripled between 2007 and 2014, a period when overall military aid to the region was decreasing.

This fits with a larger worldwide trend of these forces' sharp growth. Since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, Special Operations Forces have doubled in number to approximately 70,000 while their budget has tripled, now exceeding US\$17 billion per year. In 2015, they deployed to 135 of the world's 196 countries, mostly on training missions.

Special Operations Forces were deployed heavily to Iraq and Afghanistan during the height of the US interventions in those countries. The US presence in both countries has since been drawn down, leaving thousands of personnel available to send on new missions in more countries. Many of those missions take place through a training program called Joint Combined Exchange Training, or JCET.

JCETs do more than train US forces. They teach Latin American co-participants military tactics while also "gaining regional access with a minimal footprint," according to their reports. The reports highlight that "[JCET] activities often enhance US influence in host countries."

Military and police aid to Latin America

and the Caribbean has declined since 2010, as the Plan Colombia and Mérida Initiative aid packages have wound down. During these same years, though, Special Operations Forces deployments have increased in the region, particularly in Central America.

Honduras has been the Western Hemisphere's most-visited country during these eight years, with 21 JCET missions. The majority of trainings took place between 2011 and 2014, a time when serious allegations levied against Honduran security forces—murder, torture, rape and extortion—went uninvestigated and unpunished. Another four took place in 2009; in June of that year (three months before the end of the US government's fiscal year), where the Honduran military helped oust the elected president in a coup. In addition to JCET trainings, US Special Operations Forces have played a larger role in the country's fight against gangs. They were instrumental in building Honduras' elite SWAT squad, the Tigres, which was created in 2013 to combat organized crime. US Green Berets now advise and monitor operations and train Tigre officers in marksmanship and close-quarters combat.

El Salvador, which now has a Special Operations Forces liaison officer posted at the US embassy, was a close second to Honduras, hosting 19 missions. The majority took place between 2012 and 2014. In the Salvadoran government's internal war against street gangs; security forces have been credibly accused of extrajudicial executions, crime scene manipulation, and enforced disappearances, among other crimes.

Special Operations Forces also work closely with Colombian security forces, who now deploy all over the world to conduct trainings, especially in Central America. Colombia hosted 19 JCET missions between 2007 and 2014.

Interestingly, there have been fewer deployments to Guatemala than much of the rest of Central America. This could be due to human rights issues that prevented the Guatemalan Army from receiving any US military assistance for many years.

The "Global War on Terror" is the Special Operations Forces' most urgent mission, and their expansion happened within its context. This rationale may explain why smaller

countries with significant Islamic communities, like Belize, Guyana, and Trinidad and Tobago, are well represented on the list of JCET destinations.

Over the past eight years, nearly 4,000 US Special Forces personnel have trained nearly 13,000 Latin American security force personnel at a cost of \$73 million. In 2013, then-US Special Operations Command (SOCOM) Commander Gen. Joseph Votel said, "We want to be everywhere, know everything." The 2016 Defense Department budget showed plans to deploy more JCETs in 2015 and 2016 than ever before.

Special Operations Liaison Officers (SOLOs) are currently posted in 14 key US embassies to advise those countries' special operations forces. Four of them are in Latin America: Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, and Peru. By 2019, SOCOM is funded to place liaison officers in 40 countries. It is unclear what this would mean for Latin America.

In countries where Special Operation Forces have a greater presence, whom the United States trains matters. In Honduras, security forces have been implicated in "unlawful and arbitrary killings and other criminal activities," according to the State Department. In El Salvador, the State Department also found military and police who have been involved in "unlawful killings and cruel treatment."

But Special Operations Forces deployments lack effective safeguards to make sure that "partner" units do not kill, torture, or abuse their own people. Congress and independent experts cannot weigh in because they have very little chance to review what's happening and are given very few, if any, details afterwards. Other than US ambassadors in those countries, other civilian agencies have little or no real-time visibility over the program.

For the public, even historical data are unavailable: the congressionally mandated reports that WOLA obtained through the Freedom of Information Act only include totals of deployments, trainees, and costs: they do not identify the "partner" military or police units.

JCET trainings are part of a larger trend of the US military using its own budget to train other countries' militaries, often with little input or oversight from our diplomats or Congressional foreign affairs committees.

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Is Venezuela Really a Dictatorship?

By Ryan Mallett-Outtrim, reporter

Ed. Note: *For articles exploring the situation in Venezuela in more depth: "Venezuela, a Petroleum Economy and a Food System in the Balance," Schiavoni and Camacaro, FoodFirst.org, July 11, 2016; "Can the Venezuelan Economy be Fixed," Mark Weisbrot, CEPR Blog, Oct. 25, 2016; Lisa Sullivan's blog, AFGJ.org, Weekly News from Venezuela, 2016.*

After a year of political turmoil, Venezuela turned a corner in mid-October, at least according to an eye-catching op-ed in The Washington Post. Titled, "It's official: Venezuela is a full-blown dictatorship," the piece claimed the country has become an "all-out, no-more-elections dictatorship."

The author, Francisco Toro, cited a recent controversial decision by Venezuela's electoral authority, the national electoral council (CNE), to suspend a long awaited recall referendum on President Nicolas Maduro.

"The tense buildup suddenly ended Thursday as five separate lower courts approved injunctions to suspend the recall, closing down Venezuela's last best hope for a peaceful solution to its long-running political crisis," Toro explained.

But does the suspension of the referendum actually mean Venezuela is unlikely to have any future elections, and Maduro is now an unapologetic, iron fisted dictator? The short answer is no.

Many international readers likely haven't even heard of a recall referendum. Indeed, Venezuela is one of just a very small number of countries that even have such a mechanism. The idea is fairly simple: from the midpoint of any politician's term, the electorate can petition to recall their representative. There are a few steps though: first, those unhappy with their representative need to collect the signatures of one percent of the electorate. If that petition is accepted by the CNE, then a second petition needs to be collected – this time, of 20 percent of the voters. After this, a full referendum is supposed to be held. The incumbent loses the referendum if more voters cast ballots against the politician than who originally supported him.

So why has this year's referendum

been suspended?

The lower court decisions mentioned by Toro were the results of allegations of widespread irregularities in the opposition's initial petitions for a recall. It's worth pointing out that we're not talking about minor issues here: according to the CNE, around 30 percent of signatures were dubious for one reason or another. Some belonged to children or appeared to be simply bogus, while as many as 10,995 deceased Venezuelans somehow managed to put their names on the opposition's petition.

This is the reason why courts in some states have ruled the entire referendum process should be frozen. The CNE only agreed to do this nationwide after the Supreme Court upheld the lower court decisions.

So far, nothing here seems particularly unusual. The only other presidential recall ever attempted in Venezuela took place in 2004, but only after three failed petitions. So, nobody should have been particularly surprised by last week's events. Moreover, the CNE itself has been stating for weeks that a recall will be logistically impossible this year anyway. The only people claiming otherwise have been leaders of the main opposition coalition, the MUD. So on paper, last week's suspension of the vote made a lot of sense.

However, there's a little more to the story. The first point worth making is that the timing of any referendum is crucial for the opposition. If Maduro loses a recall before January 10, 2017, snap presidential elections will be held. However, elections after January 10 will simply result in Maduro being replaced by his vice president for the remainder of the term (till 2019). Yet the recall

US Special Ops, continued from page 9

In a 1998 investigation into the JCET training program, the Washington Post found, "American special operations forces have established military ties in at least 110 countries, unencumbered by public debate, effective civilian oversight or the consistent involvement of senior US foreign affairs officials." It seems very little has changed in 18 years, while these deployments have continued to grow.

The information in this article took years

isn't just important for the opposition in terms of ousting Maduro: it's also crucial for morale. The MUD is notoriously disorganized, and perpetually mired in internal disputes and power struggles. This has contributed to the MUD's failure to achieve any political success this year, despite holding a clear majority in the National Assembly (AN). The recall referendum has been one of the few objectives that has united, at least rhetorically, the MUD, making its suspension a huge loss for the coalition's unity and morale. For example, the day after the suspension was announced, MUD leaders were already showing signs of disunity. Far right figures like Maria Machado were again calling for civil disobedience (read: disorganized violence and looting in the vein of 2014), while others were suggesting pursuing impeachment. Both of these options are pretty much doomed to failure; the violence of 2014 left over 40 people dead (mostly government supporters, police, soldiers and innocent bystanders) and the MUD discredited. Put simply, without a referendum in 2016, the MUD is a boat without a rudder, sail or compass.

The seemingly endless political tug-o-war between the presidency and AN isn't good for anybody, and has meant serious issues have gone unresolved by the divided government throughout the year. Indeed, there can be no doubt Venezuela is facing what Greg Wilpert has described as a double political-economic confrontation. However, a vexing political standoff isn't the same thing as a "full-blown dictatorship".

Toro himself put it best when he wrote, "It's easy to over dramatize these things." Indeed it is.

Source: *Venezuelanalysis.com, October 26, 2016*

of inquiry to obtain and even then, transparency has decreased. Since 2010, the congressionally mandated JCET reports have become more classified. The report from 2009 contained 47 publicly available, non-redacted pages. The report from 2010 contained eight.

As US military operations worldwide have shifted, so have the questions that we need to be asking about the use of Special Operations Forces. But getting answers is becoming more difficult.

Source: *WOLA, August 20, 2016*

BOLIVIA: Opens New Anti-Imperialist Military Academy

On August 17, 2016, Bolivian President Evo Morales opened a new regional military defense school—a kind of anti-School of the Americas—which will offer courses on a wide range of subjects meant to counter the US imperialist presence in the developing world, including courses like: theory of imperialism, Geopolitics of Natural Resources and Bolivian Social Structures.

The new school will be based in the city of Santa Cruz in eastern Bolivia and named after former President Juan Jose Torres. It will have an initial enrollment of 100 students. Morales, a socialist and Bolivia's first Indigenous president has been a strong critic of US imperialism in Latin America and throughout the world. "Empires," he said, "exhibit cultural racism because they do not believe in the popular sovereignty of the people."

The Bolivian military academy is intended as a direct rebuttal to the infamous US School of the Americas in Georgia, which provides military training to US allies in Latin America, and whose graduates include a "Who's Who" of Cold War era military figures who carried out some of the worst human rights abuses in Latin America.

"The School of Anti-Imperialism is a school that seeks to preserve life, unlike the School of the Americas, which brainwashed military officers into believing that the enemy is our people. It became lawful, proper and normal to kill people," Bolivian Defense Minister Reymy Ferreira said.

Source: *Telesur English*, Aug 19, 2016

CAFTA: An Unmitigated Disaster

The Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) has flooded local markets with cheap, agro-industry produced corn and other products, leading to a collapse in the price of locally grown food and also a rise in the cost of food in general. Malnutrition has increased under CAFTA, and during some acute periods, so did starvation.

The treaty makes it difficult or impossible for local governments to impose regulations on certain industries, like mining. A recent report issued by Congress' Progressive Caucus

concluded that "free trade agreements, like NAFTA and CAFTA have led to the displacement of workers and subsequent migration from these countries."

In Honduras, extreme poverty has increased since CAFTA has gone into effect, as has political repression, especially following the 2009 US-backed coup.

Source: *Greg Grandin, the Nation*, July 30, 2016

EL SALVADOR: Mining Claim Dismissed by World Bank

An international tribunal has dismissed a multinational mining company's demand that the government of El Salvador pay \$250 million in compensation for refusing to allow it to dig for gold in the tiny Central American country where the slogan, "No to mining, yes to life" has become a national rallying cry.

The tribunal, which ruled that OceanaGold's (formerly Pacific Rim) case was without merit, also ordered the firm to pay the Salvadoran government \$8m to cover the majority of the country's legal costs. "For the people of Cabanas who have been fighting to defend their environment, it is mission accomplished," said El Salvador's attorney general, Douglas Meléndez Ruiz.

Bernardo Belloso, president of the Association for the Development of El Salvador, part of a national roundtable opposed to metallic mining, said the ruling "vindicates our right to determine our own development path." But he added: "This is a law suit that should never have been allowed. The millions of dollars that El Salvador has spent in legal costs could have been used to strengthen badly needed social programs in our country."

The verdict marks the culmination of more than seven years of deliberations, largely behind closed doors, at the World Bank's International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID). The ICSID case against El Salvador is one of hundreds that corporations have filed against governments under the investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) system, a mechanism enshrined in thousands of international trade and investment treaties and some domestic laws. The system has become a flashpoint for opposition to the proposed Transatlantic Trade

and Investment Partnership between the US and Europe, which would further extend the reach of ISDS.

Manuel Pérez-Rocha, an associate fellow of the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, said: "The fact that it took more than seven years to release the ruling, and that a country with so many economic difficulties like El Salvador has had to pay millions for its defense, is immoral and shows the complete discretion with which these tribunals sponsored by the World Bank, and its infamous ICSID arm, operate."

Source: *The Guardian*, Oct. 14, 2016

NICARAGUA: Daniel Ortega Wins Again

On November 6, 2016, Daniel Ortega won his third consecutive term as president as voters cheered years of solid growth and overlooked criticisms he is installing a family dynasty.

More than 4 million Nicaraguans cast their vote for one of six aspiring presidential candidates from various political groups and affiliations, among them current President Daniel Ortega, who was elected along with his wife and running mate, Rosario Murillo.

"He (Ortega) is the only person who has worked for the poor, and he will keep doing it, because that is his essence," 64-year-old retiree Jose Vicente Pong told Reuters while casting his ballot in the capital city Managua Sunday morning. "He comes from poverty, and he'll keep working for the poor."

Emerging as leader of the Sandinista movement that toppled dictator Somoza in 1979, Ortega a former guerrilla, led the country during the 1980s, when a civil war against the US-backed Contra rebels killed some 30,000 people.

This is the seventh time that Ortega, ran as candidate for the Sandinista National Liberation Front, or FSLN. The first time was in 1984 when he was elected president and ruled the country for six years before losing the 1990 election. He returned to power in 2007 and was re-elected in 2011.

Ortega's main opponent, the center-right Liberal Constitutionalist Party (PLC) candidate Maximino Rodriguez, was a distant second with 14.2 % of votes.

Sources: *Reuters*, Nov 7, 2016

Support the Water Protectors

The Task Force on the Americas stands in solidarity with the water protectors of the Standing Rock Sioux, members of the Lakota Sioux Nation in North Dakota. Our concerns in Central and South America nations have long been about land and water rights of indigenous peoples and we extend our solidarity to all the struggles for these rights, to all the Indigenous of our hemisphere.

The Standing Rock Sioux and other First Nations are bravely resisting the North Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), currently threatening contamination of the water that flows in the Missouri River to their communities and on through South Dakota, Iowa, and Illinois to refineries in the Gulf Coast. All the water and land in its path is endangered because, pipelines regularly leak, sometimes rupture and even blow up! DAPL advances with the desecration and destruction of land and cultural artifacts sacred to the Standing Rock.

The resistance movement has brought together hundreds of indigenous tribes, activists and environmentalist from around the US. They are demanding that constructions on DAPL stop now. These demands have been met by violent repression from the company and state and local government.

We are concerned with the heavy military response to the peaceful, unarmed land and water protectors exercising their first amendment rights. We are inspired by the example of strength and resolve of peoples who have continued their resistance for 500 years.

Call President Obama, raise your voice and Demand that the pipeline be stopped and that fossil fuels remain in the ground!

White House Comment Line 1/202/456-1111

Task Force on the Americas Special Appeal

We know that you value the work of the Task Force—delegations, events, legislative advocacy and of course our newsletter, which continues to receive praise. The current issue includes articles by three board members and we are very proud of their contributions. A donation at this time would improve our ability to do the work for peace and social justice in Latin America and the Caribbean. We rely solely on donations to support the Task Force, so please use the enclosed envelope to mail your financial contribution. No donation is too small (or too large.)

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