

# Report

“The US Appears to be Destined by Providence to Plague the Americas with Misery in the Name of Freedom.” - Simón Bolívar, 1829

## ECUADOR: Uncertainty Looms Over Elections



Andrés Arauz campaigning in Ecuador (Photo: marxist.com)

*By Vijay Prashad, historian and journalist, and Pilar Troya Fernández, anthropologist and former Ecuadorian Deputy Minister (edited for length)*

In Ecuador’s presidential election on February 7, 2021, Andrés Arauz won the plurality with 32.71%. Guillermo Lasso and Yaku Pérez each won around 19% of the vote and await a recount to verify who will face Arauz in the second round on April 11. A Lasso-Pérez pact sought to remove Arauz from the runoff election’s ballot, although Lasso has now backed away from the agreement.

When Lenín Moreno took office in 2017, he began weakening democratic institutions in Ecuador. The main office-holders in several state institutions—including the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Court, the attorney general’s office, the comptroller’s office, and the CNE (electoral commission)—were elected during Correa’s tenure. They would not

follow Moreno’s policy of privatization and the destruction of public institutions. Moreno began to align his political forces with the right wing, such as Lasso’s Creating Opportunities Party and the Social Christian Party. Moreno held a referendum that included one question on term limits for elected officials that targeted Correa. Other questions on corruption, children’s rights, and ecology had broad support and so passed, but the ugly parts slipped by. Moreno also appointed Julio César Trujillo to drive out the elected officials and put in Moreno’s people. The presidency of the CNE was given to Diana Atamaint of the party of Yaku Pérez.

On January 30, three days after Moreno visited Washington, DC to meet US, IMF and OAS officials, Colombian magazine *Semana* published a story, reprinted in the Argentinian paper *Clarín*, accusing Arauz of receiving \$80,000 from the ELN, a left-wing guerrilla group in Colombia. Ecuadorian media accepted the story as true.

Right after the first round of Ecuador’s presidential elections, Lasso and Pérez be-

gan to collaborate to undermine the election results. Lasso is a candidate of the right, while Pérez masquerades as an eco-socialist who would be the first Indigenous president of Ecuador. Before election results had come in, Pérez announced that the US Embassy in Quito called to tell him he would be the second-place candidate. He has an-

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## SOUTH AMERICA

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nounced that if elected president he would be open to a trade deal with the US. The country's main Indigenous organization (CONAIE) seems to have distanced itself from Pérez's deal with Lasso because, as Leonidas Iza, president of the Cotopaxi Indigenous and Peasant Movement said, its base is "against the neoliberal right wing that looted the country"; to ally with this wing is "illegitimate and inconsistent"

with CONAIE's politics.

On February 12, Colombian and Ecuadorian government officials met to discuss possible evidence supporting the Semana story. The OAS, fresh from its involvement in the 2019 Bolivia coup, sent a representative to Ecuador, who reported that she was in discussions with Lasso and Pérez about the political situation. On February 13, Lasso wrote to the CNE's president saying that the agreement he made the day

before with Pérez regarding a recount was illegal; Lasso probably believes he can defeat Arauz in a runoff election without the recount.

Will Ecuador have a second round on April 11 with Arauz on the ballot, or will the US, the OAS, the various right-wing parties in Ecuador, and Moreno's state apparatus ensure that he will be off the ballot?

Source: *Peoples Dispatch* 2/18/21

## ECUADOR: Pandemic Explodes Under Moreno

*By Omar Carrera, CEO, Canal Alliance, Ecuadorian*

Ecuador is amid a moral upheaval; corruption has spread exponentially in all public institutions. The silence of the local corporate media and international institutions has contributed to the looming health and economic crisis and ultimately makes them complicit. The perpetuation of corruption and their complicities have contributed to the deaths of more than 15,000 Ecuadorians during the COVID-19 pandemic, the worst in the region.

The government of President Lenín Moreno is the biggest electoral fraud in the democratic history of Ecuador. Moreno betrayed those who voted for him, drastically deviating from his stated government plan the moment he took office in 2017. Trust in institutions fell rapidly, causing social chaos. Ecuador's elites, including financial industry leaders, corporate media, and conservative political groups all celebrated Moreno's new political agenda as his betrayal of the Ecuadorian people directly benefited them. This agenda turned into one of Ecuador's worst nightmares since the banking crisis of the 1990s. It manifested in the political persecution of his former comrades, a setback in labor, human and political rights violations, the reduction of public investment in education and health, and the destruction of everything his predecessor Rafael Correa accomplished.

The Minister of Public Security, María Paula Romo, used the administration of public hospitals as a bargaining chip to secure votes from crooked politicians in the National Assembly. This led to the embezzlement of funds from hospitals,

layoffs, and delays in paying the salaries of nurses and doctors. Later, the National Assembly dismissed Romo for human rights violations committed by the police during protests against austerity measures like the IMF recommended elimination of the gasoline subsidy.

The pandemic should have alerted the government to prioritize use of the limited public resources in the acquisition of protective equipment, increasing hospital capacity and Covid-19 testing. Although the National Assembly approved a resolution that all resources be used to combat the pandemic, Richard Martínez, Minister of Economy and Finance, decided to pay off \$3 billion in bonds in advance to creditors such as Goldman Sachs and Credit Suisse. As a reward, The Inter-American Development Bank appointed him Vice President for Countries, an appointment prohibited by Ecuador's Constitution.

In March 2020, Guayaquil was the first city impacted by the pandemic. Dead bodies piled up in the streets and the growing number of people who experienced symptoms collapsed the already weak healthcare infrastructure. Hospitals turned away patients. Hundreds of bodies were discarded in containers without proper refrigeration. Many corpses were lost or unfortunately decomposed beyond recognition. Dr. Fauci, US Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease, said, "A pandemic sheds a very bright light on a lot of the weaknesses in a society." That light shone bright in Ecuador and helped expose the political corruption, mismanagement in public hospitals, and Ecuador's severe lack of resources available to respond to a crisis.

Arrival of the COVID-19 vaccine of-

fered hope for the Ecuadorian people after a long year of hardship. This turned into illusion as the government did not have a vaccination plan. While countries mobilized to secure vaccines, Moreno was dedicated to accelerating the implementation of the IMF agenda before the end of his four-year term, including autonomy of the central bank, privatization of the most profitable public assets, and the rollback of labor laws. Juan Carlos Zevallos, Minister of Health, held a reception ceremony for the shipment of 8,000 Covid-19 vaccines for a country of 17 million inhabitants. He assured attendees that the vaccines will be destined for health personnel who have been in the front lines of the pandemic. Instead, the vaccines ended up in the arms of political allies, administrative staff, and the private nursing home where Zevallos' mother resides. He now faces impeachment for alleged influence peddling in the deployment of the COVID-19 vaccine.

While it is true that no country was fully prepared to respond effectively to the pandemic, it is also true that Moreno's was one of the most brutal betrayals of the people in Ecuador's history, a betrayal that began with the execution of political and economic self-interests and ended up with the deaths of thousands of people.

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## SOUTH AMERICA

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### COLOMBIA: A Glimpse Into A Sad Reality

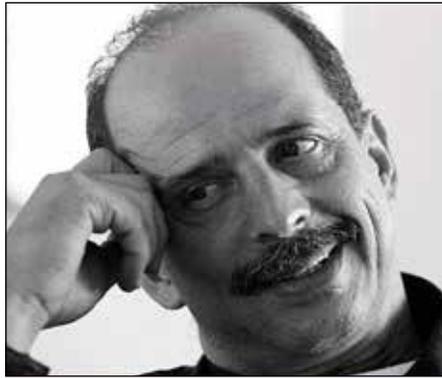
*By Alice Loaiza, Vice President of TFA, and activist in Colombia for over two decades*

When people ask me if it is safe to visit Colombia, I always answer that it is fine if you don't speak Spanish and stay on the well-guarded tourist trail. But you will never see the reality of one of the poorest countries in Latin America. You will never see the mass displacement of communities or the murders committed by paramilitaries and military or the police beating people in the streets.

Indepaz, a Colombian peace organization, recorded eleven massacres in 2021. One of the last was in the small town of Tarazá, Antioquia, where three young men were gunned down by the Golf Clan, one of the largest paramilitary groups in the country. Before that, there was a massacre in Tibú, Norte de Santander, where paramilitaries entered a farm and killed three of the ten or so people gathered there. After the Tarazá massacre, paramilitaries displaced about 80 families from the nearby villages of El Socorro and El Seis. (Justice for Colombia, 2021). It is said there is a murder by drug lords, paramilitary, army, or police every other day in Colombia.

Social leaders, indigenous, and Afro-Colombians are often targeted, especially if their community speaks up for its communal rights. Wherever there are massacres, displacement of families follows, and the lands are usually occupied by the perpetrators. Mass protests are continuous, but the government ignores them. When thousands of indigenous people called a *minga* and marched to Bogotá in October last year to denounce the systematic assassination of land defenders and community leaders, President Duque refused to meet with them.

Since the Peace Accord was signed by the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP) in 2016, there has been much state and paramilitary violence against community leaders, human rights defenders, and former guerillas. Indepaz reports that at least 375 people were assassinated in 90 massacres in 2020 alone. 253 demobilized FARC guerillas have been killed since



*Simón Trinidad, FARC-EP peace negotiator and US political prisoner (Photo: simonlibertad.com)*

2017. The assassins are mostly paramilitaries who are covertly backed by the right-wing government, landowners, the churches, and the illegal drug trade. These forces in turn are guided indirectly by the policies and practices of the US.

Before the accords, government atrocities included “false positives,” wherein the military killed civilians and claimed they were combatants just to increase the body count. Last month, Colombia’s Special Jurisdiction for Peace, a court created under the peace agreements between the FARC insurgents and the government, concluded that between 2002 and 2008 the Colombian army extrajudicially killed more than 6,400 civilians, almost three times the number of “false positives” previously reported by the government.

The US has many reasons to continue its decades long domination of Colombia and support for its government. Colombia is a strategically placed country touching both the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. And Colombia does dirty work for the US. For example, recently several failed coup attempts in Venezuela were orchestrated by Colombia, and Colombia pursues a media war throughout Latin America against Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua, and other progressive governments and movements.

As a new member of NATO, Colombia now trains mercenaries, police, and military forces of other countries, including those used as US proxies in Central America and elsewhere. Integration with US imperial strategy is evidenced by the

growing number of US military bases in Colombia and the schooling of all top Colombian military officials at the US School of the Americas (now WHINSEC). Further, Simón Trinidad, leading peace negotiator for the FARC EP, was extradited to the United States in 2004 and tried for drug trafficking and holding hostages. Trinidad, now 70, was convicted of the hostage charges and sentenced to 60 years, in an unjust criminalization of popular resistance to a murderous regime.

Yet Colombians have never stopped struggling. There has been something of a permanent national strike since 2019, with constant street protests in spite of COVID-19. These protests face one of the more brutal police forces in the world, called the Mobile Anti-Disturbance Squadron (ESMAD), created by the US. In Bogotá on September 9 of last year, ESMAD forces killed more than ten people and injured hundreds.

The Colombian social movements made up of workers, students, peasants, indigenous and Afro-Colombia communities, support the 2016 peace agreement between the government and the FARC guerilla and the democratic political process that was supposed to allow the social movements to organize and the FARC and others to participate in elections without having their leaders and candidates massacred. They seek a better life for the great majority of their fellow citizens and a sovereign Colombia, rather than the country it is now, subject to the political, economic, and military dictates of the US.

US intervention in Colombia has made it a permanent war zone, a country which exists for the interests of the US, a pawn to further control and dominate the entire Americas. So, when people ask me if it is safe to travel to Colombia, I might answer as I explained in the first sentence of this article. But if you really want to see and know Colombia, don't go as a tourist. Instead, go there to accompany the people in their communities and learn about their struggles.

Sources: *Al Jazeera* 2/23/21; *freesimon-trinidad.org*; *MRonlin.org* 6/5/20

## HAITI: Unjust and Cruel US Deportations

*By Haiti Action Committee, Oakland, CA*

*(edited for length)*

On January 17th, 2021, the US Customs and Border Protection (CPD) authorities at San Francisco airport detained two Haitian brothers, Christian Laporte (age 19) and Vladimir Fardin (age nine) despite the fact that they had valid visas to enter the US. Christian had a student visa to study at Diablo Valley College and Vladimir had a tourist visa to accompany his older brother. After being detained, the two brothers were denied access to counsel and not allowed to speak with their families.

Officials revoked Christian's visa over a paperwork issue that could have been resolved following the MLK holiday. Instead, officials separated the two brothers, forcing Christian to leave the US on January 19th, while labeling Vladimir an "unaccompanied minor" and transferring him into the custody of ICE. Vladimir was then sent to a government-run shelter for "unaccompanied minors" in San Diego where he was held for more than a week, at risk of exposure to COVID-19, before being released and sent back to Haiti. About Vladimir's release, Francisco Ugarte, SF Public Defenders' Office, tweeted: "It took several lawyers, three Congressional offices, one protest and immense social media pressure just to get ICE to do the right thing. And it still took them more than a week."

The trauma that CPD and ICE officials have inflicted on these two brothers and their family members with this act is yet another graphic reflection of the cruelty of the US immigration system. Though the Presidential inauguration on January 20th has raised hopes for major change to this immigration system, it remains to be seen if the new Administration will fully pursue this change.

The cruelty of this event goes deeper still. Why do so many Haitian youth like Christian seek to study abroad? Why do so many Haitians of all ages flee violence and conditions of deepening poverty in Haiti? Why is life becoming more and more unbearable for the impoverished Haitian majority, provoking a flood of refugees?



*Vladimir and Christian (Photo: SF Rapid Response Network)*

The same government that detains and separates Haitian families seeking to enter the US is also the architect of misery inside of Haiti. It is the US government that has made life so horrific for the people through organizing and funding the coup in 2004 against popularly elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. It is the US government that has since financed fraudulent elections and installed dictatorial puppet regimes, most recently that of the current President Jovenel Moïse who has been ruling through decree, paramilitary terror, and brazen corruption. Under President Trump, the US government provided funds, arms, and training of the Haitian police, despite its clear involvement in massacres such as the Lasalin Massacre. Will this foreign policy continue under a

Biden Administration or will it truly chart a new course?

Other recent examples of unjust US immigration policy impacts on Haitian communities include Paul Pierrilus, a 40-year-old financial consultant from Rockland County, New York. He was born in the French Caribbean territory of Saint Martin to Haitian parents and came to the US with his parents when he was five. His sister and parents are US citizens. He was picked up in January, as part of what human rights advocates say is a last sweep of black migrants in the final days of the Trump administration. He was to be deported to Haiti, where he has never been and is not a citizen. His deportation was suspended at the last minute through the intervention of his family and attorney.

"The same questions go through my head all day," said Thomas, a 60-year-old deportee who was returned to Haiti in November after five decades in the US. "Who will care for me if I get sick? I have no family here. Where will I go? I have no doctor here, and there is no hospital to go to without money. And I don't know my way. I will have to pay for a helper, and I have nothing. How can I live? Just don't get sick, I tell myself. I pray for this."

Deportation flights to Haiti at the height of the pandemic occur every two weeks on average. Some of the people deported were infected or sick with COVID-19.

Now is the time for change on all levels in US immigration and foreign policy. Abolish ICE, renew TPS and DACA, free all detainees, provide restitution and reunification to separated families. Most importantly, end US foreign policies that create the conditions of injustice and poverty that force people to flee their own countries. Haiti Action Committee stands in steadfast solidarity with Christian, Vladimir and all immigrants in their struggle for family unification and just treatment by US immigration authorities, just as we stand in solidarity with the Haitian people in their life-and-death struggle for genuine democracy, human rights, and national liberation.

Source: *Haiti Action Committee*  
2/2/21

## CARIBBEAN

# CUBA: The US Is Trying to Provoke a Soft Coup

By Rosa Miriam Elizalde, Cuban journalist

(edited for length)

We are in the era of soft coups. The images of US troops invading the Dominican Republic in 1965 or marching through El Chorrillo in Panama in 1989, for example, produced resentment and anger. A soft coup, on the other hand, is when a group of people who are in the minority masquerades as the majority, creates controversies and confrontations and wears down the majority until everyone gives in to their immense pressure, as in Honduras, 2009, Brazil, and Bolivia, 2019 (where the coup was overturned by the October 2020 election). Soft coups often feature information wars, in which the archetypes of dictators and freedom fighters are used by the United States to define international relations.

Invasions, political assassination attempts and a blockade have shaped the lives of Cubans. In November 2020, a small group of people barricaded themselves into a house in the San Isidro neighborhood in Old Havana in what appeared to be another attempted soft coup.

Cuba has faced economic punishment since 1960, just a year after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution. Since 2017, the US has escalated its economic sabotage and increased it again during the pandemic. The San-Isidro Movement (MSI) is linked to this process of a soft coup and appears to have been intended to complicate the transition from the Trump to the Biden administration.

Cubans suffer the effects of collective economic punishment. The crackdown on travel and remittances from the US has depleted the primary source of income for many artists, small private entrepreneurs, and hundreds of thousands of Cubans. The suffering is palpable; it means long queues for food, medicine, and fuel, and increases the difficulty of running small

restaurants and family-run hotels.

Despite these attempts to destabilize life in Cuba, the collective networks and the Cuban state have managed to provide services and retain a high level of social cohesion. It did not take long for the San Isidro feint to fall apart.

Undoubtedly this coup was made in the US: Denis Solis, a rapper and a leader of the MSI, has admitted that he received money from the United States. The chargé d'affaires of the US Embassy in Havana, Timothy Zúñiga-Brown, transported some of the protagonists of the MSI in his car, while high-ranking officials of the US State Department called these soft coup



“Our Country or Death” (Photo: Bill Hackwell)

protagonists their “colleagues.” Some of these protagonists have openly proclaimed their sympathies for Donald Trump.

Tracey Eaton, a Florida-based journalist, documented the US government’s expenditure of \$20 million to \$45 million a year since 1996, when it began finance groups to provoke a “regime change in Cuba.” This money was provided under Section 109 of the Helms-Burton Act of 1996. No public information shows how much has been spent on covert operations or the San Isidro plot specifically.

In 2014, the New York Times editorial board shed some light on this issue. Alan Gross, a contractor for the US Agency for International Development (USAID), was arrested in 2009 in Cuba on a “clandestine USAID mission to expand Internet access using sensitive technology that only gov-

ernments use,” according to an article in Politico. Shortly after this, the US government carried out a program that led to the development of an anti-government Twitter-like system by Creative Associates International (based in Washington, DC) called ZunZuneo. The object of this platform, as the New York Times put it, was to “provide Cubans with a platform to share messages with a mass audience, and ultimately be used to assemble ‘smart mobs.’”

Ed Augustin of the Guardian interviewed Estéban Rodríguez, one of the people involved in the San Isidro episode and a correspondent with ADN Cuba. This media company based in Florida received a grant of \$410,710 in September 2020 from US-AID, according to the article in the Guardian. Rodríguez further described the White House’s restrictions on remittances as “perfect.” However, Augustin wrote that the ADN correspondent was “falsely claiming the bulk of the money sent ends up in state coffers.”

The San Isidro events provide yet another example of the US government’s attempt to create a soft coup, intended to provoke a violent response by the Cuban government, which would be inflamed by people like Rodríguez and serve as a pretext for destabilization of the country.

Think tanks in the US that otherwise egg on these sorts of incidents and episodes nonetheless know that they have little impact on the island. On December 22, 2020, the Inter-American Dialogue, while referring to MSI, said that “the Cuban government is not close to ‘collapsing’ or ‘falling,’ and it would be a serious mistake to underestimate its capacity to mobilize to face the crisis.” It also recommended that Biden stay away from Trump’s tactics and noted that the Cuban government will not engage in “dialogue with a gun to the head.”

Source: News Click 1/24/21; Resumen-English 1/24/21

# EL SALVADOR: President Bukele Brings Autocracy and Austerity

By Karl Kramer, CISPES-Bay Area and TFA Board member

President Nayib Bukele of El Salvador has joined the pantheon of right-wing populist strong-arm leaders imposing authoritarian regimes who have been compared to ex-President Donald Trump, employing violent rhetoric to sow political division and hatred as he works to consolidate power. He has steadily increased the role of the military in civilian life, presaged in his 2020 budget proposal, which for the first time in many years increased military spending, while he slashed social services.

Bukele has cut the primary care budget by 25% and closed eleven rural health clinics. He has eliminated the adult literacy program. He cut funding to women's programs including \$1.6 million from the Violence Against Women initiative and dissolved the Social Inclusion Secretariat which served the LGBTI population. The universal basic pension has been cut by 10.3%.

In a notorious incident, on February 9, 2020, now popularly referred to as "9F," Bukele forcibly entered the legislative assembly chambers, escorted by El Salvador's Minister of Defense and armed military officers, with troops standing by to intimidate the legislators to approve borrowing \$109 million to finance his Territorial Control Plan, a hardline policing and militarization initiative.

Bukele's COVID-19 response has relied on repressive strategies as a means of social control. He used Twitter to publicly authorize the police and military to enforce his national quarantine during which they detained more than 10,000 people in unsanitary and unsafe quarantine centers, holding many for more than a month. Then, on Twitter and Facebook Live he repeatedly vetoed legislation and defied Supreme Court rulings against his policy of military-enforced arbitrary detentions, claiming that the Constitutional Court and the Legislative Assembly were trying to kill Salvadorans, inciting the population against the magistrates and legislative deputies. In one address, he stated that if

he were a dictator, he would have already had them killed.

The Court and the legislators were attempting to rein in the illegal extension of the "State of Exception" that suspended constitutional protections and permitted his administration to spend without prior authorization. They are currently investigating mismanagement of COVID-19 funds by administration officials. Under the direction of Bukele's appointee Arriaza Chicas, the National Civilian Police (PCN) refused to fulfill its constitutional mandate to assist in these investigations.

On October 20, the doubling of military and police forces was ordered in the department of Chalatenango, along the El Salvador-Honduras border, supported by the US government through military and security funding. Bukele alleged cross-border trafficking of drugs, arms and human beings but church leaders from the local diocese have rejected the claims as unfounded. The order coincided with a visit from the US Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) chief Craig Faller, who met with El Salvador's Defense Minister Rene Merino Monroy to discuss the role of SOUTHCOM in matters of security. Former SOUTHCOM chief Ronald Johnson is now acting US Ambassador to El Salvador.

The militarization of the border is making cross-border travel difficult for those whose daily tasks are on both sides of the border, a right guaranteed by the 2006

Central America for Free Mobility Agreement. Many families remain separated.

Residents have denounced harassment by troops, occupation of schools and homes, and other human rights violations. Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) members have charged the administration with targeting these communities ahead of the elections scheduled for February 28 to elect municipal council members and mayors, members of the national legislative assembly, and new representatives for the Central American Parliament (PARLACEN).

On January 31, armed assailants opened fire on a group of FMLN, traveling in a pickup truck covered with FMLN signs returning from a day of campaigning for the upcoming elections. Two veterans of the civil war, Gloria Rogel del Cid and Juan de Dios Tejada, died and at least two others were wounded. Bukele insinuated on Twitter that the assault was planned by the FMLN to gain public sympathy.

Bukele has lodged attacks against human rights defenders, the survivors and victims of the Civil War, and the peace negotiation process enshrined in the 1992 Peace Accords. Samantha Pineda, program director of the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES), wrote, "In December, President Bukele visited El Mozote, the site of one of the largest massacres in Latin America to date, to call the Peace Accords a 'farce.' In truth, his goals are to destroy many of the most important



"Bukele, my kids eat too." (Photo:dw.com)

## CENTRAL AMERICA

*El Salvador, continued from page 6*

achievements of the accords, like democratic elections, political freedoms and limits on the role of the military in society. The similarities between the strategies used by Bukele and those used by Trump to incite violence and undermine democratic institutions are chilling. But time and time again, the organized movements

in El Salvador—unions, students, feminists, campesinos, FMLN members—are taking to the streets, to social media and to the press to make clear that they see exactly what Bukele is trying to do and will resist any attempt to return to authoritarian rule.”

Bowing to grassroots pressure, including rallies in the US diaspora, growing concerns in Congress about Bukele’s authori-

tarian tendencies have led to a curtailment of some military and security assistance. On December 21, in passing an omnibus bill to finance the remainder of fiscal year 2021, Congress restricted Foreign Military Financing from going to El Salvador.

Source: [www.cispes.org](http://www.cispes.org) 2/16/21

## HONDURAS: Teacher Writes to President Biden

*By Lucy Pagoada-Quesada, US-Honduran citizen, teacher in New York  
(edited for length)*

Mr. President Joe Biden,

As a Honduran-US citizen, I am writing to urge you to change course in US policy towards Honduras so that my country can return to democracy. The neoliberal economic model that the United States imposes on other countries in the region, including Honduras, has not worked. On the contrary, it has produced and deepened extreme inequality, poverty, violence, and the massive and inhumane exodus of entire displaced families.

You have been elected at a time of profound racial division, inequity, and the economic and health crisis due to COVID-19. Therefore, you must understand how difficult it is to prepare and hold an electoral process under those circumstances.

Like you and the US people, we in Honduras are fighting to recover our democracy, justice, and peace, which was destroyed by the 2009 coup d’état. And this coming November 2021, we are going to hold presidential elections for the third time after that terrible historical moment that changed our lives when in 2009, the government of your party led by President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, supported the military coup in Honduras against our Constitutional President Manuel Zelaya Rosales. This led to a series of events that undermined our democracy and forced thousands to abandon their homes for refuge in the US.

In 2010, the US government imposed on us Porfirio Lobo-Sosa, whose son Fabio Lobo is imprisoned in the US for cocaine trafficking. In 2013, they also imposed on us the narco-dictator Juan Orlando Hernández whose brother Tony Hernán-



*US Vice President Biden greets Honduran President Hernández in Washington, DC 6/17/15 (Photo: Proceso Digital)*

dez is imprisoned in New York for trafficking tons of cocaine and weapons to the US. In 2017, the US imposed Hernández on us for a second time, and in a clearly fraudulent illegal reelection that was recognized as such by the Organization of American States (OAS).

From the moment that this violent, National Party narco-dictatorship was imposed on us, Honduras plunged into the worst social, economic, and political crisis in our history. This is what has led desperate Hondurans to flee in the massive exodus of displaced human beings called caravans. They do not come in search of the American dream, but rather fleeing the nightmare that this country, the United States, has imposed on them.

The Trump administration signed agreements with the countries of Guatemala and Mexico so that their security forces would be deployed to prevent passage of the displaced victims in route to the US border, thereby denying the right to seek asylum and refuge.

So, President Biden, the caravans are the result of the failed policies of the “savage capitalist” system, as Pope John Paul II said, which the US imposes on the Latin American region and the world. And if you and your government want the immigration “problem” to end, then we ask for a halt to US intervention in the internal affairs of Honduras. Therefore, the only thing we demand from your government is to allow us to cast our ballots without foreign interference and that our sovereign decision as a people be respected. I assure you, that, in this way, your government will not have to face the massive exodus of brothers and sisters who are fleeing from Honduras in search of what was unjustly taken away from them.

I sign with all due respect and hope that the purposes of your administration are fulfilled for the good of the people.

Source: [COHA.com](http://COHA.com) 1/19/21

## NORTH AMERICA

# MEXICO-US: Death and Abuse of Migrants at the Border

*Press release announcing third installment of “Disappeared” Report and filing of FOIA lawsuit against Customs and Border Protection*

*(edited for length)*

The humanitarian-aid group No More Deaths and community organization La Coalición de Derechos Humanos released the third installment of their “Disappeared” report about the ongoing crisis of death and disappearance along the US-Mexico border. No More Deaths and the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) filed a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) lawsuit against Customs and Border Protection (CBP) regarding CBP practices that are fueling the missing persons crisis at the border.

Hundreds of migrants die every year in the unforgiving terrain in and around the greater-Sonoran Desert on the US side of the border while trying to cross into the US. Some estimates are in the thousands. Along the border, law enforcement refer 911 calls for emergency assistance to Border Patrol when the callers are Spanish-speaking, a discriminatory practice that renders it the primary emergency services provider and is at odds with CPB’s explicit charge as an immigration enforcement agency. Key findings in “Left to Die: Border Patrol, Search and Rescue, and the Crisis of Disappearance,” the third installment of the “Disappeared” report, show that Border Patrol is “fatally unresponsive” to emergency search and rescue requests. “For years, Border Patrol has acted without any transparency about their supposed rescue operations,” said No More Deaths Parker Deighan. “Meanwhile, families and advocates searching for missing people have

experienced Border Patrol’s hostility and refusal to help.”

A FOIA request was filed in April of 2019, seeking documents and data related to Border Patrol’s response to requests for search and rescue including quantity of calls, response or lack of response, and outcomes of each case. CBP never produced a single document. The lawsuit seeks a court order compelling CBP to provide the requested documents.

According to No More Deaths’ data, in 63% of distress calls, Border Patrol did not conduct any confirmed search or rescue; in 40% of cases, there was clear documentation that the agency did not search at all. The quality of searches that were conducted was dramatically inferior to those conducted for US citizens or non-citizen tourists. Searches rarely lasted more than one day, some only one hour. 27% of searches ended without the person being found. Local county search and rescue teams responding to cases involving US citizens have a near 100% success rate. Border Patrol also actively obstructs family and humanitarian search efforts by lying about whether a search is being conducted, harassing search and rescue teams in the field, refusing to share critical information, providing misleading information, and endlessly transferring calls to non-working phone lines.

“Each year, the US government lets hundreds of migrants die in the borderlands out of intentional neglect,” said Angelo Guisado, CCR attorney. “Border Patrol, CBP’s enforcement arm, operates as a rogue paramilitary outfit under the guise of agency legitimization. Besides abusive conduct, the agency is known to employ enforcement tactics that have caused thousands of migrants to go missing. And this is the agency tasked with emergency rescue services along our border? The public deserves to know more about it.”

No More Deaths also reports that Border Patrol is twice as likely to directly cause a person to go missing (chasing and scattering groups of people through rugged terrain, causing many to become injured, disoriented, separated from others) than to participate in locating one.



*nomoredeaths.org*

“If my dad was a different person, or a citizen, I think he would have received a different search,” said the daughter of a 52-year-old man from Honduras who disappeared while crossing the US-Mexico border in 2016.

No More Deaths and the CCR demand an immediate end to the transfer of calls for emergency assistance to Border Patrol, emphasizing that CBP and Border Patrol’s mission of immigration enforcement is inherently at odds with search and rescue efforts. The only solution is to demilitarize the border, defund Customs and Border Protection, and decriminalize migration.

According to government records, the remains of at least 8000 migrants have been found in US deserts since 1994, most deaths related to elemental exposure. Tens of thousands more have disappeared. Both the lawsuit and the report emphasize that the crisis is not only exacerbated by Border Patrol but was created by the agency’s 1994 “Strategic Plan” to “force (migrants to cross) over more hostile terrain,” where they may “find themselves in mortal danger,” to discourage migration.

Source: [commondreams.org/news-wire/2021/02/03/lawsuit-filed](https://commondreams.org/news-wire/2021/02/03/lawsuit-filed)

### **Urgent Action: Decriminalize Migration**

*We must decriminalize migration, demilitarize the border and defund the CBP and ICE (\$25 billion a year). Call your Senator or Representative, tell them you are a constituent, and refer them to the No More Deaths Report. For the report, instructions and a call script, go to: <https://nomoredeaths.org/defund/>*



*nomoredeaths.org*

## SOUTH AMERICA

# VENEZUELA: US-Backed Lima Group, OAS, UN Attempt Coup

*By Vijay Prashad, a historian, editor and journalist and Carlos Ron, Venezuela's Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs for North America (edited for length)*

On January 5, 2021, the newly elected National Assembly took its seats in Venezuela's capital. That day the Lima Group released a statement most of its members signed saying that they did not recognize the legality of the assembly. They called upon countries around the world to "disregard" the assembly and to recognize instead the leadership of a former member of the assembly, Juan Guaidó. The Lima Group felt that it was appropriate for its signatories to call for a "transition process" inside Venezuela; in other words, the Lima Group affirmed its mission, which is to overthrow the government of Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro and the Bolivarian Revolution.

On August 8, 2017, 12 countries in the Americas came together in Lima, Peru, to create this group. Led by Canada, these countries had right-wing governments with a close relationship with the US. The group was formed to "contribute to the restoration of democracy" in Venezuela, which really meant to contribute to the overthrow of the elected government there.

The founding declaration made two related points. First, that Venezuela was a "critical situation," which included the "breakdown of the democratic order in Venezuela." Second, that the remedy for this "breakdown" is the "restoration of democracy," to be conducted by a "peaceful and negotiated" process.

The problem faced by the Venezuelan people in 2017 was not a deficit of democracy but the suffocating US illegal sanctions regime against Venezuela. Sanctions are only part of the range of US-imposed hybrid war techniques, which include sabotage and armed insurrection. The Lima Group says that it rejects violence and any option that "involves the use of force," but has never protested its use.

The Lima Group represents a key tool in the hybrid war arsenal: diplomatic war. In the years before 2017, the US did not have a sufficient majority in the Organization of American States (OAS) to use that

body to isolate Venezuela; therefore, the US worked with its oligarchic allies in the Americas to form a fake regional bloc with Latin American countries alongside Canada. The US has hovered at the Lima Group meetings, setting the agenda and driving the policy.

Each of the members of the Lima Group is a member of the United Nations, which means that they must abide by the UN Charter of 1945. That charter says that "regional arrangements" are perfectly legal and that such arrangements could assist in the "maintenance of international peace and security." If the Lima Group were set up to further the goals of the UN Charter, there would be no illegality.

Where the Lima Group strays into illegality is when it decides collectively to enforce decisions upon Venezuela, which is a member state of the UN. The UN Charter says explicitly that no "enforcement action" is permitted by a regional arrangement "without the authorization of the Security Council." There is no UN Security Council resolution that provides the Lima Group with the authority to pressure Venezuela's government to resign and agree to a transfer of power.

If there is no UN Security Council resolution, then it is illegal for a "regional arrangement" of UN member states to attempt to take "enforcement action"—including regime change—against another member state of the UN. The Lima Group's declarations and statements do not cite any UN Security Council justification for its actions. Based on the specific language in the UN Charter, the Lima Group's existence is in violation of the UN Charter.

The members of the Lima Group are also members of the UN and the Organization of American States, formed in 1948 as a "regional arrangement." Both the UN and the OAS charters explicitly oppose interference in the domestic matters or conspiracy to overthrow the government of another UN and OAS member state. The members of the Lima Group are also in breach of its obligations to these two foundational charters.

Now, the original 12 countries in the Lima Group have been joined by five others to make 17. However, for the statement against Venezuela on January 5,

there were only 13 signatories. Key Lima Group member countries such as Argentina, Bolivia, and Mexico had not signed this statement. Most of these countries are now governed by left-wing governments who do not believe in the regime change policy against Venezuela. They understand the Lima Group for what it is, namely a conspiracy against the UN Charter.

Since 2017, Peru has lurched through one political crisis after another from corruption cases implicating politicians and overthrowing governments; massive protests have gripped the country in its own democratic convulsions. Peru's presidents, often charged with corruption, came in and out of office in quick succession, and yet—in a very forced and insincere way—they called for democratic processes in Venezuela. More fundamentally committed to regime change in Venezuela are Canada and Colombia, which is why the Lima Group could be more accurately known as the Ottawa Group or the Bogotá Group. Whatever the group is called, Venezuela, with a new National Assembly, is exercising its political sovereignty against the hybrid war attempt to destabilize the country.

Source: *Sri Lanka Guardian* 1/13/21

### **Urgent Action: Petition to End US Sanctions**

*The US sanctions dozens of countries in violation of international law under the United Nations Charter. These sanctions constitute a crime against humanity and cause shortages of basic necessities, disease, poverty and famine. In Venezuela sanctions killed 40,000 people in less than a two year period. These sanctions can block the targeted countries from receiving essential medical necessities, including COVID-19 testing equipment, personal protective equipment and vaccines. Currently US economic sanctions affect 39 countries and one-third of the world's people, including the populations of Venezuela, Nicaragua, Cuba, Iran, Syria, North Korea, Zimbabwe, China and Russia. To petition the Biden Administration and Congress to end these illegal sanctions, go to: <https://sanctionskill.org/petition/>*

## SOUTH AMERICA

# VENEZUELA: US Media is Wrong About the Election

*By Rick Sterling, journalist and president of TFA, and official observer of the recent Venezuela elections (edited for length)*

In early December, I traveled to Venezuela to serve as an election observer during the country's National Assembly election. I was part of a group of eight people from Canada and the United States organized by CodePink. There were about two hundred international observers in total.

After having experienced Venezuela's election firsthand, on December 29 I watched a PBS Newshour segment about that election and the overall situation in Venezuela. PBS reporter Marcia Biggs said "Maduro's party essentially ran unopposed in this month's election." This, despite my personal meetings with the very opposition parties that were participating in those same elections.

In fact, there were 107 parties and over 14,000 individuals competing in the December 6 election for 277 National Assembly seats. While eight parties were in alliance with the governing United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), there were over 90 opposition parties. The strongest opposition coalition was the Democratic Alliance comprising seven opposition parties and winning 1.1 million votes (18% of the vote). The LEFT opposition to the PSUV, under the banner of the Communist Party of Venezuela, received just 168,000 votes.

Reporter Marcia Biggs claimed that "politics...can determine whether you support Maduro and eat, or go hungry." This claim is based on PSUV Vice President Diosdado Cabello's campaign statement that women can say to their families, "No vote, no food," an obviously facetious remark distorted beyond recognition by our media.

The PBS report showed video of a fist-fight in the National Assembly, neglecting to mention the fight was between competing factions of the Venezuelan opposition.

When PBS showed Guaidó climbing over a fence, it failed to mention that he was pulling off a publicity stunt to distract from the embarrassing news that Luis

Parra was elected Speaker of the National Assembly, following Guaidó's own claim to be "interim president" based on Guaidó being Speaker.

Election turnout was indeed lower than usual at 31%, yet this is likely due to the pandemic, economic hardship, and transportation difficulties due to gasoline scarcity. This was also a National Assembly election, equivalent to a US mid-term election. Yet this is roughly equivalent to a 50% voter turnout in the US, since 95% of Venezuelan voters are registered while the US registers only 67% of eligible voters.

The star of PBS's seven-minute report is Roberto Patino, the Venezuelan director of a food distribution charity. The report neglects to mention that Patino is associated with a major US foreign policy institution promoting "interim president Juan Guaidó." Patino says the Venezuelan government is "very paranoid and they see conspiracies all over." But US threats and aggression against Venezuela are not imaginary; they are very real.

In 2002 the US supported the kidnapping and coup against the popular and elected President Hugo Chávez. More recently, in August 2018 there was a drone assassination attempt on the Venezuelan President. In January 2019, the US declared that it would not recognize the elected President Maduro, but Juan Guaidó as "interim president." In February 2019, President Trump threatened military intervention against Venezuela. In March 2019, sabotage of the electrical grid there caused a massive power blackout, probably the work of the US. In May 2020, two former US Special Forces soldiers and other mercenaries made a failed attempt to overthrow President Maduro. In June 2020, the US Navy warship Nitze began provocative "freedom of navigation" patrols along the Venezuelan coast. In August 2020, the US seized four ships carrying much-needed gasoline to Venezuela. In September 2020, in an attempt to undermine the Venezuelan election, the US imposed sanctions on political leaders who planned to participate. The 2021 US stimulus bill includes \$33 million for "de-



(Photo: Al Jazeera)

mocracy programs for Venezuela." PBS ignores this history.

Another hero of the report is exiled politician Leopoldo López, imprisoned in 2014 for instigating street violence which led to the deaths of 43 people.

Like Patino, López is from the Venezuelan elite, studied in the US, and has major public relations support in the US. Like Guaidó, López is more popular in Washington than in his home country.

If the PBS Newshour sought objectivity, members of the moderate opposition in Venezuela would have been interviewed. Viewers could have heard Democratic Alliance leaders explain why they participated in the election and why they are critical of US economic sanctions and interference.

On January 5, the newly elected National Assembly will commence in Venezuela. The fig leaf pretense of Juan Guaidó as "interim president" of Venezuela will be removed because he is no longer in the National Assembly and hasn't been Speaker in a year.

But instead viewers of the PBS special received a biased report ignoring the moderate opposition and promoting a few US-backed elites. PBS ignored and denigrated the efforts of millions of Venezuelans who carried out and participated in an election that compares favorably with the election process in the US. You would never know it from PBS, and you might not believe it unless you saw it with your own eyes, as I did.

Source: *New Cold War* 1/20/21; [www.codepink.org/venezuela2020elections](http://www.codepink.org/venezuela2020elections)

## NEWS BRIEFS

### COLOMBIA: Ancient Cliff Art

Archaeologists have found tens of thousands of paintings of animals and humans created up to 12,500 years ago across cliff faces that stretch across nearly eight miles in Colombia. The paintings include now-extinct ice age animals, such as the mastodon, palaeolama, an extinct camelid, as well as giant sloths and ice age horses. The images also show people dancing and holding hands.

The discovery was made by a British-Colombian team lead by José Iriarte, professor of archaeology at Exeter University and a leading expert on the Amazon and pre-Columbian history. Speaking of the subjects of the paintings, he said, “many of these large animals appear surrounded by small men with their arms raised, almost worshipping these animals.... For Amazonian people, non-humans like animals and plants have souls, and they communicate and engage with people in cooperative or hostile ways through the rituals and shamanic practices that we see depicted in the rock art.”

Source: *The Guardian* 11/29/20

### HONDURAS: US Congress Re-introduces “Berta Cáceres” Bill

Democratic members of Congress have reintroduced the Berta Cáceres Human Rights in Honduras Act, which would suspend military aid to Honduras until the government investigates allegations of human rights violations by their security forces. The bill is named after beloved Lenca Indigenous land and water defender Berta Cáceres, who was assassinated on March 3, 2016, reportedly at the direction of military intelligence specialists linked to Honduras’s US-trained special forces.

Previously, Sen. Jeff Merkley of Oregon had introduced a bill calling on President Biden to impose sanctions on US-backed President Juan Orlando Hernández and to “determine whether he is a specially designated narcotics trafficker.”

Source: *www.democracynow.org*. 3/5/21



*Ancient Colombian cliff art (Photo: forbes.com)*

### ARGENTINA: Right to Choose

Argentina has legalized abortion in the first fourteen weeks of pregnancy, and made it free of charge. After fourteen weeks, abortion would still be legal in the case of rape or danger to the health of the pregnant woman.

Abortion is already legal in Cuba, Guyana, Uruguay, and some states of Mexico, but illegal in El Salvador, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Honduras, and Nicaragua. In the rest of Latin American it is permitted in limited circumstances, such as rape or to save the life of the woman.

Source: *Resumen* 12/30/20; *Gutmacher Institute* 12/30/20

### GUATEMALA-US: Sr. Dianna Ortiz ¡Presente!

Sister Dianna Ortiz, a Catholic nun from New Mexico whose 1989 abduction, rape, and torture by US-backed Guatemalan forces led to her becoming an outspoken peace, human rights, and anti-torture activist, died February 19 in Washington DC at age 62 of cancer. As an Ursuline nun, she went to Guatemala in 1987 to teach children in rural Mayan communities. There she was kidnapped, raped and tortured, at times in the presence of a US CIA officer. Later she exposed damning evidence of US complicity in her ordeal and similar incidents. Organizations she began or headed include the Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA and the Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition International. In 2002 she published a memoir, *The Blindfold's Eyes: My Journey From Torture to Truth*. Ortiz wrote, “I know what it is to wait in the dark for torture, and what it is to wait in the dark for the truth. I am still waiting.”

Source: *Washington Post* 2/19/21

### CUBA: US Urged to Normalize Relations

More than two dozen Congressional Representatives have signed a letter to President Biden urging the new administration to lift the economic blockade against Cuba. This would normalize relations between the US and Cuba to permit travel, tourism and family remittances to Cuba, as well as cultural exchanges between the two countries.

The letter can be read here: <https://acere.org/category/advocacy-letters/>

### VENEZUELA: UN Denounces US Blockade

Special rapporteur of the United Nations Alena Douhan, has urged Washington to remove all sanctions against the Venezuelan public sector and not to impose blockades on the country. She said the sanctions have exacerbated an enormous humanitarian crisis, slowing Venezuela’s development and causing a 99% drop in foreign exchange earnings in recent years. Sanctions have directly impacted health, migration, separation of families and all aspects of social life. One estimate found the sanctions cost Venezuela 194 billion USD.

Source: *Resumen* 2/13/21

### LATIN AMERICA-RUSSIA-CHINA: Vaccine Internationalism

The government of President Maduro signed an agreement with Russia in December 2020 to bring 10 million Sputnik V vaccines to the country to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. A review in *The Lancet* found the vaccine has a 91.6% success rate. Sputnik V is now one of the vaccines most in demand around the world. The government of President López Obrador of Mexico has also arranged to acquire 24 million doses of the Russian vaccine. And 500,000 doses of China’s anti-COVID-19 Sinopharm, a vaccine with about an 80% efficacy rate, arrived in Bolivia for that country’s free immunization program.

Source: *Orinoco Tribune* 2/14/21; *Mexico News Daily* 1/25/21; *Telesur* 2/24/21

# AMAZON: Message to the World

By *Nemonte Nenquimo, Indigenous leader from Ecuador*  
(edited for length)

Dear World Leaders,

My name is Nemonte Nenquimo. I am a Waorani woman, and a leader of my people. The Amazon rainforest is my home. I am writing to you because the fires are raging still and the corporations are spilling oil in our rivers. The miners are stealing gold and leaving behind open pits and toxins. The land grabbers are cutting down forest so cattle can graze and plantations can grow. Our elders are dying from coronavirus while you are planning ways to cut up our lands to stimulate an economy that has never benefited us. As Indigenous peoples, we are fighting to protect what we love—our way of life, our rivers, the animals, our forests, life on Earth—and it is time that you listened to us.

In each of our languages across the Amazon, we have a word for you—the outsider, the stranger. In my language, that word

is “cowori.” You have made it a bad word and it has come to mean the white man that knows too little for the power that he wields and the damage that he causes.

You are not used to an Indigenous woman calling you ignorant. But for Indigenous peoples it is clear: the less you know about something, the less value it has to you, and the easier it is to destroy, guiltlessly, even righteously. This is exactly what you are doing to us, to our rainforest territories, and to our planet’s climate.

It took us thousands of years to know the rainforest, to understand her ways, her secrets, and learn to survive. We have only known you for 70 years (we met the evangelical missionaries in the 50s), but we are fast learners, and you are not complex. When you say that the oil companies have marvellous new technologies, we know you are lying; we live downriver from the spills. When you say that the Amazon isn’t burning, we know you are wrong; we are choking on the smoke. When you say that you are urgently looking for climate solutions, yet continue to build a world economy based on extraction and pollution, we know you are lying, we hear the

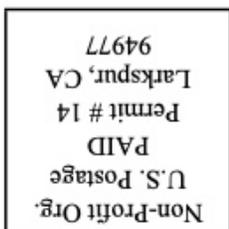
cries of the land.

My elders and the forest are my teachers. I have learned enough to know that you are in trouble and that threatens every form of life on Earth. You forced your civilization upon us and look where we are: global pandemic, climate crisis, species extinction.

In all these years of taking from our lands, you have not had the courage, the curiosity, or the respect to get to know us, and learn what we know about life on this Earth. I cannot teach you in this letter, it has to do with thousands of years of love for this forest that has taught us how to walk lightly. Because we listened, learned, and defended her, she has given us everything: water, clean air, nourishment, shelter, medicines, happiness, meaning. You are taking all this away, not just from us, but from everyone on the planet, and from future generations.

The Earth does not expect you to save her, she expects you to respect her; Indigenous peoples expect the same.

Source: *The Guardian.com, 10/12/20*



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