

Report

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CUBA: After Fidel, What Comes Next?

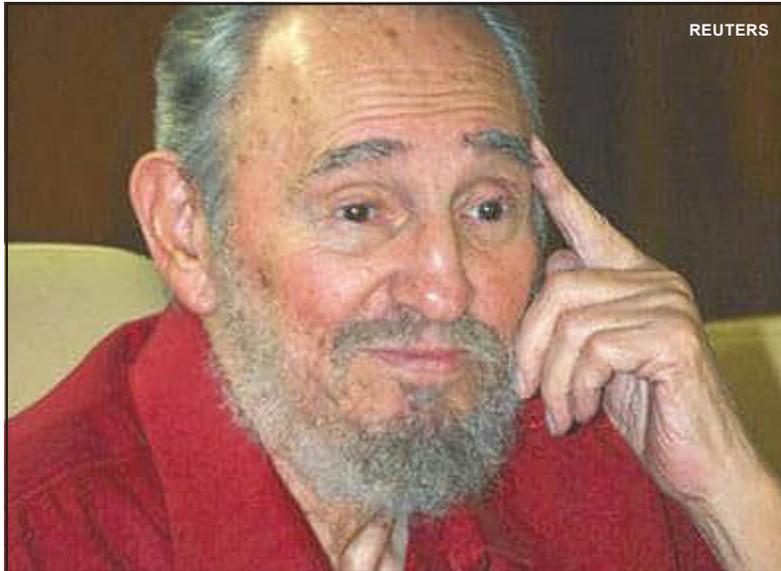
By Peter Kornbluh director of the Cuba Documentation Project, National Security Archive, Washington DC

“Our enemies should not delude themselves,” Fidel Castro declared in “After Fidel: What?” the appropriately titled last chapter of his autobiography, *Fidel Castro: My Life*. “I die tomorrow and my influence may actually increase. I said once that the day I really die, nobody’s going to believe it.”

At 90 years old, Castro did appear destined to live forever. He had cheated death when most of his small guerrilla force was slaughtered by Fulgencio Batista’s military just after they arrived from Mexico on a small boat, the *Granma*, on December 2, 1956, to start the improbable Cuban Revolution. Over the next 60 years, he outlived six US presidents and outlasted another four, a number of whom had sought his demise through assassination attempts, paramilitary assaults, and economic embargoes. After Castro became gravely ill with diverticulitis in July 2006, he twice defied the grim reaper to survive another decade, living to see the institutionalized power of the Cuban Communist Party seamlessly transferred to his brother. He also lived long enough to see Raúl Castro and President Barack Obama dramatically announce on December 17, 2014, that Cuba and the United States would bury the perpetual hostility of the past and pursue normalized relations—a peaceful coexistence with Washington that Fidel himself had secretly sought since the early 1960s.

Fidel Castro’s death on November 25 comes at a particularly delicate stage in the

ongoing effort of normalization. President Obama has done his utmost to consolidate the process of reconciliation by using his presidential authorities to open the portals of diplomatic ties, commerce, and travel. But



Fidel Castro, 1916 - 2016. He outlived six US presidents and out lasted another four.

Cuba, like much of the rest of the world, remains anxious and uncertain as to what President-elect Trump portends for the future—and whether Trump will fulfill his campaign promise to “reverse” Obama’s executive orders to improve relations unless Cuba “meets our demands.” Obama has done his utmost to consolidate the process of reconciliation. But Cubans remain anxious as to what President-elect Trump portends.

With the anti-Castro propaganda unleashed in the US by Fidel’s passing—CNN, for example, broadcast endless footage of hard line Cuban-Americans in Miami celebrating all night long—and pro-Castro homages in Cuba emphasizing how Fidel stood up to the Colossus of the North, any hope of a low-profile, non-rhetorical transition period with the new administration has been lost. The statements that Donald Trump and his

top advisors make about Fidel in the coming hours and days could well set the tone for relations for the foreseeable future. Already Trump has taken to Twitter with this seemingly celebratory tweet: “Fidel Castro is dead!” His administration, according to a statement issued today, “will do all it can to

ensure the Cuban people can finally begin their journey toward prosperity and liberty.”

Rather than implicit threats, President Obama has sent condolences to the Castro family and the Cuban people. In a carefully worded statement, he noted that “History will record and judge the enormous impact of this singular figure on the people and world around him.”

The Castro commemoration is sure to be attended by world leaders from around the globe, reflecting the stature Fidel achieved in the international community. In the confines of the Oval Office, then-Secretary of State Henry

Kissinger disparaged Castro as “that pipsqueak,” but Castro rose to legendary sta-

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CUBA: Real Human Rights are the Foundation of Society

Statement from the Co-Chairs: Alicia Jrapko, Bambose Shango, Cheryl LaBash, Greg Klave, Nelda Nigezzi of National Network on Cuba (NNOC)

The whole world reacted to the death of Cuba's historic leader Fidel Castro. For most of us there was sorrow; respect for a life well lived. The revolutionary process he unleashed created measurable improvements to the lives of many ordinary people on every continent.

But there was another reaction, too. President Donald Trump declared he wanted a "better deal," demanded that Cuba release political prisoners that don't actually exist and rolled out the slanderous code words "dictator," and "tyrant." In a little more than a month, the president-elect will lead a country where police kill Black and Latin people—men, women, children, transgender—with impunity. Yet he is quoted by the Washington Post saying that Fidel's legacy is the denial of human rights.

With International Human Rights Day around the corner, the National Network on Cuba will not let this slander go unanswered. Without going into all 30 articles of the Declaration adopted Dec. 10, 1948, the first sentence of the preamble says that recognition of "the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world."

As winter begins to bite in the Northern Hemisphere, over 500,000 will be sleeping on US streets, under bridges, families with children will be living in cars. *Not in Cuba.* One mural in Cuba says, "300 million children will sleep in the street tonight, not one of them is Cuban." In the US millions are being evicted from their homes because of sky rocketing rents and mortgages. *Not in Cuba.*

According to a Kaiser Family foundation

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survey, the average 2016 family insurance premium costs \$18,412 per year. In 2016, 83% of workers have a deductible—an amount that they have to pay themselves for medical care before insurance covers it—with an average of \$1,478. For the first time since 1999, more than half of workers must pay more than \$1000 in medical costs before insurance coverage begins. *Not in Cuba.*

According to the US Department of Education, National Institute of Literacy in an April 2016 study, 14 percent or 32 million adults can't read in this country. *Not in Cuba.* The average US 2016 college graduate owes \$37,172 in student loans. *Not in Cuba*

Trump openly advocates water boarding and other forms of torture. From the more than 800 US military installations around the world people have been "renditioned" to torture sites. Since 2002, torture has been taking place in Cuba, BUT ONLY in the territory illegally occupied by the US military base in Guantanamo.

We assert that the Cuban Revolution is an excellent example of the implementation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights today. Cuba is a small island country, with development hampered by centuries of colonialism and slavery, and despite having to endure to this day an economic, financial and commercial blockade that has lasted for over 56 years—one designed to impose hunger and privation on its people, the island remains a bright example of humanity to the world.

The full resources of Cuba are used to

develop each individual Cuban to their fullest potential. Universal health care, free education through university, the right to employment, to housing—to dignity is not only guaranteed but implemented.

Over \$4 billion was wasted this year on the presidential campaign in the US. Just imagine for a moment what that money could have been spent on in terms of social improvements. Meanwhile the people of Cuba enjoy free and fair elections untainted by financial influence. Every Cuban is registered to vote on their 16th birthday. Every vote is counted under the honest and watchful eyes of children. In addition to representation, the Cuban people are directly consulted about the direction of their society through community, union, women's, agricultural, youth and other organizations. Their views are heeded. Transgender individuals have been elected to represent their area.

So when we hear about Human Rights Day, December 10, remember the fundamental human rights enjoyed in Cuba where the 1959 Revolution converted military barracks into schools. One of them is the Latin American School of Medicine where youth from underserved communities around the world—including some from the US—learn to be doctors for free, then go home to serve the people.

Yes, that is real human rights.

Source: theinternationalcommittee.org/ Dec. 10, 2016

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tus in the eyes of many by standing up to the US and supporting anticolonial and social movements around the world. "From its earliest days, the Cuban Revolution has been a source of inspiration to all freedom-loving people," Nelson Mandela stated in a 1991 speech expressing gratitude for the role Cuba played in the anti-apartheid movement. "We admire the sacrifices of the Cuban people in maintaining their independence and sovereignty in the face of the vicious imperialist-orchestrated campaign to destroy the impressive gains made in the Cuban Revolution." Indeed, while the legacy of his authoritarian rule in Cuba will be debated for years to come, internationally

his vision, action, and principles indisputably transformed his country from a small Caribbean island into a major player on the global stage, achieving an importance and impact far beyond its geographic size.

"Soon I will be like all the rest," as Fidel commented on his own mortality during the Cuban Communist Party Congress last April. "Our turn comes to all of us, but the ideas of the Cuban communists will remain." He predicted that his ideas and revolutionary inspiration would remain, well after he was gone. "I may be carried around like El Cid," Fidel noted in his autobiography. "Even after he was dead his men carried him around on his horse, winning battles."

Source: *the Nation*, November 26, 2016

NLG Lawyers In Solidarity with Haitian Grassroots Movement

Dear friends of Haiti - We thank the San Francisco Chapter of the National Lawyers Guild for their powerful message of solidarity with Haiti's Grassroots Movement. The Guild has answered a call from Haiti's popular movement for people to people solidarity from everywhere on the planet as they confront an illegal regime. Today is the 57th day of protests in Haiti since the November 20th stolen elections. Tomorrow's inauguration of the fraudulently elected president Jovenel Moise is enforced by a campaign of intimidation and terror against popular resistance. On Feb. 7, Haitian police attacked on peaceful protesters in Tokyo-La Saline, a stronghold of Fanmi Lavalas. The time for solidarity is now.

We Say No! To Stolen Elections.

For well over a month, tens of thousands of Haitians have been demonstrating daily to protest yet another stolen election and another denial of their right to determine their own destinies. Despite this popular outcry and numerous reports of large-scale fraud and voter suppression the Electoral Council in Haiti, backed by the US State Department, the Organization of American States, and the United Nations occupying forces (MINUSTAH), has just officially anointed Jovenel Moise as the next president of Haiti. Moise is a protégé of right-wing former President Michel Martelly, whose regime was marked by corruption, wholesale repression of political opposition, and the selling of Haiti's land and resources to foreign corporations.

As Haitians demonstrate courageously to resist the imposition of an undemocratically selected regime, they have been met with repression from Haitian police and UN soldiers. In one incident, police attacked the community of La Saline, a stronghold of *Fanmi Lavalas*, for decades the party of the poor majority in Haiti. The police fired round upon round of tear gas and killed three infants. In another instance, police attacked a non-violent march using water hoses, tear gas, and a skin irritant that caused severe burns.

On Dec. 24, police attacked a peaceful Christmas Eve demonstration on Martin Luther King Avenue in Port-au-Prince – beating and shooting journalists and people protest-

ing the stolen election. Police shot up and smashed windows of cars belonging to *Fanmi Lavalas* parliamentarian Printemps Belizaire and *Fanmi Lavalas* senatorial candidate Dr. Louis Gerald Gilles. Journalist Thomas Jean Dufait, from Radio-Tele Timoun (a grassroots media outlet) sustained bullet wounds. In recent days, police have used massive force to block demonstrators from even marching.

These tactics are all reminiscent of those used by police forces in the Jim Crow South or in South Africa, who were equally determined to prevent Black people from exercising their right to vote.

We in the San Francisco Lawyers Guild condemn these attacks on Haitian's right to assemble and their right to speak out and protest. We denounce the blatant subversion of the electoral process in Haiti. We call on the US government, the UN and the OAS to end their support for dictatorial rule in Haiti. And we stand in solidarity with the grassroots movement in Haiti as they continue their



Pierre Labosierre, Haiti Action Committee holds sign at rally on MLK day. Photo: Carol Costa

steadfast fight for democratic governance and true self-determination.

Source: *Haiti Action Committee, www.haitisolidarity.net; ijdh.org*

PUERTO RICO: Oscar Lopez Rivera

By Carlos Aznárez, journalist

Before leaving office, President Obama commuted the sentence of Oscar Lopez Rivera, convicted for his role in a Puerto Rican nationalist group linked to more than 100 bombings in New York and other cities in the 1970s and 1980s.

Mr. Lopez Rivera, 74, had served nearly half of his life in prison and was the only F.A.L.N. (Armed Forces of National Liberation) member still in prison. In 1981, he was sentenced to 55 years for seditious conspiracy and in 1988 was sentenced to an additional 15 years for conspiring to escape from a prison in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

Under Obama's commutation order, Lopez Rivera's prison sentence will expire May 17. The tenacious and loyal Puerto

Rican militant has been pardoned thanks to a relentless and massive popular mobilization, both in Puerto Rico and outside the country.

Over the years, supporters of Lopez Rivera have tried to have him freed on parole. The National *Boricua* Human Rights Network in 2011 said that he posed no threat to the public and that others who were released went on to have productive, trouble-free lives.

A lawyer for Lopez Rivera, Jan Susler, said in an interview, that there was widespread support for the commutation of his sentence "Really the only controversy is that this man was still in prison after 35 years after not being convicted of hurting or killing anyone," she said. President Bill Clinton offered

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MEXICO: Caravan of Women Talk of Repression

By Carolina Dutton, Task Force board

In early November, eight women representatives of seven social movements from Mexico visited the Bay Area as part of a national tour to denounce repression in Mexico and promote solidarity. The tour traveled for a month (Oct 18-Nov 18) through 20 cities in the US. Caravan participants and speakers included two mothers of the 43 Ayotzinapa students forcibly disappeared two years ago; representatives of National Coordination of Education Workers (CNTE) which has been in the streets protesting the new federal “education reforms” designed to privatize education and break the democratic teachers union; victims of the June 2016 government attack on parents, teachers, and community members that killed eight people in Nochixtlan, Oaxaca; San Quintín farm workers who are demanding safe and sustainable working conditions in Baja California and a boycott of the US berry distributor Driscoll’s; “May Our Daughters Return Home” from Ciudad Juarez, an organization of parents demanding justice and the return of disappeared daughters; and “Struggle for Water and Land” from San Francisco Xochicuautla, an Otomi indigenous community fighting mega-projects and land grabbing.

The caravan’s objectives were to support Mexican social movements and denounce government repression of these movements in the form of disappearances, assassinations, arrest warrants, imprisonment, land grabs, femicide, etc. It aimed to inform Mexicans living in the US about the violence and repression in Mexico and create solidarity between the people in both countries. The women we heard in the Bay Area were powerful speakers and defenders of their communities.

Alicia Bustamante Pérez of the Natho-Otomi Community of San Francisco Xochicuautla, said “We went to Boston, Connecticut, Nueva York, Chicago, Washington, San Francisco, Sacramento, Los Angeles and San Diego to let our brother and sister migrants know the repression that the people of Mexico are suffering. The original people are being dispossessed of their lands and repressed and imprisoned when they raise their voices. We are going to defend our land because it is our mother who feeds us. In my case, Xochicuautla, I came to denounce the displacement from the lands which belong to our indigenous Otomi community for the construction of a highway

where the government of Peña Nieto and the construction company Higa have destroyed thousands of trees and also homes.”

Xochicuautla is part of the National Indigenous Congress (CNI) of Mexico, an organization formed 20 years ago that is comprised of Mexican indigenous communities and organizations of which the Zapatistas are a part. Alicia spoke of the proposal brought to the CNI last summer to form a national indigenous governing council and run an indigenous woman for president. She explained how before decisions are made these proposals need to be brought back to every community to be discussed and approved and then brought back to the CNI. This is happening now and is democracy from the bottom up.

Berta Alicia Garcia Ruiz from the *Comité Nuestras Hijas De Regreso a Casa* (Return Our daughters Home) of Ciudad Juarez said, “We are many women looking for our daughters and fighting for our rights.” Berta’s daughter disappeared eight years ago. She has asked the authorities to look for her daughter but they do nothing. They brought her only a piece of a bone saying it was her daughter. “My daughter disappeared whole and I want her back whole.”

Cristina Bautista Salvador and Joaquina García Velázquez from the *Asamblea de padres y madres de los 43 estudiantes desaparecidos*, both mothers of disappeared students, began speaking in Nahuatl. The families of the students of the teachers college at Ayotzinapa are indigenous campesinos. When people speak up they are assassinated and imprisoned. They spoke of how in the 25 months since the 43 students disappeared many clandestine mass graves have been found filled with many other bodies of disappeared people but none were any of the 43. They demand their children be returned alive.

Odadelmis Lleva Villafañe works with the *Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación* (CNTE) in Mexico City. She left her fellow teachers in the streets along with parents defending the right to public education and struggling against the new education reform that is being imposed by the government. “Business people are interested in taking our tax money so families can pay for education again.” They are requiring a standardized exam for teachers which discriminates against rural teachers. Like charter schools here, it means

privatization of education. Public education is a human right. The poor and the democratic teachers in the south of Mexico have organized. The teachers and parents are repressed by arms from the US paid for with our taxes.

Lucía Gutiérrez Nicolás from the *Comité de víctimas del 19 de junio de Nochixtlan, Oaxaca*, a mother, greeted us in Mixteca. She spoke of the police repression on July 19 this year when the parents of families of various nearby communities organized a protest against the Education Reform. Teachers, students, youth, and parents blocked the highway in Nochixtlan in support of section 22 of the CNTE. They were met with guns and tear gas grenades. Lucia has a bullet in her left leg and eight people were killed by the police that day.

Miriam Hernandez Neri represents the CNTE and is a family member of political prisoners of the Teachers Movement against the Education Reform (MMCRES). She works in marginalized communities in the eastern part of the state of Mexico bringing education projects to people, some of whom live in garbage dumps. She says that to carry a pencil or a book and defend education is a crime in Mexico.

María del Carmen Mata López of the *Alianza de Organizaciones Nacional, Estatal y Municipal por la Justicia Social* lives in San Quintín in Baja California. She represents farm workers who work growing squash, strawberries, cucumbers, onions etc. Her family was originally from Oaxaca but migrated to do farm work in Sinaloa and finally settled with eight children in Baja California. The San Quintín workers are organizing and are repressed. They are demanding a decent salary and dignified housing, overtime pay (they often work 13 hours a day for no extra pay), uncontaminated water, and the right to a union. María asked us to boycott Driscoll’s, a large berry distributor in the US that is supplied by San Quintín.

The women spoke of the \$2.5 billion in military aid that the US has given to Mexico supposedly to combat drug trafficking and to secure the border. The US is asking Mexico to stop migration from Central America from its southern to its northern border and giving weapons and training for that purpose. The money is being used to repress people standing up and speaking out for their rights. They ask us to demand that our legislatures cancel Plan Merida. ●

HONDURAS: Exploring the Root Causes of Migration

By J. Alejandro Artiga-Purcell, UC Santa Cruz Graduate Student in Environmental Sciences with a specialty in extractive industries and participant in the December, 2016 “Root Causes of Migration” Delegation.

Ed. Note: To view the original footnoted article see; www.taskforceamericas.org

Since November 2014, when the detention and deportation of over 40,000 Central American children at the US-Mexico border leaked to the public, the issue of migration has been a national priority. President elect Donald Trump’s continued threats to “build the wall” and increase deportation of undocumented immigrants (even after the Obama administration has already deported more people than any previous administration) have only intensified the issue. However, thorough analysis of why these migrants are coming in the first place is almost entirely missing from political debate and public discourse.

Mainstream explanations in media, government and international institutions like the United Nations point to the vicious cycle of scarce economic opportunity, rampant poverty, and growing gang violence as the primary forces pushing people to uproot and go north. This perspective was most certainly reflected in the “Alliance for Prosperity Plan” implemented as a response to the migration spike in 2014. This four-country agreement between the US and Central America’s North-

ern Triangle countries aims to curtail migration from the regions largest migrant-producing nations—Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. Tellingly, the \$750 million budget approved by the US Congress for 2016 focused primarily on aid for “development assistance” and “security measures.” The Plan thus equates its stated goal of reducing incentives for migration by cracking down on gang violence, drug trafficking, high levels of extortion and overall insecurity on the one hand, and alleviating poverty through increased development opportunities on the other.

However, on a delegation to Honduras this past December—seeking to uncover the “root causes” of migration—I was struck that while concerning, gang violence and economic underdevelopment remained mysteriously absent from communities’ analyses of why they and their loved ones fled the country. In fact, as we met with indigenous communities, farmers, *maquila* workers, church leaders, human rights activists (including Karen Spring, who lives and works in Honduras and also reports to the Honduras Solidarity Network) and returned deportees, few mentioned gangs or underdevelopment at all. Instead, the recurring themes became the rampant privatization of public resources, facilitated by political corruption at the highest levels of government, and enforced through the militarization of the country and the criminalization of all those who dissent.

Vastly disparate communities within Honduras, both geographically and cultur-

ally, told strikingly similar testimonies. The Garifuna, a coastal indigenous people, are fighting against a five-star tourist resort that seeks to displace them from their home of over 200 years; Lenca indigenous in the Honduran highlands remain threatened by hydroelectric dam and mining projects that seek to divert, over consume, and pollute the rivers that sustain their farming practices; Campesinos in the Bajo Aguan valley face harassment, disappearance and death at the hands of paramilitary and military groups for demanding that African palm plantation magnates return their illegally stolen land; National protests continue to rage against the privatization of the country’s major highways and the subsequent proliferation of tolls that extract further income from already impoverished commuters.

While these testimonies are diverse in their details, each tells a story of the privatization and consolidation of public resources—through the extraction of water, land, energy, minerals, and toll revenue—in the hands of a few political and corporate elite who propel the dispossession, displacement and repression of the Honduran people.

Seen together, these cases represent distinct but intricately connected manifestations of a larger project geared towards market-driven development—the very type of development advanced by the Alliance for Prosperity. Honduras’ overlapping waves of privatization and dispossession have stripped its people of their access to clean environments, health, security and livelihoods, often without consent or recompense. One way out of the predicament is migration. Thus, in a cruel irony, one of the key remedies prescribed for reducing migration, namely economic development through large projects that attract foreign and national capital, actually helps produce the conditions of poverty and repression that force Hondurans to flee!

The Alliance for Prosperity Plan’s other priority—bolstering security—plays an equally important role in facilitating rather than stemming the flow of migrants. It is no secret that throughout Latin America the expansion of resource extraction and privatization of public resources have often gone hand in hand with increased militarization of the state. In Hondu-



Agarian Struggle; Permanent Force; Land, Water, Forest and Mining; Popular Sovereignty.

Photo: delegation member

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ras, larger budgets for the military and police forces as well as increased impunity have been integral to the suppression of public dissent and community organizing. All those who resist development projects, human rights violations and environmental degradation are subject to legal or extralegal persecution. This past year, the anti-corruption watchdog Global Witness ranked Honduras as the most dangerous country in which to be an environmental activist. This title gained global recognition with the murder of internationally renowned human rights and indigenous leader, Berta Caceres, despite supposedly being under the protection of the Honduran state. Less known, however, is that while the case of Berta Caceres remains unresolved, two other members of COPINH and its sister organization, MILPAH, have been murdered, Nelson García and Lesbia Urquía, while others, including Caceres' replacement as the director of COPINH, Tomas Gomez, face similar death threats and assassination attempts for continuing to work in support of communities' human rights and environmental justice.

Even those not protesting large development projects remain under constant attack. Two leaders of the agrarian reform movement in the Bajo Aguan valley were killed just two months before our arrival. Others in the movement came out of hiding to meet with us to share their experience facing lawsuits and terrorist charges. In the city, unionized workers at a *maquila*, who wished to remain anonymous, spoke of having to constantly travel in groups as a precaution against kidnapping or worse. Demanding only the right to organize for fair wages, safe working conditions and maternity leave, these workers told us of how they cherished daily activities such as hugging their children goodbye in the morning, because of their painful awareness that it might well be the last time they return home alive.

While these tragedies are often blamed on random gang violence and crime, the targeting of strategic leaders in environmental, human rights, agrarian reform, and labor movements suggests that the violence in Honduras is anything but random. Furthermore, when pressed about the role of the gangs and narco-traffickers, many of those we spoke with found it difficult to distinguish between organized criminal activity and gov-

ernment-sponsored violence and corruption. In Honduras, corruption scandals are well documented in which police officers have taken their cut of the "war tax" (the price paid to gangs not to be killed), conspired against anti-drug officials, and turned a blind eye to gang and drug related violence, further adding to a culture of impunity. Currently, Honduran and US intelligence officers are investigating the close ties between narco traffickers and officials at every level of the Honduran government, including police officers, mayors, congress people, and judges.

Highlighting the blurred lines between gang violence and state-sponsored violence in Honduras in no way refutes that gangs and cartels pose serious problems that contribute to everyday insecurity and repression. The chronic economic struggle of paying the "war tax" and the risks of day-to-day life are important factors in people's decision to migrate. Karen Spring, explains, "Gangs are not autonomous actors. They are enabled by impunity, they are enabled by corruption, and they are enabled by...the mafia government of Honduras." Gangs are also enabled by the same economic system that simultaneously prioritizes economic growth and development and strips Honduras of its resources, rights, and livelihoods. Generations of Honduran youth without economic opportunity and social support often have little alternative to joining a gang. As such, any analysis of migration that stops with a critique of gangs and their so-called random acts of violence falls prey to an overly superficial and misleading representation of a much more complex reality.

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Mr. Lopez Rivera and other members of the F.A.L.N. clemency in 1999, a decision that stirred an emotional debate. Clinton said their sentences were out of proportion with their offenses. While 12 prisoners accepted the offer and were freed, Lopez Rivera rejected the chance to reduce his sentence because it did not include all of the group's members, Susler, said at the time. If he had accepted the agreement, he would have been eligible for release in 2009.

Oscar Lopez Rivera is a patriot because of his commitment to the struggle for the independence of Puerto Rico. He also worked for a society with more inclusion, less racism, and above all, he worked to

Importantly, this extractivist development model is inseparable from the high levels of government corruption, militarization, and impunity in Honduras that enforce particular economic interests and an unequal geopolitical balance of power. It should not be forgotten, that over the past century the US and "the West" (embodied in institutions like the World Bank, the IMF, and the Inter-American Development Bank) have played a key role in advancing the interests of foreign direct investment-based development in Honduras. Just this century US foreign policy sponsored the 2009 coup d'état and promoted the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA)—both of which have wrought havoc in the country's political, economic and social arenas.

The Alliance for Prosperity is just the most recent iteration of US imperialism in Honduras. Founded on misleading rhetoric attributing migration to gang violence and underdevelopment-induced poverty, the Plan not only misdiagnoses the root causes of violence, poverty and migration, but actually perpetuates the underlying disease by promoting unbridled "development" and "security". Sadly, the "development" of which the Plan speaks is a ruthless *economic development* that prioritizes profit and growth above human rights and environmental well-being. Meanwhile the "security" it emphasizes, primarily secures transnational corporations and national elites' rights to access and extract privatized resources by dispossessing the larger Honduran population.

Source: rootcausesdelegation.blogspot.com

break the chain of colonialism that ties his country to the US Empire.

Like many young Puerto Rican men Oscar was forced to fight in Vietnam. He was able to see first hand exactly how brutal the "Empire" could be when it unleashes its full force against other peoples.

Upon returning to Chicago, Lopez Rivera began to fight for those that Fantz Fanon called, "the wretched of the Earth." He participated in countless acts of civil disobedience and confronted those who exploited his brothers and sisters. He endured repression, detentions, and torture for daring to rebel in the belly of the beast.

Source: www.thedawn-news.org/2017/01/08..., *the New York edition*, 1/8/17

US: Defiant Tribes and Veterans Block D.A.P.L.

By Dave Welsh, Army veteran and retired letter carrier, joined the protest at Standing Rock in early December, working in the mess hall and kitchen at the Oceti Sakowin camp.

Ed Note: *While Obama delayed the pipeline before leaving office; Trump will push for the construction to begin again as the Army Corp gave the go ahead on Feb. 8. Readers are urged to remain vigilant.*

North Dakota, Dec. 12—since last spring, volunteers from 280 Native tribes and countless other folks have been pouring into the various camps of the Standing Rock Sioux—ultimately up to 25,000 people, some for short stays and others “for the duration.” Their mission: to help the Sioux tribes stop the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) from drilling under the great Missouri River, befouling the water supply for 17 million, desecrating sacred sites and trampling on Native lands and sovereignty. Native fighters had already employed an array of militant tactics to stop the pipeline, including chaining themselves to construction equipment.

Then on Nov. 25, the Army Corps of Engineers, backed by the state governor, issued an ultimatum, ordering all 7,000 people then living in the Oceti Sakowin (Seven Council Fires of the Great Sioux Nation) camp to pack up and leave, basically saying, “Everybody out, or we’ll bulldoze the place.” Can you believe this? The evacuation deadline was December 5, and “any person who chooses to stay does so at their own risk.” Tribal leaders refused, demanding respect for their community and territorial treaty rights.

The evacuation order, in addition to ongoing vicious police repression against the water protectors, prompted a howl of outrage from all over, as military veterans, youth and the elderly, individually and in groups, dropped whatever personal plans they may have had and headed for Standing Rock. Social media definitely helped.

Some 4,000 Indigenous people from tribes from all over: Arizona, Wisconsin, Peru, Mexico, Samoa, Hawaii and Alaska, to name a few; students foregoing important exams; a vet in pain from surgery on both knees; another vet waiting for a kidney who



US veteran group forms unarmed militia to defend Standing Rock protestors. 4500 vets came to North Dakota in solidarity with Indigenous Water Protectors. Photo: inhabitat.com

told his doctor to put it on ice, he’d have to wait; people with asthma violating doctor’s orders but bringing all their equipment with them; pensioners who took out payday loans so they could come, all came. Some came on bicycles, or walked hundreds of miles to get there. They stayed in tents (with deadman tent-stake anchors, because of the high winter winds), teepees, campers, yurts, old school buses, Winnebagos, or hastily-built wood structures.

It seems that Standing Rock struck a powerful chord with many people willing to make a sacrifice at a moment’s notice because Standing Rock needed them and they desired to come. Anything to stop that miserable pipeline, anything to prevent the eviction of the heroic Sioux water protectors from their own treaty land. Some came prepared with body armor, gas masks, and spray-bottles with diluted Mylanta to minimize the effects of tear gas.

So by the time Dec. 4 rolled around, eve of the threatened police eviction, many thousands were arriving at the camps, determined to put themselves on the line to defeat the “eviction,” prevent the drilling and stop the “Big Black Snake,” as tribal leaders call the toxic oil pipeline.

The line of stopped cars waiting to get in to the Oceti Sakowin camp stretched for three miles along Highway 1806. Listening on your car radio, you could tune in to the Native radio station 89.5 and hear updates on the struggle, along with recordings of powerful, emotional singing and drums by Native artists, and country songs that told a story by Freddy Fender and Conway Twitty.

Then over the radio came the surprise news. The Army Corps had refused to “grant an easement” to allow DAPL to drill under

neath Lake Oahe on the Missouri River to pursue their pipeline ambitions. The Army Corps statement mentioned exploring possible alternative routes for the pipeline and the need for an Environmental Impact Statement, all promising months of delay.

That night everyone celebrated this important temporary victory, gathering around the Sacred Fire at the Oceti Sakowin camp while fireworks lit the clear sky. Nearby the flags of over a hundred tribes lining a dirt road flapped in the wind.

Tribal leaders welcomed their “relatives”—allies who had come, and introduced young Native runners who had run across many states to call attention to the dire situation at Standing Rock. These young warriors expressed defiance at the encroachments on Native land and water rights, but also sorrow about the recent suicide of a teenaged friend and member of the tribe.

The next morning at 6 a.m. tribal elders convened an assembly at the Sacred Fire, with chanting, drums and prayer. An elder who identified himself as Dull Knife had this to say about the unexpected Army Corps decision: “Of course we welcome any delay in this pipeline. But we know they lie. They always lie, the government and the police. That’s why we’re here, standing strong here at Standing Rock. We’re here and we’re going to stay here until we stop the Big Black Snake!”

This was December 5th—the day the Army Corp and the State had threatened to evict everyone from the Oceti Sakowin camp by now numbering at least 10,000 people. Someone commented, “I don’t think they have enough jails in all North Dakota to accommodate that many.” A huge march of de-

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fiance, led by military veterans, left from the camp to the bridge near where DAPL had planned to drill under the Missouri River. It was snowing, soon to become a blinding blizzard, whipping people with 25 mile-an-hour winds as they approached the Backwater Bridge.

This was the same bridge, occupied by militarized police and the company's private mercenaries, outfitted like they were ready for war, where on Nov. 20 water protectors were hosed and soaked for six hours by water cannons at close range in subzero temperatures, beaten, arrested, pepper sprayed, maced, tear-gassed, strip-searched, hit with flash grenades, rubber bullets, and beanbags filled with lead pellets. After being arrested some had numbers marked on their bodies, others were caged in dog kennels. A Native elder suffered cardiac arrest. A young woman, seriously wounded by a concussion grenade, a weapon of war, was airlifted for treatment in Minnesota. As journalist Jeremiah Jones wrote from Standing Rock, the law enforcement officers who committed these atrocities "are nothing more than a militarized security force for Billion dollar energy corporations."

Together with folks from the Sioux and nearby Cheyenne River nations, this was described by one participant as the largest Indigenous gathering in living memory. Relationships were built between the different tribes, bonded in their common struggle. The slogan "Decolonize – Indigenize" was sewn onto jackets.

The extraordinary number of veterans

who came may have played a decisive role. The largest contingent, Veterans Stand with Standing Rock, was organized by Wesley Clark Jr., son of the famous general, together with Phyllis Young, a Standing Rock councilwoman. Brenda White Bull, who is a 20-year Marine veteran and also a direct descendant of Chief Sitting Bull, also played a role. Clark told me they'd expected 1,600 but 4,000 veterans showed up in three campsites.

Veterans for Peace had a strong presence, organizing and putting to use the large amount of medical supplies that had been donated. Others came from Iraq Veterans against the War and Veterans of Foreign Wars. Some identified themselves as Jewish American veterans, African American veterans, and Italian American veterans. It was about 60-40, men to women. Hundreds of vets just showed up on their own, ready to work, ready to "fight for peace and justice," as one vet put it.

One vet said Standing Rock was also a historic gathering for veterans, with many more vets coming to North Dakota than had come to the major Vietnam Veterans against the War action in Washington DC in 1971. "In the era of Trump," he said, "it's encouraging that 4,500 or more veterans dropped everything and came to North Dakota in the harsh Great Plains winter to be in solidarity with our brothers and sisters here in Standing Rock." By mid-week, forecasts were calling for winds up to 39 mph, wind-chill as low as 40 below.

Many of the vets who answered the call are Indigenous, including Navy veteran Remy, member of the Navajo Nation from

Arizona and the Indigenous Veterans Council at Standing Rock. Remy told Democracy Now (12/5/16): "This pipeline must end, and we should be able to respect Indigenous sovereignty. This is our land originally. Land and the water are life-giving elements. So we've been out here in solidarity not only with the Standing Rock people, but with Mother Earth itself."

The tribe was also happy to welcome the presence of Labor for Standing Rock, Black Lives Matter, St. Louis Copwatch activists, and solidarity visits from a collection of celebrities, including Jesse Jackson, Congresswoman and veteran Tulsi Gabbard of Hawaii, Jackson Browne, Naomi Klein, Jane Fonda, Joan Baez and Willie Nelson.

Certainly there's no sign so far that DAPL is backing down. The main highway going north from the camp is still blockaded, with military-style checkpoints. The bridge is still guarded by police and DAPL mercenaries, who recently arrested three water protectors for "trespassing."

As a consequence of the global oil glut, oil prices have dropped sharply since ETP began the project in 2014. "Production in the Bakken Shale oil field has fallen, creating major financial hardships for drillers." Moreover, if oil prices remain low, "Bakken oil production will continue to decline, and existing pipeline and refinery capacity in the Bakken will be more than adequate to handle the region's oil production [and] DAPL could well become a stranded asset."

The struggle at Standing Rock and na-

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ECUADOR: President Rafael Correa Interviewed

By Abby Martin, Telesur

Ed Note: Assuming the chairmanship of the G77, Ecuadorean President Rafael Correa spoke about neoliberal policies in Latin America and the historic achievements of his model of 21st-century socialism.

Asked how he would respond to US critics of "socialism of the 21st century," Correa contrasted the achievements of progressive Latin American governments like his own in the past 10 years with the previous 200 years of "traditional capitalism."

"The course of progress in Latin America

began with the left-leaning governments in the 21st century. For the two centuries before that we pursued a traditional capitalism, and where were we? What did we achieve? Societies with great contradictions, with extreme wealth and extreme poverty. Societies badly structured. So their models, recipes, policies have been a disaster. On the contrary, with our policies, in the case of Ecuador, there have been historic changes," said Correa.

"When we took over we received a country in disaster," noted Correa, a former economics professor who led a self-described citizens revolution to power in 2006. "From the financial crisis of 1999, to the trag-

edy of migration, where two million people left the country, breaking up families...we have recovered pride, self-esteem, and this is something that you can't measure, like economic indicators, but for us, this is the greatest achievement."

Correa acknowledged that despite his government's achievements in reducing poverty and building infrastructure—an estimated two million Ecuadoreans have risen out of poverty due to investments in social infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, and roads—he knows "there is still a lot left to do," especially

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in the area of child malnutrition.

He also noted that despite the historic reduction in inequality since he took power, traditional elites continue to block efforts to more equitably distribute wealth. "We've helped by improving people's salaries, but the problem now is with distributing wealth," he said, referring to his recent proposals for an inheritance tax. "The oligarchies have used their resources to convince people that what's good for the rich is good for them." The President, who will leave office in May of this year after 10 years in power, noted that despite recent unprecedented challenges, Ecuador's model of 21st Century Socialism continues to offer a contrast to Western neo-liberal models of globalization.

"In the past months when oil prices have been at their lowest in 30 years, where for the first time in history we haven't received a cent in new oil investments, when we have suffered an earthquake that dropped our GDP by 3% by itself...without our improvements in government administration and policy the country would have collapsed," he suggested. "The country has demonstrated capacities that didn't exist before."

In the interview Correa also acknowledged the complexities and contradictions of his government's commitments to the environment (under Correa's leadership Ecuador was the first country in the world to embed the rights of nature in its constitution) and its economic dependence on extractive industries.

"I don't particularly like mining or oil extraction, but I like misery a lot less, so we must use our resources to overcome, as quickly as possible, the miserable conditions in which many Ecuadoreans live," he said, adding that "there are moral imperatives to fighting against inequality."

"How do we deal with the contradictions this resource development creates? Through elections. In 2013 I told the Ecuadorian people that we will use the last drop of oil, the last ounce of gold in an absolutely responsible manner to take the country out, as quickly as possible, from its sub-development, and we won 57 % of the vote. The radical opposition to mining and oil industries got 3%," he added.

He further noted the refusal of the wealthy countries largely responsible for climate change to accept his proposal for an international tribunal on greenhouse gas emissions. "We understand that this [planet] is the only house we have," he said. "So I brought the idea of an international court of justice for the planet to Paris. Who has the power? The polluting countries. If the rich countries were forced to pay for their consumption this would greatly reduce global warming."

Correa also responded directly to those who have criticized his treatment of NGO's and media organizations and raised concerns about the human rights situation in Ecuador. "Human rights have never been as respected as they are in Ecuador now," he said. "But no other country, not even Pinochet, has had as many complaints in the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights because it's been turned into an instrument of persecution of progressive governments."

He added that this persecution has largely been driven by US interests given that "the complaints have come from NGO's funded by Washington, by the National Endowment for Democracy which is funded by the CIA. This is sadly part of the international politics of certain groups, and the intent is to destabilize progressive governments."

In this context, Correa noted the hypocrisy of the recent concerns about Russian interventions in the US elections. "Our for-

eign policy and our moral principles are the same. We don't have double standards," he declared. "We respect the internal affairs of each country, and more than that, their elections." Correa also commented on both the legacy of President Obama's policies towards Latin America and the prospects of the looming Trump administration.

While acknowledging that Obama's recent policies towards Cuba are important, he said they've been contradicted by his efforts to destabilize Venezuela and that over his two terms in office Obama "practically did nothing for Latin America." He also reiterated his speculation that the threat presented by incoming President-elect Trump might serve to unify Latin America and lead to a strengthening of the progressive governments in the region.

He was, however indirectly, highly critical of President-elect Trump's xenophobic rhetoric and European anti-migrant sentiments, drawing a stark contrast to his government's law affirming the universal right of mobility.

"We believe in the right of mobility. In these supposedly Christian countries like the US and Europe there is free movement of capital, and yet the movement of people has been criminalized. You're not going to solve [a migration crisis] with walls. You're going to solve it with justice, with the distribution of wealth and prosperity to all regions of the planet."

In closing, Correa noted that after his term in office ends in May, he hopes his fellow citizens will continue the "moral imperative of fighting against poverty." "Poverty is not a product of a lack of resources, or natural disasters. It's a product of a perverse system of exclusion, so there is a moral imperative to fight against exclusion."

Source: *Telesur, Jan 14, 2017*

COLOMBIA: Most Dangerous Country for Human Rights Defenders

By Dan Kovalik, Labor & Human Rights Lawyer

Front Line Defenders, annual report on Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) at risk, has just put out its most recent report detailing the struggle of HRDs throughout the world in 2016. As Front Line Defenders details, there were 281 HRDs killed throughout the globe in 2016, and an incredible 85 of these (or about 30%) were from Colombia, the US's closest ally in the Western Hemisphere.

Another 58 HRDs killed were from Brazil which experienced a US-supported right-wing coup beginning in April of 2016; and 33 were from Honduras which had a right-wing, US-backed coup in 2009. In total, these three countries accounted for about 61% of all HRDs killed world-wide in 2016.

What is more shocking than even these statistics, is the lack of reporting on them that one hears in the mainstream media (MSM.) Colombia in particular receives barely a whis-

per of reportage from the US press, despite its uniquely bad human rights situation, a human rights situation which has only gotten worse as the peace process in that country progressed.

As Frontline Defenders explains:

In Colombia, the progression of the peace process and the establishment of a definitive ceasefire between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia

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ARGENTINA: Stand in Solidarity with HOTEL BAUEN Workers

After almost 14 years of struggle, the Argentine Senate passed a bill for the expropriation of the Hotel BAUEN in favor of the worker cooperative on November 30th, 2016. The existence of such law has consolidated workers' self-management and has brought historical justice to this cause, given that former owners of the hotel built it using public credit facilitated by the genocidal *de facto* military government (1976-1983); this credit was never repaid. Beyond historical rectification, the expropriation bill recognized the Hotel BAUEN's social purposes, including myriad solidarity-based initiatives, and cultural activities that regularly take place in this worker-managed hotel, making the BAUEN an emblem of workers' self-management in Argentina and in the world. But Argentine President Mauricio Macri has subsequently vetoed the expropriation bill based on fallacious arguments that deny the social purposes of the cooperative, that reject the recovery of the public funds, and that will leave 130 workers unemployed and unable to provide for their families. We urge the members of the Argentine Chamber of Deputies and the Argentine Senate to reject the presidential veto and to confirm the law that expropriates the Hotel BAUEN on behalf of its workers in order to repair this injustice, avoid the eviction of workers from the hotel, and

strengthen our democracy.

Hotel BAUEN constitutes one of the most emblematic worker-recuperated businesses in Argentina. Closed by its owners as part of a fraudulent scheme that left its workers out on the street by the end of the 2001, the 20-story building located in downtown Buenos Aires was asset stripped and abandoned by its owners for more than a year before a group of former workers occupied the space on March 21st, 2003. Thus began a process of 13 years of workers' self-management that has created 130 jobs and witnessed the Hotel BAUEN's workers make major investments in repairing and renovating the hotel's infrastructure, all with very little external financing. Hotel BAUEN, which was once a symbol of corrupt power in Argentina, has now, under workers' self-management, become a meeting place for social movements, unions, and workers' organizations. Over the past decade, the hotel has hosted hundreds of organizing conferences and debates, as well as academic and cultural events.

Hotel BAUEN is not just an emblem of self-management. Its origins also constitute a symbol for the collective memory of the collusion and corruption between economic power and the genocidal dictatorship that ruled and bloodied Argentina between 1976 and 1983.

Hotel BAUEN was originally constructed in preparation for the World Cup of soccer hosted in Argentina in 1978 and financed with loans from the national bank (BANADE) that were never repaid. Thus there still exists an outstanding public debt. The expropriation bill permits the Argentine State to regain the ownership of the building and subsequently have it transferred to the workers' cooperative, which has, after all, recuperated it for the working class and Argentine society. The subsequent presidential veto, however, has impeded this historical reparation promised by the expropriation of the Hotel BAUEN, and has, instead, consecrated the impunity of the accomplices of the military dictatorship and punished the workers who have devoted their effort, their work, and their resources to the recuperation of this hotel.

The signatures in the petition represent those who stand in solidarity with the workers of Hotel BAUEN. They represent a call for the Members of Congress of the Argentine Republic to confirm the expropriation bill they passed, allowing the continuation of workers' self-management, which is exemplary to the world.

* Urgent appeal! *

Send an email of support to the HOTEL BAUEN workers: solidaritybauencooperative@gmail.com

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(FARC) was met by an increase in the level of violence experienced by the HRDs. After the peace agreement was unveiled on August 26, 13 HRDs were assassinated in less than three weeks in Antioquia, César, Cauca and Nariño.

As Frontline Defenders points out, "local organizations reported that these and other attacks were carried out by groups who sought to derail or postpone the peace process"—namely, the right-wing paramilitaries backed by the Colombian security forces who are in turn backed by the United States. Indeed, the well-respected NGO, *Programa Somos Defensores* (We Are Defenders Program) related in its report covering the first half of 2016 that paramilitaries and the official Colombian security forces were responsible for a combined 78% of all aggressions against HRDs, while the FARC guerrillas were responsible for a mere 0.1% of such aggressions.

Of course, these figures are the exact opposite of what one might have guessed from con-

suming mainstream press information which tends to downplay the crimes of the Colombian State while attempting to blame the FARC for the terrible human rights situation in Colombia. Meanwhile, it must be said that the FARC has shown a sincere resolve to end the nearly 53-year conflict in that country, to own up to the crimes it has committed over the years and build a lasting peace in that country.

As all of this illustrates, the mainstream press simply refuses to give equal time to the atrocities carried out by the US and its allies, while instead focusing on the abuses (both imagined and real) of the US's ostensible enemies. While the press obsesses about any and all alleged misdeeds of Colombia's next door neighbor, Venezuela, you might be surprised to learn that Frontline Defenders relates that only one HRD was killed in that country last year. But alas, these are inconvenient facts to a press corps which largely has become a mouthpiece for the US State Department, and has stopped doing any real journalism.

The selective concern of the MSM has real-life consequences. If the press focused on the human rights situation in such countries as Colombia proportionally to the abuses they commit, countries like Colombia would receive nearly-daily coverage, and there would be some real accountability for the US's continued support of the Colombian military to the tune of \$10 billion since 2000 and counting. However, as it stands now, there is almost no accountability at all. So, in a real way, the MSM aids and abets the US's continued support for repressive regimes, while stoking public antipathy for countries the US has designated as our enemies.

We must demand more accountability from both our press and our government in order for human rights to be honored as they should be, instead of being used as a mere bludgeon for the US to wield against countries which are simply too independent for its liking.

Source: *Front Line Defenders, 2016 report, January 3, 2017*

NICARAGUA: Report from US Citizen

By Susan Lagos, living in Nicaragua

Ed. Note: *Both: Susan and Walter Lagos participated on a Task Force delegation to Venezuela in 2015*

My husband Walter and I have been living in Darío, Nicaragua since 2004, when I retired from teaching Spanish, and after my mother passed away. Walter grew up on a ranch in western Nicaragua, so he is devoted to his cows, although feeding them has been hard work these last three years of drought. He grows corn, sorghum and Taiwan grass to chop up, and rents pastures, since our *finca* is only 15 acres. We also raise pigs, ducks, turkeys, *pelibuey* sheep, chickens, and four horses, as well as the dogs and cats. He is installing irrigation systems to save water. His sons Julio (just married at 23) and Walter Junior (almost 25) have been working with him and the manager. We sell milk, fresh cheese, eggs, piglets, ducks, etc. Nicaraguan country chicken soup with their version of dumplings and vegetables adapts well to duck, and is *deliciosa*. Our *finca* is about 10 kilometers, 15 minutes from our house in Darío.

Since my back no longer likes lifting and bending much, I do some of the cooking and cleaning, but no more picking lemons, oranges and tangerines to sell. Anyway the trees died in the drought. I also have been participating in local government. Recently the fiestas for the 150th anniversary of Rubén Darío's birth (famous poet born here, father of *modernismo*) entertained us for a week with election of the Muse (10 young women competed in the election, they declaimed his poetry, with voice inflections and hand gestures, and answered questions about Darío's life and work, and wore Greek dresses, with family and friends cheering them on.) We also had *baile* folkloric performances, singing contests, children's games, parades, a visit by the National Assembly, art exhibits, and a cake contest for a week.

Nicaragua had elections two days before the US, and Daniel Ortega won a third term, with his wife Rosario Murillo as VP, with more than 70% of the votes. His government has made great strides in infrastructure, education, and public health, and in case you haven't noticed, those Central American refu-

gees arriving in the US are from Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala, where gangs, violence and corruption cause so much trouble, but none are leaving from Nicaragua for those reasons. It is a very safe country, where no one wants war, since during the revolution against the US supported dictator Somoza ending in 1979, and the contra war funded by Ronald Reagan and the CIA in the 80's left 120,000 dead.

By law here, half of public offices must be filled by women, in the National Assembly, local government, and department level, so if the mayor is a man, the vice-mayor must be a woman, etc. And there are several parties, but as long as they are legal and have at least 5% of the vote, they are represented appropriately in the Assembly by their percentage. So people like me that voted for Dr. Jill Stein would not be unrepresented here just because they didn't vote for one of the two main parties. Rosario Murillo has been working overtime for years as the National Coordinator on women's and children's issues, land title issues, cultural and tourism issues, youth and community development issues, etc. so she is definitely not just a figurehead.

As for freedom of the press, the opposition *La Prensa* newspaper weekly has caricatures of Daniel as *el Bachi* (he never finished the University because of the revolution, therefore only has a HS degree or *bachillerato*), and Rosario as *la Chamuca* or witch, perhaps because she dresses like an aged hippie, colorful, with rings on every finger. They have renovated Managua, which was destroyed by the 1972 earth-

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tionally, where 300 cities have mounted actions against the financial backers of this toxic pipeline: Citibank, Wells Fargo, TD Bank and 15 others, has clearly had an effect. Norway's largest bank, DNB, under pressure from Greenpeace Norway, sold its stake in the pipeline project and is reconsidering its outstanding loans to the project. Wells Fargo has apparently experienced a drop in deposits, following the divestment campaign.

Standing Rock has caught the imagination of the world; a resurgent Indigenous movement which has been leading many battles in the US and Canada, a fighting Vet-

quake, so that now after 40 plus years, there are no more half destroyed buildings downtown, everyone has been getting their home or land titles legalized, and the lake front instead of a huge garbage dump called *La Chureca*, has a shiny recycling center employing lots of the people who earlier dug through the trash. We also have the Salvador Allende Park on Lake Managua, with restaurants and entertainment for families.

Public health care has much improved, and I have several neighbors who have had knee, back, and eye operations for free. My dermatologist, optometrist, general practitioner, and acupuncturist were trained in Cuba. Hospitals and clinics are much better equipped. Pregnant women from the countryside are provided a free stay in town at the Casa Materna. Upon their due date they are taken to the hospital in an ambulance and cared for, also for free. People with chronic conditions like heart disease or diabetes receive their weekly medicine and checkup for free. Our electricity coverage is up to 90% of rural areas, when with the opposition government (1990-2006) it was under 50%. Now over 50% of our electricity comes from wind, solar and geothermal sources. Education at all levels is more accessible everywhere, not just in the city.

So if any of you are interested in visiting us, we have lots of natural beauty to show you, as well as colonial cities, 13 volcanoes, two big lakes, and great beaches. When it's cold up north, we have 70 degree weather. Nicaraguans are hospitable and just learning how to share their country with tourists. ●

erans movement re-emerging as a powerful force, a large contingent of young people of many colors from all over selflessly devoting themselves to the struggle, networks being activated around the country and the world, coming together in a coalition that, in the context of the global economic and financial crisis, just might be able to take on a powerful oil company that is threatening to poison the water, and defeat it.

Many thanks for the information and insights of Maurice Martin of Veterans for Peace, who worked tirelessly at Eagle Butte to provide medical support for the tribes and the huge contingent of veterans.

CUBA and US: New Migratory Agreement

An important step forward in improving bilateral relations occurred on January 12 with the signing of an agreement between the governments of Cuba and the United States. They issued a Joint Statement on that date.

With this agreement, eliminated are the policies known as “wet foot-dry foot” and the temporary admission parole program for Cuban health professionals, which Washington implements in third countries.

For several years now, there has been on-going interest, on the part of the Cuban government, in adopting a new migratory agreement to resolve serious problems that continue to affect migratory relations, despite the existence of bilateral agreements in this area. Cuba formalized this request for the first time in 2002, a request which was rejected by then President George W. Bush. The country made another attempt to present a new migratory accord in 2009, which was updated in 2010, and reiterated most recently on Nov.30, 2015.

The policy commonly known as “wet foot-dry foot,” a flagrant violation of the letter and spirit of the migratory accords reached between Cuba and the US in 1994

and 1995, has constituted, until this point, a stimulus to irregular migration, trafficking in emigrants, and irregular entries into the US from third countries by Cuban citizens who travel abroad legally and are admitted to US territory automatically, affording them singular, preferential treatment not available to citizens from other countries. Its implementation and that of other policies have provoked migratory crises; hijackings of airplanes and boats, and the committing of crimes like trafficking in emigrants, migratory fraud, and the use of violence, with a growing extraterritorial destabilizing impact on other countries in the region used as transit routes to reach US territory.

From now on, the US is also committed to apply, in the case of Cuban citizens, the same procedures and migratory norms stipulated for migrants from other countries, with no selective criteria, which is a positive step in terms of eliminating the exclusivity with which Cubans have been treated, motivated by political considerations.

Likewise, the so-called Parole Program for Cuban Medical Professionals, which has

been part of the arsenal used to deny the country doctors, nurses, and other professionals from this sector, virtually an international talent theft operation promoted by the US government since 2006, and an attack on Cuba’s humanitarian medical missions in Third World countries, which are so needed. US policy has encouraged Cuban health personnel working in third countries to abandon their missions, and immigrate to the US, becoming a reprehensible practice that harmed Cuba’s international medical cooperation programs.

The US government continues to guarantee regular migration from Cuba for a minimum of 20,000 persons annually.

Both governments agree to apply their migratory laws in a non-selective manner, in accordance with international obligations. They are likewise committed to halting dangerous departures that put human lives at risk, preventing irregular migration, and combating violence associated with these, as well as trade and trafficking in persons.

Source://en.granma.cu/cuba/2017-01-13/revolutionary-government-declaration

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