

Report

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EL SALVADOR: First Nation to Ban Metal Mining

By *Nina Lakhani*, reporter

El Salvador has made history after becoming the first country in the world to ban metal mining. Lawmakers in the water-parched country passed the ban in a unanimous vote on March 29, declaring El Salvador a mining-free territory.

The decision followed a long and bitter struggle to protect the Central American country's diminishing water sources from polluting mining projects. Campaigners holding banners with the now famous "No to mining, yes to life" slogan celebrated inside and outside the legislative assembly in the capital, San Salvador.

"The vote is a victory for communities who, for more than a decade, have relentlessly organized to keep mining companies out of their territories. The prohibition ensures the long-term ecological viability of a country already considered one of the most environmentally vulnerable in the world," said Pedro Cabezas, from International Allies against Mining in El Salvador.

The vote, which was expected by both sides to be much closer, builds on a rising tide of popular opposition to environmentally destructive projects across Latin America, where partial bans have been implemented in Costa Rica, Argentina and Colombia.

El Salvador is the most densely populated country in Latin America and, while rainfall is plentiful, holding on to the water is a major issue because of unsustainable farming practices and inadequate industrial controls that have led to widespread soil erosion and the almost total destruction of its forests.

More than 90 per cent of El Salvador's surface waters are estimated to be polluted by toxic chemicals, heavy metals and waste matter. The water crisis has steadily deepened since the pro-business Arena Party granted an array of permits for mineral exploration. Cyanide and iron have been found in the San Sebastián River, in El Salvador's La Unión state.

Momentum around a ban had been gathering pace since last October, when an international tribunal threw out a claim by a multinational mining company to force the Salvadoran government to pay out millions in compensation for refusing to let it dig for gold. The company had backed the campaign opposing the ban, promoting the benefits of responsible mining.

But the claim by OceanaGold that it was

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A consulta popular, established by the country's Municipal Code as a mechanism for community participation, is a municipal-level referendum on an issue of local concern. Forty percent of registered voters must sign petitions to invoke a referendum. Consultas were held in at least five municipalities in El Salvador to determine if residents were for or against metallic mining in communities. Consultas played a strategic role in the country's national movement against metallic mining.

(Photo & caption: Sandra Cuffe)

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unfairly refused permission to start digging at its El Dorado mine, in the Cabañas region, was dismissed as without merit and the firm was ordered to pay El Salvador \$8m towards legal costs. The ruling marked the end of a long-running, bitter dispute that had been blamed for delaying concrete measures to tackle worsening pollution and water shortages.

National polls have consistently reported that the vast majority of Salvadorans wanted a ban, and earlier this month thousands of people took to the streets in support of the bill, which was backed by the Catholic Church, academics and civil society groups.

Jen Moore, the Latin America program coordinator at Mining Watch Canada, said the victory would encourage other countries to stand up against the muscle of mining giants. “The Salvadoran people and leaders made huge efforts to weigh the short-term benefits with the long-term risks to their water, environment and social wellbeing ... and despite the efforts of a company to try to blackmail the country, they showed it is possible to win against significant odds.”

In 2009, the newly elected left-wing FMLN government initiated a de facto moratorium on metallic mining amid growing anger in threatened rural communities. In the Cabañas region, where the El Dorado mine is situated, resistance mounted after community station Radio Victoria launched a campaign opposing mining in 2008.

Cristina Starr, from Radio Victoria, said: “Today water won over gold. This historic victory is down to the clarity and determination of the Salvadoran people fighting for life over the economic interests of a few.”

Source: *The Guardian*, March 30, 2017

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HONDURAS: Juan Orlando Confronted by Protestors in DC

By Lauren Gambino, reporter

Supporters and family members of Berta Cáceres, the Honduran environmental and indigenous rights activist who was assassinated last year, confronted the country’s president in Washington to demand an independent investigation of her murder.

President Juan Orlando Hernández traveled to Washington to meet with lawmakers on March 21 and was greeted by protesters carrying signs with photographs of murdered activists and chants of “asesino”—Spanish for murderer.

Cáceres was one of more than 120 land and environmental campaigners murdered since a military-backed coup d’état ousted the democratically elected president Manuel Zelaya in 2009, according to the anti-corruption NGO Global Witness. Eight men have been arrested in connection with her murder, including one serving and two retired military officers.

Human rights organizations have joined the family in calling for an international independent investigation into her death. “We want to have an independent investigation to follow up on what the justice in Honduras has done so far,” said Neery Carrillo, Cáceres’s sister. “We don’t trust the justice [system] in Honduras.”

The Honduran government has denied any role in Cáceres’s killing, but records obtained by the Guardian show that one of the suspects had been appointed chief of intelligence for elite Special Forces and that he and another suspect received military training in the US.

During the meeting, Mark Pocan, a Democratic congressman from Wisconsin, raised concerns that some of the suspects in the murder had received US training, according to an aide in the congressman’s office. The congressman asked the Honduran president how to ensure that US aid money was not being used to abet human rights violations. He had met with Cáceres’ sister and niece before the meeting with the president, and said he raised their demand for an independent inquiry into her murder. According to his staff, Hernández argued that his government was making strides in combating the violence that has devastated his

country, one of the most deadly in the world, and said local authorities had done an adequate job investigating her death.

Cáceres led the decade-long struggle against a project to build a dam along the Gualcarque River on territory that is sacred to the Lenca people and that could flood large areas of ancestral lands and cut off water supplies to hundreds. She was murdered late in the evening on March 2, 2016, after at least four gunmen stormed her home on the outskirts of a town called La Esperanza.

The murder of Cáceres, recipient of the prestigious Goldman Environmental prize in 2015, sparked international outcry and calls for US to suspend aid to the country. The Honduran government, which receives tens of millions of dollars in annual US aid, is under mounting pressure to conduct an independent inquiry into the crime. Her family is supporting the Berta Cáceres Human Rights in Honduras Act, HR 1299, a bill that would suspend US funding for security assistance until basic human rights conditions are met. The legislation was reintroduced by Hank Johnson, a Democratic congressman from Georgia, on the one-year anniversary of Cáceres’ death.

Silvio Carrillo, her nephew, a US citizen who lives in Oakland, California, said the government was “absolutely implicated” in his aunt’s death. “They’ve got eight guys in custody there but these aren’t the intellectual authors,” Carrillo said. “There is a direct tie straight up, way high up into the army and into the government, but I think there’s a fear of finding out too much.”

Last year, a former Honduran soldier told the Guardian that he had seen Cáceres’s name on a hit list that was passed to US-trained units by the Honduran military Joint Chiefs of Staff. The soldier said that two elite units had been given lists featuring the names and photographs of activists – and ordered to eliminate each target. Honduran authorities have denied the allegations.

The protesters waited outside of a meeting room in the Cannon building. As Hernández left, Cáceres’ niece shouted a question about the investigation but the president, swarmed by security, did not turn his head.

Source: *The Guardian*, March 21, 2017

“Alliance for Prosperity”

By Diana Bohn, Task Force on the Americas, Board member

In 2014 the United States announced a five year joint regional plan called the Alliance for Prosperity in Central America which was to assist the northern triangle countries of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras to improve their economic status, lower the crime rate, human rights abuses, and provide incentives for at-risk persons to remain in their own countries rather than migrate north to the US.

In 2016 the US Congress allocated \$750 million dollars for development assistance to Central America under the Alliance for Prosperity. According to the Council on Hemispheric Affairs more than 60 percent of that money is going for security measures. In 2015 immigration was down, the statistics for the last six months of that year showed that apprehensions by the border patrol increased by 171 percent.

A letter was sent to Presidents of US, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Mexico signed by 45 organizations from 12 Latin American Countries as well as 32 US organizations to express urgent concerns about the Plan of the Alliance for Prosperity for the Northern Triangle.

The letter states that the Plan reinforces the same economic policies that have resulted in skyrocketing inequality, widespread

abuse of workers’ rights and increased violence against labor leaders, and forced displacement throughout Mesoamerica. Furthermore, the Plan perpetuates the same militarized security policies that have become synonymous with the horrors of the Drug War. Many of our organizations are witness to and have suffered from the systematic human rights abuses carried out by police and military.

According to Guatemalan political writer Fernando Solis, the Alliance for Prosperity in the Northern Triangle is framed as an anti-immigration plan that seeks to curb immigration to the United States through the economic growth and increased competitiveness of Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala. The plan seeks to further entrench the neoliberal economic model within these countries through large-scale investments into the pillars that support the accumulation of wealth in a capitalist system: mega-development projects, extractive industries, and new forms of monocultures that produce the raw materials for a globalized world market.

The Alliance for Prosperity fits within Guatemala’s Development Plan K’atun 2032 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals, given that both frameworks are also based on this model of capital accumulation.

Another important aspect is that large-scale investments into the aforementioned areas by American investors and their Euro-

pean, Mexican, and South American allies, requires security on two fronts. The first is the security for the project itself and a general strengthening of State security apparatuses, such as the police and military.

Secondly, large-scale investments and the side businesses they generate require a business climate based on “governability,” which is threatened by the growth of organized crime in its various forms; trafficking has given rise to mafia networks, narco-activity, corruption, and illegal and illicit business. These activities weaken the State and make governments lose control—particularly when members of the State themselves are involved in these criminal networks—and compete with “legal” businesses in terms of costs and tax losses.

The main people affected by the plan will be the same as always: immigrants, workers and the communities negatively impacted by mega-investments projects.

The US doesn’t purport to end immigration and the previously-mentioned criminal structures, but instead, to control them. Curbing immigration is only part of the discourse, but isn’t the main goal. Instead, the US seeks to control the countries involved and link them onto the chain of global power and wealth accumulation. Certainly, as has been shown, this model of accumulation and security concretized by the Alliance will only deepen and streamline this phenomenon even further.

The US isn’t just supporting governments through security policies and attacks against corruption, but is mobilizing to guarantee security for its own mega development investments. The borders of the US are increasingly extending south towards the Northern Triangle; the Alliance for Prosperity will merge with the Southern Border Plan (*Plan Frontera Sur*), which was launched in Mexico two years ago and is itself a military plan for security in light of narco-trafficking and organized crime.

Sources: [coha.org/alliance-for-prosperity-plan-in-the-northern-triangle-not-a-likely-final-solution-March 3, 2016](http://coha.org/alliance-for-prosperity-plan-in-the-northern-triangle-not-a-likely-final-solution-March-3,-2016/); cispes.org/sites/2015/04/Final-Letter-to-Presidents-at-Summit-of-the-Americas.pdf; [nigua.org/fernando-solis-from-el-observador August 23, 2016](http://nigua.org/fernando-solis-from-el-observador-August-23,-2016/)



END US MILITARY TRAINING AND AID TO HONDURAS

Take Action!

Contact your member of Congress: Call the Congressional switchboard: 1-202-224-3121

Ask your Representative to co-sponsor the Berta Cáceres Human Rights in Honduras Act, H.R. 1299

California Senate Approves ‘Sanctuary State’ Bill

By Melody Gutierrez, staff writer



California took another step April 3rd toward a showdown with the Trump administration over sanctuary policies when the state Senate approved a bill that would prohibit local police officers and sheriff's deputies throughout the state from enforcing federal immigration laws.

The bill essentially would force all city and county law enforcement departments to follow the type of sanctuary policies that many of the more liberal cities, including San Francisco and Oakland, embrace. The legislation passed the Senate with a 27-12 vote and now heads to the Assembly. "This is about making our communities safer, not less safe," said Senate President Kevin de León, D-Los Angeles, author of SB54. De León said Trump's policies have caused fear in immigrant communities to such a degree that some people are afraid to report crimes.

De León said the bill requires the state to protect its immigrant communities and would ensure that people living in the country without documentation know they can call police to report a crime or take their children to school without fear of being deported. SB54 would bar police agencies from enforcing immigration laws, including arresting or detaining people in the country without documentation for immigration violations unless a judge issues a warrant. The agencies would be prohibited from asking about someone's immigration status or providing information to federal immigration officers.

The bill also would prohibit local law enforcement agencies from working with Immigration and Customs Enforcement on task forces, such as on drug and human trafficking cases, if the primary focus is immigration enforcement.

Lawmakers made several amendments to make the bill more palatable to police agencies, including a provision allowing state and local law enforcement agencies to notify ICE before a felon convicted of a serious or violent crime is released from prison or jail so the person can be deported.

The action comes as the Trump administration hardens the country's policies on illegal immigration, which includes beefing up border security and immigration enforcement. Last month, US Attorney General Jeff Sessions said states and cities with sanctuary policies will lose federal Department of Justice funding. "The tough talk is all rhetoric coming out of Washington," de León said. "We are going to be punished or they will strike back at us? We are the great state of California. We don't grovel or put our hand out so we can get a little budget money so we can buy a police car."

But state Republican lawmakers lashed out at Democrats over SB54, saying the majority party is putting California at risk of losing billions in federal funding by antagonizing the president and that the bill will put residents in danger by allowing criminals to remain in the state. "Don't get caught up with 'I hate Trump' fever," said Sen. Joel Anderson, R-San Diego, as he urged lawmakers to oppose the bill. "SB54 is the wrong direction."

Democrats, who have a supermajority control of both houses of the Legislature, pointed out that studies have shown that immigrants, including those living in the country without documentation, commit crimes at lower rates than people born in the country.

Last week, state Supreme Court Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye criticized federal immigration officials for conducting raids at courthouses, saying it would have a chilling effect in communities as people worry they can't "seek protection because they will see the court as a bad place. And I worry that crimes will go unreported and communities will live in fear."

De León said the Senate met with its outside legal counsel, former Attorney General Eric Holder, and is confident that

the state has a strong legal basis to move forward with the statewide policy. "The gun-to-the-head method to force resistant cities and counties to participate in Trump's inhumane and counterproductive mass deportations is unconstitutional and will fail," he said.

Before the vote, lawmakers introduced the family of Romulo Avelica-Gonzalez, who was taken into custody by US immigration agents in February while driving his daughter to school in Los Angeles. Avelica-Gonzalez's arrest made national headlines after his 13-year-old daughter recorded it on her cell phone between sobs. "This bill is about people who are just trying to live their lives; people who are living in fear because of the political atmosphere," said Sen. Scott Wiener, D-San Francisco. "People who need to be able to trust their government."

Republicans gave their own examples, including the 2015 shooting death of Kathryn Steinle along San Francisco's Pier 14. Steinle's alleged assailant was a man who was not authorized to be in the country and had been released despite immigration officials requesting the city hold him. "I'm not saying an illegal alien is more likely to commit a crime," said Sen. Jeff Stone, R-Temecula (Riverside County). "What I am saying is that an illegal alien who commits serious and violent crimes should not be protected the way this law would protect them."

The Senate also approved SB6 by Sen. Ben Hueso, D-San Diego, which would create a \$12 million state-funded program where the state would pay for lawyers at nonprofit organizations to represent people facing deportation. People who have been convicted of a violent felony would not be eligible for the free legal services. SB6 passed 27-10 and now heads to the Assembly.

Supporters of the bill say immigrants who have an attorney representing them in deportation cases are three times more likely to win the right to remain in the country.

Source: *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 3, 2017

COLOMBIA: Murders of Human Rights Defenders Increase

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights raised alarm over the fact that at least 41 activists have been killed in Colombia so far this year, a record figure in comparison to past years that lays bare a troubling continuation of violence despite last years' historic agreement between the government and the country's largest rebel army.

Social movements and human rights activists have been calling on Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos to do more to address paramilitary violence targeting social and left-wing leaders.

UN Commissioner Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein said the figure shows a worsening trend of crimes against social leaders and human rights defenders. "It's an increase over the same period last year and the previous years, and it is very alarming," said the UN official during a news conference.

In all of 2016, a total of 80 human rights defenders lost their lives, including community leaders, organizers and lawyers defending indigenous people, campesinos, Afro-

Colombians, labor activists, victims' groups, youth and LGBTI community members, according to the program, We Are Defenders.

More human rights defenders lost their lives in Colombia in 2016 than any other year that Santos was in power, according to a new report. According to official statistics, a staggering 156 social leaders were killed in Colombia in the 14 months between Jan. 1, 2016 and March 1, 2017. Amid the crisis, human rights groups have urged the Colombian government to prioritize tackling paramilitary violence that often targets progressive social leaders including campesinos, Indigenous activists and other human rights defenders.

According to the US State Department, paramilitary forces are responsible for up to 80 percent of the human rights abuses committed in Colombia's 52-year civil war that has claimed the lives of some 260,000 people and victimized millions more.

According to Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein, the attacks appear to be concentrated in areas that the FARC previously controlled during

the armed conflict and recently abandoned in order to demobilize after the signing of the peace agreement.

Hussein said the peace process in Colombia "advances, although slowly, but it advances." He said that, if the tendency to assassinate human rights defenders in Colombia continues it "could harm the enormous efforts made in this peace process."

Human rights organizations and leaders of the FARC have repeatedly warned that violence waged by right-wing paramilitaries, which they hold responsible for the surge in violence against social leaders, poses the greatest threat to the fledgling and fragile peace agreement.

Hussein urged everyone in Colombia to "stay vigilant," noting that in post-conflict situations it's common to see that while the number of deaths caused by armed violence reduces, there's an increase in human rights violations. "We have to be very careful that this does not happen in Colombia," he said.

Source: *TeleSUR May 1, 2017*

PUERTO RICO: National Strike Protests 'Colonial' Debt Crisis

By *TeleSUR*

Thousands of Puerto Rican workers, students and other demonstrators took to the streets in a national strike in the early hours of International Workers' Day on May 1 to protest against the harsh austerity measures pummeling the island and the controversial federal control board managing its economy and crippling debt load.

Groups began demonstrations from different parts of San Juan as early as 5:00 a.m. local time, according to local media, ahead of a midnight deadline to reach debt restructuring deals with creditors or face lawsuits from those lenders.

The strike shut down businesses and blocked several streets, including traffic to the Luis Muñoz Marín international airport on the outskirts of the city as well as to the University of Puerto Rico, while dozens of others gathered at the offices of the Department of Labor in the capital's Hato Rey area to prepare for a thousands-strong march on the financial district.

Demonstrators carried signs with slo-

gans against US colonialism and against the neoliberal austerity measures targeting the island's public education, health care, social security and other public services. Protesters chanted slogans including "Ricky is selling the island!" to criticize Governor Ricardo Rossello, while others marched with images of the Puerto Rico flag in black and white as a symbol of resistance amid crisis on the island.

Marches led by students, feminists, trade unionists and other groups began by congregating at five points in the city and later converged by late morning in the one-mile stretch of San Juan's Ponce de Leon Avenue, known as the Golden Mile, where the controversial US president-appointed fiscal control board steering the island's economy is headquartered in the heart of the city's financial center.

The fiscal control board—set up last year through the contentious PROMESA law that gained bipartisan support in the US Congress as a plan to save Puerto Rico from its nearly US\$73 billion debt crisis—has become a powerful symbol of

the island's colonial relationship with Washington and the sacrificing of basic rights in the name of servicing the island's unmanageable debt load.

Puerto Rican artist Rene Perez, known as Residente, also joined the marches and addressed the demonstrators. Wearing a T-shirt promoting free public education, the famed rapper said he was proud to see the massive strike against the debt and in favor of workers' and students' rights. "This debt cannot be paid from the pocket of the workers," community leader Juan Camacho said during the demonstrations.

"I'm very certain what is happening is completely unjust," Residente said on stage to a large crowd, giving a shout out to students of the University of Puerto Rico, the island's main public post-secondary education system with a total of 11 campuses and 70,000 students, and criticizing the hundreds of millions of dollars in cuts targeting the institution. "Education is fundamental for all countries' development. That is what they

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“Haiti Will Never Accept the Electoral Coup d’etat”

By Dave Welsh activist and member of Haiti Action Committee

On April 23, five hundred people packed an Oakland church to welcome Dr. Maryse Narcisse, presidential candidate of *Fanmi Lavalas*, the party of Haiti’s first democratically elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide. The program, organized by Haiti Action Committee, was a benefit for the Haiti Emergency Relief Fund

“The United States, United Nations and other so-called ‘Friends of Haiti’ brought about the electoral coup d’etat,” she said. “The election of 2015 was thrown out because of widespread election fraud. Then the re-run in 2016 was stolen again. But *Nou Pap Obeyi* (We will not Obey) is a slogan our people believe in, because Haitians, who overthrew French colonialism and slavery in 1804, will never accept foreign domination.”

There was music by the Vukani Mawethu choir, and the revolutionary words of drummers Phavia Kujichagulia and Val Serrant. A Black community security service, the Community Ready Corps, clad in black uniforms and berets, provided security for the event, protecting our special guest from the real dangers that democracy fighters in Haiti face every day and could face here.

Over the past two years, Haiti’s popular movement has fought a relentless campaign for free and fair elections in support of Dr. Narcisse’s candidacy, with tens of thousands in the streets almost daily for many months. They fought to overturn the results of fraudulent elections that gave the presidency to a US-backed right-wing candidate.

A long-time *Lavalas* militant, as well as a medical doctor, Maryse Narcisse has been in the streets with the people day after day as they faced police bullets, tear gas, water hoses and clubs. “When you give voice to the demands and grievances of the people,” she said, “you win their hearts.”

She pointed out that “Haiti is an unequal country, where one percent of the population own 45 percent of the wealth, and most live in abject poverty, with high unemployment. The economy is at a standstill. The price of food and fuel keeps go-

ing up. There is poisoned water, flooding, and deforestation. Over 200,000 children cannot go to school because most primary schools are private. “There is constant meddling by the US and the UN occupation force, creating instability,” Dr. Narcisse continued. “They don’t want us to have our own strong government

serving our people. These self-appointed ‘Friends of Haiti’ want to hold onto the power so they can serve international interests. That is why they intervene and steal our elections.”

The small right-wing Haitian elite controls the government, she said, and there are signs of a return to the methods of the Duvalier dictatorship, which ruled Haiti from 1957 to 1986. “But in 1986 the people rose up and overthrew Baby Doc Duvalier. As in those times, today we are re-organizing, holding large mass meetings, educating and mobilizing our people - be-



cause the people want to resist and they will never give up.”

Dr. Narcisse’s party takes its name from *Lavalas* which means ‘flood’ or ‘cleansing torrent’ in the Haitian Kreyol language. And there is a saying in the movement: “Alone we are weak. United we are strong. All together we are *Lavalas!*” As a medical doctor, she led the Aristide Foundation’s medical response after the 2010 earthquake and Hurricane Matthew. This was her first visit to the Bay Area.

Source: www.haitiemergencyrelief.org

Puerto Rico, continued from page 5

are taking away from us and that’s what we have to defend until the end and that’s why we’re here.”

The marches come as months of austerity policies have already had an impact on the cash-strapped island, while health care, pensions, higher education and wages have been some of the keys areas suffering cuts ordered by the corporate experts of the PROMESA board. Government services are increasingly being privatized to meet creditors’ demands.

Protests against the cuts and the fiscal control board have argued that much of Puerto Rico’s debt is illegitimate. An initial audit report found that up to US\$30 billion of Puerto Rico’s more than US\$70 billion debt load was issued illegally.

A mind-boggling report by the ReFund America Project found that nearly half of

the debt the island owes is not borrowed funds, but interest on bonds underwritten by Wall Street firms, who are raking in big profits from predatory lending schemes.

Nearly half of Puerto Rico’s population lives in poverty and child poverty is soaring at 60 percent. The island faces a Medicaid funding gap of \$650 million this year, while unemployment is nearly twice the average of the rate in US states.

Puerto Rico’s ability to deal with its debt crisis has been crippled by the fact that it is a virtual colony of the United States, which bars the island from filing for bankruptcy. Critics argue that the PROMESA bill and fiscal control board—which can override the local government in making decisions on the economy and debt restructuring—lays bare Puerto Rico’s lack of independence.

Sources: *El Vocero-El Nuevo Dia-Primera Hora-Reuters, May 1, 2017*

Venezuela and the OAS: The Logic of Withdrawal

By Mark Weisbrot, Co-Director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research and the president of Just Foreign Policy.

Venezuela's announcement that it would withdraw from the Organization of American States (OAS) has been greeted with the usual derision in the US media, most of which long ago abandoned any pretense of journalistic neutrality on that country.

But if we step back a bit from the major media narrative, there is a logic to Venezuela's decision. The OAS, especially under its current secretary general, Luis Almagro, is not the multilateral body that it pretends to be. Almagro, with backing from the US, has been on a *jihad* against Venezuela for years now. In 2015, he spent months trying to delegitimize the Venezuelan National Assembly elections, claiming that they would be stolen without "help" from OAS

observers.

His behavior was so out-of-bounds and repugnant that José Pepe Mujica, ex-president of Uruguay, denounced Almagro, his former foreign minister. "I regret the line you have taken and I know it's irreversible, so now I formally say goodbye," wrote Mujica, who is widely loved and respected in South America for his honesty and integrity. Almagro turned out to be completely wrong, as the Venezuelan elections were conducted

without problems, with the opposition winning 56 percent of the vote.

So, from any objective viewpoint regardless of what one may think of either side of the conflict in Venezuela the OAS intervention is difficult to see as anything other than a partisan, Washington-driven initiative. In fact, this would never have happened a few years ago, when most South American governments had an independent foreign policy. But now Brazil, Argentina, and Peru have right-wing governments that are strongly aligned with Washington.

In 2013, when the Venezuelan opposition launched violent protests to reverse the result of a democratic presidential election in Venezuela, the then secretary general of the OAS, José Miguel Insulza, joined the US government and the right-wing government of Spain as the only diplomatic actors in the world who would not recognize the results despite there being absolutely no basis for opposition claims of fraud. But Spain and Insulza had to back down under pressure from South America, and then Secretary of State John

VENEZUELA: Gardens of Hope

Faced with a national shortage of basic goods, many young Venezuelans are unleashing their creative spirit. They are producing everything from soap to construction of their own homes using local renewable resources. And they are forging a new economic model based on barter, solidarity and sustainability. One such project is Conuco Colibrí (Hummingbird Farm), Sanare, Venezuela. It is a project of Lisa Sullivan and the kids of Sanare. Conuco Colibrí is a community permaculture farm in the foothills of Venezuela's Andes Mountains.

Food shortages in the country have brought hunger to the community and many parents spend long hours in food lines; so the kids decided to take action! They gathered rocks, sticks, stones, soil and manure from the surrounding mountainside. And with help from a few adults, friends and some donated seeds, they built raised vegetable beds and permaculture plots on an abandoned plot of weeds at Hummingbird Farm. Soon there was spinach, squash, tomatoes, passion fruit, corn, beans and broccoli.

The beautiful food plot is called the Garden of Hope. The kids experimented with compost, different styles of beds, alternative crops, companion planting and more. After they began taking home fresh vegetables every week, their parents, teachers and classmates came to see what they were doing. When the adults asked the kids to teach them, they said YES!

The kids are asking for help because they want to learn more, share more and grow more. They want to bring these Gardens of Hope to their homes, schools and neighboring communities. Garden by garden they are returning food to their homes and hope to their community and dignity to their country.

Conuco Colibrí is a fiscally sponsored project of the Task Force on the Americas and contributions are tax deductible.



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ECUADOR: President-elect Moreno Praised by UN

Ed. Note: *The UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) contain "17 goals with 169 targets covering a broad range of sustainable development issues. These included ending poverty and hunger, improving health and education, making cities more sustainable, combating climate change, and protecting oceans and forests."* (wikipedia)

The secretary-general of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres, said he expects Ecuador's President-elect to continue the social gains promoted by the progressive government of Rafael Correa over the past decade that has helped lift nearly two million people out of poverty since 2009.

Guterres congratulated Ecuador's President-elect Lenin Moreno, who served the country as Correa's vice president during his first term from 2007 to 2013, and as the UN special envoy on disability and accessibility from 2013 to 2016. The UN chief wished Moreno success in his administration, which begins on May 24, 2017 when Correa steps down after 10 years as head of the government.

"I am convinced that, under his leadership, Ecuador will consolidate the achievements made in recent years, particularly in terms of sustainable and equitable development and poverty reduc-

tion, and will move towards meeting the so closely-linked Sustainable Development Goals to national development policies," said Guterres in a letter to the Ecuadorean delegate to the UN, Horacio Sevilla. Guterres said he anticipated that Moreno will continue to work toward progress under the movement dubbed Citizen's Revolution in the country. He underlined that the Ecuadorean government and the UN will continue to strengthen their work in areas of peace, security, development and human rights.

The UN authority added that he had "deep respect for Moreno's valuable contribution to the integration of people with disabilities," during his tenure as UN special envoy for disability and accessibility from 2013 until 2016.

Moreno and his Vice President-elect Jorge Glas, Correa's vice president since

The Left Prevails: Moreno Wins!

Editors Note: *The following was excerpted from a much longer article*

First and foremost, Lenín Moreno's winning of the Ecuadorian presidency means that the country will not be returning to the unbridled neoliberal policies that Argentina and Brazil have newly embraced under new rightist administrations. Instead, Moreno has promised to triple poverty relief, ramp up the construction of public housing, double pensions for the poor, and invest in job creation for 250,000 new jobs. Exactly how all this would be funded in times of tight budgets he never spelled out. Will he redirect state funds or will he increase taxes on the wealthy? But perhaps the most important result of his election is that it interrupted the rightward shift in Latin American politics.

Moreno's election will inspire other progressive movements and parties not to despair amidst the recent right turn in the region. With presidential elections scheduled in Mexico, Chile, Colombia, Brazil, Paraguay, and Venezuela, we could see Moreno's win provide an opening for a comeback of the left in Latin America in 2018.

Source: *Gregory Wilpert NACLA, April 12, 2017*

2013, won the presidential elections on April 2 with 51.15 percent of the votes, against right-wing Guillermo Lasso who had 48.85 percent. Lasso contested the results and demanded a recount, which only confirmed Moreno's victory.

Under Correa's government, Ecuador slashed the poverty rate by 38 percent and the extreme poverty rate by 47 percent, fueled by economic growth and employment programs that have offered a boost to many of the country's poorest communities.

The government also doubled social spending from 4.3 percent of the country's GDP in 2006 to 8.6 percent in 2016, which included an increase in spending on education, health, and urban development and housing.



President Rafael Correa congratulates Ecuador's President elect Lenin Moreno on April 2.

Photo: Reuters

Source *TeleSUR, April 11, 2017*

ARGENTINA: Senate Unanimous in Protecting Justice for Crimes Against Humanity

By Carolina Dutton, Task Force of the Americas board member

Hundreds of thousands of people gathered in the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires and in other cities in Argentina together with the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Disappeared on May 10, Mother's Day, to protest a supreme court ruling which could have reduced the sentences of perpetrators of Crimes against Humanity and lead to the liberation of many perpetrators who have been convicted in the last 10 years of disappearances, assassinations, and torture during the military regime from to 1983.

People from all sectors of society who often have opposing political views were united in protest. They carried signs saying "No 2x1, No forgetting, No pardon," "30,000 disappeared *presentes*," "Never again," "Not even one who Committed Genocide Should be free."

The "two for one" is a law, which was in effect in Argentina from 1994-2001. The objective of this law was to reduce the prison population by reducing time served after sentencing by double the time served before sentencing. Last week the Argentine Supreme Court applied this old law to the case of Luis Muiña, who was sentenced in 2011 to 13 years for torture and illegal detention and was the first to benefit from the controversial law in recent years.

People were outraged because this decree could potentially free perpetrators now in prison who have finally been brought to justice after years of impunity. The defunct law had never before been applied in the case of crimes against humanity, and the move to set a precedent that could benefit as many as hundreds of other dictatorship-era human rights abusers has sparked widespread alarm. The regional representative of the United Na-

tions, the Regional Office for South America of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, urged Argentina's top court to respect international standards with the treatment of grave human rights crimes, those convicted of state terrorism.

Because of the unified outrage, the Argentine Senate unanimously passed a law, also on May 10, banning the use of the "2x1" law in cases of Crimes against Humanity. Moved by this decision the large crowd in the Plaza de Mayo closed the rally jubilantly, waving thousands of white bandanas, symbol of the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Disappeared. President Macri signed the law into effect two days later.

Sources: *BBC mundo, Qué es el 2x1, May 10; Eldestapeweb.com, La impactante imagen de los pañuelos en el cierre del acto contra el 2x1, May 10; Eldestapeweb.com, El Gobierno promulgó la ley que limita el 2x, May 12*

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Kerry subsequently gave in.

The US has successfully manipulated the OAS numerous times to get rid of governments that it did not like. Recent examples include Haiti in 2011, when an OAS commission illegitimately reversed the results of the first round of Haiti's presidential elections; and the coup in Haiti in 2004, which was the culmination of a four-year effort by the US and its allies with help from the OAS to topple the democratically elected government there. The US/OAS role in the destruction of Haitian democracy has passed mostly without notice because most Haitians are poor and black.

Latin American governments put up a fight over Honduras in 2009, when the US was trying to legitimize the government that came to power there in a military coup. But in the end, Washington was able to block the OAS from taking the position that the majority wanted: that the OAS should not recognize the post-coup elections until the democratically elected president, Mel Zelaya, was returned to office. Hillary Clinton (then Secretary of State) admitted that she success-

fully blocked Zelaya's return, in her 2014 book, "Hard Choices."

Washington's manipulation of the OAS in 2009, in support of the coup government in Honduras, moved the rest of the hemisphere to create a new organization that excluded the US and Canada. But the worst part about the current Trump/OAS effort to delegitimize the government of Venezuela is that it appears to be geared toward extralegal regime change. This is a standard playbook—delegitimation followed by overthrow—which encourages violence where negotiations are necessary. This is especially true with an opposition that since the US-supported military coup of 2002 has been divided on whether to use peaceful or violent tactics. People who say that these are efforts to put constructive "pressure" on the Venezuelan government are delusional or dishonest—especially when the pressure comes from an OAS that is so openly partisan and dominated by Washington, and therefore lacks legitimacy of its own.

Venezuela needs a negotiated solution because it is still a polarized society. Despite 400 percent inflation, widespread shortages of food, and a 17 percent decline in GDP

last year, President Maduro still has an approval rating of 24 percent, according to the most reliable antigovernment pollster (Datanalisis). For comparison, that is better than the presidents of Brazil (10 percent), Colombia (16 percent), and Mexico (15 percent). There is a base of Venezuelans that support the governing party and fear what might happen if the opposition seizes power. That base includes the military.

Violent regime change often has unforeseen and terrible consequences we can see what happened when the US pursued this strategy in Iraq, Syria, Libya, Haiti, and elsewhere. Venezuela needs change both economic and political but it must come about peacefully, through dialogue, negotiations, and elections. The US strategy of manipulating the OAS for political purposes will make this much more difficult, and it encourages more political violence in Venezuela.

The current president of the Dominican Republic, Danilo Medina, recently asked for an apology from the OAS for approving the US invasion of his country in 1965. Some things never change.

Source: *HuffPost, April 28, 2017*

Venezuela: Inside the Bolivarian Revolution

Delegation with Venezuelanalysis - August 20 - 30, 2017

Venezuela has been in the world's spotlight for the last two decades as the people have embarked on an unparalleled journey known as the Bolivarian Revolution. They have marched toward 21st Century Socialism unifying Latin America and the Caribbean against US imperialism. Many things have been said about Venezuela, its leaders and its people; namely, the ability of its process to survive the historical challenges of the growing economic crisis and attacks from the political opposition. Now is the time to stand in solidarity with Venezuela and really get to know its people and process.

Join Venezuelanalysis for our August 2017 delegation "Inside the Bolivarian Revolution" to learn firsthand about the achievements and challenges facing grassroots movements, the Venezuelan government and society at large. We will visit Afro-Venezuelan communities, meet

with feminists and LGBTQ organizers, share with students, farmers and people building communes to understand the complexities of Venezuela's current political and economic context.

Cost : (\$700) This delegation fee covers all set-up preparation, 2 meals per day, housing accommodations, interpreters, transportation within the country and a trained delegation coordinator. The fee also includes extensive reading materials and activist tools before and after the delegation. \$700 excluding international airfare and tourist visa fees for certain countries. **Deadline:** Application with a non-refundable deposit of \$150 is due by May 31st, 2017. Limited space available—Apply early!

Please contact: editor@venezuelanalysis.com for an application and more information.

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