

# Report

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## BOLIVIA: Election Stunner

By Jim Shultz, *The Democracy Center, Cochabamba*

*Author's Note: On December 18, 2005 Bolivians cast a vote that made history, not only for Bolivia but also for all of Latin America. By an unprecedented margin, South America's poorest and most indigenous nation elected as its new president an Aymara Indian who rose to prominence as leader of the nation's coca growers, a harsh critic of the US, a socialist, a guy who doesn't own a tie.*

A few weeks ago he was just a guy hanging out in the green yard behind my office, wearing jeans and sneakers (as he most always does), drinking *chicha* and shooting the breeze with friends. My three-year-old daughter Mariana asked him to dance. He laughed and squeezed her cheeks. Then on Sunday, by a whopping and historic margin, Evo Morales was elected President of Bolivia. It looks like he will win with a 51% majority, the first modern Bolivian president to ever do so, or even come close.

Headline writers in the foreign press have had a field day trying to pin a label on Morales' surprise victory. The New York Times announced the victory of a "coca farmer". The Chicago Sun-Times abbreviated Morales as a "leftist". CNN picked up a campaign rally declaration in which Morales called himself the US government's "nightmare". But what does the election of Morales to the presidency here really mean?

First and foremost it means that the Bolivian people, across class lines and regions, are demanding a reversal of twenty years of market-crazed economic policies pressed on the country from abroad, and by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund in particular. Growing coca leaves was not the issue in



**Evo Morales, newly elected president of Bolivia.**

these elections. Recovering national control over gas and oil, privatized away at bargain prices in the 1990s, that was the issue.

Nearly six years after the people of Cochabamba took to the streets to take back their water from the Bechtel Corporation of San Francisco (a privatization done under pressure from the World Bank), the nationwide voices of protest for economic change found their voice on the ballot through Evo Morales. Last night he told cheering supporters, "We will change the economic models that have blocked development for the people." That change begins with Morales' plans to take back control of the nation's vast gas and oil reserves and renegotiate all the nation's contracts with foreign oil companies.

Economic foolishness? Joseph Stiglitz, the economic Nobel laureate and former chief economist at the World Bank didn't

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think so when he spoke with the New York Times Magazine last month, "They could do it," he said, noting that other oil companies would gladly negotiate new deals on better terms.

Second, Morales' victory represents the rising of the country's Indian majority into power. Last night, speaking to the nation's Quechua and Aymara people he said, with clear pride, "For the first time we are the president."

I saw that indigenous identification with Morales up close in October when I spent five days in a small Quechua Indian village three hours off into the mountains. On a sunny afternoon I sat with the village leader, Lucio, a man I have known for almost a decade. I asked him if the coming elections were big on people's minds. "No, we are really more worried about whether it will rain soon." I asked him if people were excited about Evo Morales and the prospect of electing an Indian as president. "Well, he is really just a politician." Then I asked him whether the people of the village would vote. "Oh yes, we will vote. All 400 of us will walk together 45 minutes to the place where we vote and we will all vote for Evo."

And so on Sunday, Bolivians by the millions marched distances short and far to give Morales the biggest mandate of any president here in half a century.

There are risks to be sure. The people whom I have worked with here as activists for many years are suddenly Senators and Congress members. They are good people but, like Morales, they are likely

to underestimate how hard it is to actually govern. The dance with foreign donors, including the US, will be difficult but essential, with Bolivia dependent on foreign aid for a huge portion of its annual budget. The economic plans that Morales and his backers have in mind, important as they are, will also prove difficult. Putting twenty years of economic toothpaste back in the tube is no easy task.

In addition, any political victory, especially a big one, is a recipe for disaster in itself. It makes people think that their public support will endure. It invites recklessness. In Bolivia, public discontent doesn't just mean people turn against you at the polls. In Bolivia it means they block the streets. It means they chant for your downfall and sometimes win it.

Morales takes office with far fewer options than he may think and with public expectations that will be virtually impossible to meet. Already some social movement leaders have given him just three months to take strong action on retaking the nation's gas and oil and in convening the long-awaited constituent assembly to rewrite the constitution.

But for now, Morales and his backers, and the Bolivian people along with them, have won a victory that is both sweet and historic. When I first moved back to Bolivia in 1998 the country was governed by Hugo Banzer, a former dictator. World Bank and IMF economics was the rule of the day. In a month Bolivia will be governed by a man who earned his political stripes confronting Banzer and others in the streets and the market fundamentalism forced on Bolivian from abroad will begin to be dismantled piece by piece.

Bolivians have succeeded remarkably in declaring what kind of country they don't want. Now the challenge is to build, in a practical and sustainable way, the country that they do want. I think there is a decent chance they'll pull it off. If they do they will set, once again, an example for all of us – that what's possible in the world is often more than what we think.

Source: *Democracy Center On Line, Volume 68, December 19, 2005; www.democracyctr.org*

## ARGENTINA: People Protest Bush Visit

By Cory Fisher-Hoffman, *Upside Down World*

Ed. Note: *While MITF hosted Patricia Isasa from Argentina, here in the Bay Area, her friends in Argentina were very busy. At one point she insisted that 100,000 came out to demonstrate against Bush! The following is an excerpt of the original article.*

The Argentina beach town of Mar del Plata became a symbolic site in the historic struggle between neo-liberalism (corporate globalization) and social movements in Latin America in early November, when President Bush and the 34 other presidents participated in the IV Summit of the Americas. They were met by hordes of protestors against Bush and his free trade agenda. As Argentina President Nestor Kirchner hosted the official Summit of the Americas behind miles of fences, the People's Summit brought together social movements, labor unionists, piqueteros (unemployed workers), non-profits, and

community groups from Argentina and across the Americas to create a more just and humane form of Latin American political, economic and social integration.

The People's Summit provided the space for dialogue on how to build an anti-imperialist hemispheric movement. Some of the main themes of the event were: reproductive, indigenous, and human rights, alternative production models, challenging imperialism, youth movements, genetically modified (GMO) crops and building autonomy.

There was also a growing divide evident at the summit over what role the progressive and "leftist" governments in the region will have in building alternatives to the neo-liberal model. Many social movements, especially the autonomous-oriented *piquetero* groups from Argentina, do not believe that the progressive leaders of Latin America truly represent their interests.

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## VENEZUELA: Economic Growth is a Home Run

By Mark Weisbrot, Center for Economic and Policy Research

Ed. Note: *In contrast to the Bush administrations assertions that Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez is a "disruptive force" in the hemisphere, UNESCO honors him with the 2005 International Jose Marti Award for his contributions to the integration and unity of Latin America and Caribbean nations.*

CARACAS - "Viva Chavez," shouted Chicago White Sox manager Ozzie Guillen, as the team celebrated its World Series sweep last week. Guillen is Venezuelan, and a national hero in this country of 25 million people who seem to believe that they too, along with Chicagoans, have won the World Series.

His cheer for the country's leftist President Hugo Chavez might have caused some reaction just a year or two ago. But these days it went largely unnoticed, despite the continuing hostility between the Chavez government and the Bush administration. Relations between the two governments have been sour since the Bush administration supported a military coup against Chavez in April 2002, as well as a failed attempt to recall him last year.

But Chavez' popularity is now among the highest of any president in Latin America,

*Argentina, continued from page 2*

Other groups, mainly the political parties that are aligned with Kirchner, see hope in an alliance with Lula, Chavez, Castro, Vazquez of Uruguay, and Evo Morales, who just won the elections in Bolivia.

The Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) was the ghost that haunted the summit and President Bush. Although the agreement was not passed by its January 2005 deadline and the 2003 FTAA ministerial in Miami was a huge failure for those pushing this agreement, it is still on the US agenda. And it is still a highly contentious issue, even among leaders of Latin American nations. Mexican President Vicente Fox suggested that the FTAA was inevitable, thus provoking a response from Brazil claiming that the FTAA was not on the agenda.

According to Mark Weisbrot of the Center for Economic and Policy Research, during the 1960s and 70s, per capita in-

come, a key measure of economic performance, grew by a whopping 80 percent in the region. But over the next two decades, per capita income grew by just 11 percent and between 2000 and 2004 it rose by a dismal 3 percent. Across much of South America, unemployment stands at between 10 and 15 percent and 43 percent of the region's population live under the poverty line.

with a 77 percent approval rating, according to the latest polling.

A few economic statistics go a long way in explaining why the Venezuelan government is doing so well and the opposition, which still controls most of the media and has most of the country's income, is flagging.

After growing nearly 18 percent last year, the Venezuelan economy has expanded 9.3 percent for the first half of this year - the fastest economic growth in the hemisphere. Although the government's detractors like to say this is just a result of high oil prices, it is not so simple.

Oil prices were even higher and rose much faster in the 1970s. But Venezuela's income per person actually fell during the 1970s. In fact, for the 28 years that preceded the current government (1970-1998), Venezuela suffered one of the worst economic declines in Latin America and the world: per capita income fell by 35 percent. This is a worse decline than even sub-Saharan Africa suffered during this period, and shows how completely dysfunctional the economic policies of the old system had become.

Although Chavez talks about building "21st century socialism," the Venezuelan government's economic policies are gradualist reform, more akin to a European-style so-

cial democracy. The private sector is actually a larger share of the Venezuelan economy today than it was before Chavez took office.

One important reform, long advocated by the International Monetary Fund, has been the improvement of tax collection. By requiring both foreign and domestically owned companies to pay the taxes they owe, the government actually increased tax collection even during the deep recession of 2003 — a rare economic feat.

As a result, the government is currently running a budget surplus, despite billions of dollars of increased social spending that now provides subsidized food to 40 percent of the population, health care for millions of poor people, and greatly increased education spending. The official poverty rate has fallen to 38.5 percent from its most recent peak of 54 percent after the opposition oil strike. But this measures only cash income; if the food subsidies and health care were taken into account, it would be well under 30 percent.

The government's currency controls have also helped to stem the capital flight that had hurt the economy prior to 2003. The country's public debt and foreign debt are at moderate levels. With an accumulated \$30 billion of reserves - perhaps twice what the country needs — Venezuela is well poised to maintain growth even if oil prices drop unexpectedly.

Of course, Venezuela still faces many of the challenges common to the region: the judicial system is weak, crime rates are high, and the rule of law is not well established. But, the present government that has had less than three years of political stability (attempts to overthrow the government through violence and large-scale economic sabotage did not cease until the oil strike collapsed in February 2003) has set the economy on a solid growth path. And it has kept its promise to share the nation's oil wealth with the poor.

In short, the vast majority of Venezuelans got what they voted for, and even some who voted against the government now seem to be satisfied with the result. It's a pretty good start, and whatever the Bush administration thinks of Chavez - who calls President Bush "Mr. Danger" - it's the way democracy is supposed to work.

come, a key measure of economic performance, grew by a whopping 80 percent in the region. But over the next two decades, per capita income grew by just 11 percent and between 2000 and 2004 it rose by a dismal 3 percent. Across much of South America, unemployment stands at between 10 and 15 percent and 43 percent of the region's population live under the poverty line.

The strongest opposition to the FTAA comes from Venezuela, the MERCOSUR countries (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay) and social movements throughout South America. This IV Summit addressed the growing rejection of the neo-liberal model by progressive leaders in Latin America and the counter-proposal on the table from Venezuela. A few years ago President Chavez proposed ALBA (Alternativa Bolivariana para las Ameri-

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Source: *Knight-Ridder/Tribune Information Service, November 1, 2005; www.cpr.net*

## COLOMBIA: A Legacy of US Intervention and Terror

By: *George Friemoth, MITF*

Ed. Note: *On November 17, 2005, a unit of the 17<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the Colombian Army fired upon Arlen Salas-David and six other unarmed civilians as they cleared weeds from a cornfield near Arenas Altas, which is a part of the San Jose peace Community. They threw a grenade at the group, which exploded near Arlen, causing his death. Arlen was engaged in establishing a "humanitarian zone", where residents could take refuge from military/paramilitary and guerrilla attacks. The Commander of the 17<sup>th</sup> Brigade, who is responsible for the Army's action in the region, is General Luis Alfonso Zapata. He is a graduate of the SOA/WHINSEC at Ft. Benning, GA.*

The United States has intervened in Colombia for the past 50 years. The intervention has been continuous, something no other country in Latin America has had to endure. To justify meddling in Colombian affairs, different US administrations had to keep finding new pretexts or excuses. The US policy shifted from the war against communism, to guerrillas, then the drug war and now the war on terrorism. The consistent result is state terror and human suffering on a grand scale.

MITF director Dale Sorensen and I participated in a Fellowship of Reconciliation delegation last August and our worst fears were confirmed. We knew that Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch view Colombia as having the worst human rights record in the Western Hemisphere. Noam Chomsky had stated, "Colombia is the worst humanitarian catastrophe in the Hemisphere." But, we were hoping that what we had heard about the mushrooming of peace communities that were neutral and resisted any involvement with all armed actors would start turning war-torn Colombia around and pave the way for peace.

Unfortunately, our meetings with peace community leaders and organizations showed the opposite was true; both are still

targeted, now as potential terrorists. Hardly a week goes by without a killing or a massacre. Confirmation came from a UN official of the High Commission on Human Rights in Bogotá at the end of our trip. The official briefed us at length and provided a 69-page report of human rights violations for 2004 and early 2005. He stressed how critical the human rights situation continues to be in Colombia.

In order to understand this tragedy one needs to look at the role the US continues to play in Colombia with military aid and training mainly, in counterinsurgency (CI). Colombia is the third largest recipient of US aid in the world, after Israel and Egypt. Since President Clinton initiated Plan Colombia and the Bush Administration added the Andean Regional Initiative (Bolivia, Peru and Colombia), US aid has increased significantly to \$4 billion in the last six years, 80% of which goes to security



*All the residents, from Santa Ana, a commercial center, were displaced by the military.*

*Photo: George Friemoth*

forces and 20% for "social" development.

The US training in counterinsurgency (CI) goes back to the 1950s when US Special Forces were the lead agency tasked with training the Colombian military and paramilitary forces. Military officers also received training at the US Army School of the Americas (SOA) founded in 1946 and located in Panama and later at Ft. Benning, Georgia. According to CI doctrine, the paramilitaries provide the military and police plausible denial by doing the "dirty" work (killings, torture, disap-

pearances, displacements, and illegal actions). However, all armed forces were trained according to the US Army manual, to "fight fire with fire utilizing guerilla and terrorist tactics" that included psychological warfare, civilian informants, interrogation and torture of targeted civilians who may be in sympathy with or supportive of the insurgents.

A key element in CI training is to forcibly displace civilian population considered potentially pro-insurgency and relocate them to controllable urban areas, usually far away from their homes and land. According to the training manuals, the idea is to remove all the water (people) from the pond so that the fish (guerrillas) will die off. Today, there are over 3 million displaced people in Colombia. In close cooperation with military and police, the paramilitary forces are responsible for an average of 4,000 political killings per year and

70% of all flagrant human rights violations. The displaced Colombians are entire families and communities, farmers, teachers, students, workers (union leaders are simply killed); also targeted are human rights advocates, non-governmental social and development organizations (NGOs), and any group that criticizes the government. Indigenous groups continue to pay a heavy price for insisting on their rights to land and culture that are guaranteed by international treaties.

Why Colombia? Why 50 years of US intervention using different excuses to justify its presence? The answer is: US economic interests. The US recognized the strategic importance of Colombia with its vast natural resources as its "jewel in the crown," the gateway to South America, with Panama to its north, the Pacific Ocean to the west, the Caribbean and Venezuela to the east and Brazil, Peru and Ecuador in the south.

Over 100 years ago, in 1903, Wall Street persuaded President Teddy Roosevelt to take the Panama region from Colombia to build the Panama Canal and thus provide the US with greater access to the global trade market. The motivation

Over 100 years ago, in 1903, Wall Street persuaded President Teddy Roosevelt to take the Panama region from Colombia to build the Panama Canal and thus provide the US with greater access to the global trade market. The motivation

then was economic, and that is the chief motivation now. Today it includes: market access, investments, control of resources including oil, gas, forests, gold, nickel and other precious metals. Colombia is the third largest exporter of oil to the US, after Venezuela and Mexico. The Cold War, the guerrillas, the war on drugs and now the war on terror are all pretexts to maintain US presence in order to pursue its economic goals.

The main obstacle to the fulfillment of US interests are the guerrillas, the FARC and the ELN forces that, while they have been driven out of almost all Colombian towns and villages they once controlled continue to operate in the countryside. For example, they continue to bomb the 500-mile long Caño Limón oil pipeline of the Los Angeles-based Occidental Petroleum in east-central Colombia. US forces in Colombia have trained three battalions to provide security for the pipeline but attacks continue. Southern Colombia is the area that US advisors and the Colombian military have concentrated on mostly, mounting what appears to be an all out war on the insurgents, including massive aerial fumigations by US private contractors that Noam Chomsky calls "chemical warfare." The insurgents (guerrillas) are now called "terrorists" by the Colombian and US governments. They have retreated into the mountains but remain a threat to future oil development in the southern region, killing hundreds of Colombian soldiers each year.

Another obstacle to the US are the Indigenous who have title to lands with prime natural resources that Wall Street wants to exploit. Protected by international treaties granting their land rights and culture, the indigenous of Colombia continue their struggle against exploitation of their resources, as the case of U'wa Indians and their continuing battle with Occidental Petroleum demonstrates.

The over 3 million people, mostly Afro-Colombian who were displaced from their lands and resettled along the hillsides of the big cities, are a potential obstacle since they could return to and reclaim their lands. To counter this and to ensure the displaced are controlled, as the US CI strategy spells out, the government of President Uribe has been placing the disbanded paramilitaries in key positions in the resettled communities. Many people told us that they live in con-

stant fear of the 'former' paramilitaries who control them, restricting their activities and taxing them like guerrillas did. Some accuse them of introducing drugs to the young. Most believe they are still armed and dangerous.

Since early 2004, the Uribe administration has been demobilizing the paramilitary forces, paying them a monthly stipend of \$180. The government claims that 13,000 of the 20, 000 AUC paramilitary groups have been demobilized. Human rights organizations dispute this high number and condemn the demobilization without justice and with impunity for those forces that are the worst violators of human rights and the principal narco-traffickers in Colombia. Also, condemned is the killing of over 500 trade unionists, mostly by paramilitary forces, over the past four years making it hard to believe that the touted demobilization has occurred.

Plan Colombia and later, the Andean Regional Initiative were presented to Congress as a six-year plan to reduce drug crop cultivation, improve human rights and the rule of law, and promote a peaceful end to 50 years of civil war. It's not surprising that none of those goals have been realized. The US has failed to reduce the availability and use of cocaine and heroin in the US. The quantity, quality and price of co-

caine and heroin from Colombia and Andean countries to the US streets have not been interrupted and basically remain the same as before Plan Colombia took effect. The human rights situation has not improved; it remains critical. Colombia is far from realizing a peaceful end to a decades-old war.

The tragedy is that, in the process of pursuing its economic interests, the US is terrorizing civilians. This is not to say that successive Colombian governments over the years are not to blame too. They have followed the US lead and are also responsible for the present state of terror in Colombia. Their forces continue to kill, torture, disappear and displace the civilian population.

As activists and concerned citizens we can join human rights delegations, speak out, expose the illegitimacy of US intervention and resist the current situation by working to limit funding that only seems to make a bad situation worse.

Source: "*Americas Other War: Terrorizing Colombia*", by Doug Stokes, Zed Books Ltd, 2005; "*Building from the Inside Out: Peace Initiatives in War-Torn Colombia*", American Friends Service Committee and Fellowship of Reconciliation, November 2004.

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## *Argentina, continued from page 3*

cas), an alternative hemispheric trade agreement. The economic terms of this counter-proposal for Latin American integration are still unclear, although some suggest it would be a model that is based on solidarity, not competition.

ALBA was initially disregarded, but is now beginning to gain genuine political clout. Cuba and Venezuela have signed onto this model of Latin American integration by Venezuela exchanging oil at below market level prices for a variety of services, mostly medical, which Cuba provides.

The People's Summit hosted three separate workshops on ALBA and one workshop on Telesur, a Latin American Satellite television station that is seen as an integral part of hemispheric integration. Chavez also addressed the People's summit after a concert where Cuban musician

Sylvio Rodriguez, among many others, played to a packed stadium. Chavez has become a hero to many labor groups and political parties who waved Venezuelan flags with fervor.

The People's Summit culminated in street actions in Mar del Plata, to protest Bush, the FTAA and neo-liberalism. The streets were filled with people expressing their discontent with Bush and all that he stands for. Rocks were thrown through windows of multinational corporate businesses. The message was clear, "Bush is not welcome here!" nor is an economic model that has led Argentina into crisis. The corporate driven agenda has failed to reduce poverty, create jobs, improve education, or foster democracy.

Source: [www.UpsideDownWorld.org](http://www.UpsideDownWorld.org), November 7, 2005; *Houston Chronicle South America Bureau*.

## ARGENTINA: Bitter Memories of a 'Dirty War'

By Michael Fox, free lance journalist based in Venezuela

Ed. Note: MITF sponsored Patricia Isasa's visit to the US and was part of a coalition of groups and individuals who planned her tour that culminated at the SOA vigil in Ft. Benning GA. A delegation is planned that will focus on closing the SOA and ending impunity in Argentina. The group will meet with Isasa in Buenos Aires and commemorate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the military coup, March 24<sup>th</sup>. For those interested in joining please contact MITF for information.

In 1976, in search of his 16-year-old daughter, Miguel Angel Isasa walks to Police Precinct Number One in the small Argentine town of Santa Fe and knocks on the door. It is answered by a man in a uniform who tells him she's not there. Isasa demands to see the register of prisoners, but her name is not listed. And although he has reason to believe his daughter is in custody, there is nothing he can do. In fact, Patricia Isasa is inside, locked in an empty room, hooded and shackled, awaiting her turn to be beaten, raped and subjected to electric shock, another victim of Argentina's "dirty war."

Nearly thirty years later, Patricia Isasa stares out at the hundreds of activists gathered on November 19 at the Civic Center Ballroom in Columbus, Georgia, recalling her experiences as a torture victim.

"We're here because we want to stop torture everywhere," she says. "It's incredible, but how is it possible that throughout all of Latin America it's the same torture and it's the same in Iraq? It's because the School of the Americas is still here and they haven't changed the manual. They haven't changed their policy."

Listening to Isasa is a cross-section of the 15,000 priests, nuns, torture survivors, students and other activists who have traveled to nearby Fort Benning for the annual weekend vigil at the controversial School of the Americas, whose graduates are said to be responsible for torture, killings and death-squad activity across Central and South America. This year's protest was marked by increasing concern over the use of torture tactics on terrorism suspects by CIA and US military operatives.

The weather holds out just long enough for the rally and symbolic funeral procession honoring victims of the SOA to conclude before a heavy rain sends people scattering to their cars. By then, thirty-nine people have been arrested, the majority of whom, in an act of civil disobedience, have crossed the barbed wire fence onto base property; if convicted, they face three to six months in prison.

One of those leading the procession is Argentine Eva Urrutia, whose parents were tortured and killed by the dictatorship in 1977. "In Argentina, when SOA graduate Leopoldo Galtieri headed the military,



Patricia Isasa speaking at the SOA in Ft. Benning, Georgia Photo: George Friemoth

30,000 people were killed or disappeared," she says to the crowd, "We cry..."

Patricia Isasa knows this story well. Accused in 1976 of being a terrorist during Argentina's "dirty war," she was kidnapped from her home, "disappeared" for three months and then spent two years and two months in prison. The following year she was again abducted with another thirty men and women. Although she was released after only a few days, according to her testimony she was one of only four of those to make it out alive.

In 1996, almost twenty years after her ordeal, Isasa returned to Santa Fe to care for her dying mother. She realized that she had yet to confront the nightmares that haunted

her. Over the next two years, she interviewed other torture survivors, retraced steps and dug through public records collecting thousands of documents. She had found the names of those she believed to be directly responsible for her detainment and torture. Although she believed she had found ample evidence to bring her perpetrators to trial, she knew the Argentine "laws of impunity," which granted immunity to former military officials, would block her from seeking justice.

With nowhere else to turn, Isasa traveled to Spain in 1998 to visit Judge Baltasar Garzón, whom she had heard was working to try Argentine and Chilean officials for crimes committed during the dictatorships. Presented with the exhaustive documentation she had collected, Garzón called for the extradition of her eight suspected torturers. Argentina denied the request three years later, but under Argentine law the government was then obliged to hold its own trial. A Congressional ruling in 2003 nullifying the "laws of impunity" helped to speed the process.

Since April of this year, all eight of Isasa's alleged torturers have been behind bars awaiting the trial that began October 17, 2003, and is still pending in the courts. A short list of those in prison includes former federal judge Victor Hermes Brusa, former mayor of San Jose del Rincon; Mario Jose Facino and Juan Marcelini, who, according to Isasa, is the first and only Argentine graduate of the School of the Americas behind bars.

In a recent interview in New York, Isasa, who has a career as an architect, sips yerba maté and discusses her just-concluded US speaking tour and *El Cerco*, a documentary about her case produced by *Cuatro Cabezas*, which will be released in Argentina in 2006.

Her next stop is Washington, DC, where she plans to lobby members of Congress in support of her case. When she returns to Argentina, she plans to create a foundation to help other torture survivors bring their oppressors to justice and deal with the psychological memory of their experience.

"I'm just tired of living in the past," she says with a smile. "I want to be able to think about the future."

Source: <http://www.thenation.com/doc/20051226/fox>, Dec. 8, 2005

## HAITI: And You Call This an Election?

By Larry Birns and John Korzyn,  
Council on Hemispheric Affairs  
(COHA)

Ed. Note: *The following article has been excerpted. As the Report goes to press we have learned that Fr. Jean-Juste has been diagnosed with leukemia and remains in prison and the election has been postponed for the fourth time. For update and action you can take see: Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti, www.ijdh.org*

On an in-and-out trip to Haiti on September 27, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice stressed the importance of Haiti's upcoming presidential balloting on November 20 to her "democratic promotion" campaign, aimed at legitimizing her alleged Haitian game plan for returning to constitutional rule.

Rice's pronounced apprehensions over the turbulence bedeviling Haiti's preparations for its ill-starred elections (postponed) did not mention a word about the human rights violations which are being repeatedly committed by the Haitian National Police along with the UN peacekeepers, and only a few words were given over to the catastrophic state of the country's judicial system, which tolerates the outrageous detention, on totally fabricated charges, of such notable political prisoners as Father Jean-Juste and former Prime Minister Yvon Neptune.

Washington created Gerard Latortue, who was far better known for living a low silhouette life in quiet semi-retirement in a gated community in Boca Raton, Florida as well as for his radio program over a local station, than for having any visceral connection with his motherland Haiti, a country that he had scarcely visited in recent years. Simply put, we are witnessing a fraud in the making.

Looking at the manner in which Haiti is now being run, you will have to come up with the judgment that interim Prime Minister Latortue has established beyond question that he is the quintessential total incompetent, and that he has neither the heart to relate to a populace, nor the administrative capacity to run a country.

During her trip to Haiti, Rice implored the interim government to speed up planning for the elections and had some misty words about speeding up trials, but she did

not use the opportunity to order that the State Department's Latortue release all political prisoners.

The fact that Rice was spotlighting attention on the need for speeding up election preparations may have been somewhat harsh, considering that the Haitian government has been creating many new polling stations. Unfortunately, most of them are being furnished in the better off urban areas of the country, while the slums on the outskirts of the city and rural areas are being woefully neglected. ... considering that a majority of Haitians live on under two dollars a day, it will be hard pressed to afford the trip to distant election booths.

Soon, Haiti is scheduled to hold the first round of its presidential election. Indisputably the most impoverished and forlorn of all the hemispheric nations, Haiti also has been the nation most frequently singled out for US intervention in the region. Such interventions, as the one that took place in early 2004, had the US orchestrate the ouster of constitutionalist president Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Under him, according to Washington, Haiti had become a "failed state" and he had to go because under his friend, President Préval, Haiti allegedly had staged "fraudulent elections." This became the justification for the likes of former Senator Jesse Helms to pressure the White House to turn off the spigot for crucially needed foreign aid.

Haitians are once again being urged to the polls to vote for a president under totally unacceptable conditions, while the UN has created for itself the unenviable record of being far more adept at killing innocent Haitians than bringing stability to the country. What is almost worse is that Brazil's president Lula da Silva doesn't even seem to care about the bad name that Brazil's Haitian military operation is giving to his country.

Those who voted for President Aristide's Fanmi Lavalas party in recent elections, only to see their vote later invalidated by Washington's malevolence, can only wonder why they bother to even vote when it will be the US embassy in Port-au-Prince that runs the country.

Haiti's current political landscape seems eerily familiar to that which was left

in the ruinous wake of the departure of Baby Doc Duvalier in 1986.

Starting over a year ago, the interim government's infamous ex-minister of justice, Bernard Gousse, began to systematically imprison invariably without any evidence or charges leading Lavalas figures, while at the same time he set much more relaxed standards when it came to the treatment of murderous rightwing villains, some of whom were released from jail in spite of the fact they had been found guilty of an array of brutalities.

The anti-Aristide cabal led by the State Department never had a word that clearly condemned Gousse, who routinely violated constitutional norms to prosecute Aristide partisans, while convicted murderers like Louis-Jodel Chamblain, who former Secretary of State Colin Powell referred to as a "thug," walked the streets with a beaming Gousse, a free man.

Haiti's widely assailed Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) declared some 30 candidates eligible to contest the presidential elections. Their sheer number, along with CEP's antique methodology, almost assures that a run-off will take place. Haiti's political spectrum includes parties from the far-right, to centrist liberals, to socialists and even more radical parties.

Secretary Rice's baffling problem is that no party in Haiti's history has been able to draw the numbers that ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's Lavalas party has been able to attract. Nothing that the State Department can do seems to lessen those numbers. From gaining 67.5% of the electorate in 1990, every ballot since has resulted in Lavalas winning by sizeable majorities. US embassy officials have informed Washington that if Lavalas had been able to nominate either a Yvon Neptune or a Gérard Jean-Juste in the approaching elections, and have Latortue guarantee their personal security; there would be little doubt that history would repeat itself.

As of today, the Rev. Gérard Jean-Juste (a Catholic priest, as Aristide was in 1990), languishes in the National Penitentiary, and is not likely to be the Lavalas standard-bearer, although he is by far the country's

*continued on page 8*

## CAFTA Likely to Hurt the Poor

By *Alvaro Ramazzini, Bishop of San Marcos, Guatemala*

Ed. Note: *Bishop Ramazzini, is president of the Bishops Secretariat of Central America and Panama. CAFTA is due to be implemented in early 2006 and protests are being planned in the US and Central America. Senator Dianne Feinstein is the only California Democrat to support the trade agreement.*

The recent passage of the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) by the U.S. Congress is a source of grave concern to my diocese and to citizens of my country, Guatemala. A good agreement might have been a tool to ease the grinding poverty that plagues the daily lives of too many Guatemalans. Instead, this agreement not only fails to address the needs of Central America's poor, sick and vulnerable but also may well make conditions here worse.

CAFTA's U.S. passage, made possible by political threats, payoff promises and procedural manipulations, resembled the tactics employed in March to pass CAFTA in Guatemala's Congress. The juxtaposition of certain politician's claims

that CAFTA would promote democracy with the process that was required to pass it is one of CAFTA's cruel ironies.

In my country, when thousands of protesters raised their voices against CAFTA, President Oscar Berger responded by calling on the Guatemalan military to suppress them, thereby violating the fragile Peace Accords that ended decades of bloody civil war. The military used water cannons, rubber bullets and armored vehicles in the capital. In the countryside, military police attacked a march of Mayan peasant farmers, murdering two civilians.

People who wonder why there is such passionate opposition to CAFTA — an expansion of the 1993 North American Free Trade Agreement to six more nations — need look no further than the results of NAFTA in Mexico during the last decade. NAFTA displaced 1.5 million Mexican peasant farmers. Many of these displaced farmers sought industrial jobs, causing Mexican wages to drop by 20 percent. Communities and families were torn asunder as those who lost their livelihoods undertook the perilous journey to the United States in hopes of finding some way to support their families.

*Haiti, continued from page 7*

most popular potential candidate. Former President (and Prime Minister in the first Aristide presidency) René Préval, who in the past has been close to Aristide, has now entered the fray as an independent candidate, and whose organizational skills and positive reputation attracted tens of thousands of voters to newly register, could be a strong prospect in the field if he's allowed to win and then run in the inevitable run-off.

Between January and February, much is likely to happen; on February 1st the victor in the run-off is scheduled to take office, but first the US-led anti-Aristide cabal has much to lose if the electoral process continues to take a chaotic course.

If one views the forthcoming elections in Haiti as a mindless exercise in "procedural democracy," the vote itself will provide far from indisputable evidence of quality governance. Haiti's basic fact of life to-

day is that neither economic nor political democracy exists in the country, and no one could venture to claim that the vote of a subsistence farmer in Haiti's Artibonite valley will carry the same political weight after the election as that of a Pétionville businessman.

The most gifted politicians, like religious leaders, are supposed to make the electorate feel germane to the political process and convinced that they are vital to their nation's future. Aristide was particularly adept at empowering the poor. But for the United States, the very concept remains almost a frightening specter. It is almost synonymous with Fidel Castro, therefore making it an abomination for Washington, therefore sealing the Haitian leader's fate and the island with him.

Source: *COHA, October 11, 2005; www.coha.org*

CAFTA, like NAFTA, is designed to complement and lock into place the neoliberal structural adjustments imposed on Central American nations, with disastrous results, by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. Formerly pro-NAFTA development economists, such as Professor Riordan Roett of Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, warned that CAFTA is based on a logic that favors profit over human rights and sustainability.

What benefits can come for Guatemalan workers when CAFTA will roll back the stronger labor rights requirements existing under current U.S.-Central America trade law? What will become of the 60 percent of Guatemalans population that lives in small farming communities when CAFTA allows the dumping of subsidized food exports into our countries? And what can a priest say to the family of a person ill with HIV-AIDS for whom the generic antiretroviral medicines forbidden by CAFTA's rules are the only hope? The Bush administration demanded that before the U.S. Congress would even consider CAFTA, our nation had to revoke a law that helped ensure access to these medicines for the more than 78,000 Guatemalans living with HIV-AIDS. Is this a good neighbor policy?

CAFTA did not come down from God. It is the flawed work of man, and only one of many versions of how our nations could be linked. I thank those members of the U.S. Congress who voted against CAFTA. They desire trade with fairness, justice and morality. They rise against the Bush administration's threats to cut off our existing trade preferences so as to force Central American approval of this trade agreement. They yearn for a country that cooperates with, not presides over, its neighbors in the Western hemisphere.

I hope and pray that the valiant efforts of those opposing CAFTA both in Central America and the United States will prove lasting in confronting the challenges of CAFTA's implementation.

Source: [http://ncronline.org/NCR\\_Online/archives2/2005d/111105/111105w.php](http://ncronline.org/NCR_Online/archives2/2005d/111105/111105w.php)

## HONDURAS: U.S. Businesses Implicated in Illegal Logging

By Dale Sorensen, MITF

Ed. Note: *The author and MITF's Colleen Rose visited with members of the Environmental Movement of Olancho (MAO) in September 2004, spoke to environmental activists and witnessed the effects of unregulated logging.*

In early November 2005, the Center for International Policy (CIP) and the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) released a report titled "The Illegal Logging Crisis in Honduras." The result of a yearlong undercover investigation by EIA, the report documents how US imports of illegal Honduran wood increase poverty, fuel corruption and devastate forests and communities. In the last 35 years, Honduras has lost almost 5 million hectares of its forests. There's been an upset in the ecology resulting in unforeseen changes such as long droughts often followed by rainstorms that wash everything away. Many harvests have been lost, causing migration from communities due to the economic crisis.

The report names US firms, including Home Depot, that profit from the trade, and offers recommendations to the Honduran and US government on how to end this crisis. According to Allan Thornton, EIA's investigation and report "document an epic tragedy for Honduras. We discovered a far-reaching web of corruption and illegalities involving politicians, bureaucrats, timber companies, mayors, police and other officials. The US is the biggest importer of Honduran timber; EIA is calling on the US government to urgently enact the commitment they made at the G8 summit to stop the import of illegal wood."

An estimated 75% of pine logged is logged illegally, along with an estimated 30% of precious hardwoods logged, often from protected areas, and then exported to North America and Europe. Even when loggers have the required permits and management plans, they often disregard even basic environmental regulations. The Honduran Forestry Development Corporation, COHDEFOR, is the government agency responsible for both granting logging concessions and ensuring compliance with environmental regulations, including the administration of the national protected area system. The agency has been subject to repeated interventions by the executive power,

but these have led only to publicized scandals, not to substantial transformation.

Reportedly, some 40% of campaign money for both of Honduras' major political parties (Liberal and Nationalist) comes from the logging industry, which has close ties with politicians and bank owners. For years, Honduras has ranked among the most corrupt countries of the hemisphere, according to Transparency International. This corruption is systemic and deeply connected to the invasion and exploitation of the country within the global development model. Meanwhile, a poor rural farmer can be jailed for cutting down a tree to build a home without



*Illegal logging truck in Olancho, Honduras  
Photo: www.goldmanprize.org*

proper authorization.

All over Honduras, communities and organizations are struggling to defend their forests, which protect the water sources that people, communities, crops and animals need to live. Many communities are trying to build their own healthy local development, protecting their water, forests and environment. Initiatives include direct action to remove logging machinery from community territory, organizing marches, law and policy reform proposals, participating in watershed area delimitation and assemblies.

The overwhelming responses to these initiatives have been silence and repression. The latter is particularly grave in the department of Olancho, where community and environmental movement leaders have been the targets of constant death threats, arrest warrants on false charges, intimidation and other human rights violations linked to their work. Four environmentalists have been murdered and others have been forced to flee.

Father Jose Andres Tamayo is a priest and forestry reform activist who directs MAO, a coalition of subsistence farmers, religious and community leaders dedicated to protecting the endangered forests of Olancho, Honduras' largest and most biologically diverse region. In a previous Report MITF wrote about the 2003 March for Life that he organized. The 120-mile weeklong march to the capital of Honduras started with 3,000 and ended with 40,000 marchers. He was in San Francisco this fall speaking out against CAFTA. Father Tamayo issued a plea for assistance. "In light of these shameful acts, we ask for the solidarity, support, and protection of the authorities, organizations and the good people of the United States of America to help our environmental leaders and the community that defends the rights of the people."

CIP's Robert White stated: "The US demand for this illegally harvested Honduran timber is helping to propel a rogue industry that destroys ecosystems, rots democratic institutions and harms the people, especially the poorest Hondurans, whose lives depend on healthy forests."

The report details four steps that must be taken in the US to stop the trade in illegal wood:

1. Retailers, like Home Depot, must follow their own internal guidelines and refuse to buy timber from illegal loggers.
2. The Bush administration must act on its many prior commitments to clamp down on illegal timber imports from Central America.
3. The US must act to stop the flood of cheap, illegal wood from Honduras by supporting the listing of Honduran Pine in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species Agreements with a strict export quota limited to legal wood.
4. The US must also link debt aid with a requirement that the Honduras Government guarantee its citizens' freedom from death threats intended to destroy the anti-illegal logging movement.

Sources: *Center for International Policy, www.ciponline.org; Environmental Investigation Agency, www.eia-international.org; Rights Action Commentary Dec. 7, 2005; Rainforest Action Networks, the Panther, Summer 2005*

## EL SALVADOR: ILEA, A New School of Assassins?

By Tanya Snyder, *Voices on the Border*

Ed Note: *The author is the Executive Director of a Washington, DC-based non-profit that works in solidarity with El Salvador. On November 30, 2005, the Salvadorian National Assembly approved ILEA.*

As the solidarity movement prepares for another protest and vigil against the Western Hemispheric Institute for Security and Cooperation (WHINSEC, nee School of the Americas and forever known to the movement as the School of Assassins) this November, another threat to peace and democracy in the Americas lurks behind the curtain. On September 21, the United States and El Salvador ratified the establishment of a new police academy for Latin America, to be built on Salvadoran soil. The International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) presents several concerns for Latin America's peace and security.

After the Central American civil wars of the 1980's, El Salvador and other nations established constitutions, peace accords, and treaties clearly delineating the roles of the police and the military. The role of the military was to defend national borders and not to control dissent among the civilian population. The role of controlling dissent was firmly lodged with the police forces, which were brought under civilian control, at least nominally.

While no one argues that more training and professionalization would help the Salvadoran security forces, which since being re-formed after the war, have been plagued by accusations of corruption, arbitrary detention, and abuse, many question the ILEA as the ideal tool to accomplish that goal. Section 660 of the US Foreign Aid Bill prohibits aid to foreign police forces except in democratic countries with exceptional human rights records. Although we cannot conflate today's Salvadoran civilian police force with the militarized police of the war years, it is still safe to say that the Salvadoran police force is light years away from satisfying the conditions of the bill.

Meanwhile, Latin American social movements do not trust the United States as an appropriate purveyor of the ILEA's purported objectives of strengthening the

criminal justice system with an emphasis on human rights and democratization. This mistrust is based at least as much on current events, such as the US refusal to sign on to the International Criminal Court and the torture scandals of Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo, as its long history of supporting death squad governments in the Americas. The School of the Americas trained many of the soldiers responsible for the most notorious massacres of the Salvadoran civil war and circulates manuals with such names as "How to Keep Torture Victims Alive."

There are already four other ILEAs, in Budapest, Bangkok, Botswana, and New Mexico. None of these places have the traumatic history of U.S. intervention that El Salvador has. The ILEA has the stated purpose of strengthening the fight against organized crime, including drug trafficking, money laundering, international terrorism, human trafficking, arms dealing, illegal migration and the epidemic of gang violence. The composition of ILEA students would not be only police officers, but would include judges, prosecutors, and immigration officials.

The ILEA-South was first proposed for Panama, which rejected it, and then for Costa Rica in 2002. The Costa Rican social movements pressured the parliament to put several strong conditions on ratification. They insisted on a non-military character of the school, which had already been confirmed by diplomatic notes between the two countries affirming that "the academy and its installations do not seek to develop any kind of military instruction or connection with military activities" and countless other assurances. The Costa Rican assembly also rejected diplomatic immunity for U.S. Academy personnel. The U.S. refused to accept the conditions and decided to take the ILEA elsewhere.

On June 5 of this year, the ILEA landed decidedly in El Salvador, with U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's surprise announcement of the plans at the meeting of the Organization of American States. In July, the first course began in a separate facility, with students from El Salvador, Colombia, and the Dominican Republic. The school is expected to be

fully functioning within a year, and will have a capacity for 1,500 students – about twice the current enrollment of the School of the Americas.

The social movement fears that further Salvadoran cooperation in the U.S. war on terror (in addition to El Salvador's contribution of troops to the Iraq war) would increase security risks to the country. The secretive nature of the negotiations (the agreement is still not publicly circulated) has bred more distrust in the motives behind the ILEA. Many worry about further U.S. intervention in public security at a time of intense U.S. economic interests in the region, especially with the implementation of the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) set for January 1. Suppression of popular protest, especially related to CAFTA, has been increasing.

Far from feeling "proud that the United States has chosen us," (as Salvadoran President Tony Saca suggests) the Salvadoran social movement, including the Ombudsperson for Human Rights, energetically opposes the establishment of the ILEA in their country. The solidarity movement in the United States must do the same.

Source: *CommonDreams.org*, October 24, 2005



## GUATEMALA: UC law group fights “femicide”

By Colleen Rose, MITF

On November 10, MITF partnered with the Center for Gender and Refugee Studies (CGRS) of UC Hastings College of Law to present “Getting Away with Murder: Guatemala’s Failure to Protect Women and Rodi Alvarado’s Quest for Safety.” The program was held during the lunch hour in the Law School’s auditorium on McAllister Street, San Francisco.

Using footage from a PBS documentary about Rodi Alvarado, an asylum seeker from Guatemala, the audience was made aware of the high numbers of murders of women in that country, labeled by many as “femicides.” Rodi fled her home country after suffering ten years of brutal domestic violence, and she has become the center of a highly publicized case spearheaded by CGRS.

Ms. Alvarado was born and raised in Guatemala. In 1984, at age 16, she married a former soldier, Francisco Osorio, who threatened and assaulted her throughout their ten-year marriage. He raped and sodomized Rodi, infected her with sexually transmitted diseases, broke windows and mirrors with her head, dislocated her jaw, and tried to abort her child by kicking her in the spine. He pistol-whipped her and terrorized her with his machete. On more than one occasion she fled the family home, but her husband always found her. Neither the police nor the courts responded to her pleas for protection. Fearing her husband would kill her, Rodi made the heartbreaking decision to flee Guatemala, leaving everything behind, including her two young children.

CGRS seeks to raise awareness of the growing violence against women in Guatemala, where hundreds of women are being murdered with impunity with very little attention from the international media. Over 1800 women have been murdered in Guatemala since 2001, while only 5 perpetrators have been convicted. According to police statistics, personal vengeance seems to be the motive in the majority of these crimes. Most of the victims were homemakers or students.

Educating the public about conditions that cause people like Ms. Alvarado to flee is important for starting a dialogue about the role the U.S. can and should play in

protecting women. People like Ms. Alvarado must be recognized as refugees. Furthermore, US aid to Guatemala, especially aid for police and judicial system reform, needs to be made conditional on that country’s adoption of specific measures to end impunity for violence against women.

Rodi’s case has been pending for more than ten years as the question of whether the torture she suffered at the hands of her husband combined with the lack of protection by the Guatemalan police and courts are sufficient grounds for asylum. An immigration judge granted her asylum in 1996, but a higher court reversed that grant in 1999. Since that time two successive attorneys general—Janet Reno and John Ashcroft—have personally become involved. But her case has yet to be resolved. The Center for Gender and Refugee Studies has championed her cause, with the knowledge that a victory for Rodi is a victory for women everywhere who suffer human rights violations in situations where their governments fail to protect them.

The afternoon’s speakers included Karen Musalo, Resident Scholar at Hastings College of Law, and director of the Center for Gender and Refugee Stud-

ies. Karen has been on the cutting edge of asylum law for more than two decades. Ms. Musalo has been one of the most influential advocates for gender asylum and has been instrumental in the shaping and development of the jurisprudence. Karen is attorney of record for Rodi Alvarado.

Also on the program was Hilda Morales Trujillo, a courageous human rights attorney and activist from Guatemala and the 2004 recipient of the Amnesty International Ambassador of Conscience award. Over the past thirty years Ms. Morales Trujillo has worked tirelessly for reforms in the Guatemalan legal system so that women’s rights would be protected.

Because violence against women in Guatemala receives so little media attention, MITF is considering adding this topic to its 2006 agenda of educational events by inviting CGRS representatives to present the program in its entirety.

Sources: *CGRS Report “Getting Away With Murder,” Nov 2005; Guatemala Human Rights Update, Vol. 17 No 21 & 22, Dec 5, 2005; Kenneth Wood, Director, Guatemala Human Rights Commission, letter Nov 12, 2005*

### BREAKING NEWS

#### The \$54 Million Verdict Upheld Against Salvadoran Generals Found Responsible for Torture!

Atlanta, GA: January 6, 2006 – The US Court of Appeals for the 11<sup>th</sup> Circuit upheld the \$54.6 million jury verdict against two Salvadoran generals. Both generals were former Ministers of Defense who were earlier found guilty of torturing in the 1980s. The three plaintiffs in the case were Juan Roagosa, Neris Gonzalez and Carlos Mauricio of San Francisco.

The generals came to the US in 1989 and continue to live in South Florida. They appealed the verdict on grounds that the 10-year statute of limitations had expired. Initially, the 11<sup>th</sup> Circuit overturned the verdict based on the statute of limitations issue. But the Appeals Court found extraordinary circumstances in the case that suspended the 10-year limitation.

The case was filed in 1999 by the San Francisco Center for Justice and Accountability (CJA). The CJA’s Litigation Director stated that this decision is a landmark victory for human rights.

Source: Press release by Moira Feeney, CJA attorney, January 6, 2006

## PARAGUAY: Fears Mount as US Opens New Military Base

By George Friemoth, MITF

In early July 2005, 500 US Special Forces arrived in Paraguay with planes, weapons and ammunition at the Mariseal Estigarriba air base, a large complex built in the 80s during the reign of dictator Alfredo Stroessner by US technicians. Journalists who have seen the base say the airfield can handle B-52 bombers and Galaxy C-5 cargo planes. It has a huge radar system, an enormous air traffic control tower and vast hangars. It can also house 16,000 troops. The air base is larger than the international airport in Paraguay's capital city, Asuncion.

Bush Administration officials are using rhetoric about terrorist threats in the tri-border region where Paraguay, Argentina and Brazil meet in order to build their case for counterterrorist training and operations. But there is no credible evidence of terrorist activity in that region, according to intelligence officials of the tri-border countries. Human rights groups in the region are worried. In May, the Paraguayan Senate granted the US troops total immunity from national and international Criminal Court jurisdiction until December 2, 2006, with an automatically extendable clause.

The tri-border area is the home to the Gurani Aquifer, one of the world's largest

reserves of water. The air base is located 200 kilometers from Bolivia's natural gas reserves, the second largest in Latin America. Political analysts believe US counter-terrorism operations in Paraguay are a pretext for gaining control of these resources and suppressing social uprisings that may oppose US interests.

Argentine Nobel Prize laureate Adolfo Perez Esquivel commented on the situation in Paraguay and warned, "Once the United States arrives, it takes a long time to leave. And that really frightens me." Esquivel is not alone. Controversy is raging in Paraguay. In the past, US armed forces needed Paraguayan congressional authorization every six months, but now they have been authorized to be in Paraguay for a year and a half. While the Paraguayan and US governments officially deny that Estigarriba is now a US base, Brazil and Argentina are highly skeptical. They see disturbing similarity between US denials about Estigarriba in Paraguay, and similar disclaimers made by the Pentagon about the US airbase in Marta, Ecuador that the US now admits is a major military base tasked with security-related missions, and a 10-years basing agreement with Ecuador.

The "security-related missions" at the \$80 million US base in Ecuador involves hundreds of US troops and thousands of

US private contractors and foreign mercenaries who rotate in and out of Colombia and other countries like Haiti. Several leaders of the US supported coup against President Aristide spent several months there before launching the 2004 coup that exiled Aristide to South Africa.

The US base in Ecuador has become the perfect example of the Bush administration's drive for contracting everything out to the private sector. The use of private contractors shields the White House's operations from US Congressional oversight as US Rep. Jan Schakowsky says, "It is their ability to fly under the radar to avoid accountability."

As the US opens a new military base in Paraguay, fears mount in not only Paraguay but in other countries of the Southern Cone, Uruguay, Brazil and Argentina, all of which have progressive leaders who view another US base in South America as further evidence of the US drive for hegemony and control of the regions resources.

Sources: Benjamin Dangl, "What is the US Doing in Paraguay?" August 1, 2005, [www.upsidedownworld.org](http://www.upsidedownworld.org); Conn Hallinan, "Dark Armies, Secret Bases and Rummy, Oh My!" November 22, 2005, <http://lists.riseup.net/www/info/globalnetnews-summary>

## N E W S B R I E F S

### US: Salvadoran held liable for torture

On November 18, 2005, a Memphis, federal jury of nine US citizens found resident Colonel Nicolas Carranza, the former Vice-Minister of Defense of El Salvador, responsible for overseeing torture and killings in that country. The verdict in favor of four of the five plaintiffs represents the first time that a US jury in a contested case has found a commander liable for crimes against humanity. This means that violations were committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack against the civilian population of El Salvador. The jurors awarded each of the four plaintiffs \$500,000 in compensatory

damages and recommended that Carranza pay punitive damages as well. Five courageous people who were tortured or had family members murdered by government forces under Carranza's command in the early 1980s brought the case. They testified about the abuses they and their relatives endured at the hands of the military, especially the notorious Security Forces.

The trial was marked by several important revelations. Former US ambassador to El Salvador Robert White testified that Col. Carranza was a paid informant for the CIA while he was Vice-Minister of Defense and a member of the High Command in 1980. At that time White asked the CIA station chief in El Salvador to remove Carranza from the CIA payroll

because of his deplorable human rights record but no action was ever taken. Carranza admitted on the witness stand that he had been receiving money from the US government since 1965.

The suit was jointly brought by the Center for Justice and Accountability (CJA), a San Francisco-based non-profit human rights organization that works to bring perpetrators of human rights abuses to justice, and the Tennessee-based law firm Bass, Berry and Sims, PLC. Plaintiffs' counsel Matt Eisenbrandt of the CJA stated, "This verdict sends a strong message that the people of the United States, as represented by this jury, do not tolerate torture and other human rights abuses."

## **BRAZIL:** Corruption scandal taints presidency

President Lula da Silva's re-election prospects are looking increasingly dim, due to the much-publicized congressional investigations being carried out against the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Worker's Party or PT). The recent impeachment of the president's chief of staff Jose Dirceu on bribery and political extortion charges has captured the public's attention, as well as its disgust.

The scandal broke at a time when the excitement over the upcoming October 2006 presidential election had begun to mount. Though Lula has not yet officially confirmed whether or not he will run for re-election, many speculate as to whether the scandal might have already cost him the ballot. The November impeachment of Dirceu, Lula's right-hand man, further adds fuel to the fire and worsens the charismatic Brazilian leader's prospects for victory. The current scandal threatens to bring to an end the rule of the PT, a party that was spearheaded by Lula and built its popularity over the past twenty-five years on the basis of its public stance of being a warrior against corruption and the success of its sophisticated party machinery.

To make matters worse, Delubio Soares, Lula's constant companion and PT treasurer has been expelled from the PT due to revelations that he administered monthly payments to congressmen of the Partido Progressista and Partido Liberal so that they would vote the PT line.

Lula entered the presidency adored by much of the Brazilian citizenry, particularly the lower classes, which identified with his impoverished upbringing, his upright mother of whom he speaks with undying admiration and to whom he attributes his success. With Lula radiating sincerity that, despite his Zero Hunger programs' lack of success and his inability to adequately appease those of the MST (Landless Worker's Movement), Brazilians have always been willing to forgive him, until now.

The saving grace of Lula's presidency has been the economy's robustness. Both he and the PT had hoped that the good health of the economy might go a long way to wipe from the minds of the voters the PT's problems come next year. Unfortunately, Finance Minister Palocci has recently come

under attack, linking him to a scandal during his term as mayor of Riberao Preto, an important city. A fiscal conservative who has been lauded by Washington and the IMF, as well as a founding member of the PT but recently his economic policies have been called into question because the economy contracted in the third quarter of 2005. The primary reason that about two-third of Brazilians voted for Lula was his Zero Hunger plan. Lula has essentially failed to provide the types of successful social and economic re-distributive plans that he championed on the campaign trail; now his reelection plans are in serious doubt.

Source: *Council of Hemispheric Affairs, Memorandum to the Press, December 5, 2005*

## **US:** Justice for the Cuban Five?

As readers may recall, the Atlanta-based 11<sup>th</sup> Circuit Appellate Court threw out the convictions of the Cuban Five on August 5, a stunning acknowledgment of injustice by the US Administration. The three federal judges voted unanimously to overturn the convictions.

On November 15, the US Court of Appeals for the 11<sup>th</sup> Circuit issued the procedure for the upcoming en banc (full court) rehearing of the case of the Five by all 12 judges of that circuit.

Richard Klug, an appeals process expert and graduate of Harvard said that, in his more than 25 years of experience as a jurist, and particularly in these cases, "I have never seen any appeals court accept a case like this en banc." Full court rehearings are not granted for reconsideration of a unanimous decision. Rehearings are granted when one of the three judges strongly objects and requests a rehearing. Klug acknowledges the decision to rehear was very unusual but happened after the Bush Administration insisted on it.

The court set the calendar for the defense and government arguments to be filed on January 27, 2006 and set the hearing date before the full court during the week of February 13, 2006 in Atlanta. In the meanwhile, the Cuban Five continue to languish in different federal prisons since their arrests in September 1998.

Klug comments; "We are speaking of

ideas, of an ideological battle. In the US what we have is the politicization of criminal law, and in this case the criminalization of the political and attempting to bring a political battle before a criminal court. This is the only case in which I have participated with such a situation, because the Five are not criminals and they did not cause any harm to my country. What they attempted to do was to protect Cuba from terrorist actions planned in Miami by extreme right groups of Cuban origin. In my experience there is no other case in the USA that you can compare with that of the Five."

Source: *National Committee to Free the Cuban Five, November 16, 2005*

## **CUBA:** Praised by UN

The United Nations and other international organizations have long praised Cuba's track record in preserving lives during hurricanes. Wilma was no exception. While Hurricane Wilma was blamed for at least 22 deaths-five in Florida, 12 in Haiti, at least four in Mexico and one in Jamaica, no one was killed in Cuba. By the time Havana was hit with a sea wall of raging water, 700,000 people of the country's 11.2 million had been evacuated to safer places.

As usual the states resources were mobilized and focused on one goal: ensure that no one dies. When Katrina hit New Orleans Cuba was the first country to respond offering doctor, emergency specialists, food, medical supplies and amphibious vehicles, but the State Department flatly refused any assistance from Cuba.

In a report on the current worldwide situation of children, UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Education Fund recognized the excellent protection of children by the Cuban government in 2005.

UNICEF noted that in Cuba there are no "invisible" or excluded children, despite being located in Latin America where the abysmal gap between rich and poor keeps growing. By "invisible", UNICEF classifies those children who are not taken into account and those who are unprotected against violence and suffer maltreatment and exploitation.

Sources: *Vanessa Arrington, Associated Press, October 26, 2005; Nation Network on Cuba, December 19, 2005.*

## C A L E N D E R

### **Human Rights Delegation to Uruguay & Argentina Closing the SOA from Latin America's Southern Cone**

March 19 - 30, 2006 (\$1200 plus airfare)

In Uruguay the group will meet with Fr. Roy Bourgeois, government officials, human rights groups to urge that no more soldiers be sent to the SOA/WHISC. In Argentina we will commemorate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Argentina military coup, meet in solidarity with torture victim Patricia Isasa, human rights groups and other grassroots activists in order to support ending impunity. Trip leader is human rights/anti-military activist Andres Conteris.

Contact Dale at MITF for more information or an application  
[geodale1@earthlink.net](mailto:geodale1@earthlink.net) or 415/924-3227

### **Venezuela: A Hopeful Revolution Celebrate the 4<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Undoing of the Coup Against Pres. Chavez**

April 7-17, 2006 (\$1100 plus airfare)

Come see for yourself the remarkable literacy, health care, food nutrition, and land reform programs. Go to the barrios to see implementation of these innovative social programs. Visit the capital, Caracas and the countryside. Meet activists, human rights groups and government officials. Learn about US government's attempts to undermine this Bolivarian Revolution.. The trip leader is Lisa Sullivan a US citizen who has lived and worked in Venezuela for 20 years.

Contact MITF for details

## **National Solidarity Conference on Venezuela, March 4-6 in Washington DC, location TBA Workshops, Plenaries, Entertainment and more!**

Join together with human rights, faith-based, labor and all activists who want to build a better world. We will learn from each other and plan together how we can oppose any form of US government intervention in Venezuela and also how what we learn from the Bolivarian Revolution will benefit our own communities and support Venezuelans in their communities.

To guarantee your place send \$10-25 to: Alliance for Global Justice, 1247 E St., SE, Washington, DC 20003. [www.LASC.org](http://www.LASC.org) for more information and a registration form.

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