

Report

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MEXICO: Grassroots Uprising In Oaxaca

By Pedro Pineda I Coloch and Antoine Libert Amico; translated by Miguel Pickard, CIEPAC, Chiapas Mexico

Since May 2006 there has been a profound social movement in Oaxaca (some 300 miles southeast of Mexico City) that has shaken traditional concepts of politics and government to the core. The movement arose in response to repression by the Oaxaca state governor, Ulises Ruiz, against striking teachers. This CIEPAC (*Centro de Investigaciones Economicas y Politicas de Accion Comunitaria*) bulletin summarizes complex events that have occurred over the past six months.

What is the APPO? On June 17, 2006 some 365 social organizations, local governments run by grassroots organizations, teachers from the Section 22 of the National Teachers Union, all 16 of Oaxaca's indigenous peoples, and citizens from all walks of life joined together to form APPO (Popular Alliance of the Peoples of Oaxaca).

Why was APPO formed? For decades, the people of Oaxaca have struggled against the looting of their natural resources and biodiversity by large companies. For example, the Plan Puebla Panama, a government sponsored scheme to build large infrastructure projects for the benefit of multinational companies, seeks to separate indigenous people from their ancestral and communally-held lands to make way for dams, major toll highways, "multimodal" shipping corridors, etc. Struggles to stop the pillaging of land and resources have led to the creation of hundreds of mobilized grassroots organizations throughout the state.

Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, from the Institutional Revolutionary Party or PRI, took over as governor of the state of Oaxaca through massive fraud at the polls in August 2004. Once sworn in, Ruiz committed numerous violations of human rights as he unleashed brutal



Teachers confront Mexican Federal Police
Photo: NYC Indymedia

repression in response to demands made by grassroots organizations and as a way of defending neoliberal economic policies.

On June 14, 2006, Ulises Ruiz sent armed state police to clear the sit-down strike that teachers from Section 22 of the National Teachers Union had staged in the central plaza of the city of Oaxaca to press for salary increases and improved working conditions. The violent police raid initially cleared the plaza but led to detentions, forced disappearances of several people and a miscarriage when a pregnant woman was overcome by tear gas. It was the last straw for many Oaxacans, fed up with two years of violence, corruption, fraud, environmental destruction and incompetence. Common people poured out into the streets to defend the teachers and together they took over the central plaza once again. Three days later APPO was born in an attempt to unify the diverse social struggles in Oaxaca and to demand the re-

moval of Ruiz.

How is APPO organized? All the important decisions are taken in assembly. The assembly has a temporary leadership, but real power emanates from the base of diverse social organizations that make up APPO, a fact

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Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle

By Roger Stoll, MITF

Ed. Note: *The following is a summary by the author of his book review of, "The Other Campaign" by Subcomandante Marcos and the Zapatistas*

Mexico is often overlooked as a bellwether of world-historic changes. Yet it was there that a peasant-worker alliance with a revolutionary ideology made a try for national power almost a decade before the Russian Revolution of 1917. In just this past year, events in Oaxaca and Mexico City have drawn attention for their revolutionary implications. Twelve years ago, on January 1, 1994, Mexico took the world stage with the Zapatista rebellion in the southernmost state of Chiapas.

The indigenous-led Zapatista movement continues, hoping to radically transform Mexico. Since January 1st of this year, representatives of the Zapatista military leadership, including spokesperson Subcomandante Marcos, have been on a nationwide tour of Mexico to bring to light people's struggles: workers, peasants, fishermen, students, anti-globalization activists, human rights activists, and just about everyone who seeks a just, equitable, sovereign Mexico free from political and economic domination by the United States and Mexico's own elites. This quest is "The Other Campaign" (*La Otra Campaña*), an ironic reference to the national Mexican elections of 2006.

To understand *La Otra Campaña* and Zapatista politics, a good place to start is with the Sixth Declaration from the Lacandon

Jungle (*Sexta Declaración de la Selva Lacandona*, aka *La Sexta*), issued by the Zapatista leadership in June 2005. This simply written, eloquent document briefly outlines the history of the Zapatista struggle and its accomplishments, the genesis and purpose of *La Otra Campaña*, the Zapatista critique of capitalism, neo-liberalism and globalization, and the movement's aspirations for the transformation of Mexico and the world.

What follows are excerpts of the Sixth Declaration. Here is *La Sexta* on how the Zapatistas came to be, the 1994 New Year's Day rebellion, and its conclusion: "In the beginning there were not many of us ... We remained like that for about ten years, and when we had grown, we were many thousands. We trained ourselves quite well in politics and weapons, and, suddenly, when the rich were throwing their New Year's Eve parties, we fell upon their cities and just took them over ... Then the rich sent their great armies to do away with us, just like they always do when the exploited rebel."

"Then the people from the cities went out into the streets and began shouting for an end to the war. And then we stopped our war, and we listened to those brothers and sisters from the city who were telling us to try to reach an arrangement or an accord with the bad governments, so that the problem could be resolved without a massacre ... So we set aside the fire and took up the word." The Zapatistas then entered into lengthy negotiations with the government, leading to the San Andrés Accords — to which the government famously agreed and infamously later rejected.

La Sexta on capitalism: "Capitalism means only a few have great wealth ... So capitalism is based on the exploitation of the workers, which means the few exploit the workers and take out all the profits they

can ... Capitalism is a system where the robbers go free, and are actually admired and held up as examples." *La Sexta* introduces the concept of commoditization: it notes that according to capitalism, "everything must be able to be bought and sold," concealing the exploited labor within it. "[F]or example, we see coffee in its little package ... but we do not see the *coyote* who paid him so cheaply for his work, nor do we see the workers in the large company working their hearts out to package the coffee."

La Sexta on neoliberalism: "Sometimes conquest is by armies who invade a country and conquer it by force. But sometimes it is by way of the economy, in other words, the big capitalists put their money into another country or they lend it money, but on the condition that what they tell them to do is obeyed."

La Sexta's sketch for *La Otra Campaña*: "What we think is that, with these people and organizations of the Left, we can make a plan for going to all those parts of Mexico where there are humble and simple people like ourselves. And we are not going to tell them what they should do or give them orders. Nor are we going to ask them to vote for a candidate since we already know that the ones who exist are neoliberals. Nor are we going to tell them to be like us, nor to rise up in arms. What we are going to do is to ask them what their lives and struggles are like, their struggle, what their thoughts about our country are, and what we should do so capitalism does not defeat us."

Source: "The Other Campaign/la otra campaña," *Open Media Series*; published by City Lights Books, 2006. See www.citylights.com/pub/openmed.html; www.mitfamericas.org

repression that initially Ruiz, and then the federal government, let loose against them.

What are APPO's plans? APPO's main demand is the immediate resignation of Uro, but its sights are set higher. Over the past six months since its creation, APPO has in essence taken over running of the city of Oaxaca and some 30 municipalities throughout the state. Shouting "Ulises is already gone!" APPO supporters closed all state-level

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that has hindered the state and federal governments from weakening the movement.

Now regional APPOs have been formed throughout Oaxaca. Decisions are made at the grassroots level and proposals are taken to APPO's general assembly in the capital city of Oaxaca. What has emerged is a new way of doing politics in the hands of a true grassroots democracy. Common people identify with APPO as seen in the heroic and organized way they have fought against the

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HAITI: Judgment Against Toto Constant

By Moira Feeney, Center for Justice and Accountability (CJA)

Ed. Note: CJA is a San Francisco based human rights organization dedicated to ending torture and other severe human rights abuses through litigation, education and outreach.

On August 17, 2006, Emmanuel "Toto" Constant, the former leader of Haiti's notorious death squad known as FRAPH, was held liable by a US federal court for torture, including rape, attempted extrajudicial killing, and crimes against humanity. US district Court Judge Sidney H. Stein, of the Southern District of New York, granted a default judgment today in favor of several women who survived savage gang rapes and other violence at the hands of members of FRAPH. In a later hearing, the judge

ordered Constant to pay the three women plaintiffs a total of \$19 million.

The three women, all survivors of torture under the brutal campaign of terror orchestrated by Constant and carried out by members of FRAPH during the period of military rule in Haiti from 1991-1994, filed the lawsuit in December 2004.

The judgment marks the first time that anyone has been held to account for the state-sponsored campaign of rape that destroyed so many families in Haiti. Despite the outcry from the Haitian community and human rights organizations, Mr. Constant lived and worked freely in New York until he was arrested last month in connection with a mortgage fraud scheme in Suffolk County, NY. He remains in jail awaiting a criminal trial on charges of grand larceny, forgery and falsifying business

records. The US government moved to deport Mr. Constant in 1995. However, after he disclosed on *60 Minutes* that he had been on the CIA payroll during the period when FRAPH was formed, he was released from detention and has been allowed to remain in the US.

This judgment condemns the systematic use of state-sponsored violence against women and highlights the bravery of the plaintiffs who stood up and confronted the man who was the mastermind behind the torture that they suffered. The fact that Mr. Constant defaulted does not decrease the significance of this judgment to the people of Haiti, the people of New York, and the global community that refuses to tolerate torture in all its forms.

Source: www.cja.org

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government offices, demonstrating that corrupt, repressive governments will no longer be tolerated. In practice, then, Ruiz is no longer the state's governor.

APPO has proposed that Popular Assemblies be created throughout Mexico and that grassroots organizations join together to create a new way of exercising representative democracy.

What has been the response to repression? The people of Oaxaca have articulated common sense demands, yet Ruiz's main reaction has been to unleash repression, betting on wearing down resistance through violence. Ulises Ruiz has ordered gunmen to carry out armed attacks against barricades erected every evening by neighbors (including the elderly, children, housewives, etc.) in the capital city. Throughout the conflict, the federal government has taken a hypocritical stance, proclaiming its desire to find a negotiated solution while simultaneously carrying out violent repression against the movement. The overtly biased mass media (mainly the TV duopoly: Televisa and TV Azteca) have discredited and criminalized APPO in an effort to justify a violent resolution to the conflict.

Last October 27, gunmen from Ruiz's party, the PRI, murdered three people, among them US journalist Brad Will. Now under pressure from the US, the Fox government sent in the Federal Preventive Police

(PFP), supposedly to reestablish "order and peace."

As the federal militarized police invaded Oaxacan streets, people carried out peaceful civil resistance by forming human shields, handing out flowers and singing the national anthem. Since their violent incursion into the city of Oaxaca, the PFP have killed four people, raising to 16 the number of confirmed dead due to repression against the APPO movement, and to 44 the number of dead since Uro became governor.

The militarized police's violent occupation of Oaxaca provoked protests throughout Mexico and in 26 countries. The Other Campaign (a Zapatista-inspired movement), together with other movements, blocked highways throughout Mexico on November 1st. In Chiapas all roads through Zapatista territory were blocked throughout the day.

Following these signs of solidarity, on Nov. 2 the PFP sought to suppress the voice of the movement by attacking Radio University on the campus of the State University. A fierce battle ensued, lasting over seven hours, as young people, women, teachers and neighbors from the University area poured onto the streets and forced the PFP to retreat, leading APPO to call it a historic victory for the people.

Given continuous government brutality, as witnessed against the people of Atenco (state of Mexico), against miners striking at Sicartsa (Michoacán) and against partici-

pants of The Other Campaign (throughout the country), the organized, peaceful and grassroots struggle of the Oaxacan people shows us that fear can and must be overcome in order to strengthen resistance and continue building a participatory democracy.

What's next? Sadly, the number of detained and disappeared rises daily. Yet the struggle will continue until all political detainees and disappeared people return to their families, communities and organizations.

Solidarity with the struggle in Oaxaca is urgently needed in order to head off governmental repression and to allow people to continue building their dream of a new Oaxaca and a new Mexico. APPO has called for mobilizations on November 20 and December 1st against repression and to prevent the inauguration of president-elect Felipe Calderón (known on the streets as FeCal). In addition to protests, however, the time has come to build another way of expressing ourselves politically. The Oaxacan people are not going to stop once Ulises Ruiz resigns. Rather, they will continue to build grassroots empowerment. International solidarity is needed now to support them in their struggle to build a true representative democracy.

"This is not a leaders' movement; it belongs to the grassroots" (APPO slogan).

Source: *Bulletins of CIEPAC*, 9 Nov/2006, Number 524, www.ciepac.org

NICARAGUA: Return of the Sandinistas

By *Bill Blum, author of "Killing Hope"*

Ed. Note: *On November 5, 2006 Daniel Ortega was elected president of Nicaragua.*

Captain Ahab had his Moby Dick. Inspector Javert had his Jean Valjean. The United States has its Fidel Castro. Washington also has its Daniel Ortega. For 27 years the most powerful nation in the world has found it impossible to share the Western Hemisphere with one of its poorest and weakest neighbors, Nicaragua, if the country's leader was not in love with capitalism.

From the moment the Sandinista revolutionaries overthrew the US-supported Somoza dictatorship in 1979, Washington was concerned about the rising up of that long-dreaded beast — "another Cuba." This was war. On the battlefield and in the voting booths. For almost 10 years the American proxy army, the Contras, carried out a particularly brutal insurgency against the Sandinista government and its supporters. In 1984, Washington tried its best to sabotage the elections, but failed to keep Sandinista leader Ortega from becoming president. And the war continued. In 1990 Washington's electoral tactic was to hammer home the simple and clear message to the people of Nicaragua: If you re-elect Ortega, all the horrors of the civil war and, America's economic hostility will continue. Just two months before the election, in December 1989, the United States invaded Panama for no apparent reason acceptable to international law, morality, or common sense (The US naturally called it "Operation Just Cause." One likely reason was to send a clear message to the people of Nicaragua that this is what they could expect, that the US/Contra war would continue and even escalate if they re-elected the Sandinistas.

It worked. One cannot overestimate the power of fear, murder, rape, and your house being burned down. Ortega lost, and Nicaragua returned to the rule of the free market, striving to roll back the progressive social and economic programs that had been undertaken by the Sandinistas. Within a few years widespread malnutrition, wholly inadequate access to health care and education, and other social ills had once again become a widespread daily fact of life for the people of Nicaragua.

Each presidential election since then has pitted perennial candidate Ortega against

Washington's interference in the process in shamelessly blatant ways. Pressure has been regularly exerted on certain political parties to withdraw their candidates so as to avoid splitting the conservative vote against the Sandinistas. US ambassadors and visiting State Department officials publicly and explicitly campaign for anti-Sandinista candidates, threatening all kinds of economic and diplomatic punishment if Ortega wins, including difficulties with exports, visas, and vital family remittances by Nicaraguans living in the US. In the 2001 election, shortly after the September 11 attacks, American officials tried their best to tie Ortega to terrorism, placing a full-page ad in the leading newspaper which declared, among other things, that: "Ortega has a relationship of more than thirty years with states and individuals who shelter and condone international terrorism." That same year a senior analyst in Nicaragua for the international pollsters Gallup was moved to declare: "Never in my whole life have I seen a sitting ambassador get publicly involved in a sovereign country's electoral process, nor have I ever heard of it."

Additionally, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) — which would like the world to believe that it's a private non-governmental organization, when it's actually a creation and an agency of the US government — regularly furnishes large amounts of money and other aid to organizations in Nicaragua which are opposed to the Sandinistas. The International Republican Institute (IRI), a long-time wing of NED, whose chairman is Arizona Senator John McCain, has also been active in Nicaragua creating the Movement for Nicaragua, which has helped organize marches against the Sandinistas. An IRI official in Nicaragua, speaking to a visiting American delegation in June of this year, equated the relationship between Nicaragua and the US to that of a son to a father. "Children should not argue with their parents," she said.

With the 2006 presidential election in mind, one senior US official wrote in a Nicaraguan newspaper last year that should Ortega be elected, "Nicaragua would sink like a stone." In March, Jeanne Kirkpatrick, the US Ambassador to the UN under Reagan and a prime supporter of the Contras, came to visit. She met with members of all the major Sandinista opposition parties and declared her belief that democracy in Nicaragua "is in dan-

ger" but that she had no doubt that the "Sandinista dictatorship" would not return to power. The following month, the American ambassador in Managua, Paul Trivelli, who openly speaks of his disapproval of Ortega and the Sandinista party, sent a letter to the presidential candidates of conservative parties offering financial and technical help to unite them for the general election of November 5. The ambassador stated that he was responding to requests by Nicaraguan "democratic parties" for US support in their mission to keep Daniel Ortega from a presidential victory. The visiting American delegation reported: "In a somewhat opaque statement Trivelli said that if Ortega were to win, the concept of governments recognizing governments wouldn't exist anymore and it was a 19th century concept anyway. The relationship would depend on what his government put in place." One of the fears of the ambassador likely has to do with Ortega talking of renegotiating CAFTA, the trade agreement between the US and Central America, so dear to the hearts of corporate globalizationists.

Then, in June, US Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick said it was necessary for the Organization of American States (OAS) to send a mission of Electoral Observation to Nicaragua "as soon as possible" so as to "prevent the old leaders of corruption and communism from attempting to remain in power" (though the Sandinistas have not occupied the presidency, only lower offices, since 1990).

The explicit or implicit message of American pronouncements concerning Nicaragua is often the warning that if the Sandinistas come back to power, the horrible war, so fresh in the memory of Nicaraguans, will return. The London Independent reported in September that, "One of the Ortega billboards in Nicaragua was spray-painted 'We don't want another war'. What it was saying was that if you vote for Ortega you are voting for a possible war with the US."

Per capita income in Nicaragua is \$900 a year; some 70% of the people live in poverty. It is worth noting that Nicaragua and Haiti are the two nations in the Western Hemisphere that the US has intervened in the most, from the 19th century to the 21st, including long periods of occupation. And they are today the two poorest in the hemisphere.

Source: *Anti-Empire Report, October 19, 2006; www.members.aol.com/bblum6/aer38.htm*

GUATEMALA: Femicide

By Tanya Snyder, Director Voices on the Border

Ed Note: MITF's Dale Sorensen and Camilla Schneider participated in the delegation, organized by the Guatemala Human Rights Commission (www.ghrc-usa.org) July 27-August 6, 2006.

I share an office in Washington DC with GHRC and went on the delegation to learn more about their work and how the issues in Guatemala relate to my work in El Salvador.

You probably didn't know violence against women is a big problem in Guatemala. Most of us are aware of the rash of murders of young women in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico in recent years, but not the epidemic of femicides in Guatemala. It was only in the year 2000 that murder statistics began to be separated by gender. The rate of murders of women has risen every year since, totaling over 2,600 murders since 2000. Already this year there have been 350 murders – almost as many as Juárez has seen in ten years.

Violence against women in Guatemala doesn't happen in a vacuum. This is a country that suffered a brutal civil war for 36 years (that's three times longer than El Salvador's brutal civil war) and whose government was a world leader in torture, disappearance, massacre, and wholesale terror. Of course there were several governments over 36 years, the most grotesque being the presidency of General Efraín Ríos Montt, who ruled for two short years, 1982-1983, and in that time essentially managed to obliterate the guerrillas and anyone who might have ever given them food. It was still another decade and a half before peace accords were signed and the war ended. By the end, 200,000 people, most of them indigenous, had lost their lives. El Salvador had a war. Guatemala had genocide.

The US supported the Guatemalan government forces in various ways – even when the Congress banned military aid to the death squad government, they would send economic aid that would then free up Guatemala's money for guns and warplanes. The CIA and State Department remained close allies to the Guatemalan regime, ban or no ban, throughout the war. Our government's support for such flagrant poli-

cies of massacre and terror prompted President Bill Clinton to do the unthinkable in 1999: Apologize.

Thirty-six years of war, apparently, will twist enough people's heads to allow for a special kind of violence. Our cities in the US are plenty violent, but we don't often have severed heads showing up in buckets. Many people told us that the violence of today is directly related to the trauma – and the training – from the war. Some said it went all the way back to the Conquest. Some blamed the murders of women on gangs; some said it was domestic violence. Some said police were involved. We were told that after the war, only the Left demobilized. The Right just reconfigured itself.

No one knows who is killing these women. There are rarely investigations. Of the 2,600 murders in the last six years, 5% have been investigated. There have been 14 trials and just a handful of convictions. Witnesses in some of the trials have been murdered.

Meanwhile, the government issues statements telling women to be careful, to dress discreetly, to not go out at night. They are using the pandemic of violence to return women to a state of servitude. Women with tattoos are assumed to be gang members. Women with gold jewelry are assumed to run with drug-traffickers. Housewives must have been neglecting the cooking and cleaning and the maintenance of the family. This is a country where, until last November, a rapist could have the charges against him dropped if he offered to marry his victim. Rape within a marriage is not recognized as a crime.

At *Sobrevivientes* (Survivors), an advocacy and service-provider organization for women victims of violence and their families, founder Norma Cruz told us: "I always advise women, if you're attacked, just let them kill you right there. If you let them take you somewhere, you'll be dead within five or six hours anyway, but you'll be raped and tortured first, and it will take your family days to find your body. Or the pieces of your body."

We met with an impressive line-up of human rights defenders, all inspiring and committed. Each one, working under threat of death and terror, continues day after day to stand up publicly and vulnerably for hu-

man rights, holding open the thin wedge of political space they still have, that tiny sliver of freedom that keeps Guatemala from tumbling back into dictatorship and repression. Each of these women truly believed – and I believed with them – that their work was essential in holding that space open.

Sandra Morán from *Sector de Mujeres* (the Women's Movement) said their office was broken into just a few months ago, that the attackers left blood and took only the phones. They came again exactly a week later, before dawn Monday morning. The second time, the neighbors called the police, but the police never came. The attackers ransacked everything. All they left was a small coffin filled with blood.

The next week, the women were worried. Would the weekly cycle repeat? Would the attackers come before dawn this Monday morning? As Sandra said, the women went "to meet the terror." They held an all-night vigil Sunday night in front of the office with music and poetry and drumming. They held a ceremony with candles, recovering the space and healing themselves.

At the end of the week we met with four top government officials from different parts of the government. We were prepared to rake them over the coals for the apparent indifference of the government toward the violence against women and human rights defenders. When we first arrived at the Congressional building for our 8:30 am meeting with Mirna Ponce, the head of the Congressional Human Rights Commission (and, curiously, a member of the FRG, the party of Ríos Montt), we were greeted by a young bilingual staffer.

Upon hearing of our interest in women's issues, he told us how women had achieved equality. Now they comprise 13 out of 158 members of the Congress, and he was sure that within two more terms they'd be 50%. He said that when the women talk everyone listens, and the women get more done than the men! He told us about a woman who had led a general strike in her state, stopping 80,000 from working, "and for what? *For human rights.*" He guaranteed us a woman president within 10 years!

We were surprised that nearly all the government officials we met with seemed

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ARGENTINA: Missing Witness Awakens Dark Past

By Maria Trigona, journalist based in Buenos Aires; Americas Program Special Report.

Ed. Note: *The article has been excerpted.*

Argentines are searching for 77-year-old Julio Jorge Lopez. He was a key witness whose gripping testimony of torture helped convict a former chief of police of crimes committed during Argentina's military dictatorship (1976-1983). The trial was one of the first to take place since an amnesty law was overturned in 2005. No one has seen or heard from Lopez since September 18, when he was last seen at his home, 40 kilometers from Buenos Aires.

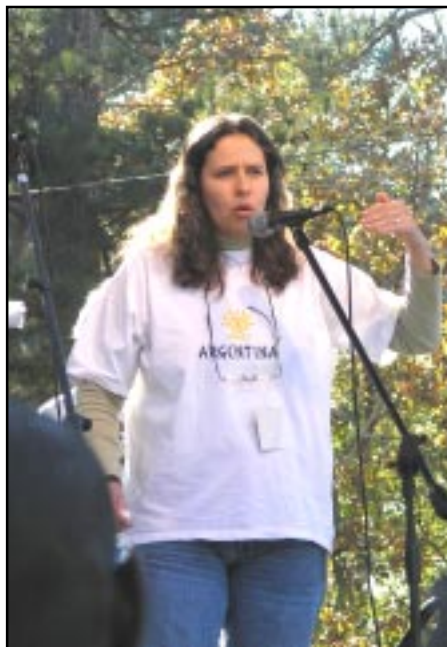
Lopez, a retired construction worker and former political prisoner disappeared just hours before he was slated to give his final testimony on the eve of the conviction of former Head of Police, Miguel Etchecolaz for crimes against humanity, genocide, and torture of political dissidents. Had there not been 130 other witnesses who testified during the trial, the conviction of Etchecolatz could have been stopped or delayed. On September 19 he was sentenced to life in prison for crimes against humanity.

Argentina's president and Buenos Aires' governor both expressed concerns over Lopez's disappearance and a wave of threats against torture survivors who are testifying in ongoing trials against former military and police officers during the dictatorship. A \$64,000 reward has been offered by the government for leads regarding Lopez's whereabouts.

Over 5,000 people protested against the government's human rights policies on October 5, calling for an amnesty for former military officers, including Etchecolatz, who served under the dictatorship. Pro-dictatorship groups chanted slogans saying the tactics were justified in the fight against subversion.

Some members of the Catholic hierarchy have criticized the re-opening of human rights trials. Buenos Aires' Archbishop Jorge Bergoglio sent an open letter to the pro-dictatorship rally, calling for reconciliation and an end to the trials. The archbishop has accused President Kirchner of dividing Argentina and encouraging the resurgence of military death squads.

Countering the pro-dictatorship rally,



Patricia Isasa speaking to protesters at Ft. Benning Photo: George Friemoth

over 100,000 rallied for the safe return of Lopez during a march in Buenos Aires on October 8, sending a clear message that they will not stop their fight for justice and against impunity.

During the rally, Kirchner spoke out against threats received by witnesses and courts. He said, "Some say that putting the crimes of the dictatorship on trial is going to divide Argentina. What has divided Argentina is that there's been no justice and impu-

nity continues. This is why we are witnessing confusing acts like the case of our friend Lopez, because if there would have been justice when it was due, all of these actions would be a thing of the past."

The next officer, a former chaplain scheduled for trial is Catholic priest Christian Van Wernick, facing charges of kidnapping 45 people, torture, three murders, and illegal appropriation of a baby born in captivity. Despite threats, witnesses say they won't be scared off and will testify.

Another high profile witness who will not be scared from testifying is human rights activist Patricia Isasa, an Argentinean torture survivor. Her preliminary testimony resulted in the arrest of several officers, including a former federal judge. Because of threatening phone calls made to her and the presiding judge hearing her case, she flew to the US pending her notice to appear in court. Isasa said, "I was eligible for the Witness Protection Program, but it is very difficult to lead a normal life." She added, "Since Lopez's disappearance, some witnesses have refused to testify; others went into hiding and still others fled the country. But most are determined to bear witness." Isasa considers herself fortunate to be able to again go to the SOA vigil at Ft. Benning to tell her story before returning to Argentina to testify.

Source: *IRC Americas Program, Oct 12, 2006.* www.americaspolicy.org

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genuinely concerned about the issue of the femicides and the lack of investigation. They blamed the government, but *other* parts of the government. The vice-minister of the Interior blamed poorly trained and undereducated police officers as well as "dark forces" – organized crime that has infiltrated the government. We had heard endless criticism over the week of the Public Ministry, or the public prosecutor's office, in charge of investigation and prosecution of these crimes, but the man we met with seemed genuinely to be working as hard as he could for justice. It was getting hard to point fingers. Who is sawing apart these women? Who is covering it up?

At the Unit for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, Claudia Samayoa told us

what was the most hopeful and the most depressing thing I heard all week. About the constant attacks on human rights defenders, on those people fighting with their lives to preserve that tiny sliver of freedom, she said: "We have suffered 1,000 attacks on human rights defenders since 2001, but I look at that as 1,000 rays of hope. We have 1,000 opportunities to learn about these 1,000 great dreamers that we might not have known about, doing 1,000 beautiful things for the world."

I couldn't imagine that being the only drop of hope I could squeeze out of the stone of my country. But I left also amazed and humbled by the people we met in Guatemala, risking their lives in some of the most profound acts of courage and solidarity I have witnessed. ●

Venezuela: US Role in Upcoming Election

Ed. Note. *The following is a summary of a report compiled by Chuck Kaufman (Venezuela Solidarity Network) in collaboration with Susan Scott (National Lawyers Guild) and other members of the delegation.*

A delegation of US citizens and residents spent September 30-October 8, 2006, in Caracas, Venezuela meeting with representatives of the Venezuelan government and its opposition, civil and social organizations, the media, the OAS, and the US government. The delegation looked at factors influencing the upcoming December 3, 2006, presidential election with a particular emphasis on the US government role in that election.

The Venezuela Solidarity Network and the Marin Interfaith Task Force on the Americas (MITF) organized the delegation. The Venezuela Solidarity Network was formed at a conference in Washington, DC in March 2006 to oppose US government intervention and support the gains of the Bolivarian revolution. MITF was founded in 1985 to help end human rights abuses in Central America and has since expanded concern to all of Latin America and the Caribbean.

The delegation was met with un-failing courtesy by every Venezuelan organization we interviewed ranging from Sumate (Stand Up!), one of the best known opposition groups, to the vice foreign minister for North American relations on the government side. The most difficult meeting to arrange was the meeting with the US embassy, which was unwilling to approve our meeting until the last day of our visit, requiring us to cancel meetings with other groups. Our request for a meeting with the US ambassador was turned down in favor of a meeting with the political officer. Our request to meet with USAID officials housed in the Embassy was denied.

Since the 1998 election of Hugo Chavez, a new constitution has been approved by popular referendum and the "Bolivarian Revolution" – called "*el proceso*" by the Venezuelan people – has been initiated, instituting a participatory system of democratic control and diverting petroleum revenues

from a small elite class to social services and economic programs for the impoverished majority. While some of those whose privileges have been eliminated are supportive of the process, others, including the owners of the major print and broadcast media, are viciously opposed, and their anger occasionally surfaces in daily life.

We witnessed the extremes of this polarization at the end of our first day of meetings when we went to dinner with a law professor from the Central Venezuelan University and with lawyer and author of *The Chávez Code*, Eva Golinger. Golinger's



Bush welcomes Maria Corina Machado, the founder and executive director of Sumate, to the Oval Office May 31, 2005.

Photo: by Eric Draper

book exposed US government support for opposition efforts to remove Chavez from office, including the failed coup of April 2002. Some opposition supporters at the restaurant recognized the professor, who was born in Argentina, and then Golinger. They began screaming at our party, calling us "assassins," "Cubans," and "Argentines." The verbal abuse went on for long minutes.

After some minor pushing between a pro-Chavez patron and those who were shouting at us, waiters escorted the most out-of-control anti-Chavez woman out of the restaurant. We later learned that she is an attorney in the Attorney Generals' office.

We found that the one issue that unifies both the opposition and the supporters of the government is rejection of the Bush government's foreign policy. Nearly every-

one we met with criticized President Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice for their public efforts to discredit Chavez. The opposition uniformly volunteered that statements from the White House or State Department only strengthened Chavez. Government supporters remember the attempted coup, and most believe the US played a key role in it or at least knew about in advance.

Hugo Chavez is running for his second six-year term for president, as allowed under the 1999 Bolivarian Constitution. Although there are 18 presidential candidates, only Chavez and opposition candidate Zulian State Governor Manuel Rosales are considered to have a large popular backing, and all but a single US-owned polling company have Chavez well in the lead. Two opposition candidates withdrew in favor of Rosales, who now appears to have unified the opposition for the first time since Chavez was first elected in 1998.

For the Dec. 3, 2006 election there will be 33,000 polling places all with automated voting machines with paper trails. Of the 16,083,986 registered voters 162,000 of them are foreign residents who can vote for local offices but not president. The official campaign started Aug. 1. As a result of many years of corrupt government funding, the new electoral law allows no State funding for campaigns. The National Electoral Commission (CNE), the autonomous branch of

government responsible for conducting elections, has a mechanism to oversee spending and there are fines of \$3,000-\$10,000 for campaign spending violations. Polls show that 60-70% percent of registered voters intend to vote. The CNE is planning a massive media campaign to promote the greatest possible participation. The term of office for the new president will be Feb. 2007-2013.

Summary and Conclusions

1. Conditions and systems are in place, which will allow a free and fair election for president on December 3, 2006.

2. The electronic voting machines – with their paper trails, audits and con-

continued on page 8

CUBA: Bush's Dysfunctional Policy

By Wayne Smith, Center for International Policy

Ed. Note: *Excerpts from author's article*

The Bush administration's Cuba policy has reached a dead end with no hope of success. Its objective is nothing less than to bring down the Castro regime. President Bush appointed a Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba with goals of bringing about "an expeditious end of the dictatorship" and developing a plan to achieve the goal. In May 2004 the Commission came out with a 500 page plan with the basic premise that the Castro regime was near collapse and that a shove or two would bring it down - a few more Radio Marti broadcasts, a few more travel restrictions, another economic sanction or two, and it would all be over. The plan offended many Cubans who read it, even those who didn't necessarily agree with the Castro government. A new report issued by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and others on July 10 of this year stressed that its purpose was simply to assist Cubans on the island, adding that the US stood ready and willing to support their initiatives. But the report went on with page after page of recommended actions. The plan included an objective to prevent what was called a "succession strategy," i.e., that Fidel Castro be succeeded by his brother Raul. This was deemed "unacceptable." Then on July 31 it happened Fidel announced that Raul would now become acting President! The Cuban people took the succession with calm maturity. And after two and a half months things are running smoothly and normally in Cuba.

Rather than collapsing, the Cuban economy, between 2004 and 2006, grew at a rate of approximately 8% per year. Revenues from tourism increased. The price of nickel, Cuba's main export, went to record highs. Cuba has new and very profitable economic relations with Venezuela and China, and there is an indication of a new oil field off the north coast, with other countries already bidding for drilling sites.

Even with fewer US visitors, tourism has increased, with visitors from Canada, Europe and Latin America coming in

greater numbers. Tightening the US travel ban is a futile gesture that mostly hurts Cuban-Americans who are only allowed to visit their families in Cuba once every three years. And there is no emergency provision, even if one of their close family members is dying. This is inhumane - and accomplishes nothing.

The administration (or congress) should immediately remove all restrictions on travel to Cuba - restrictions which violate the rights of American citizens and which do not in any way encourage liberalization in Cuba. As Elizardo Sanchez,

Venezuela, continued on page 8

controls - are far less subject to manipulation and fraud than those in many states in the US, and monitors will be present at every voting site.

3. US involvement in the 2006 election is less public than, for instance, it was in Nicaragua's close presidential election.

4. The US government strategy to delegitimize the current election is part of a broader strategy to destabilize Venezuela in a manner similar to what it did in Chile after the presidential election of socialist Salvador Allende in the early 1970s.

5. \$26 million in grants from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and US Agency for International Development (USAID) have been made to opposition groups, many of which are undisclosed, and additional funding has come from other US agencies to serve the needs of opposition groups, without Congressional scrutiny. USAID's grants of \$23 million area managed though the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), an office established shortly after the 2002 coup which the Bush administration supported. In a Christian Science Monitor article earlier this year, OTI described itself as "overtly political." Its name alone indicates that US "democracy building" efforts are not nonpartisan.

6. Due to a US-supported strategy of boycotting last year's National Assembly elections, the opposition sacrificed political spaces their parties otherwise would have commanded. Only

one of Cuba's leading human rights activists, has said to me on a number of occasions: "The more American citizens in the streets of Cuban cities, the better for the cause of a more open society."

Lifting the embargo will be more complicated and take more time, but that should not pose an insurmountable obstacle. For its part Cuba has indicated its readiness to negotiate.

Source: *The author's entire article and more information is available on www.ciponline.org*

"pro-process" parties won seats in the National Assembly after opposition parties pulled out at the last minute. The five rectors of the National Electoral Council (CNE), a separate branch of government responsible for running elections, are nominated by civil society and elected by the National Assembly resulting in only one non-Chavez supporter directing the current CNE.

7. A united opposition behind the candidacy of Governor Manuel Rosales may improve the opposition's share of the vote, but it will be difficult for the opposition to lure some of its voters back to the polls after last year's effort to convince them to abstain.

8. Chavez has won with roughly 60% of the vote in the three elections in which his name has been on the ballot and numerous others when his policies were at issue. His vote in this election is likely to be within a few points of that 60%.

9. The US government and the most hardline groups of the opposition will not accept the results of the election regardless of the assessment of international observers as to whether it was "free and fair."

10. US government "democracy building" programs through the NED and USAID are designed not to build democracy but to promote the perceived interests of the US government. All US so-called "democracy building" grants to Venezuela should be terminated.

Source: www.mitfamericas.org or www.vensolidarity.org

The Quest To Close The SOA

By Lisa Sullivan, SOA Watch

Ed. Note: *Earlier this year, the author traveled to Chile, Ecuador and Peru with Fr. Roy Bourgeois to request these countries' leaders stop sending troops to the SOA for training.*

Many years ago I stood in the cemetery of Santiago, Chile as the fall leaves of March swirled in the wind. I had made my way thousands of miles to this immense burial ground where I furtively made my way to the back lot. Oddly, it was the most beautiful spot I had found in this city. Acquaintances had whispered to me where I would find what I was looking for. I scanned the large gray wall of niches until I spotted what I sought, and slowly approached and read: Victor Jara, 1932-1973. I looked over my shoulder before scrawling something next to hundreds of other words, some of them whitewashed over. This was 1980 and under the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet the country was ruled by fear.

As I looked up at the tomb of this gentle singer/songwriter who had been tortured and murdered in the first days following a bloody coup, one of his songs floated through my head:

*"Fragile as a kite, on the rooftops of Barrancas
Plays the child, Luchin, with his purple hands. . . .
If there are children like Luchin, who eat dirt and worms
Let us open all the cages so that they may fly like birds."*

My mind burned with a question: how could someone who sang with such tenderness about a child as fragile as a kite be brutally beaten until his bones broke? How could someone whose plea was that we free children from the cage of poverty have his body pumped with 36 bullets? No one is born capable of unleashing such inhumanity, where

could this be learned?

Twenty-six years later, I discovered the answer to this question: at the School of the Americas. Former Chilean military officer Edwin Dimter Bianchi, now an anonymous bureaucrat working in Chile's Pensions and Audit Department, was recently identified as Victor Jara's killer by those who were present at the stadium where he and thousands of others were held in the days following the coup that toppled Salvador Allende. A graduate of the SOA course in "Combat Arms Orientation," Dimter, along with dozens of other Chilean graduates, returned to his country to participate in a bloody rampage that exterminated over 3,000 lives in order to impose and maintain one of the longest and most repressive dictatorships in the Americas. Though Pinochet himself was not an SOA graduate, many of his closest aides - including key leaders of DINA, the intelligence agency that was responsible for the vast majority of the disappearances and murders - were SOA graduates. For many years, Pinochet's sword adorned the wall of the commander of this institution that had taught such inhumanity.

Just last week, on an early spring morning in the southern hemisphere, I returned to the cemetery in Santiago along with Roy Bourgeois, Linda Panetta and Carlos Mauricio. This time there was no need to search discretely. Free maps of the cemetery highlighted Victor's tomb, a small but significant symbol of change in the now democratic Chile. The entrance to the cemetery held a new and imposing granite stone, engraved with the names of the thousands of victims of the dictatorship, including that of Victor Jara. Below the names flows water collected from all of Chile's lakes and rivers, over stones brought from the seas where many of the bodies were thrown from planes, in a pulsating rhythm that seems to say, "nunca mas", "never again."

It was that hope of "never again" that had brought us to Chile. Recognizing that Chile was in a process of healing from years of military abuses, we had come to ask that they stop sending troops to this school of assassins that had done so much to contribute to its pain. The thinking behind this new "Latin American strategy" was simple: If there were no more students, there would be no more school.



On previous trips to Venezuela, Argentina, Uruguay and Bolivia we received the good news from leaders that they would withdraw their troops from the SOA, some immediately and some gradually. This time our travels brought us to Ecuador, Peru and Chile. While we were aware that the character of these governments made it unlikely that we would again find such instant agreement, we knew that it was important to frame the question directly to government leaders, bring the issue of the SOA to public debate, and engage local human rights activists in demanding their country's withdrawal from this institution.

Given the large numbers of Chilean students at the SOA, our visit to Chile was key. Only Colombia has sent more students to the school in the past decade. We had hopes of meeting with Chile's current president, Michelle Bachelet. Her own father, a general who had opposed Pinochet, was an indirect victim of the SOA, having died after mistreatment in prisons overseen by SOA graduates. We were, however, perplexed by the fact that as former Defense Minister, Bachelet herself had continued to send large numbers of army officers to train at the SOA. President Bachelet responded to our request with a letter affirming that the SOA was indeed an important issue, and that she had asked her Defense Minister to meet with us to discuss it.

From the start of our meeting, Defense Minister Vivianne Blanlot openly acknowledged the terrible abuses unleashed by graduates of the SOA. We presented our own con-

cerns and request that Chile withdraw its troops from this school. Our friend Pablo Ruiz asked if he could say a word “as a Chilean, and as a former political prisoner and torture victim.” This plea, he stated, was not made in the name of healing abuses of the past. It was a plea in the name of his children, of all of Chile’s children, that they may never experience a repeat of this tragic history. He reminded the minister that during the Allende government, many key military officers trained at the SOA, to later return and participate in his bloody overthrow. As long as Chile continues to train troops at this school what guarantee is there that history will not repeat? After a moment of thoughtful silence, the minister stated that she would recommend that the army refrain from sending more officers to this school.

We were quite pleased with the results of this meeting, but many of the Chilean human rights activists were less enthusiastic about Defense Minister’s response for two reasons. First, the fact that Chile was continuing to send so many officers to the SOA had not been public information. Only after being asked by a Chilean newspaper as a result of our visit, did the Defense Department acknowledge that 170 officers were scheduled to attend the SOA this year. Coming from this new government that had committed to overcoming past abuses of its military, this information created a sense of outrage. Secondly, the minister made it clear that while she would strongly “recommend” to the army that they refrain from sending officers to train at the SOA, she was not in a position to “impose” such a decision. This statement highlighted a growing concern among Chileans that much more must be done to assure that the Chilean military be held responsible to the civil government rather than vice versa.

In the following week we participated in numerous meetings, forums and media events, where we found tremendous interest in the issue of the SOA and support for withdrawal of Chilean troops. Students, teachers, ex-political prisoners, lay leaders, sisters, priests and activists committed to educating the public about the issue and pressuring their government to withdraw. A consortium of human rights organizations placed the withdrawal of Chilean troops from the SOA as top priority for their bi-centennial agenda. A dozen groups committed enthusiastically to organizing a vigil on November 19. Several

congressmen, including Tucapel Jimenez, whose father was a labor leader killed by an SOA graduate, decided to draft legislation to demand the withdrawal of Chilean troops from the SOA.

While I have reported in some detail on our visit to Chile, our visits to Ecuador and Peru were similar. In Chile, Ecuador and Peru we were able to meet with high-level government officials, where we received serious attention and obtained commitments to reconsider their participation in the SOA. In Ecuador, with elections right around the corner, we decided to share our concerns with all the presidential candidates and personally met with the leading candidate of the moment, León Roldós, who agreed to support withdrawal of Ecuadorian troops as part of his platform. Thanks to ample media attention the issue of the SOA catapulted to the public eye and public debate on the issue took place. We shared our concerns about the SOA in dozens of forums and meetings organized by local organizations. But perhaps what is most important of all, key organizations and individuals stepped forward to seriously commit to pressure their governments to withdraw their country’s troops from the SOA and to participate in the larger effort to close this school forever.

We were also reminded by many of our counterparts in these countries that the interests represented by the SOA and the tactics taught at that school are not limited to the halls of Ft. Benning. More and more there is concern that as the spotlight shines ever brighter on the SOA, the Pentagon is moving its instructors, tactics and techniques to hidden and not-so-hidden places in Latin American countries. We heard this in Bolivia on our previous trip, and in Ecuador this concern was expressed regarding the U.S. military base in Manta. In early March (2007) a continent-wide meeting will be held to strategize around opposition to this and other US military bases, and local organizations strongly requested the support of the SOA Watch movement at the conference.

In Peru we found even more concern about the presence of 1031 U.S. military from the Southern Command in Lambayeque, in northern Peru. Called “Nuevo Horizonte” and billed as a “civic humanitarian” mission, the initiative involves training Peruvian troops as well. Local newspapers carried articles about the military mission with such intriguing titles as

“The Savior Who Came from the Skies,” in reference to one of the women helicopter pilots who “became an angel for the poor of Lambayeque.” What they forgot to report was that these “angels” were bringing with them hundreds of arms and munitions. We received a list of the exact number of guns they are bringing. When a Peruvian Congresswoman took us to meet with the Prime Minister to share our mutual concerns about the SOA, she addressed this issue as well, seeing it as a different chapter in the same book. She and others promised to rally support for withdrawing Peruvian troops from the SOA and asked if we would support them in opposing this new disguised version of the SOA on their own soil?

When people ask Roy how such a huge movement came to be, he always says: “there are no shortcuts.” All of our efforts are necessary to close this school of assassins and to make sure that no new schools appear. We must continue to join hands so that no old or new schools that train soldiers to silence the voices of poets in the name of freedom.

Victor Jara’s voice, however, was not silenced. We met with his widow on a rainy morning in Santiago. We cried as she showed us a video of Victor, and she cried as we showed her a video of the SOA. She asked what she could do to close this school. When I pointed out to her my delight in finding the words to “Luchin” on her wall, she said what a shame it was that many of Victor’s words were still so pertinent. And how beautiful, we agreed, that other words of his are so timeless. Such as these, which were sung by thousands on the day that the stadium where Colonel Dimter broke Victor’s hands was renamed “Estadio Victor Jara”.

*“Listen to our song
it is fire of pure love
dove and dove’s nest,
leaves of an olive branch,
it is the universal song,
a cry which will bring to
triumph
the right to live in peace”*

Victor Jara, 1932-1973

BOLIVIA: Demand for Return of Former President

By Dale Sorensen, MITF

Ed. Note: *The author, MITF's director and several Board Members recently returned from the first MITF delegation to Bolivia (October 21-31).*

On October 17 Bolivians commemorated the third anniversary of "Black October," the massacre of 67 people by military forces under orders from President Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada (Goni) and two of his ministers who fled the country and are now living comfortably in the US. At that time Bolivia's indigenous majority referred to the multi-millionaire Sanchez de Lozada as "el gringo," because he was raised in the United States and spoke Spanish with an accent. He was a leader of one of Bolivia's leading right-wing parties and was a long-time proponent of neoliberalism and IMF-recommended structural adjustment policies.

In September and October 2003 popular non-violent protests took place in opposition to Goni's plan to sell Bolivia's privatized gas to California via Chile, demanding nationalization of their gas resources. When protestors blocked roads and interrupted the delivery of gas to La Paz, the army moved in, unarmed civilians, including children, were gunned down indiscriminately.

This year, in La Paz, over 60 foreigners marched, side by side, with family members who lost their loved ones three years ago. They carried painted crosses with the names of the fallen and handed flowers to the families as a symbol of their compassion.

In San Francisco sympathizers carried 67 cardboard tombstones with the names of the massacred, along with "Goni wanted posters" from the Federal Building to the steps of City Hall, where the names of the dead were read out and responded to with "Presente." A dozen MITF members participated in the event and similar vigils occurred in 20 other cities worldwide. That day, the San Francisco board of Supervisors unanimously passed a resolution for justice in Bolivia by agreeing to send a letter to the US State Department urging the return of Goni and his ministers to Bolivia to testify.

Bolivians want former President Sanchez de Losada (1992-1997) and (2002-2003) now residing in Chevy Chase, MD, Jorge Joaquin Berindoague (Moraga, CA), and



Valerie Laciak, Ruth Hunter and Dale Sorensen at SOA Vigil

Photo: George Friemoth

Carlos Sanchez Beszain (Key Biscayne, FL), for trial in Bolivia. On June 22, 2005, the Bolivian government issued a formal request to the US State Department requesting it to serve legal subpoenas for the return of all three. To date the State Department has not honored the request saying that a trial is politically motivated, and that the Bolivian Judicial system cannot guarantee a fair trial.

International arrest warrants have been issued through Interpol for the three ex-officials, and sufficient legal arguments exist to prove that they are aware of the charges against them. The Bolivian Solidarity Network (www.boliviasolidarity.org), made up of concerned citizens world wide in solidarity with the Bolivian social movements, organized a campaign to support efforts to bring Goni and his ministers to justice in Bolivia. The Network has organized an electronic petition to gather signatures calling for the US to serve papers on the three. There is a postcard campaign (MITF has requested 500 postcards), and a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request has been initiated pertaining to the three officials. In order to keep informed regarding the current situation in Bolivia you can subscribe to the Bolivian Solidarity email list to receive updates; send a

message to bolivia_solidarity@lists.riseup.net with a message "subscribe."

Source: www.boliviasolidarity.org

CUBA: UN Votes Against the Embargo

On November 8, for the 15th straight year, the UN General Assembly voted overwhelmingly for a resolution urging the US to end its 45-year-old embargo against Cuba, after defeating an Australian amendment calling on Fidel Castro's government to free political prisoners and respect human rights.

Delegates of the 192-member General Assembly burst into applause when the vote flashed on the screen – 183 to 4 with one abstention. The three joining the US in voting "no" were Israel, Marshall Islands and Palau, while Micronesia abstained. Last year's vote was 182 to 4 with one abstention.

The assembly voted on the embargo resolution soon after adopting a resolution to take "no action" on the Australian amendment on political prisoners and human rights in Cuba. The "no action" resolution was adopted by a vote of 126 to 51 with 5 abstentions.

Source: *Cuba Journal*, Nov. 8, 2006.

HAITI: Lawyers Call for Release of Prisoners

The National Lawyers Guild (NLG) recently urged Haiti's Constitutional government, especially President Rene Preval and Minister of Justice Rene Magloire, to immediately release all of the political prisoners remaining from the unconstitutional regime of Prime Minister Gerard Latorture (2004-2006). Almost all of the political prisoners were arrested illegally; all have been in jail longer than Haitian law allows. None have been convicted of any crime. It has been well documented that the US-backed Latorture government systematically incarcerated political opponents.

Many of these prisoners have been released since President Preval's May 15 inauguration, but there has been no apparent progress on political prisoner cases for the last two months. According to NLG President Professor Marjorie Cohn, "Haiti's newly elected government showed

democracy's potential by releasing several political prisoners in July and August 2006. But after five months in office, it should be turning that potential to reality for all political prisoners."

In Haiti, a coalition of human rights groups has organized a week of mobilization starting off with an Open Letter to the Minister of Justice to demand liberation of these prisoners.

Source: *NLG Press Release, October 26, 2006; Half Hour for Haiti program, October 25, 2006*

GUATEMALA: Arrests Ordered

On Nov. 6, Guatemala's Fifth Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for six former military leaders in response to extradition requests from the national Court of Spain. The Spanish court has charged the six men with genocide, terrorism, torture, murder and illegal detentions during the 1980s, and

specifically the burning of the Spanish embassy on Jan. 31, 1980. A group of indigent activists had occupied the embassy to demand respect for human rights; 39 people died in the blaze.

The Spanish court also sought the extradition of former dictator Gen. Rios Montt but the Guatemalan court declined to issue an arrest order for him. Judge Pedraz (of Spain) had charged Rios Montt with genocide, noting that the Commission of Historical Clarification had found that over the 36-year armed conflict, 69% of all executions, 41% of the rapes and 45% of the torture incidents took place during Rios Montt's rule.(March 1982-August 1983).

Rigoberta Menchu, the 1992 Nobel Peace laureate, originally filed the charges in the Spanish court in Dec. 1999; her father was among those killed in the Spanish embassy fire.

Source: *Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA Nov. 9, 2006*

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