

Report

WINTER 2022

PUBLISHED BY MARIN INTERFAITH TASK FORCE ON THE AMERICAS

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

Honduras Makes History: Xiomara Wins!



Xiomara celebrates her presidential victory. (Photo: Midwestern Marx)

By Karen Spring, human rights activist, researcher, and TFA Board member. She hosts the Honduras Now podcast and has lived in Honduras since 2009.

On November 28, 2021, Honduran Presidential candidate Xiomara Castro Sarmiento and the LIBRE Party made history. Within hours of the polls closing and with a 70% participation rate, Castro became the candidate to receive the most votes in Honduras’s history. On January 27, 2022, when she will be inaugurated, Castro will become Honduras’s first woman President and the first self-identified democratic socialist in such a position.

On election day from outside the country, solidarity activists and observers held their breath wondering if any attempts at electoral fraud (the computer system crashing, ballot box stuffing, US-support for fraud and a continuation of the dictatorship, all of which characterized the 2017 elections) would threaten Castro’s victory. But shortly after the polls closed, outside the LIBRE Party headquarters in the cap-

ital city of Tegucigalpa, Hondurans could not wait to celebrate, feeling confident with the preliminary results and Castro’s clear and definite lead. The streets were blocked off and thousands of Hondurans carrying red and black flags representing *la resistencia* and the LIBRE Party danced to music and cheered as Castro delivered her victory speech:

We won! We won, after 12 years of the people in resistance. And those 12 years were not in vain. Because today, the people showed up and gave meaning to the slogan, ‘Only the people save the people!’ Thank you to the resistance ... today, the people have created justice. We stopped authoritarianism and stopped them from staying in power... Never again, Hondurans, will there be an abuse of power in this country. From this moment on, the people will prevail eternally, onward towards a direct democracy, onward towards a participatory democracy. (Paraphrased)

That night, Hondurans started the beginning of the end of the corrupt, neoliberal narco-dictatorship that took shape following the US and Canadian backed 2009 mil-

itary coup. But despite LIBRE’s hard work, it would not be fair to attribute the election results solely to the party or to Castro herself.

It took 12 hard years of struggle, protests, campaigning and sacrifices all led by the Honduran social movement and grassroots community groups, for Honduras to get to where it is now.

In the weeks following the elections and as the vote counting continued, it became increasingly clear that LIBRE was doing well in the two other races for the 128 seats in Congress, and at the municipal level for local authorities in 298 municipalities around the country. In Congress, LIBRE won 50 seats, the most seats of any party, gaining 20 seats more than in the 2017 election. The National Party that previously controlled Congress lost 17 seats, ending up with a total of 44.

But despite LIBRE’s success on the Congressional level, they fall far short of a simple majority. This puts Castro’s ambitious electoral promises to dismantle the Nation-

Continued on page 2

CONTENTS

Honduras	1-2
Venezuela	3
Nicaragua	4
Chile	5
Haiti	5
ALBA	6
Mexico	7
Colombia	8
Guatemala	9
Alicia Jrapko	10
Cuban Documentary	10
Briefs	11
Chuck Kaufman	12

Honduras, continued from page 1

al party dictatorship and elect new key positions in Honduras's Supreme Court and the Public Prosecutor's office at risk. To maintain many key parts of Castro's and LIBRE's electoral platform, which include overturning the law that gave birth to the extreme neoliberal project, the Zones of Employment and Economic Development (ZEDEs), and amnesty for the imprisoned Guapinol water defenders and other political prisoners, LIBRE will need to negotiate with other parties to pass legislation. More importantly, the possibilities of former President Manuel Zelaya and LIBRE's long-standing promise to call a National Constituent Assembly upon winning power also seems bleak and uncertain.

LIBRE's most likely ally in Congress is Salvador Nasralla's Savior Party of Honduras (PSH) that won only 10 seats. Nasralla formed a Presidential coalition with Castro but maintained a party structure of candidates in some races on two levels of government. But even with that alliance, LIBRE will have to negotiate with the traditional Liberal party for a simple majority, and worse yet, may have to depend on National party votes. They will need two-thirds of the Congress in order to overturn many of the laws that maintain the structure and economic interests of the 12-year dictatorship.

Almost as if the US was waiting for their long-time ally Juan Orlando Hernandez's defeat, the US's show of support for Xiomara's victory was odd and suspicious. Two days after the elections on November 30th, the same day that the National Party Presidential candidate conceded, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken congratulated Hondurans on their "free and fair" election and recognized Castro's victory.

Within two weeks, US Vice President Kamala Harris tweeted that she looked forward to working with Castro on her promises to combat corruption, a sore spot in the US's relationship with Juan Orlando Hernandez. On December 13, 2021, Harris announced that the US will be increasing their commitment to the Central American region in order to deepen private sector investments currently totaling \$1.2 billion dollars.

With Harris's designation as the White House's point person on tackling the Central American migration crisis, the US is wasting no time promoting investments from US companies such as Microsoft, Cargill, Price Smart and PepsiCo, in their efforts to "sustainably address the root causes of migration." These new investments, at a time when a democratic socialist President is taking power, will indeed present a significant challenge for Castro who will be balancing many interests and demands from both the left and the right.

Honduras has suffered a 12-year plunder of state institutions and public funds as well as being hit hard by the pandemic. Castro will now face these difficulties as well as the challenges of a strong, independent social movement that will continue to demand transformation and could become antagonistic to the Libre Party which will now try to balance its interests and negotiate power in Congress. Recognizing these difficulties since their victory on November 28th, LIBRE has called for meetings and discussions with many sectors of the Honduran social movement.

Many grassroots organizations have expressed their relief for the election results, both because a violent post-electoral confrontation was expected, and because of the National Party defeat.

Organizations such as the Civic Council for Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH) welcome the victory and have reaffirmed their autonomy and independence from the government, emphasizing the importance of the role of the social movement in holding LIBRE accountable to their promises. Castro and her government will face strong, independent social movements that continue to push for transformative change. These movements will play a fundamental role for LIBRE as the party balances multiple interests and negotiates with the powers that be, from a minority position in Congress.

La Union, Honduras: Election Day Report

By Maria Robinson, TFA board member

In the days leading up to election day I was contacted about violence in the *aldeas* (villages) of La Union and specific threats to the family of Rigo Matute. Rigo is a coffee farmer and activist whom I met during the Honduras election of 2012. He has since become head of the Consejo Electoral Municipal in La Union, with authority to investigate voting irregularities. Rigo and his family had been threatened when someone tried to break down the door of the bedroom where he and his wife Demi and two young children were sleeping. It was suggested that I accompany Rigo and his family during the election process. La Union is dominated by the Reyes family,

prominent in National Party politics. Rigo is a known LIBRE supporter; he had just been informed of a plan to douse him in gasoline and light him on fire!

On Thanksgiving Day I flew to San Pedro Sula, where I was met by Demi and was driven for four gut-wrenching hours over mountainous roads to La Union. Staying at their home, I would observe the election from the inside. It was a scary time. Since vote-rigging on election day has been made difficult, the local Nacionalistas were applying pressure before the voting day. In the middle of the night Rigo was called to a nearby *aldea* (village) where two 4X4s had been driving around with loaded guns in a threatening manner for five days. The locals were meeting them with only rocks,

brooms, and machetes.

During election day I accompanied Rigo to several *aldeas*. In one heavily Libre area, the election officials slowed down the voting so that the LIBRE area supporters had to wait in the hot sun for hours to vote. Later, an alarmed election observer called to report that the President of the Mesa Electoral (a Nacionalista) was trying to invalidate LIBRE vote-counting by marking ballots with double entries.

The actual vote-counting was slow and very public, each vote being read aloud, held up for all to see, and stamped so it could only be counted once. In the end the Nacional Party candidate for mayor lost, thus ending the 100-year domination of the Reyes family in La Union.

VENEZUELA: Voters Defend Their Democracy

By David Paul, TFA board member

Ed. Note: The author observed the regional elections in Venezuela that took place on November 20, 2021. It was the 27th election in the last 20 years since the election of Hugo Chavez in 1998. The following is his report.

The election took place during a massive disinformation campaign by the US government and US media, calling Venezuelan elections fraudulent before the election, and without any evidence. I witnessed a very different reality. Thousands of candidates from 37 political parties and 43 regional organizations ran for positions of governors, mayors, regional legislatures, and municipalities. Unlike the US government's claims, this election was a calm and very transparent process witnessed by 300 international observers including the United Nations, the Carter Center, CEELA (Council of Latin American Election Experts), the National Lawyers Guild, and for the first time, the European Union. We were free to closely watch the voting process and speak with the voters and workers at the voting stations. All voters present a national ID card, along with a verified thumbprint, and then vote on a machine which also produces a paper receipt verifying their vote. All political parties participate in every stage of the process, from examining voting machine software and observing the actual voting, to involvement in the frequent audits during and after the voting, comparing the paper and machine counts. Opposition party members told me the voting process was fair and that they were proud to be a part of it. Although the economic, and psychological pressures caused by the US economic war are still evident, most people I met said the elections were in fact a reflection of the peace and stability of their country.

A coalition of parties and social movements organized by the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) won 19 of the 23 governorships and 210 of the 225 mayoral positions. Opposition candidates won three state gubernatorial races and one is still being contested pending a repeat election.



TFA Board members deliver Sanctions Report to Foreign Minister Felix Placencia (second from left) (Photo: Teri Mattson)

The pandemic and the US economic war of sanctions have crippled the economy, causing thousands of unnecessary deaths, and shortages of basic goods. Just holding the elections was a demonstration of Venezuela's determination and courage to defend their sovereignty. Millions voted to support their government, knowing it will lead to continued sanctions.

A few important events occurred leading up to the elections. There was a formal dialogue between the Maduro government and most opposition parties in which they agreed to reject violence and support the electoral process. The European Union finally sent a delegation to observe the elections and no longer recognizes the US-backed, self-declared "interim president," Juan Guaidó. Two opposition party members joined the five member Nacional Electoral Council overseeing the elections. Recently, the UN overwhelmingly voted to recognize the democratically elected Maduro government as the only government, with only 15 nations continuing the US's false narrative of Juan Guaidó as president. He holds no government position.

While observing the enthusiasm of the many poll workers and the open and fair electoral process, it was hard not to think of the contrast with US elections and the gross hypocrisy of US calling Venezuela's election a fraud while in the US the electoral process itself is essentially flawed.

The US makes claims of fraudulent elections in Venezuela to justify continuing its economic coercive measures, or sanc-

tions, which include the theft of financial assets and the blocking of food, fuel, and medicines, all of which is clearly illegal according to the UN charter and international law. Sanctions are intended to punish Venezuela for its defiance of having an election that reflects the will of its people, rather than accept a leader picked by the US who would prioritize the interests of US corporations and local oligarchs over the needs of the Venezuelan people.

The political revolution which began with the presidency of Hugo Chavez in 1998 ignited a sense of pride and dignity that was very evident in conversations I had with many Venezuelans. They are committed to defending their democracy, as well as combating the institutional corruption and bureaucracy that have existed since long before Chavez. They see the Bolivarian revolution as a process, constructing a form of socialism, not a utopia, to which too often foreign critics seem to want to make a comparison.

It was clear to me that the survival of this process in Venezuela is important for the struggle of poor and working-class people all over Latin America to defend their sovereignty against the predatory capitalism that the US empire continues to try to impose on them. Many challenges and internal debates exist in Venezuela, but it is a process that they have a right to pursue without US interference. There is much we can learn from their electoral process and what a resulting representative democracy could and should look like here in the US.

CENTRAL AMERICA

NICARAGUA Celebrates Democracy: Election Day Report

By Roger Harris, TFA Board member

On the flight down to Nicaragua as one of 225 international official election observers from 27 countries, the expat Nicaraguan woman sitting next to me was hostile to the current Sandinista government. She said there will be an election but no vote, because only one person is on the ballot. At the polling station in the colonial city of Leon this election morning, November 7, candidates from six political parties standing for president were in fact on the ballot: PLC, FSLN, CCN, ALN, APRE, and PLI.

Some of these parties included elements that tried in 2018 to violently overthrow the Nicaraguan government in a US-instigated regime change endeavor. All the perpe-

trators had been granted amnesty, despite such heinous acts as rape, torture, and even burning people alive, not to mention destruction of billions of dollars' worth of public property.

to discredit and undermine the Nicaraguan election. According to imperial logic, any election (e.g., Venezuela), where someone not beholden to the US is elected, is illegitimate and the democratic winner is a dictator.

None of the arrested individuals in Nicaragua, who are mostly connected with non-governmental associations (NGOs), were associated with the established opposition political parties. Yet the US government incredulously calls seven of them "pre-candidates," a made-up electoral category. Not one of them was remotely a "rival" political candidate. In any case, the ruling Sandinistas were polling 60-75% pre-election approval rates, while the opposition was in disarray.

overwhelmingly heard: "These elections are a call to peace, harmony, and reconciliation." A religious man, he said that he went to church to get divine guidance on how to vote to promote tranquility and calm. He added that despite the regime change violence of 2018, "we are all one people."

Clarisa Cardenez, a voter, commented to us election observers: "I am very happy because this is a civic festival for Nicaraguans." Like so many other Nicaraguan citizens who spoke with us today, she expressed her appreciation for us accompanying their election to see "our peace and calm."

Outside one of the polling stations, we met Yacer Hermiday and Clender Lopez. Their Facebook account, La Consigna, along with their accounts on Instagram and Twitter, were among the over 1000 such pro-Sandinista social media accounts that had been shut down in the run-up to the election. The two young men had been using social media to show the good things happening in Nicaragua, since the end of the 2018 violence, only to be censored by Silicon Valley for reporting positively about the Sandinista government headed by President Daniel Ortega.

They laughed when I asked if they were being paid to post positive images of the Nicaraguan government's programs or were associated with the government. Shaking their heads "no," they explained that a small group of friends were just trying to show "what is going on in Nicaragua and how our government is doing so much for our people." They concluded: "We were shut down for telling the truth." The last person to engage us, on leaving the polling station, was a 26-year-old man. Voting for the second time in his life, he said: "It is a great privilege to vote; elections are an expression of Nicaragua's sovereignty."

In contrast, just days before today's election, the US passed the RENACER Act. Imposing additional new illegal sanctions on Nicaragua, the act explicitly interferes in the Nicaraguan election to punish the people of this small and poor Central American country for exercising their independence from the colossus to the north.

Source: *CounterPunch* 11/08/21



Proud family shows proof of voting.

(Photo: Roger Harris)

trators had been granted amnesty, despite such heinous acts as rape, torture, and even burning people alive, not to mention destruction of billions of dollars' worth of public property.

To prevent a reoccurrence of the violence around today's election, the government had arrested certain individuals who had violated the amnesty by continuing to promote the violent overthrow of the government and/or to serve as unregistered agents of foreign states (namely the US) engaged in regime change activities, actions, it should be noted, which are illegal in the US.

Yet the US government and its allied corporate press are using these legal arrests

When buying an election through lavish funding of NGOs fails, when even a coup attempt as in 2018 fails, and when it is no longer politically acceptable to send in the Marines as the US did in previous times, Uncle Sam is relegated to carping about the election process.

In contrast to the US political class' gnashing of teeth over the arrests, there were no demonstrations in support of those arrested here in Nicaragua. The response of the head of a rural women's cooperative was typical. She felt safer that they are locked up so that they won't repeat the violence of 2018.

This morning an Indigenous election worker at a polling station, Alfredo Jose Rodriguez Sanchez, summed up what we

LATIN AMERICA

CHILE: The Resounding Victory of the Left

By *Alejandra García, journalist*

On November 21, minutes after the victory of leftist Gabriel Boric was declared, the centers of Santiago de Chile and other cities were filled with people honking horns and waving Chilean flags. The long-suffering nation, battered by the fascist legacy of Augusto Pinochet, took to the streets to celebrate a long-awaited victory.

In 2019 and 2020, Plaza Baquedano – renamed Dignity Square – was the scene of the bloodiest social struggles experienced by the country since the years of the dictatorship. Outgoing President Sebastián Piñera had sent the national police to contain the social outburst at whatever cost; the square was filled with people injured and murdered due to police brutality.

Two years later, Dignity Square became the center of celebrations as thousands of people sang and carried banners with the image of former president Salvador Allende. “The people united will never be defeated”, was heard in unity as the Santiago residents celebrated Boric’s sweeping and uncontested victory, which has achieved several historic milestones.

The candidate will become the youngest



President Gabriel Boric meets with Mapuche leader Elisa Loncón. (Photo: Sebastian Beltran/Getty Images)

in the country’s history, with the greatest number of votes for a president, a reflection of the political change demanded by Chileans. His rival, the right-wing José Antonio Kast, acknowledged defeat as soon as Boric began to gain an advantage during the counting of the ballots. The pre-election polls had the two candidates running neck to neck but in the end Boric crushed Kast by over 10%.

The Social Convergence party representative will be the first president who is not part of the country’s two major political forces (center-left and center-right).

Boric was four years old when Pinochet handed over power to a civilian government.

He represents a generation of young politicians who promise to move from a state that was the darling of neoliberalism in Latin America, to a state promoting wellbeing for all, with a strong social agenda. Boric is part of a Chile turning its back on the memory of the dictatorship and Kast’s discourse of order and security, to look towards a better future. “We will advance with responsibility in structural changes without leaving anyone behind. We will grow economically, transform what for many are consumer goods into social rights regardless of their wallet size, and guarantee a peaceful and safe life for Chileans,” Boric said during his first speech as the country’s leader. His government program includes increasing taxes on big business and the richest oligarchs, ending the current pension system, and transforming the health care system.

Boric, unlike Kast, supported the call for the new Constitution, which seeks to sweep away the remnants of Pinochet. His transforming agenda is in tune with the feeling of Chileans who are demanding greater social rights.

Source: *Resumen Latinoamericano - English 12/21/21*

Haiti Action Committee Responds to the New York Times

By *Charlie Hinton, Haiti Action Committee*

On December 19, the New York Times published an article, “As US Navigates Crisis in Haiti, a Bloody History Looms Large,” that traces some of the US imperialist history in Haiti, from not recognizing Haiti’s 1804 independence from France until 1862, to the US occupation of Haiti from 1915 until 1934, to support for the Duvalier dictatorships, but it takes a sharp turn when it ignores the accomplishments of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide’s administrations, and the US role in both the 1991 and 2004 coups to overthrow him. There’s no mention of the significance of Haiti’s first democratic election, or the schools or clinics or parks built, just the notion that somehow Aristide was ousted in 1991 and then the US reinstated Aristide (clearly a mistake, implies the author) and then ten years later he “resigned in disgrace,” a to-

tal distortion of his 2004 ouster and kidnapping. The history embeds anti-Aristide hysteria in an article that purports to analyze the interventionist role of the US in Haitian politics, totally neglecting the role of the US in both coups, and the irony that in the 2004 coup, it was a US military plane that flew him out of the country into forced exile, the ultimate intervention.

Noteworthy in the article is a quote from Joe Biden in a 1994 interview with Charlie Rose, “If Haiti—a God-awful thing to say—if Haiti just quietly sunk into the Caribbean or rose up 300 feet, it wouldn’t matter a whole lot in terms of our interest.” Can this attitude contribute to the mass deportation of Haitians by the Biden administration?

Here’s *Haiti Action Committee’s response*:

To the Editor: “As US Navigates Crisis in Haiti, a Bloody History Looms Large”

(12/19/21), Mr Camercon slips into his article an historically inaccurate and biased attack on former President Jean Bertrand Aristide, Haiti’s first democratically elected president. In 1990, Aristide was elected with almost two-thirds of the vote in the first free and fair election in Haiti’s history. His progressive government was driven out of office by a violent US-orchestrated coup in 1991. Re-elected with an overwhelming majority in 2000, his government was again toppled in a US-backed coup. During Aristide’s time in office, more schools were built than had been built in Haiti’s history. Dramatic advances were made in public health. In the wake of the 2004 coup against Aristide, Haiti has had to deal with one dictatorial government after another, as thousands of refugees continue to flee the country. Any article that purports to analyze US intervention in Haiti should be clear about the attacks on Haiti’s first democratic government.

LATIN AMERICA

ALBA: Stronger Economy is Pushed at Summit in Cuba

By Paul Dobson, *journalist*

The Venezuelan government has called on the Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA-TCP) to draw up “commercial, financial and monetary plans” to strengthen post-pandemic economic development. The proposal came during ALBA’s XX Summit in Havana, Cuba on December 7. The gathering likewise commemorated seventeen years since Hugo Chávez and Fidel Castro founded the multilateral organization in 2004. It followed the XIX Summit held earlier this year in Caracas.

The latest summit was attended by the presidents of Venezuela, Nicaragua, Cuba, and Bolivia, respectively, as well as by high-level delegations from ALBA members Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Granada, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Saint Lucia, which returned to the body this year after a left victory in its July elections. Delegations from non-members Haiti, Syria and Surinam were present as well.

The economy was top on the meeting’s agenda, with several representatives focusing on both the reactivation of their productive apparatus and debt relief after the Covid-19 pandemic. “I request that we make a new and stronger effort to articulate comprehensive plans for economic, commercial, financial, and monetary development between ALBA nations,” said Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro during the encounter. “We need to generate wealth to be able to distribute it,” he continued, encouraging “new investment to produce food, oil, gas, everything our peoples need.”

Equally, Bolivia’s president and economist Luis Arce, who brought 20 tons of humanitarian assistance to Havana, proposed creating two additional “gran-national” enterprises to produce food and medicine. Gran-national enterprises are mixed firms which operate under ALBA control across various countries. They are based on core values of solidarity and fair distribution instead of profit-making.

“...Bolivia proposes and accepts the responsibility for drawing up a strategic plan



Reps. of ALBA nations meet at 20th Summit in Cuba, December 2021

(Photo: VenezuelAnalysis)

to develop our economies,” Arce told those present, while also calling for the jump-starting of ALBA financial arms such as the ALBA Bank and Sucre currency.

The summit’s final statement echoed the calls, as well as establishing “a more complete mechanism to alleviate foreign debt for developing countries, as well as the writing-off or refinancing of debt (and) the democratic transformation of international financial organizations.”

Similarly, the summit pledged to reactivate the ALBA Economic Zone project, as well as regional fisheries, agriculture and PetroCaribe projects. PetroCaribe distributed crude and fuel to Caribbean nations under long-term and low-interest payment agreements. The project was halted in 2018 as US sanctions severely hit Venezuela’s struggling oil sector. The Venezuelan president stated that the flagship initiative will “return stronger-than-ever sooner rather than later.”

The ALBA Summit went on to take aim at US intervention in the region, blasting the “genocidal” blockade against Cuba and the “massive, flagrant and systematic violation of human rights” through unilateral coercive measures against a number of the alliance’s members. “Not even a thousand sanctions will defeat the dignity of the Venezuelan, Nicaraguan and Cuban people,” said Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel at the meeting.

From Cuba, ALBA Executive Secretary Sacha Llorenti unveiled a Counter-Intervention Observatory which will reportedly look to “periodically analyze the role of non-governmental organizations and

funding in destabilizing efforts,” as well as study how the “neoliberal coercive measures” are being levied against member nations.

The observatory comes as a response to Washington’s Summit for Democracy last week, which unveiled over US \$424 million of funding for the region. According to US President Joe Biden, the resources will be channeled into media projects, “defending free and fair elections and political processes, fighting corruption, bolstering democratic reformers, and advancing technology for democracy.” Most ALBA nations were not invited to Washington’s virtual gathering, and Managua, Havana, La Paz and Caracas have all accused Washington of funding destabilization efforts in their countries of late.

The fight against the coronavirus pandemic was also high on the agenda in Havana, with member nations congratulating the island on developing its three vaccines, as well as recognizing the efforts of the ALBA Bank in creating a vaccine bank and Venezuela’s CONVIASA airline for setting up air-bridges between member states. Likewise, the summit saluted the region’s healthcare workers for their frontline work.

For his part, recently re-elected Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega used the opportunity to blast “US imperialism,” claiming that in addition to the Covid-19 pandemic, “savage capitalism and imperialism is the worst pandemic the world has suffered.”

Source: *Venezuelanalysis.com*, 12/12/21

NORTH AMERICA

MEXICO: Racism and War Against the Indigenous in Chiapas

By: *Gilberto López y Rivas, journalist*

This past November 4th, the Fray Bartolomé Human Rights Center (Frayba) reported the forced displacement of more than 3,000 inhabitants of the municipality of Aldama, whose recorded population is not greater than 5,000. They counted 47 recent attacks with high powered firearms against ten communities by a paramilitary group that operates out of Santa Martha in the municipality of Chenalhó and denounced the ongoing absence and complicity of the Mexican government in attending to the serious situation and extreme violence.

The EZLN, in its communiqué from the 19th of September, “Chiapas on the Brink of Civil War,” confirms that the alliances of the Chiapas government of Rutilio Escandón with drug trafficking are forcing the indigenous communities to form self-defense groups because the government does nothing to protect the life, liberty and property of the inhabitants. The government of Chiapas not only gives shelter to the gangs of drug traffickers, but it also supports, promotes and finances paramilitary groups such as those that continuously attack the communities in Aldama and Santa Martha.

Frayba has repeatedly made it clear that the inefficiency and simulation of the actions of the Mexican state continue to foster an environment of violence and terror against the communities of Aldama, which since March of 2018 presented before the InterAmerican Commission on Human Rights a plea for cautionary measures “in the face of risk to life and physical and psychological integrity from the constant attacks with firearms that they receive from paramilitary-style armed groups acting in the municipality of Chenalhó, Chiapas, causing the displacement of people.” Three years after this request in April of 2021, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), granted cautionary measures. Despite the adoption of these measures, there have been more than a hundred aggressions causing seven people their lives and leaving another 22 wounded, provok-



*Residents of Aldama are displaced due to paramilitary violence.
(Photo: La Jornada)*

ing an environment of total insecurity that has disrupted community life.

The EZLN in its communiqué pointed to the actions of ORCAO (Regional Organization of Coffee Growers of Ocosingo), which it characterizes as a paramilitary style political-military organization that has uniforms, gear, weapons, and a fleet obtained with the money that they receive from social programs. They keep some (for the organization) and give the rest to officials so that they could report that they were complying with social assistance. With those weapons, they fire every night against the Zapatista community of Moisés y Gandhi.

In this context, it is very concerning that the Zapatistas warn: “Given the action and negligence of the state and federal authorities, in the face of current and previous crimes, we will take the necessary measures so that justice is applied to the criminals of ORCAO and the officials that sponsor them... On another occasion there will be no communiqué. That is, there will be no words, but actions.”

Doesn't it seem evident that we are facing a scenario like the one which preceded the Acteal Massacre? With recommendations from an international agency, like the IACHR, to the Mexican State, its representatives are not aware of the seriousness of the deeds in Chiapas that concentrates the greatest number of military personnel in the entire national territory.

Could it be that those in the high command of the SEDENA (military) are not informed by their second division of the existence of the paramilitary groups that have ravaged Chiapas from 1994 to this day? Is their commander in chief, busy as he is granting considerable increases in budget, mission, tasks, duties, responsibilities, and perks to the armed forces, outside of the Constitution, going to continue to maintain the old theory of community conflicts, to avoid his responsibility of a situation that is reaching its limits?

The historical racism of Mexico, which devalues indigenous people, considered passive targets for the government's policies and actions, continues in Chiapas with the multiple forms of violence of their counterinsurgency strategy, with the complicity of the local political class, saturating the area with soldiers, barriers, paramilitary groups, and organized crime, despite the evident political and social risks and costs.

Whether it be by omission or commission, it will be the Mexican State that will have to answer for another humanitarian tragedy foretold.

Source: *La Jornada, Mexico, 12/11/2021*

For a detailed chronicle of the violence in Chiapas see: Chiapas_Support.org.blog/Nov.2021

SOUTH AMERICA

COLOMBIA: State Terrorism Becomes Visible

By Renan Vega Cantor, Marxist historian

The State and the ruling classes of Colombia, which constitute the counter insurgent power bloc, have made use of a series of fallacies to hide the terrorist nature of the State in this country, consolidated as such for decades. The first of these fallacies, repeated ad nauseam, is that Colombia is a democratic society with a social rule of law, which, moreover, is ratified by the 1991 Constitution. In the same direction, it is affirmed that Colombian democracy is stable of long standing and has not suffered the anti-democratic onslaught of “populism” (read left-wing). It is argued that in this country there is a separation of powers, freedom of the press, respect for individual liberties, all made possible by the unrestricted preservation of private property.

Secondly, it is pointed out that the military forces have been respectful of the constitutional order and have faced multiple wars from which they have emerged victorious. This fallacy has gained strength in the last five years because of the signing of the agreement between the government of Juan Manuel Santos and the FARC. Added to this is the fact that these armed forces are neat and, as an institution, are formed by martyrs who sacrifice their lives to preserve the assets of Colombians. At most, there have been a few bad apples within them who have gone astray and committed crimes or have allied with paramilitaries and murderers, but these are isolated and individual actions that do not compromise the military entity, which has always respected human rights. It is even said of the members of these military forces, in an official campaign that circulates throughout the country, that “heroes do exist” and that they are the ones.

These fallacies, among many others, have been the Colombian State’s letter of introduction to the rest of the world and have been effective, because at the international level they were assumed to be true. And we speak in the past, because if the events of this year 2021 that is ending have had any importance, it is that

this year State terrorism in the Colombian style became visible to the world.

One thing is that it has become visible, and another thing is that it did not exist. State terrorism did not appear suddenly in (this) 2021, since it has been a recurrent practice in the last 75 years, as we have endured it directly or indirectly in multiple ways (assassinations, disappearances, tortures, bombings, expulsion of population, conversion of social, ethnic and political sectors into internal enemies, open and disguised anticommunism, judicial persecution, media lynching by the great powers of disinformation, exile....), but this never gained prominence in the eyes of the majority of Colombian society and, much less, was it seen outside the country. Some of these terrorist practices have not only been legitimized by sectors of Colombian society (the “well-to-do Colombians”), its intellectuals, its paid journalists, but the denunciations made about this State terrorism were limited to certain activists and political militants, inside and outside the country.

On certain occasions in recent years, some of these terrorist practices (assassination of trade unionists, “false positives” – a name created on purpose to conceal the magnitude of State assassinations) were denounced and some knowledge of them has been acquired among sectors of public opinion in Europe. These genocidal practices have not always been analyzed as the manifestation of State terrorism but considered in a structural way and inscribed in a set of counterinsurgency doctrines and practices, which are permanent, systematic, proper to the logic of the doctrine of national security, anticommunism, and the internal enemy, forged in the United States and fully assumed by the counter-insurgent power bloc in Colombia.

State terrorism in this country has been so “successful” that it has become an export service because the Colombian police and army train (i.e., teach their expertise in terrorist practices under cover of security rhetoric) to more than fifteen states in the world. Also, another variable that indicates the “recognized success” of these terrorist practices is the exportation of

mercenaries (civilian and military) to different parts of the world, something that also became visible in (this) 2021 with the assassination of the president of Haiti, a topic we discuss below.

What has happened in 2021 cracks the erected fallacies and has laid bare the terrorist character of the Colombian State, as shown by two events that we briefly examine: the national strike and the assassination of the president of Haiti.

The year 2021 was the year of the extraordinary national strike, the most important social protest in Colombian history in terms of duration, geographical extension and the diversity of social sectors that participated. This strike broke out for reasons of long, medium, and short duration. In the immediate term, it was the result of the accumulation of grievances during 2020, due to the confinement, the repression of the regime of sub president Iván Duque and because the handling of the pandemic showed the dimension of the inequality and injustice existing in the country. As a repressive factor, the immediate antecedent was the massacre of September nine and ten, 2020 in the streets of Bogota and Soacha, when the police massacred 13 people, among them a Venezuelan citizen. That protest was brutally shut down, with the legitimization provided by the sub president who disguised himself as a policeman and showed up at one of the police stations that had been attacked by the angry crowd.

In the medium term, the strike is part of a broad cycle of protests that is part of what has taken place in the country in the last ten years, and in which various social sectors have participated, although with mobilizations in most cases. Within these protests, the mobilization of students (La Mane in 2011, 2017 and 2018), of peasants (Agrarian Strike of 2013), of indigenous people (various *mingas* and regional strikes in the south of the country) and a first general strike attempt (November 2019), which was postponed due to the interruption of the pandemic, stand out.

Continue reading this article at the Source: *International 360*, 1/2/22

CENTRAL AMERICA

GUATEMALA: 25 Years After the Peace Accords

By Dale Sorensen, TFA Advisory board

It is apparent that there is a connection between immigrations to the US and non-compliance with Peace Accords at the end of Guatemala's civil war. The war ended in 1996 when the accords were signed by the Guatemalan government and the guerrilla leaders of the URNG. The accords were intended to open the door to resolving the many problems that caused the war; including poverty, racism, social inequities, all of which have plagued Guatemala since the Spanish invasion of 1524 and later the 1954 US backed coup against democratically elected President Jacobo Arbenz. The 36-year-long civil war ended 25 years ago but lack of hope has driven thousands to migrate in search of a better life primarily due to lack of economic opportunities and government inaction.

When the Peace Accords were signed, new institutions were established to address issues of rural development such as land disparities and discrimination against women and Indigenous peoples. But in recent years the institutions have come under attack and adherence to agreements has eroded. Connections between the administrations and the military have become common.

Since 1996 successive Guatemalan governments have consolidated and limited the state institutions and far-right politicians have proposed amnesty for soldiers accused of war crimes. Fraud and corruption have become frequent and many of the causes for taking up arms in the 1960s and 1970s are still present today.

Under President Alfonso Portillo (2000-

2004) the military was allowed to work in collaboration with the newly formed Guatemalan National Civilian Police. Worse was when the Perez Molina Administration (2012-2015) allowed the National Reparations Program for victims of the conflict to be underfunded and not executed. Later under the administration of Jimmy Morales (2016-2020) and the current administration of Alejandro Giammattei further action was taken to limit the accords. Ana Lopez, director of the Guatemalan Council for the Compliance with the Peace Accords, was fired by Giammattei in 2019; he also closed the secretariat of peace and the secretariat of agrarian affairs, created with the intent of guaranteeing compliance with the goals of the accords.

According to the Guatemalan Human Rights Commission there has been a new wave of violence and attacks against human rights defenders. These attacks have doubled from 2019 to 2020 and surged again in 2021. Victims include members of the judicial system like judges and prosecutors, especially those focused on ending corruption and impunity.

After the war, many refugees fled to Mexico but after returning, they often found their lands had been taken by other farmers and there was no mechanism to help resolve land disputes. Some immigrants returning years after the war ended reported that conditions had not changed—everything stayed the same. The persistent poverty in rural communities, and in Guatemala as a whole, reflects the government's failure to address the needs of the people or the guarantees of the Peace Accords.

Inequalities in government investment are apparent when you compare the amount the state spends on Indigenous communities as opposed to non-Indigenous ones. For every *quetzal* the state invests in non-Indigenous communities, it invests 45 cents in Indigenous communities.

Life in Guatemala had grown worse for most of the country's population in the 25 years since the signing of the peace accords despite overall economic growth. But low wages contribute to the decision of many to migrate and remittances have continued to increase significantly over the years. The low minimum wage is less than the basic cost of living which is relatively high at \$425 per month. Agricultural work pays \$355 per month and factory labor starts at \$334. There are 2.9 million Guatemalans living in the US sending more than \$11 billion to family members.

The refusal to comply with the accords has resulted in the Indigenous communities being the hardest hit. The civil war left more than 200,000 Guatemalans dead and one million displaced; 83 percent of the victims were Indigenous Maya. These rural communities are now being abandoned even more frequently than any time since the war ended, and poverty is as high as 80 percent. For many, immigration is the only way they can survive.

Sources: Jeff Abbot, *The Progressive*, 12/21 & 01/22; *Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA*, Winter 2021

GUATEMALA: Indigenous Women Welcome Ruling

By Theresa Cameranesi, TFA Board member

Survivors of Guatemala's decades-long armed conflict have welcomed a court ruling that found five former paramilitary guilty of raping and sexually abusing Indigenous girls and women during the war. The former members of the so-called "Civil Self-Defense Patrols" were sentenced to 30 years in prison for crimes that took place in the early 1980s. This is only the second time that former military or paramilitary members have been



The Maya Achi women survivors
(Photo: *Verdad y justicia en Guatemala*)

tried for sexual violence against women. The Maya Achi women spent years demanding justice for crimes committed during the conflict, and said the ruling is a step in the path to justice.

The court ruled in January that 36 Indigenous Maya Achi women had been subjected to domestic slavery, sexual violence and rape during the 36-year conflict, which took place from 1960 to 1996. Cases such as that of the Maya Achi women have highlighted how

Continued on page 10

Cuba Mourns Death of Solidarity Activist Alicia Jrapko

By Nuria Barbosa León, journalist

The First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba and President of the Republic, Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez, lamented today the death of the tireless Argentine fighter Alicia Jrapko, who devoted her life to fight for justice on behalf of her disappeared comrades. She also fought with determination for the return of Elián Gonzalez to Cuba and the freedom of the Cuban Five and against the long US blockade of Cuba.

“Farewell sister,” Díaz-Canel wrote on Twitter. Also, Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla expressed his heartfelt condolences for the death of the solidarity activist of Argentine origin and resident of Oakland, California, who had been fighting against a malignant tumor for more than two years.

Granma spoke with her during the solidarity event held in Havana from November 1 to 3, 2019, where she expressed her committed activism as coordinator of the International Committee Peace, Justice and Dignity in the US.



Alicia receives Friendship Award from Cuba. Photo: reditt.com

She urged us to “reflect that today the US is a convulsed society with a decaying system. The government chooses which countries to attack and which to support, depending on their behavior regarding obeying the laws of imperialism. Today the enemy for them is Venezuela, Cuba, Bolivia, Syria, and other nations that have chosen to protect their sovereignty without bowing to US interests”.

“Cuba has not done anything to the US, it has never attacked it, but that government

must justify its actions to divert attention so that people cannot reflect on the chaotic situation inside their own country. There are many fundamental problems there in terms of unemployment, racism, drugs, murders, and other evils. It is a society that shows a face of hatred, xenophobia, instead of messages of love and peace,” argued the woman who headed the International Committee for the Freedom of the Cuban Five in the United States.

“I have hope because in the United States we are uniting in the fight to conquer our rights. Every day there is struggle and someday that society will explode,” said Alicia who has received several distinctions in Cuba, including the Felix Elmuza Medal awarded by the Union of Journalists of Cuba, the Shield of the city of Holguin and the Medal of Friendship granted by the Council of State of the Republic of Cuba, at the proposal of the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples.

Source: *Granma*, Jan 12, 2022, translation *Resumen Latinoamericano – English*

CUBA: New Documentary

Guatemala, continued from page 9

sexual violence was used by the Guatemalan military as part of its war strategy. “All transitional justice cases have shown how sexual violence was used as a strategy [of war],” said Ada Valenzuela, director of the National Union of Guatemalan Women. “The case of the Mayan Achi women puts the issue of sexual violence back on the stage and calls us as Guatemalan society to effectively understand that it was a constant.”

While these cases have reinvigorated survivors’ efforts to seek justice, last year some conservative Guatemalan lawmakers presented an amnesty bill that would free all ex-soldiers and paramilitary members accused or convicted of crimes during the conflict. It is the second recent amnesty proposal in the Guatemalan Congress.

Source: *Al Jazeera*, 1/24/2022



The War on Cuba is a six-part documentary series that exposes US-imposed sanctions that impact daily life on the island that were intensified under the Trump Administration. It was created by Belly of the Beast which is a Havana-based media organization that tells Cuba’s untold stories through hard-hitting journalism and stunning cinematography. With a team of Cuban and US-based journalists, Belly of the Beast pioneered a new model of documentary filmmaking and reporting from

the Global South that breaks with the practice of parachute journalism.

Liz Oliva Fernandez is a 27-year-old Cuban journalist who is the protagonist of the documentary and leads us through the episodes showing the reality of today’s Cuba, whose people have been deeply affected by the US blockade. Oliver Stone and Danny Glover are the executive producers of this documentary.

View on YouTube.

BRIEFS

CELAC 2022

Argentina will preside over the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). Mexico held the CELAC presidency during 2021; Argentine Foreign Affairs Minister Santiago Cafiero has now assumed the chairmanship of the regional political bloc. Cafiero stated that in this role his country will emphasize climate change, epidemiological emergencies, comprehensive disaster risk management, educational exchange, the fight against corruption, food security, and regional connectivity in transport and communications.

Source: *Telesur English* 01/07/22

MEXICO Offers Asylum to Assange

The Puebla Group supported an initiative, first proposed by the President of Mexico, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, to offer asylum to the Australian journalist and founder of Wikileaks Julian Assange, who is a victim of political persecution by US authorities. At the National Palace, AMLO again made the asylum proposal and said that the US administration should act with humanism towards the activist. "Assange is ill and it would be a sign of solidarity, of fraternity, to allow him to receive asylum in the country where he decides to live, including Mexico," he reiterated.

Source: *Telesur*, 01/04/22

LATIN AMERICA: Upcoming elections

The Latin American and Caribbean electoral calendar for 2022 promises to be no less hectic than that of the previous year. Among the upcoming elections and referendums (Costa, Rica, Chile, Peru, perhaps Haiti) two contests will attract the most attention due to the specific geopolitical weight of their respective countries: the general elections in Brazil in October and the Colombian parliamentary and presidential elections in May. After 20 years of pro-Uribe governments, and with the eternal backdrop of the armed conflict, Colombia is playing with the future of the unfinished peace process.

Source: *Lautaro Rivate, Alanet, January 2022*

NICARAGUA: Leads in Renewables

In October, the World Bank reported that Nicaragua ranks third in the world in renewable energy. Since 2007, Nicaragua has implemented an electrification program that tripled energy production from renewable sources and expanded electricity coverage from 54% in 2007 to 99% in 2021. In a few years they will overcome dependence on fossil fuels. Nicaragua ranks first in the region in infrastructure investment.

Source: *Nicaragua News*, October 12 & 15, 2021.

VENEZUELA: Shoots Down Narco-Jet

The Bolivarian National Armed Force (FANB) of Venezuela confirmed that it neutralized a plane belonging to Colombian drug traffickers that landed on an unauthorized runway. Venezuela issued a press release on December 15, reporting the operation against an aircraft designated as "TANCOL" (an acronym for Colombian armed terrorist drug traffickers) that was illegally in Venezuelan airspace. The military stated that in 2021 they have destroyed 54 "TANCOL" planes in Venezuela. The narco-traffickers hope to use this airspace to transport drugs produced in Colombia to the United States and Europe.

Source: *Orinoco Tribune*, 01/05/22

PERU: Updates

President Pedro Castillo recently sent a bill to Congress to modify the Electric Social Compensation Fund (FOSE), to ensure that the most vulnerable families have a discount of up to 15% on their monthly electricity bills.

He also launched a "second agricultural reform", a development program that will provide roads, technology, and technical advice to farmers. He additionally announced that Petroperu has assumed the exploitation of the Block I field. This allows the public company to return to producing oil after 25 years. "Until the 1990s, Petroperu produced up to 187,000 barrels per day, but privatization policies paralyzed its development to the detriment of the country," Castillo commented.

Source: *Telesur English* 12/2021

Task Force on the Americas Report is published quarterly by the Marin Interfaith Task Force on the Americas. Editorial Committee: Carissa Brands, Theresa Cameranesi, Carol Moeller Costa, Alice Loaiza, Dale Sorensen.

VENEZUELA: Maduro Recognized

The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) voted in December to recognize the credentials of the government of President Nicolás Maduro as the legitimate representative of Venezuela. Venezuelan Foreign Minister Felix Plasencia called the vote a "resounding victory for International Law and a slap against imperialist interference and aggression, as well as "a dose of reality..." The "interim" administration led by Juan Guaidó only managed to get 16 countries at the General Assembly to vote against the recognition of the Maduro government as the legitimate president of Venezuela. Previously, in 2019, 60 countries opted to follow Washington's dictates and recognize the then National Assembly president. Those that support Guaidó appear now to be largely maintained by the US Department of State,

Source: *Venezuela Analysis*, 12/08/21

MEXICO: To End Exporting Oil

Mexico plans to halt crude oil exports in 2023 as part of President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's goal of self-sufficiency in fuel production. Pemex, the Mexican state-owned petroleum producer, will reduce daily crude exports next year by more than half to 435,000 barrels before phasing out sales to foreign customers the following year. The ambitious endeavor is part of Lopez Obrador's drive to expand homegrown production of gasoline and diesel that Mexico now mostly buys from US refiners.

Source: *Yahoo Finance*, 12/28/21

NICARAGUA: Defends Sovereignty

In 2021, Nicaragua defended their right to sovereignty: relations with China (not Taiwan) was reestablished, the process to leave the OAS was begun, and the government responded to US interference by exposing agents who attempted the coup in 2018, and Christina Chamorro was arrested for money laundering. A new law was enacted that requires those who receive money from a foreign government (US) must report it in order to control funding of right-wing groups.

Source: *Nan McCurdy, TFA webinar*, 12/23/21

Chuck Kaufman Presente!

Task Force on the Americas mourns the unexpected news that Chuck Kaufman has died. On December 28, he passed away from natural causes at his home in Tucson, Arizona. He was 69.

A long-time leader of the Alliance for Global Justice, Chuck built an organization that has steadfastly opposed US aggression and intervention in Latin America and the Caribbean. AFGJ not only worked in the Americas; they fiscally supported and financed social change, north and south, as the Fiscal Sponsors of Occupy Wall Street and dozens of other organizations challenging US racism, exceptionalism, Israeli apartheid and more. Even when such actions were controversial and most would not touch them, Chuck remained clear-eyed and his moral compass straight. As such, Chuck Kaufman changed US history forever.

When there was confusion about the situation in Nicaragua in 2018, Chuck was clear. As someone said, "Chuck was a defender of the right of countries to defend themselves and the need to convey to peo-

ple in the West the successes and achievements of revolutionary governments in the face of US hostility and aggression."

Chuck led or initiated dozens of solidarity delegations, and many TFA members knew him personally. A few of the shocked reactions are as follows:

"Chuck is a hero of the solidarity movement."

"He was such a gift to all of us, a tireless comrade."

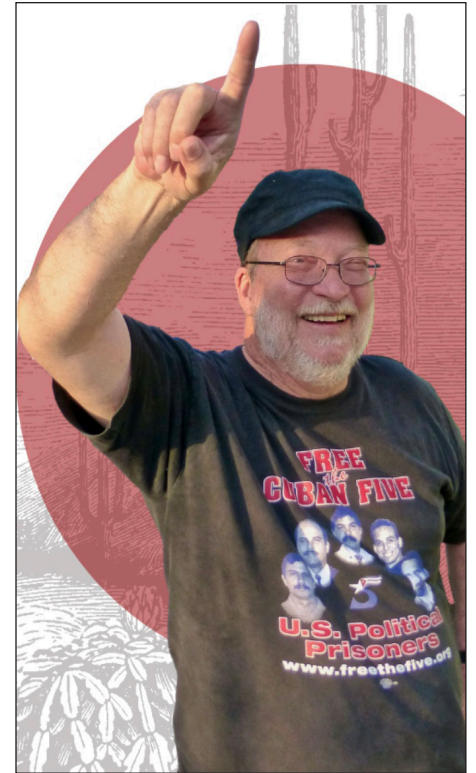
"His sense of humor never failed to bring laughter even in perilous situations."

"He was a giant who relished challenging the established order."

"It's so sad. I thought Chuck would live forever. We needed him to live forever."

Chuck set the highest standards of good humor, respectful debate, sharp analysis, and unwavering solidarity. With his favorite Flor de Caña rum, made in his beloved Nicaragua, let us honor and toast our fallen comrade.

Chuck Kaufman Presente!



¡Qué viva Chuck! (Photo: AFGJ)

Non-Profit Org.
US Postage
PAID
Permit # 14
Larkspur, CA
94977

Marin Interfaith Task Force on the Americas
P.O. Box 925
Larkspur, CA 94977
Time Value Material Return
Service Requested