

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

NewsNotes

*a bimonthly newsletter on information on
international peace and justice issues*

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Mexico: 200+ women killed in Ciudad Juarez

Erika Abigail Loera Varela (16) reportedly was last seen on December 20, 2002 on Avenida de la Raza in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. On January 8, 2003, Esmeralda Juárez (26) left her work at a stall in Carranza market in central Ciudad Juarez and has not been seen since. Esmeralda is a student at the same information technology academy in the city from which, between 2001 and 2002, three young women also went missing only to be later found murdered and sexually assaulted.

Since 1993, over 200 women have been killed in Juárez. Many of the victims were raped and mutilated. To date, no one has been held accountable for the crimes.

In 1998 the National Commission of Human Rights (Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos) issued a recommendation to the authorities requiring thorough and effective investigations to clarify the circumstances of the murders of women in Juárez, asking for all those responsible to be brought to justice, and for public officials who had failed in their duty to investigate these cases to also be investigated and punished. According to Amnesty International, however, the authorities have failed to comply.

Mexican authorities periodically have detained suspects in the murders. Although these detentions have been heralded by the authorities as the solution to the cases, they have failed to stop the killings and have been marred by irregularities and reports of abuse, undermining the confidence of the relatives of the victims and the community.

Amnesty International and many other Mexican and international organizations insist that the Mexican authorities, both at a state and a federal level, have an obligation to carry out thorough, impartial and prompt investigations into these patterns of violence against women, to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice, and to take appropriate measures to prevent similar cases from happening again. These measures must be transparent and effective if confidence in the judicial system is to be built and the pattern of murders ended. A pattern of such terrible

murders demands a fully integrated response from all relevant state and federal institutions to demonstrate that such crimes cannot and will not be tolerated.

Many of the women killed or “disappeared” in Ciudad Juárez were migrants, lived in marginalized communities, often with no support structure, and worked in maquiladoras. These cases highlight the link between economic globalization and violence against women. While globalization has created economic opportunities for women in some areas, increased poverty and the casualization of labor have led thousands of women to migrate in search of work, often in situations where they are vulnerable to abuse, exploitation and violence, and where they are denied access to effective protection by the criminal justice system.

Faith in action:

Write to the ambassador from Mexico, urging him to ensure that authorities conduct an immediate, thorough, transparent and impartial investigation into the matter. Insist that these women deserve justice, as do all the women living and working in and around Juárez – that Mexican officials, both at the state and federal level, have an obligation to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice, and to take appropriate measures to prevent similar cases from happening: His Excellency Juan Jose Bremer Martino, Embassy of Mexico, 1911 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006; tel: (202)728-1600; fax: (202)833-4320; Mexembusa@sre.gob.mx

Border Pilgrimage: A journey of hope and life along the U.S.–Mexico border San Diego/Tijuana to El Paso/Ciudad Juarez, October 27–November 2, 2003

Sponsored by the Border Working Group, the Border Pilgrimage will start on October 27, in both San Diego/Tijuana and Brownsville/Matamoros. Along the way people on both sides of the border will build community, ask for forgiveness and provide and receive hospitality. There will be stops including Calexico, Yuma and Tucson where celebratory events will take place, and others can join the journey to El Paso/Juarez. Towns and organizations along the border are invited to participate by hosting

events. (Contact borderpilgrimage@yahoo.com to add an event to the pilgrimage.)

For more information, contact: Border Pilgrimage, Maryknoll Border Team, 109 N. Oregon #302 El Paso, TX 79901; 915-543-6771; borderpilgrimage@yahoo.com. To download an education packet on the border, go to www.maryknoll.org/GLOBAL/global.htm and click on “Updates on on-going issues.”

Brazil: "Movement of Those Affected by Dams"

The United Nations has declared the year 2003 as the "Year of Fresh Waters." In Brazil, many groups struggle to preserve and protect the water; however, the building of dams has greatly affected the quality and accessibility of water. The following article about the "Movement of Those Affected by Dams" is from *Sejup* No. 485 (April 4, 2003) <http://www.oneworld.net/sejup/>

"The Movement of Those Affected by Dams," part of the International Rivers Network, helps local communities to support their rivers and to encourage equitable and sustainable river development projects. In the 1970s, Brazil initiated the construction of large hydroelectric dams in order to generate energy for industries. Vast areas of land were expropriated. [Yet] today, more than 20 million Brazilians do not have electricity; 60 percent of these families are in rural areas. In addition, one million people have been forced off their lands due to dam constructions. Three and a half million hectares of land have been flooded. Those affected by dams include small farmers, indigenous peoples, river-dwelling populations, quilombo (former slave colonies) communities, and urban dwellers. Many of these people lost their cultural roots because of their expulsion from the land but have now organized to struggle for resettlement on new land as well as indemnity. Their goal is to help current groups affected by dam construction remain on their lands and to preserve nature with an energy policy that takes human and environmental needs into consideration.

Many studies conclude that dams do not attain their promised objectives — they produce less energy, generate less water, and irrigate fewer areas than promised. They normally are more expensive and take a longer amount of time to construct than is projected. Along with this, dams have not contributed to equitable or sustainable development; in contrast, they have increased misery and social inequality among the peoples affected by their construction. The construction of dams in Brazil has met the economic and political interests of dominant and elite national and international groups as well as the interests of electric companies and dam-construction industries. There are many viable alternatives to dams that have fewer social and environmental costs and that lead to the better administration of water resources.

A recent letter from the Campaign entitled "Waters without Dams in the Amazon Basin" used the examples of the Tucuruí and Lageado dams to illustrate some of the negative effects of dam projects, including:



- Disappearance of fish species (surubins, dourada, jaú etc), which are the basis for the diet of local populations, given the great quantity of biomass rotting in the water and the appearance of aquatic plants, which obstruct creeks; damming of rivers with the resultant impacts on the reproductive cycle of fish;
 - Expulsion of affected populations from their homes and lands, without guarantees of a minimal infrastructure needed for their dignified survival;
 - Loss of lands which bring life, employment, and cultural identity for traditional populations (indigenous peoples, riverbank dwellers, babaçu palm nut gatherers, etc.)
 - Loss of biodiversity, of the productive capacity of farms downstream and proliferation of mosquitoes in affected areas and in the region;
 - Swelling of slums in nearby cities and an increase in urban violence and unemployment;
 - Climate impacts, especially regarding rainfall and temperature;

Even after having experienced all these problems, the letter says, the same errors are being committed. The Environmental Impact Assessments often do not take the local population into account and are based upon fragmented studies which fail to consider the cumulative impacts of multiple dams in the basin.

Current struggles among Brazilian peoples negatively affected by dam construction include that at Uhe Itaparica, involving 6,050 families in Barra do Tarrachil, Pedra Branca and at Uhe Ita, involving approximately 400 families in Rio Grande do Sul, Paraná, Santa Catarina.

The Movement of Those Affected by Dams has had some success in resettling people and halting the construction of new dams. However, the struggle to resettle populations or to stop the construction continues in many states including São Paulo, Mato Grosso do Sul, Goiás Tocantins, Amazonia, and Pará.

Faith in action:

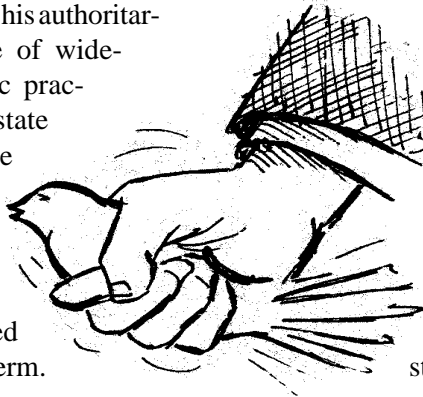
Send a letter that expresses your concern about the energy generation plans of the Advance Brazil program of the federal government. Letters may be sent to:

His Excellency President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva
 Her Excellency Minister of Mines and Energy Dilma Rousseff
 Her Excellency Environment Minister Marina Silva
 Address: Brasilia, D.F. Brasil 70.084-970

Peru: Extradite Fujimori

The Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have joined Peru's Coordinadora Nacional de Derechos Humanos, an umbrella group of over 60 of Peru's key human rights groups, in launching an international campaign: "Fujimori Extraditable." The campaign aims to educate the international community, gain the support of governments around the world, and encourage the Japanese government to extradite former President Fujimori. The timing of the launch corresponds with the anniversary of former Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori's April 1992 "self-coup."

Fujimori fled to Japan in 2000 after his authoritarian regime collapsed under evidence of widespread corruption and anti-democratic practices. During his time as Peru's head of state he carried out a "self-coup" in which he closed the congress and the courts, and a shadowy death squad known as the Colina Group carried out massacres, disappearances, and executions. In 2000, the Fujimori regime conducted fraudulent elections for an illegal third term.



Fujimori has been indicted in Peruvian courts on charges of homicide and forced disappearance related to Peru's most notorious massacres – Barrios Altos and La Cantuta. He is also charged with "misuse" of \$15 million of public funds and two additional corruption and human rights

charges are in the pipeline. Although the Peruvian government formally requested Fujimori's extradition from Japan, the Japanese government has stated its unwillingness to extradite Fujimori, claiming that he is a Japanese citizen.

The campaign, Fujimori Extraditable, seeks to pressure the Japanese government to return Fujimori to Peru in order to stand trial for human rights violations and corruption. It also seeks to educate the Japanese public and international public opinion about the Fujimori case. The campaign is a civil society effort amongst human rights and citizen groups in Peru, the United States, and Japan. In Peru, the Coordinadora Nacional de Derechos Humanos is coordinating the effort.

Faith in action:

There are several ways in which individuals and organizations can be part of the campaign. Amnesty International is collecting signatures on a letter to Japan's Prime Minister and so far 13,000 individuals have signed on. To sign-on, go to <http://www.amnistia.org.pe/firmas/enindex.php>. U.S. groups are also encouraged to press the U.S. government to support international efforts to extradite Fujimori. Letters can be sent to Secretary of State Colin Powell at U.S. Department of State; 7th Floor; 2201 C Street, N.W.; Washington, D.C. 20520.

For more information on the campaign and how to join, please visit the WOLA website: www.wola.org/andes/Peru/fujimori_2.htm as well as the official Fujimori Extraditable campaign website: www.fujimoriextraditable.com.pe.

Venezuela: Ongoing saga

In the past year President Hugo Chavez survived two major attacks: a coup attempt in April 2002 and a prolonged general strike (called a "lockout" by some people) from December 12, 2002 to February 3, 2003. A recent article published by the Council on Hemispheric Affairs (COHA) attributes the ability of the elected government to survive to the Venezuelans' "residual high regard for nonviolent solutions" and "the population's almost visceral respect for nonviolent solutions to political differences." The Venezuelan non-governmental organization Program of Education-Action in Human Rights (PROVEA) notes that Chavez all along had much more support than the opposition was willing to recognize – "remarkably high ratings" for any president in his fourth year in office.

Now the opposition is splintered and its leaders scattered around the Americas. Chavez, according to Maryknoll lay missionary Lisa Rodriguez, appears to be stronger than ever and oil production is almost back to normal, but the economy is in shambles.

Antonio J. Gonzalez Plessman of PROVEA, in an article published by the Washington Office on Latin America, reflects on the reasons why the strike lasted so long and why it failed to overthrow Chavez:

"Amongst the factors which help to explain the government's successful resistance are: a) important hard currency reserves which had accumulated in the Macroeconomic Stabilization Fund and in international reserves, b) lack of intervention on the part of the armed forces, c) international pressure against any outcome which could be interpreted as unconstitutional, and d) the support of an important proportion of the population...."

"The strike undoubtedly strengthened President Chávez's position but by no means enough to enable him to end the conflict. The opposition did not have enough strength to overthrow Chávez in the short run, but it was able to prolong the crisis and oblige the government to dedicate the greater part of its energies to the task of simply remaining in power.

"Responding to the demands of its supporters, the government has taken advantage of what it considers a victory to confront the opposition. Chávez is once again accentuating his aggressive style and has firmly stated his preference for the August referendum."

During the conflict, Chavez repeatedly reminded the opposition that the new constitution provides them with the possibility of ousting an elected official mid way through his term (through the "referendum revocatorio") and that they should use this solution rather than resort to a coup or chaos. Now that the opposition has lost its bid for ridding themselves of Chavez outside of the constitution, they hope to use this mechanism. The confusion comes from whose responsibility it is to take this on. According to the constitution, a certain number of signatures are needed to bring to the ballot this referendum (this cannot happen until Chavez completes half his term - August 19). Signatures could be collected at any time. The government claims it is the responsibility of those who want to oust the president to organize and collect the signatures; the opposition thinks otherwise - that the government should do the work. That is why there is an impasse now.

Meanwhile, danger is lurking at the Venezuelan/Colombian border.

For additional information, contact the Washington Office on Latin America, 1630 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009; tel: (202)797-2171; fax: (202)797-2172; email: wola@wola.org; web: www.wola.org.



Nicaragua: Civil society demands action

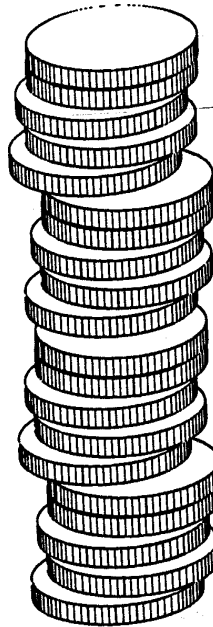
After more than 10 years of negotiations and various efforts, including in the Highly Indebted Poor Country framework, to reduce the external debt burden that plagued Nicaragua, by the end of 2002 the country still carried a foreign debt balance of US\$6.563 billion, 2.3 times the gross domestic product for that year. Now, according to civil society organizations, Nicaragua is facing an onerous and heavy burden due to the internal debt. At the end of 2002, Nicaraguan taxpayers owed domestic creditors a total of US\$4.122 billion, of which US\$1.470 billion is owed to the private sector and the remaining US\$2.652 billion to the public sector, principally to the Central Bank of Nicaragua (CBN).

This internal debt, which represents 1.6 times the GDP for 2002, has a number of illicit sources, such as the unjust confiscations of property in the 1980s (although there were also just confiscations), the fraudulent bank failures in the 1990s, and the arbitrary management of auctions of bonds issued by the government during the last administration.

These civil society organizations are concerned that part of the interim relief from the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative will be diverted for the payment of the internal debt. In accord with the Expanded HIPC Initiative redesigned by the G-7 in Cologne, Germany in June 1999, the interim external debt relief for highly indebted poor countries should be exclusively directed to finance poverty reduction projects. The reduction of the foreign debt and the reduction of poverty in poor countries are conditioned on the transparent use of the resources of the national budget and a growing participation of civil society in the solution of the economic and social problems in these countries.

In light of all of the above, making an important claim on their right to participate in decisions that will affect their lives and their communities, these groups have presented the following recommendations:

Nicaragua should prepare a strategy for the “sovereign exchange” of the domestic debt within the National Council for Economic and Social Planning (CONPES). This exchange implies reducing the payment of interest and deferring the payment of principal facing Nicaragua, given the insufficient resources in the National Treasury. The “sovereign exchange” of the domestic debt is nothing more than replacing the current certificates, which are earning high interest rates, with new bonds that have interest rates that are lower, but that are guaranteed, in principle, by tax collection. The sovereign exchange of the domestic debt would be “voluntary” in that the government would not



formally declare the end of payments on the domestic debt so that creditors would not carry out judicial action, alleging that there are sufficient reserves in the CBN.

In order to reduce spending by the governmental apparatus and to free up tax resources, first for the fight against poverty through investments, and secondly, to pay a “restructured” domestic debt, it is important to:

Prepare and approve, in an expedited fashion, a law to regulate salaries and pensions for retirement and resignation in the public sector (branches of government, autonomous financial and non-financial entities, and government enterprises) which will take effect beginning with the next budget exercise, and which will be incorporated into the Civil Service Law.

Regulate the use of the fleet of vehicles and fuel in the public sector (branches of government, autonomous financial and non-financial entities, and government enterprises), prohibiting the assignment of vehicles, except for the posts of Minister, Vice Minister, Secretary General and the Magistrates.

Regulate the use of mobile telephones, credit cards, trips and official missions outside the country in the public sector (branches of government, autonomous financial and non-financial entities, and government enterprises).

Due to the G-7’s condition to establish greater transparency in the management of public resources, the internal relief from payment of the foreign debt should be clearly identified in the budget in the section for income as grants from the donor community, and in the expenses section as projects for poverty reduction.

Request that governmental authorities establish an adequate mechanism for assuring the transparent use of the tax resources freed up from paying the foreign debt in

order to avoid the use of these resources for other purposes. An exclusive account of the National Treasury should be established in the Central Bank of Nicaragua which would be used for all the resources freed up from the payment of the foreign public debt, including the transfers which the Central Bank of Nicaragua would have to make to the Central Government under this budget category.

Request that the main granters of the interim relief on payment of the foreign debt, Germany, Spain, France and Italy, evaluate the assignment and use of their resources

donated for this relief, both in budget preparation and implementation, as well as in the implementation of the projects in the prioritized areas of the poverty reduction strategy.

The effectiveness of any debt cancellation programs will depend on the accountability of government decision-makers to the citizens of the country, especially the most impoverished communities. Deeper debt relief is desperately needed, but it also must be transparently managed.

Puerto Rico: Calling the U.S. Navy to task

The U.S. Navy says it has carried out its last bombing exercises on the Puerto Rican island of Vieques and is moving training operations to Florida and elsewhere in the United States. Local protesters say the move is a victory for their campaign against the live-ammunition exercises which first began in 1947, but the Navy said the decision was not influenced by public pressure.

The issue made headlines in 1999 after a stray bomb killed a civilian guard. Since then, more than 1,000 protesters have been arrested for trespassing on Navy land. On May 1, the Navy turned the eastern third of the island over to the U.S. Department of the Interior; it will become a wildlife reserve.

Navy Secretary Gordon England certified to Congress and President Bush that alternative methods and sites in Florida and North Carolina will be made available to replace the bombing range in Vieques.

Residents claim that the Navy has broken promises for economic development and other assistance in the past. They are determined to press the federal government to clean up the site. Recent revelations that a Navy destroyer sunk about 900 feet off the Vieques shore was used as a target ship for nuclear tests in the Pacific in 1958 and that chemical weapons simulants were tested on the island in the 1960s have helped their case. The Navy has also admitted to firing illegally 263 rounds of Uranium 238 (depleted uranium or DU) on Vieques. DU, with a half-life of 4,500 million years, is easily ingested into the lungs when dispersed in the air.

The Puerto Rico Health Department has revealed that cancer rates in Vieques - already 27 percent higher than the rest of Puerto Rico in the late 1980s - continued to rise in the 1990s. Studies show high levels of cadmium, lead and other contaminants in the island's soil and vegetation and in residents' hair samples.

It is essential that next steps in Vieques:

- involve local people in developing both interim and comprehensive land use plans for Vieques;
- employ local people in the restoration and conservation of the cultural and natural resources in the areas under discussion;
- hold the Navy accountable for a full and comprehensive clean-up of explosives and contamination in eastern Vieques, as well as for restoration of damaged ecology; and
- prohibit all military activities in eastern Vieques, except those absolutely required for contractors to conduct environmental remediation and restoration.

For additional information: www.viequeslibre.org, www.viequesvive.net, www.afsc.org/lac/puertorico.htm and www.forusa.org/Programs/puertorico/default.html

Faith in action:

Write to the Secretaries of the Navy and Interior, expressing satisfaction that the U.S. Navy is ending its operations on the island of Vieques and insisting that the U.S. government fully resolve the environmental and health crisis left on the island in the military's wake.

Hansford T. Johnson, Acting Secretary of the Navy, 1000 Navy Pentagon, Washington, D.C. 20350-1000; Gale A. Norton, Secretary of the Interior, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1849 C Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20240