

# Report

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## OAXACA: People's Movement Still Strong

By George Friemoth, MITF

Ed. Note: *The author participated in the July 2007 MITF delegation to Oaxaca, organized by the Oaxaca Solidarity Network and lead by Grahame Russell of Rights Action.*

During the last eight months of 2006 the people of Oaxaca have organized and marched in the streets against repressive forces sent first by their fraudulently elected governor, Ulysses Ruiz Ortiz, and then by outgoing and incoming presidents of Mexico, Vicente Fox and Felipe Calderon, respectively.

The movement in Oaxaca represents a new kind of resistance that has arisen from the grassroots and overcome its fear despite brutal repression. With its wealth of diversity and collective strength, Oaxaca has become Mexico's most important social justice rebellion in recent years. It is reminiscent of the Zapatistas' insurrection in 1994 when NAFTA went into effect. This movement also discredits the neo-liberal model imposed on Mexico by multinational corporations and the US. It opposes Western representative democracy and formal elections that puts in place one bad government after another. It describes itself as a "Movement to democratize democracy."

Oaxaca has a long history of resistance to oppression going back to Pre-Colombian times. Even the Spanish never fully conquered the indigenous people who frequently escaped into the mountains. Subjugating the rebels by the Spaniards required some of the nation's most brutal forms of repression that continues to this day. Oaxacans seem proud of their reputation for being like a Tlacuache, a frequent figure in Mexican mythology. When the cornered by an enemy, the Tlacuache plays dead, but woe to the enemy who thinks the



*Alba Cruz Ramoz, Mayem Arellanes, both lawyers and Alma Soto, director of the November 25th Liberation Committee, work with the legal body of APPO. Photo: Gwen Meyer*

battle is over. The small, fierce creature merely waits for a propitious moment to fight back.

The state of Oaxaca has a population of 3.5 million, 75% are indigenous and represent Mexico's largest population of indigenous peoples speaking 15 different languages and many dialects. The rest of the population is mestizos and Afro-Oaxacans who live on the coast. The state has the country's largest number of municipalities or counties (570) due to the people's determination to preserve their traditions and strengthen local self-government.

The UN has compared Oaxaca to Africa with 1.8 million people living in extreme poverty and 72% of the population earning less than \$6 per day. In order to understand the dramatic situation in

Oaxaca one must take into account the Mexican government's plans to prioritize transnational investments that monopolize wealth and serve the elites. Plan Puebla

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Panama, for example includes several mega-projects in Oaxaca. In the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, the MITF delegation visited the La Venta wind turbine electricity project and a project to convert the former Benito Juarez reservoir into a hydroelectric dam. We found there is growing public opposition to all these projects due primarily to government appropriation of land with little or no consultation with the people. We learned that when the original reservoir had been created 30 years before, the people had been promised services and compensation for their lands. The government never followed through with their promises.

In addition, the free trade agreement (NAFTA) with the US has seriously affected the domestic market causing a crisis in traditional agriculture, especially maize. It has intensified agrarian conflicts at the same time that many communities are being impacted by severe soil erosion and the loss of water sources. The delegation visited the Mixteca region and saw a community-based reforestation project along with projects to save water and build up the soil organically for sustainable food production.

Poverty, unemployment, inequality, exclusion and authoritarianism characterize Oaxaca. It is the second poorest state after Chiapas. Lacking local opportunities, 150,000 Oaxacans migrate north to other parts of Mexico and to the US every year. Migrants' remittances account for a third of the state's income, after tourism and coffee. Many Oaxacans have no birth cer-

tificates; therefore, they cannot vote, obtain visas or receive services.

The state has long suffered from targeted social, political and economic inequalities. Run by political strongmen, the state is plagued by corruption. Nearly 80 years of PRI governments, including the current governor have had the full support of the Federal government that expects the Oaxacan state government to repress rebellions by any means.

Rebellions are not by their nature tidy affairs as the current situation in Oaxaca illustrates. But the current one can be viewed in phases. The first phase occurred shortly after the teachers (20,000) went on strike for better teaching conditions and wages in early May 2006. (Teachers have been striking every year since the 1970s.) The teachers occupied the Zócalo, the center of the city in pursuit of their demands. They held many marches: June 2, 80,000; June 7, 120,000. On June 14 Governor Ulyses Ruiz Ortiz (URO) ordered state police to attack the teachers, encamped in the Zócalo. Helicopters sprayed tear gas and bullets; the teachers fought back and regained the Zócalo winning admiration and support throughout the state.

In the second phase, URO's actions ignited a mass uprising in the state that generated a mega-march of close to 800,000 against him. On June 17, in a precedent-breaking assembly meeting, the Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca (APPO) was born. APPO declared itself the supreme authority in Oaxaca and took over some government offices, asserting the illegitimacy of the entire political structure. The Assembly consisted of 170 activists representing 85 organizations and people from all walks. Now, it represents over 300 organizations.

The third phase centered on the fight for the communication media. The first target of State forces on June 14 was to destroy the teachers radio station, Radio Planton which had been used as a vital communication link broadcasting 24 hours a day. When it was destroyed students replaced it by seizing the university's larger station. After several attacks failed to close it down, three infiltrators into the APPO managed to destroy the station by throwing sulphuric acid on the equipment.

Upping the ante, on August 1, a spontaneously organized women's group called for a women's march expecting 2-3000 to show up. Surprisingly 15,000 women responded and marched. They seized the state TV and radio station that broadcast throughout Oaxaca. For three weeks the women let ordinary people speak about the reality of their lives, their opposition to neo-liberal free trade and Plan Puebla Panama. They spoke about the loss of land to developers, corporate takeovers of local businesses and rural schools in the mountains without toilets and safe drinking water. On August 23, in a counterinsurgency action, heavily armed police and state thugs totally destroyed the control equipment located on a hill at the base of the transmission tower. In response, APPO groups seized 12 commercial radio stations and continued broadcasting. By this time the popular movement was producing material, videos and CDs spreading its message through all means of communication. The movement consolidated its forces and became an inspiration throughout Mexico.

The final phase demonstrated clearly that whatever fear had been instilled by government repression had been overcome by the determination to seek justice and true democracy. In October 2006, the most violent actions began with the killing of four people, including a teacher and US journalist Brad Will, by URO's henchmen. In November, outgoing President Fox sent in 4500 National Preventive Police to reinforce the state's police and put down the rebellion using brutal force. Hundreds were arrested, beaten and transported to far away prisons. Family and friends did not know their whereabouts.

For many people the preservation of one's life became secondary to fighting for their cause. The voices of women were particularly strong. Some said that what they had been through made them feel like they were living under Pinochet, Chile's former dictator. A young woman commented over the air, "Our eyes are burning with tear gas, but at least now we can see the government for what is really is. We're not budging."

One indigenous leader said, "those who thought the citizens' movement could be put down through exaggerated violence

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## GUATEMALA: 25 Years After the Coup...and Massacre

By Josh MacLeod, NISGUA/GAP  
(Network in Solidarity with the people  
of Guatemala / Guatemala  
Accompaniment Project)

Ed. Note: *The author is currently working as a human right accompanier with survivors of the genocide that took place in the Ixil triangle region of Guatemala in the early 1980s. Several communities have requested an international presence to dissuade any violence as well as document and witness anything that might happen. For several years MITF has helped with financial support for accompaniers who are part of the NISGUA/GAP.*

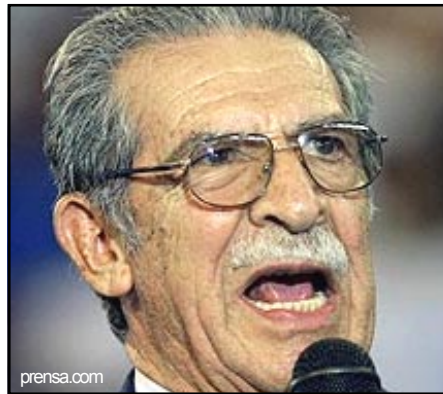
March 23 marks the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1982 military coup in Guatemala that overthrew General Romero Lucas Garcia, president since 1978, and installed General Efraín Ríos Montt as the head of a triumvirate of generals who took control of the state. March 23 also marks the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the day the Guatemalan Army marched into the highland Maya village of Ixil, gathered the people in the central plaza and massacred 96 of them.

But who is General Ríos Montt? And, 25 years later, what relevance do these two anniversaries have?

Born in 1926, Efraín Ríos Montt is one of the most controversial, and divisive, political figures in Guatemala. A 1950 graduate of the School of the Americas, then in Panama, Ríos Montt is a career military officer who attained the rank of General in 1970. Though he almost certainly won the popular vote in the Guatemalan election of 1974 he was denied the post by the corrupt military establishment. Instead, he was sent into de-facto exile in Spain as Guatemala's military attaché. Ríos Montt stayed in Spain for three years in this position before he resigned. The next year, 1978, he left the Catholic Church, becoming a born again pastor with the California based Church of the Word. On March 23, 1982 Ríos Montt again burst onto the Guatemalan political scene as the head of a military junta that deposed then president General Romeo Lucas Garcia. The junta immediately suspended the constitution, and shut down the legislature. By early June Ríos Montt had forced the two other members of the junta to

resign and was left as the sole President of Guatemala and head of the Armed Forces.

The stated purpose of the 1982 coup was to end the general terror and violence of the previous Lucas Garcia regime and to defeat once and for all the Communist guerrillas who had been fighting in the mountains for more than two decades. In order to accomplish this goal Ríos Montt and his high command of military advisors formulated a counter-insurgency policy known as "Plan Victoria 82." The presidency of Lucas Garcia was known for its intensely violent and indiscriminate "scorched earth" campaign that targeted almost anyone and everyone that could possibly be against the regime in power. Ríos



*Efraín Ríos Montt*

Montt's Plans Victoria 82 and Sofia 82\* focused and organized the "scorched earth" policy of his predecessor. The result was less random violence but more actual deaths at the hands of the state. This policy defined the rural population, the majority being indigenous Maya, as an "internal enemy" who gave support to the guerrilla insurgents. To combat this threat the full brunt of state violence was directed at the civilian non-combatant population. The frightful analogy used by military strategists at the time held that if the guerrilla is a fish, then the best way to catch this fish is to remove the water in which it swims — the civilian population.

In actuality this led to the indiscriminate massacring of the civilian population. The 18 months of Ríos Montt's presidency before he was, in turn, overthrown by his defence minister, was the bloodiest of Guatemala's 36-year civil war. The two official reports on the war in Guatemala written by the United Nations Mission to Guatemala and the Catholic Church respectively estimate that 43% of the

deaths that occurred during the entire war occurred during the 18 months of Ríos Montt's term in office. This is at least 16,000 documented deaths and perhaps as many 70,000 actual deaths during Montt's tenure (with 200,000 deaths for the entire period). This is more than the so-called dirty wars of El Salvador, Nicaragua, Argentina, and Chile combined.

"They set fire to our houses, our corn, our beans, and we remained with nothing — only the clothes that we wore when we left," says my friend Oliverio. He is speaking about the aftermath of the massacre in his hometown of Ixil in the Ixil region of Guatemala. On the same day as Ríos Montt's coup in Guatemala City the army entered Ixil, rounded up the people in the plaza of the town and massacred 96 people. The survivors fled. In the following months as Ríos Montt's scorched earth campaign accelerated so did the suffering of the people of Ixil. About the terrible living conditions on a neighbouring plantation, where the survivors were forced to live after the massacre, Oliverio says, "the children began to die; over 150 children died. It was under Ríos Montt's regime that these hundreds of children died — of sickness, of hunger, of cold, of fear — because they had no homes, because they lived in the rain. Sometimes one child would die each day, or two, or three. Every day children died."

\* On March 18th, 2007 the Guatemalan daily newspaper the *Prensa Libre* published an astounding article about something called "Plan Sofia 82". Plan Sofia was the name that the high command of Ríos Montt gave to their counter-insurgency operations which carried out the genocide in the Ixil area of Guatemala. The existence of this document has been denied for years by Guatemalan authorities. The undeniable appearance of this document lays out with chilling language the methods Ríos Montt's government used to annihilate the civilian population.

Oliverio is president of a group of survivors of the massacres of the early 1980's called the Association of Justice and Reconciliation (AJR). As survivors of the violence the members of the AJR are bravely serving as witnesses in two legal cases here in Guate-

*Guatemala, continued from page 3*

mala accusing the high commands of the Rios Montt presidency and that of his predecessor, Romeo Lucas Garcia, of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. The aim of these cases is to hold the intellectual authors of the killings responsible. This would be unprecedented here in Guatemala where corruption and impunity are the rule rather than a well-functioning system of Justice.

Currently the case against Rios Montt is stalled due to a lack of political will on the part of the prosecutor. The justice system in Guatemala requires that after an accusation is made and the complainants present their evidence to the Attorney General, he has the responsibility to call the accused to give testimony. Last October the AJR made a formal request for the Attorney General to move forward. To this day the Attorney General has refused to take the action required of him by law.

In January Rios Montt announced his intention to run for the Guatemala Congress. As head of the FRG party slate, he will most likely be elected and has a good chance of becoming President of Congress. Since May 3, as an official candidate he is immune from prosecution pending the election in September.

On August 1st the Guatemala Congress, in a groundbreaking decision, approved the United Nations Commission against impunity (CICIG). The purpose of the investigative body is to determine the extent of the illegal security organizations and their relationships with State entities. CICIG will strengthen Guatemala's judicial institutions by assisting in the prosecution of such groups. It is widely believed that Montt and the FRG are linked to organized crime. While the commission will not be able to prosecute Montt since he has immunity, it is nevertheless a vital tool to break impunity in Guatemala and reduce levels of violence. ●

### Action Alert

Contact local political representatives urging them to put pressure on the Guatemalan government to end impunity in Guatemala. Help move the genocide cases forward by emailing the Guatemalan authorities from the NISGUA website:

[http://nisgua.org/get\\_involved/action\\_alerts/action\\_alert\\_02.asp](http://nisgua.org/get_involved/action_alerts/action_alert_02.asp)



*Dolores Villalobo and Rafael Perez Cruz of the Popular Indigenous Council of Oaxaca (CIPO-RFM), which is an alliance of indigenous communities working for self-determination, control of land and resources.*  
Photo: Gwen Meyer

*Oaxaca, continued from page 2*

got it wrong again, as a very broad sector of Oaxacan society has shaken off fear and is clear that PRI infiltrators were behind the provocations. The government maxim has been 'divide, attack and conquer,' but Oaxaca has changed and they can't go back to what it was."

In December, the national Human Rights Commission released information, reporting 349 detained, 370 wounded and 20 killed in 2006. It received 1,211 charges of human rights violations, including excessive force, illegal searches, arbitrary detentions, people being held incommunicado and forced disappearances. The commission had also received information on the use of weapons against APPO members by subjects identified as local police officers dressed in civilian clothes. Its information was based on over 2,700 testimonies. The commission omitted that over 30 people were disappeared, and failed to mention either the degrading treatment and torture; or the serious responsibility of both the state and federal governments in the events. The women's testimonies were particularly powerful.

Most of the prisoners were released on bail paid by an anonymous person associated with URO's regime. The reason was that some of the prisoners were paid

agents or infiltrators into APPO. Almost all the released still have charges pending and are required to sign in regularly to show they have not fled. The charges are bogus. Many are charged with fire bombing and burning state buildings—charges that were committed by the governor's thugs and undercover police. Conveniently, all files showing government fraud and corruption were destroyed in the fires.

APPO has been first and foremost a peaceful movement and cannot be blamed for the violence, except for a few, isolated individual cases. The responsibility for the violence rests heavily on the shoulders of the state government that trained and used an extensive network of undercover police, agent provocateurs and paid thugs to infiltrate organizations, marches and places to provoke violence. In almost every case when the Oaxaca State government or pro-government media blamed APPO members for a criminal act, credible evidence later showed the opposite was true. As long as injustice with impunity exists in Oaxaca, the people will continue to march and resist.

Source: *ENVIO, January-February 2007; Laura Carlson, Americas Updater, November 2006; George.Salzman@umb.edu, August 30, 2006*

## It's Time to Pass Humane Immigration Legislation

By *The Marin Immigrant Rights Coalition*

Ed. Note: *The Marin Immigrant Rights Coalition is made up of individuals and community organizations working to support immigrants in our county. MITF is a member of the coalition.*

Humans migrate. They have done so for thousands of years, and almost always for the same reasons — to escape harsh, frequently life-threatening conditions where they live and to seek better lives for themselves and their families.

Sadly, it is rare that immigrants are welcomed to a new place. They are typically regarded with suspicion, disapproval, or outright hostility. This even happens in the United States of America, a nation that owes its very existence and its great wealth to wave after wave of immigrants (including millions of Africans forced to “emigrate” from their homes).

Yet from the moment they arrive, immigrants begin making significant contributions to the economies and the cultures of their new communities. And, if they are able to persist and remain, their children and grandchildren will not be immigrants, but

native-born daughters and sons.

Today in the United States there is heated debate about people who immigrated to this country without the necessary documents. There are millions of these undocumented immigrants. Some U.S. citizens are demanding that they all be declared criminals, thrown into detention centers, and deported. (At present, being in the U.S. without documentation is a civil, not a criminal offense.)

Many say that these undocumented immigrants are taking more than they are giving back, overloading public services, going on welfare, not paying taxes. In fact, undocumented immigrants are ineligible for welfare, food stamps, Medicaid, and most other public benefits. And they *do* pay taxes, the same real estate (most often passed on through their rent) and sales taxes we all pay. In addition, the Social Security Administration estimates that undocumented workers have paid between \$6-7 billion into Social Security that they will not be able to collect.

The immigration legislation rejected twice by the U.S. Senate would have devastated immigrant families and communities and criminalized and deported a great many

of those who came here without documents. Its so-called “amnesty” provisions were so extreme and so severe, that few undocumented workers would have been able to qualify, or to pay the exorbitant fees required.

The legislation also called for a “guest worker” program that would have allowed immigrant workers into the country for six years, but do nothing to protect their rights while here, then send them back to their home countries. So those “guest workers” would be welcome to contribute to increasing the economic wealth of this nation, and as a reward, they would be discarded. And while here, they would be second-class persons, virtual indentured labor, subject to dismissal and deportation if they tried to organize for better pay or working conditions. Labor unions have opposed guest worker provisions because they leave immigrant workers unprotected, and undermine the rights of *all* workers.

But the business interests that President Bush listens to are hungry for an endless supply of cheap, exploitable labor.

We hope that after the second defeat of immigration legislation by this Congress, citizens of our country take time to reflect on the situation, and realize that it is unfair to take advantage of the labor of undocumented immigrants and then repay them for that hard work with deportation.

We hope that the people of the U.S. will understand that immigrant workers and U.S. workers are both victims of NAFTA, CAFTA, and other trade agreements that maximize profit through exploitation. And, we hope the people this country will support immigration legislation that would:

- Create a short, simple, low-cost path to legalization and/or citizenship for undocumented workers already in the country, a process that does not require people to return to their home countries and does not penalize them for being here without documents.
- Acknowledge and honor the centrality of family in American life by making family reunification the primary consideration for immigration eligibility.
- Immediately stop the I.C.E. raids and deportations that are shattering fami-

## A Grateful Tribute

By *Bill Hutchinson, MITF*

To many of you reading this newsletter the name Suzanne Bristol will trigger a faint memory or no memory at all. She died in late March after a gallant three-year struggle with cancer, and it had been many years since she was directly involved with MITF. But your activism and your passion for the peoples of the Americas are living reflections of her activism and passion.

In 1985 a small group of Marin County religious people, all appalled with what our government was then wreaking in El Salvador and Nicaragua, blundered around for a meaningful and effective response. From that persistent blundering MITF was born, and Suzanne and I were asked to Co-Chair our first event, and then to Co-Chair the Task Force itself. Some years later she moved to Menlo Park and I moved to Sonoma, but the Task Force has endured and flourished, and in doing so represents as wonderful and lasting a tribute as she could have asked for.

Suzanne had the rare talent to care deeply about things while at the same time engaging others. Her projects had a way of blooming into friendships and her friendships had a way of deepening and lasting. Thanks to her, lives were saved, North Americans became engaged in a vital struggle, and MITF was born. We loved her and we miss her.



## CUBAN FIVE: A Shameful Injustice

By Phillip Agee, former CIA operations officer, author of "Inside the Company: CIA Diary."

There is a wave of progressive change sweeping Latin America and the Caribbean after the many lonely years in which Cuba held high the torch, with free universal healthcare and education, and world-class cultural, sports and scientific achievements. Although you won't find a Cuban today who says things are perfect – far from it – probably all would agree that compared with pre-revolutionary Cuba, there is a world of improvement.

All Cuba's achievements have been in defiance of US efforts to isolate Cuba; every dirty method has been used, including infiltration, sabotage, terrorism, assassination, economic and biological warfare and incessant lies in the media of many countries. I know these methods too well, having been a CIA officer in Latin America in the 1960s. Altogether nearly 3,500 Cubans have died from terrorist acts, and more than 2,000 are permanently disabled. No country has suffered terrorism as long and consistently as Cuba.

*Legislation, continued from page 5*

lies, and continue a moratorium on deportations as the new law is being implemented

- Continually increase the number of visas for new workers as the economy grows, and establish a simple process for granting green cards to those new workers.
- Guarantee the rights of *all* workers, U.S. workers as well as immigrants, to adequate wages and safe, healthy working conditions.
- De-militarize the border.
- Offer services at the border that help ease the transition for immigrants and assure that their human rights and civil liberties rights are protected.

We hope that the immigration legislation that Congress finally passes will be humane rather than punitive.

Source: *Marin Independent Journal*, July 23, 2007



Ramón LaBaòino

Fernando Gonzalez

Rene Gonzalez

Gerardo Hernandez

Antonio Guerrero

The Cuban revolution has always needed intelligence capabilities in the US for defense purposes, even before it took power in 1959. Such was the fully justified mission of the Cuban Five, who have been in jail in the US since 1998 after being convicted of conspiracy to commit espionage in Miami, where they had no chance of a fair trial. Their sights were set exclusively on terrorist operations against Cuba – activities ignored by the FBI – and they neither sought nor received any classified government information. Their cases are still on appeal and will be for years, but their biased convictions rank with the legal lynching in the 1920s of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, the anarchist immigrants, among the most shameful injustices in US history.

Current US policy can be found in the 2004 report of the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba. A fundamental goal – is the isolation of Cuba to stop this bad example spreading. . . .

Yet nearly 50 years of US economic warfare hasn't worked, even though Cubans estimate the cost to them at more than \$80 billion. After the free fall in the early 1990s, triggered by the collapse of the Soviet Union, the economy began to recover in 1995. By 2005 growth was 11.8% and in 2006-12.5%, the highest in Latin America. Exports of services, nickel, pharmaceutical and other products are booming and the US has not been able to stop this.

In the end efforts to isolate Cuba have failed. Last September Cuba was elected, for the second time, to lead the Non-Aligned Movement of 118 countries, and two months later the UN voted for the

15<sup>th</sup> consecutive year to condemn the US embargo, by 183 to 4 (US, Israel, Marshall Islands, Palau). In 2007 Cuba has diplomatic or consular relations with 182 countries and Havana hosts seemingly endless international conferences. In recent years Cuba's resorts have been attracting more than 2 million tourists annually. Far from isolating Cuba, the US has isolated itself.

More than 30,000 Cuban doctors and health workers are saving lives in 69 countries, many in difficult areas. Meanwhile 30,000 young people from dozens of countries are studying medicine in Cuba on full scholarships. All come from areas lacking doctors.

Cuba's literacy program, known as "Yes I can," has been adopted in nearly 30 countries, with thousands of Cuban volunteers teaching. The scheme, conducted in Spanish, Portuguese, English, Creole, Quechua and Aymara, has helped some two million people to read and write, most of whom continue their education afterwards.

Thanks to this international assistance, Cuban prestige and influence – and international solidarity with Cuba – have never been greater. It was to defend these worthy programs that the Cuban Five, unjustly convicted, went to Miami in the 1990s. Freedom for them should be the cause of everyone for whom human rights and justice are important, both in the US and around the world; and that cause can be supported through any of the 300 Free the Five solidarity committees in 90 countries.

Source: *The Guardian*, London March 19, 2007. See: [www.freethefive.org](http://www.freethefive.org) and [www.nlg.org/cuba](http://www.nlg.org/cuba)

## ECUADOR: How Chevron Poisoned the Amazon

By Roger Stoll, MITF

Ed Note: *The author was part of an MITF delegation to Ecuador last spring that visited the Amazon River basin as part of a "Toxic Tour" arranged by Global Exchange.*

They are called "extractive industries," taking oil, minerals, metals and stones out of the ground. Something surgical, like removing a wisdom tooth. But it's not that at all. Mountains are demolished to get the metals, coal and gems inside them. Ecosystems, peoples and cultures have been laid waste to extract oil from the ground.

Three decades ago Texaco (now Chevron) began drilling in Ecuador's Amazon region. 18.5 billion gallons of toxic waste were dumped into the rain forest and millions more spilled from broken pipelines. The amount that exceeds 30 times the Exxon Valdez spill is perhaps the world's worst oil-related disaster.

Thousands of kilometers of road were cut into the jungle, opening the way to 250,000 settlers, dispersing and impoverishing tens of thousands of indigenous people. Originally there were five distinct peoples: Tete, Cofán, Huarani, Siona, Secoya. Texaco's first well was drilled in Lago Agrio, the site of a Tete village. The Tete are

now extinct. Shushufundi, a Cofán village, turned into the site of Texaco's first refinery. The Cofán, once many thousands, now number a couple hundred.

There is no safe water to drink or wash in. Animals die from drinking contaminated water. Birth defects, skin rashes, respiratory illnesses, and gastrointestinal disorders are common. The region's town of San Carlos has one of the highest rates of cancer in Ecuador.

Indigenous groups and other communities have brought suit against Chevron in *Agunda v. ChevronTexaco*, seeking \$1.5 billion to clean up the damage. It is a fraction of the \$30 billion Chevron reaped in profits from Ecuador. There is also a corporate campaign to expose the actions of the company and CEO David O'Reilly, which are fighting the lawsuit and denying responsibility. Recent demonstrations joined by MITF members targeted annual shareholders' meetings in San Ramon, California.

In March an MITF delegation visited the site of the destruction. Our guide was a local indigenous man in his early thirties, an elected leader of the community, activist and a keen student of the region's history. Northern Lago Agrio is the site of the discovery of oil in 1967 and where the first oil well was located.

When the first well was drilled there was a celebration here. People dressed up, danced, and toasted the well with champagne. Something went wrong and a gusher sprang up hundreds of meters into the air, splattering everyone with oil. Thus, the very first oil drilled was spilled.

We went to an area pocked with open oil pits, used to determine how much oil was in the site by timing the flow of oil into the pits. The pits were then abandoned. Our guide poked a stick in the ground, pulled it out, and instantly the air in the 50-foot clearing smelled like gasoline. It was overpowering, like sticking your nose into the gas tank of a car. From pools like this one, rainwater sifts through the ground into a stream, then a river, then everywhere the river goes. Unsurprisingly, the entire region is a cancer cluster. Our guide's mother died of it, washing her clothes in the river, bathing in it everyday. Yet Chevron claims this has all been cleaned up.

Our guide macheted a path to a stream some distance from the pool. It was obviously oily and smelled intensely of gas, like all the streams in the area. Nearby was a thousand barrel spill that went via these streams into the Amazon River basin. And, over there, he pointed out, is where the cows grazed.

We came upon an oil pond about one hundred fifty feet in diameter: black oil mixed with rainwater. No membrane lined it, so everything leaches into the ground, streams and rivers. Next to the pond stood three metal torches more than two stories high, their flames shooting 15 feet in the air. Since most of the gas found with the oil deposits is too expensive to process, it's flared off through torches like these, in the middle of the forest.

How does a company get rights to drill in Ecuador? The company bribes the official responsible for granting the concession. To the company and the official, the environmental and economic consequences to Ecuador's people are irrelevant.

What do the people get in return? When the law requires the oil companies to negotiate with the indigenous peoples in the area of the concession, the company might build a single school or a soccer field, but it's almost nothing.



*Our toxic tour guides and trip leader Yury Guerra at black oil pond with metal torch burning off gas.*

*Photo: George Friemoth*

## COLOMBIA: Trade and Terror

By Sean Donahue, freelance journalist

Ed. Note: *The author is a human-rights activist who has traveled to Colombia three times to document the human and environmental consequences of U.S. military involvement in the country's civil war.*

Imagine that you work bundling cut flowers in Colombia. After years of working ten and twelve-hour days for very little pay, you and your fellow workers finally form a union to fight for better conditions, better pay and you are elected president. Your manager calls you into his office and tells you that unions only bring trouble and that you should really consider your family's safety.

Three days later you wake up to find the words "military target" spray-painted across the front of your house. Later that day, while you're at work, your 10-year-old daughter is playing in the street and a strange man comes up to her and tells her to tell her mom to make sure she doesn't get hurt.

*Chevron, continued from page 7*

Did Ecuador benefit from the drilling? In the 1970's there was an oil boom, and credit flowed from the international banks to build infrastructure. The national debt exploded and external debt is now \$13 billion, with 25% of the national budget lost to debt repayment. The oil profits went to the companies.

I've read that Ecuador's oil exports are mostly consumed in the US, especially California, where I grew up. My oil, then, came from here, and here was the mess I left behind. "What can we do?" we asked. Our guide answered simply, stunningly, "Don't forget us."

The struggle with Chevron is only one example of Ecuadorian resistance to the pillaging of the country by transnational corporations. The Serayaku people of the southern Ecuadorian Amazon continue to resist oil exploration there. In mountainous Intag in northern Ecuador the local communities are resisting copper mining efforts. (See MITF Report, Spring 2007.) There is hope that the new government in Quito will be able to support this national spirit of resistance.

Source: *Amazon Watch*,  
[www.amazonwatch.org](http://www.amazonwatch.org)

The next night a teenager drives by on a motorcycle and opens fire on your house with an Uzi. He just barely misses you and your daughter and your walls are riddled with bullets.

Over 400 union organizers have been murdered in Colombia since Alvaro Uribe became president in August 2002. The majority of them were killed by right-wing paramilitary groups with a long history of close ties to the Colombian military, and to cocaine and heroin traffickers. Despite the fact that the killers made threatening public death threats, stalked their victims and their families and published public death lists, there have only been convictions in ten of those murders.

This past week, Uribe came to Washington trying to convince Congress that if they passed a free-trade agreement with Colombia and increased funding for prosecutions he could curb the violence against trade unionists. Uribe even hired a K Street firm in DC for \$100,000 a month to lobby in favor of the Free Trade Agreement.

One major problem with Uribe's plan: Colombia's Department of Administrative Security (DAS), the police agency that is responsible for protecting union organizers and investigating their deaths, is currently in complete disarray, rocked by a scandal involving large-scale, high-level collaboration with the paramilitaries. Among the charges: a claim that DAS agents provided the paramilitaries with intelligence files on union organizers who were later murdered or targeted for assassination.

The scandal has extended to other parts of the government as well. A dozen of Uribe's congressional allies have been arrested on charges of taking illegal campaign contributions from the paramilitaries. Fresh charges of paramilitary collaboration have surfaced against General Mario Montoya, the head of Colombia's armed forces, a man Colombian and U.S. human rights groups have long suspected of complicity in gross human rights abuses.

Uribe himself has been plagued with charges of ties to paramilitaries since early in his career. While governor of the state of Antioquia, Uribe administered a program that involved creating armed local militias. Paramilitary members joined those groups and used their weapons to threaten and attack civilians.

Uribe claims that the paramilitaries have been disarmed and demobilized through a truce his government negotiated, giving amnesty to paramilitary leaders who confessed their crimes and allowing them to keep a large portion of the money and land they acquired through murder and cocaine trafficking.

But according to a recent report from Amnesty International: "Paramilitarism has not been dismantled, it has simply been 're-engineered.' Many demobilized combatants are being encouraged to join 'civilian informer networks,' to provide military intelligence to the security forces, and to become 'civic guards.' Evidence suggests that many paramilitary structures remain virtually intact and that paramilitaries continue to kill. Amnesty International continues to document human rights violations committed by paramilitary groups, sometimes operating under new names, and often in collusion with the security forces."

U.S. companies have been implicated in the growing scandal as well. Chiquita recently pled guilty in federal court to paying millions to the largest paramilitary group, which the U.S. State Department had officially designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization. The families of murdered union organizers have also brought civil cases against Drummond Coal and Coca-Cola in U.S. courts, charging the companies with collusion with the groups that murdered their young ones. And human-rights activists have long raised questions about close ties between Occidental Petroleum, the Eighteenth Brigade of the Colombian Army, and the paramilitary groups that have terrorized indigenous communities in the Colombian state of Arauca.

With violence, repression and corruption so rampant in Colombia, it's hard to see how any labor rights provisions in a trade agreement with the Colombian government could be worth the paper they are written on. American workers will certainly be hurt by a treaty that makes it easy for U.S. companies to set up shop in a country where workers who speak out for their rights risk being killed. Colombian union organizers have begged Congress not to award their country with preferential trade treatment until workers' rights are protected.

Source: *Times-Record*, Brunswick, ME,  
06/15/2007

## CHIAPAS: Memorable Meeting with Zapatistas

By Carolina Dutton, MITF

Ed. Note: MITF sponsored a delegation to Chiapas in mid-July 2007. The author and members of SIPAZ (Service International for Peace) helped organize the itinerary.

While in Chiapas, in late July some of the MITF delegation members attended the “Second *Encuentro* (gathering) between the Zapatistas and the Peoples of the World” in the Zapatista Caracole (autonomous area gathering place), “Windmill of our Words,” Morelia. It was a wonderful, almost mythical experience with Zapatista women and men from three regions of Chiapas in their masks appearing single-file out of the mist to share their achievements and difficulties with us. One night Marcos read a story to the kids who were on stage with him, about a pebble that went to an autonomous school. He is a great storyteller with such a gentle voice. We were excited enough about being there that we were willing to put up with the bathrooms which were quite unpleasant.

From 7:00 am into the afternoon the visiting members of the *Via Campesina* delegation from different parts of the world shared stories with the Zapatistas. This seemed to me to be a very important meeting between peasant farmers from around the world. An indigenous farmer from the mountains of Thailand told us that the Thai government has declared their land a national forest and is displacing them with hydroelectric dams, threats and violent evictions. The Mexican government is doing the same thing in the Montes Azules preserve of Chiapas. Thai government schools “educate” children against their traditional way of life and of working the land. These people of Northern Thailand practice their own traditional for-

est management and their movement is independent of political parties.

A *campesino* leader from Indonesia said he felt at home in the mountains of Morelia, which reminded him of his village where people get up before dawn to start the wood cooking fires before going to work in the fields. He spoke of the resistance of farmers and the land they have recuperated from African palm production. Indonesian farmers cannot compete with the low prices of imported rice and have to migrate from their villages to the city.



Three Zapatista women participate in the international meetings in Morelia, Chiapas in July.

Photo: Gwen Meyer

An Indian brother testified to massive evictions of farmers from the best traditional agricultural lands in the Punjab to create special economic zones. There is civil disobedience or direct action (inspired by Ghandi) by farmers somewhere in India everyday. In 2006, members of the 300 million strong farmers movement burned Monsanto’s experimental GMO rice farm. India now has two indigenous autonomous states.

A woman leader from the MST (Landless Peasants Movement) in Brazil told of their land occupations, reforestation efforts, creation of their own health and education systems and the struggle for equal participation of women. Sharing with the

Zapatistas for over ten years, MST representatives first came to Chiapas in 1996.

I was so impressed with the Zapatista’s experiments in autonomous education. In the region of the Caracole of Morelia there are now secondary schools in each of the seven municipalities. We walked to the newly constructed school near Morelia and it is beautiful. Very sweet and industrious Zapatista students from the school in Moises Gandi set up a restaurant at the *encuentro* to raise funds for their school. We made sure to eat there often. One night, education promoters gave

a theater performance comparing a “bad government” school where girls are ridiculed and punished, to an autonomous school where the challenging of gender roles is part of the curriculum.

The *encuentro* was a profound experience of immersion in the misty mountains of Chiapas in resistance; we shared food, intense sun, fog, rain, stinky bathrooms, hope and dreams, dancing, storytelling, theater, humor, and litanies of the accomplishments and difficulties of autonomy, and lots of cups of autonomous coffee. As a fellow Zapatista supporter from California said, these *encuentros* are like a rite of pas-

sage, an initiation or a periodic re-initiation into *Zapatismo*. Few people left this gathering unchanged, and we all left with a deep respect for the Zapatista’s organization and experiment in autonomy.



## VENEZUELA: Hugo Chavez versus RCTV

By Bart Jones, *Newsday* journalist

Ed. Note: *Author spent eight years in Venezuela, as an AP reporter. His new book is "The Hugo Chavez story: From Mud Hut to Perpetual Revolution"*

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez's refusal to renew the license of Radio Caracas Television might seem to justify fears that Chavez is crushing free speech and eliminating any voices critical of him.

Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the Committee to Protect Journalists and members of the European Parliament, the U.S. Senate and even Chile's Congress have denounced the closure of RCTV, Venezuela's oldest private television network. Chavez's detractors got more ammunition Tuesday when the president included another opposition network, Globovision, among the "enemies of the homeland."

But the case of RCTV — like most things involving Chavez — has been caught up in a web of misinformation. While one side of the story is getting headlines around the world, the other is barely heard.

The demise of RCTV is indeed a sad event in some ways for Venezuelans. Founded in 1953, it was an institution in the country, having produced the long-running political satire program "Radio Rochela" and the blisteringly realistic nighttime soap opera "Por Estas Calles." It was RCTV that broadcast the first live-from-satellite images in Venezuela when it showed Neil Armstrong walking on the moon in 1969.

But after Chavez was elected president in 1998, RCTV shifted to another endeavor: ousting a democratically elected leader from office. Controlled by members of the country's fabulously wealthy oligarchy including RCTV chief Marcel Granier, it saw Chavez and his "Bolivarian Revolution" on behalf of Venezuela's majority poor as a threat.

RCTV's most infamous effort to topple Chavez came during the April 11, 2002 coup attempt against him. For two days before the putsch, RCTV preempted regular programming and ran wall-to-wall coverage of a general strike aimed at oust-

ing Chavez. A stream of commentators spewed nonstop vitriolic attacks against him — while permitting no response from the government.

Then RCTV ran nonstop ads encouraging people to attend a march on April 11 aimed at toppling Chavez and broadcast blanket coverage of the event. When the march ended in violence, RCTV and Globovision ran manipulated video blaming Chavez supporters for scores of deaths and injuries.

After military rebels overthrew Chavez and he disappeared from public view for two days, RCTV's biased coverage edged fully into sedition. Thousands of Chavez supporters took to the streets to demand his return, but none of that appeared on RCTV or other television stations. RCTV News Director Andres Izarra later testified at National Assembly hearings on the coup attempt, that he received an order from superiors at the station: "Zero pro-Chavez, nothing related to Chavez or his supporters.... The idea was to create a climate of transition and to start to promote the dawn of a new country." While the streets of Caracas burned with rage, RCTV ran cartoons, soap operas and old movies such as "Pretty Woman." On April

13, 2002, Granier and other media moguls met in the Miraflores palace to pledge support to the country's coup-installed dictator, Pedro Carmona, who had eliminated the Supreme Court, the National Assembly and the Constitution.

Would a network that aided and abetted a coup against the government be allowed to operate in the United States? The U.S. government probably would have shut down RCTV within five minutes after a failed coup attempt — and thrown its owners in jail. Chavez's government allowed it to continue operating for five years, and then declined to renew its 20-year license to use the public airwaves. It can still broadcast on cable or via satellite dish.

Granier and others should not be seen as free-speech martyrs. Radio, TV and newspapers remain uncensored, unfettered and unthreatened by the government. Most Venezuelan media are still controlled by the old oligarchy and are staunchly anti-Chavez. If Granier had not decided to try to oust the country's president, Venezuelans might still be able to look forward to more broadcasts of "Radio Rochela."

Source: *Los Angeles Times*, May 30, 2007

## NEWSBRIEFS

### HAITI: Drug Raid?

In mid-July 2007 Haitian police and the US Drug Enforcement Administration targeted Guy Philippe in a raid. Philippe was one of the leaders of a 2004 coup that toppled Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide — a coup probably orchestrated by the US. Philippe avoided capture and is now in hiding; he has since been heard on Haitian radio claiming his attempted arrest was for political reasons.

Between his alleged drug affiliations and human rights abuses, Philippe has few friends in the government of current Haitian President Rene Preval or in the US and according to Haiti Information Project's Kevin Pina, there may be another reason for the attempted arrest.

According to Pina, on May 27, after the arrest of another coup participant, Philippe went on Haitian radio and "began to name names of business and political leaders who backed the paramilitary insurgency against Aristide's government by providing arms, ammunition and logistical support. High on Philippe's list was Andy Apaid, the leader of the civil society organization called the Group 184."

In July 2004, Salon.com reported that Group 184, along with a group called the Democratic Convergence, was supported by the International Republican Institute, dominated by Bush loyalists and funded by the National Endowment for Democracy, the USAID and conservative groups.

Source: *Monterey Country Herald*, July 26, 2007

## **BOLIVIA: Withdraws from World Bank Dispute Body**

In June 2007, Bolivia joined Venezuela and Nicaragua in withdrawing from the World Bank's arbitration body, the International Center for the Settlement of Investment Disputes. The ICSID is the place where foreign investors who have a dispute with any government can submit their case to binding arbitration. Bechtel used the ICSID to sue Bolivia for \$25 million when citizens kicked its water company out of Cochabamba.

Bolivia's position is that the ICSID is biased since it is part of the World Bank. The government argues that there are other conflicts of interest in having the World Bank's arbitration panel rule on disputes, citing the recent French water giant Suez's dispute with Bolivia when, in fact, the World Bank was a shareholder in the Suez privatized water company in La Paz. Finally, Bolivia says the ICSID's ruling process lacks transparency, checks and balances, or the openness of a real judicial system. And the World Bank's influence in selecting arbitrators makes it anything but neutral. Analysts say Bolivia has a good case for withdrawal.

Other Latin American countries have taken other routes for leaving the World Bank and IMF behind. Ecuador expelled the World Bank's representative from the country, charging him with bribery when President Correa was the Finance Minister in the previous administration. Argentina engaged in the largest default to the IMF in history and has recovered with an economic growth of 8.6% annually for the past five years. Venezuela, in withdrawing from both the World Bank and the IMF is opening the Bank of the South (America) with the expectation of taking the place of both lending institutions.

Source: *Mark Weisbrot, Center for Economic and Policy Research, June 14, 2007.*

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## **BRAZIL: Nun's Killers Sentenced**

On May 14 a judge in the Amazon state of Para sentenced a rancher, Bastos de Moura, to 30 years in prison for ordering the killing of American nun and rain

forest activist, 73 year old Dorothy Stang, on February 12, 2007. The 30-year sentence, hailed as "historic" by human rights activists, is the maximum in Brazil, which does not have a death penalty. Stang, a naturalized Brazilian originally from Dayton, Ohio, had been organizing poor settlers around the jungle region of Anapu for the last 23 years.

In 2005, two ranch hands were found guilty of shooting Stang and sentenced to 27 and 17 years in prison, respectively. Another rancher was sentenced to 27 years for hiring the two killers. A third rancher and landowner, also accused of masterminding the murder, was released on bail pending trial.

Jose Pedro Stédila, leader of the landless workers Movement (MST) pointed out that "in Brazil there is a tradition of impunity for those in power and for the murderers of workers and land reform activists." He also said, "We hope this will serve as an example for other landowners and encourage other judges to speed up the prosecutions in more than 700 cases of rural murders that have gone unpunished, including the massacre of 19 MST members who were killed in Carajas in April 1996."

Source: *IPS Analysis, May 16, 2007.*

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## **COSTA RICA: No More Police to the SOA**

On May 16, Father Roy Bourgeois and Lisa Sullivan of School of the Americas Watch met with Costa Rica's president and former recipient of the Nobel Peace prize, Oscar Arias.

After a surprisingly emotional meeting and a request that Costa Rica withdraw its police from the SOA/WHINSEC, President Arias immediately said, "It is done." He spoke of the brutality that this school has leashed on El Salvador, and on the people of South America including Argentina, Chile and Bolivia. Costa Rica does not have an army but it has sent 2,558 personnel to the school over the years. Costa Rica joins Venezuela, Argentina and Uruguay in totally withdrawing its students from the school at Ft. Benning GA.

Source: *SOAWatch, May 17, 2007*

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## **CUBA; Revolutionary Hero Dead**

On June 18, Vilma Espín Guillois, a heroine of the Cuban revolution died in Havana after a long and painful illness.

Born in Santiago de Cuba on April 7, 1930 in a family that cultivated social values and moral principles, Vilma from a young age distinguished herself in political issues, actively participating in student demonstrations following Bastista's *coup d'etat* in 1952. She became a legendary guerrilla leader and fighter until the triumph of the revolution in 1959.

She will be most remembered for devoting her entire life to the struggle for women's rights, a battle that led her to found the Federation of Cuban Women and attend as many national and international conferences on women as were humanly possible. Before the revolution Cuban women used to work as domestic servants or in luxurious shops and bourgeois bars, selected for their good looks. Factories assigned them the simplest jobs, ones that were the most repetitive and worst paid. Today women in Cuba make up 66% of the technical and scientific workforce and hold the majority of post-graduate degrees.

Source: *Fidel Castro Ruiz, June 20, 2007*

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## **PARAGUAY: Bishop Leading in Presidential Race.**

Known as the bishop of the poor and strongly influenced by "Liberation Theology," Monsignor Fernando Lugo has entered the presidential race in Paraguay and is ahead of all other candidates in the polls. Lugo's candidacy has brought hope for social change and economic justice in Paraguay, which is gaining increased geo-political importance in the US because of its common borders and proximity to countries with left-of-center governments that are often critical of US foreign policy. If retired Bishop Lugo wins in April 2008, Paraguay will complete the sweep of progressive political change in the Southern Cone and will add to the rising wave of independent politics in Latin America.

Source: *The Global Labor Institute, Cornell University-ILR, June 8, 2007*

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*Marin Interfaith Task Force on the Americas  
Annual Fundraising Dinner Event on  
September 30, 2007.*

*This will be a chance to renew old friends and fellow  
activists and support the work of MITF*

Honored Guest Speaker:

**Roy Bourgeois**, Maryknoll priest and outspoken critic of US foreign policy in Latin America, is the founder of the School of the Americas Watch, the largest opposition to the torture and training of foreign military in the US. The SOA Watch opposes the School of the Americas (renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation) that trains hundreds of Latin America military. Over the past 18 years, Father Roy and a group of activists have built a significant force to close down the School. A record 22,000 protested outside of the School in November 2006 and in June a Congressional amendment to close the School lost by a mere six votes.

Meanwhile in the past two years Father Roy has traveled to Latin America to request that they not send any more troops to SOA/WHINSEC for training. Four countries have now promised not to send their military to the SOA/WHINSEC: Venezuela, Costa Rica, Argentina, and Uruguay!

Father Roy has received three international awards for his peace and justice work: The Aachen, Germany Peace Award in 2005; the Comin Human Rights Award in Barcelona in 2004; and the Pax Christi Teacher of Peace Award in 1997.

Please contact MITF to have an invitation mailed to you. 415-924-3227



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