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Exposing fault lines

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Earthquake reveals unpreparedness, irresponsibility and chaos beneath Chile's façade of development.

In soccer, a glimmer of hope

Haiti's national U-17 women's soccer team makes emotional appearance at regional championship.

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Election cycle brought mixed results this year.

LATIN AMERICA

Andrés Gaudin

2009 proves mixed bag for region

Some historic gains for the left also met with conservatives' advances this year.

This is not the election cycle of five years ago, when a wave of left-leaning governments swept Latin America. Despite a series of victories for progressive governments this year, it was also met with a return to conservatism and dashed hopes for deep and lasting political reform.

The year saw historic victories for the left, most notably in El Salvador, where Mauricio Funes, from the former guerrilla Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, won the June 1 presidential election, unseating the conservative Arena party from two decades of rule.

Re-election victories of left-leaning Presidents Rafael Correa in Ecuador and Bolivia's Evo Morales were followed by Uruguay's election of José Alberto Mujica, a former guerrilla, whose victory ratifies support for the left in the South American nation that was ruled by conservative governments for decades.

But progressive candidates are not synonymous with immediate progressive changes. In October, despite the fact that Mujica topped

“If the United States wanted to do away with the coup organizers, they would do so in five seconds.”

— Manuel Zelaya

the first-round of voting, Uruguayans rejected in a referendum a proposal to throw out amnesty laws that shielded members of the 1976-85 dictatorship from facing charges in human rights crimes.

Even in the United States, three months after President Barack Obama took office on Jan. 20, he lifted a ban on Cuban-Americans traveling to Cuba or sending money to the island, but he fell short of lifting the more than four-decade embargo on the country.

A swing back to the right?

Some electoral victories promised a swing back to the right.

In May, Panamanians elected business magnate Ricardo Martinelli as president. In Chile on Dec. 13, the top vote-getter in the first round was billionaire tycoon Sebastián Piñera, whom outgoing President Michelle Bachelet defeated four years ago. Piñera faces former President Eduardo Frei in a runoff vote on Jan. 17, but his victory signaled an end to the fractured Concertación Democrática coalition of Bachelet.

Right-wing politicians came out on top in midterm elections in two major races. The Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI, whose more than 70 years of continuous rule in Mexico was broken in 2000, won legislative elections, defeating the party of President Felipe Calderón, of the National Action Party, another right-wing party.

Midterm elections in Argentina in June showed signs that politics were moving back toward the right, after President Cristina Fernández, whose term ends in 2011, lost control of Congress.

Tensions rise

The June 28 ouster of Honduran President Manuel Zelaya was a shock to the region, and even following the Nov. 29 presidential election, which was held as Zelaya was holed up in the Brazilian Embassy in Tegucigalpa, Latin America remains divided on whether to recognize the vote. President-elect Porfirio Lobo takes office on Jan. 27.

When he took office nearly a year ago, Obama said he wanted to improve relations with Latin America, which had hit one of their lowest points during the 2001-2009 government of ex-President George W. Bush.

The United States, along with Panama and Costa Rica, were some of the first presidents to recognize the contested Nov. 29 elections, which countries that rejected Lobo's victory and the vote because Zelaya had not been reinstated – including the entire Mercosur trade bloc – say it is validating the coup.

“If the United States wanted to do away with the coup organizers, they would do so in five seconds,” Zelaya had said in July.

Tensions ran high in the Andes this year with the announcement that Colombia, Latin

America's top recipient of military aid, had agreed to let the US military perform counter-drug surveillance from seven military bases, after a 10-year contract for the Manta air base on the Pacific coast of Ecuador expired this year. Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa refused to renew the agreement to let the US military run surveillance flights from the base. His ally, Venezuela's President Hugo Chávez, whose country neighbors Colombia, attacked the idea, saying it will be used against targets outside of Colombia. The calls against the base

were echoed by the governments around South America.

In early November, the United States also began construction of four naval bases for counter-drug surveillance on the Pacific coast of Panama. Panamanian Deputy Government Minister Alejandro Garuz said that while the bases will be Panamanian, US military will operate there, again showing that while Obama began the year with big promises, US political interference in Latin American affairs has continued. □

LATIN AMERICA

Lucien Chauvin in Lima

Slow recovery ahead

Unemployment may hamper economic growth.

The impact of the international financial crisis on Latin America is expected to subside in 2010, but other factors – economic, political and climate-related – could put the brakes on the recovery.

The financial crisis, while not as severe as in other developing regions, such as Eastern Europe, hit Latin America and the Caribbean hard. The UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, or ECLAC, reported in early January that regional gross domestic product shrunk by 1.8 percent in 2009 after nearly a decade of uninterrupted growth.

Mexico, the region's nation with the greatest economic dependence on the United States, received the biggest blow of the 20 countries ECLAC evaluated. Its economy contracted 6.7 percent last year. Bolivia, with arguably the fewest economic ties to the United States, registered the highest growth, 3.5 percent. Peru, which is frequently held up as an example of crisis management by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, went from 9.8 percent growth in 2008 to a forecast 1 percent economic contraction last year.

The biggest drag on growth resulted from crash-

ing exports, sparked principally by a drop in raw materials. Venezuela, for example, witnessed a 42-percent decline in exports in 2009, because of the massive fluctuations in oil prices. Ecuador, another oil-based economy, saw exports drop 30 percent. Foreign direct investment in the region dropped by 37 percent.

These trends led to a one-point increase in unemployment in the region, to 8.3 percent, and an increase in poverty rates. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that an additional 3 million people fell into extreme poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2009, bringing the total to 71 million. Another 110 million Latin Americans are classified as poor.

The one positive macroeconomic trend was in the area of consumer prices, which dropped considerably by 4.5 percent last year from 8.3 percent in the region in 2008. In Peru, for example, inflation in 2009 totaled 0.3 percent, down from a 12-year high of 6.6 percent the previous year.

International organizations, such as ECLAC, and financial institutions are forecasting low inflation, higher exports and GDP recuperation for 2010. ECLAC puts regional growth at 4.1 percent, with three countries, Brazil, Uruguay and Peru topping that. Brazil is expected to lead the recuperation with 5.5-percent growth.

“For 2010, better growth expectations and the higher prices of some commodity exports from the region will boost fiscal income in the region, improving the fiscal balance,” states ECLAC in a preliminary report on the region published in early January.

No guaranteed recovery

Economists, nevertheless, say that recuperation is not a given, pointing to a series of factors, such as unemployment, that could temper growth. There is concern that poverty and unemployment rates may not follow the growth trend.

Germán Alarco, chief researcher at Catholic University's business program in



More than 180 million Latin Americans live in poverty.

WILLIAM GHECO

Peru, said many countries in the region are banking on a return to higher prices for natural resources again. He said this could be a mistake.

“The concentration on just natural resources creates the risk of Dutch disease, with manufacturing dropping off because of the income generated by mineral production and exports. We should not discourage investment in extractive industries, but they should not be the only focus,” he said.

Dutch disease is generally associated with discovery and exploitation of natural resources that result in a large inflow of capital into a country. The term was coined to explain the impact of income from hydrocarbons on the economy of the Netherlands several decades ago. Venezuela is an extreme version in the region, choosing to import nearly all its food, medicines and other goods with its oil revenue.

Alarco said one of the main problems in a country like Peru is that raw material projects do not create jobs. A \$3-billion copper project would generate about 2,000 direct jobs and may be upward to 10,000 indirect jobs, but the economy needs to create 300,000 jobs annually to absorb the new people entering the workforce. It would need to add dozens of multi-billion projects annually.

Recuperation from the crisis will coincide with a new round of elections in the region. The swing of the electoral pendulum could depend on how governments have managed the crisis. Much of the attention will be on Brazil, where President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva remains immensely popular and is credited with guiding the country through the crisis, but right now does not appear capable of transferring his personal support to his party. A similar situation is seen in Chile, where outgoing President Michelle Bachelet has 80-percent support, but her ruling coalition faces its most difficult election since 1990. The coalition candidate, former President Eduardo Frei, was polling in the mid-40-percent range with a week before the Jan. 17 run-off against the conservative candidate Sebastian Piñera, whom Bachelet defeated in 2005. Other to-watch countries are Mexico, which will hold gubernatorial elections, and Peru where voters will choose mayors and regional presidents in October as a prelude to the 2011 presidential elections. Peruvian President Alan García said in early January that the country needed to be ready for an “election crisis” caused by political noise.

Elections will also be closely watched in Venezuela, where President Hugo Chávez could face the electoral battle of his career. Venezuela was not only hurt by the financial crisis and precipitous drop in oil prices, but has had to contend with an energy crisis caused by lack of rain. Nearly three-quarters of Venezuela’s energy is produced by one hydroelectric complex. Inflation, shortages of some basic goods and blackouts are not a recipe for electoral success.

An increase in oil prices could help Chávez, but the government does not want to sit back and wait. He made the surprise announcement Jan. 8 to devalue the currency by nearly 50 percent to help stimulate growth. ECLAC forecasts Venezuela to grow by 2 percent in 2010, far below the rates it achieved through most of the second half of the decade.

The state of the Venezuelan economy also reverberates through the countries that form the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas, or ALBA, an integration project spearheaded by Chávez as a response to U.S.-led regional integration based solely on trade. Venezuela was the key proponent of the regional ALBA Bank and regional currency, known as the sucre, and the major financial contributor to ALBA programs supporting agricultural, manufacturing and social programs in the nine member nations. □

LATIN AMERICA/CARIBBEAN

Remittances recover

Families still heavily reliant on money from abroad.

Remittances to Latin American families are expected to stabilize this year after plunging 15 percent in 2009, according to a report by the Inter-American Development Bank.

Remittances totaled US\$58.8 billion last year in the wake of the economic crisis, down from \$69.2 billion in 2008, the bank said, marking the first drop in monies sent back to workers’ home countries since the bank began monitoring the flows in 2000.

The money continues to be an important portion of the income of poor countries in the region. In El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras and Nicaragua, remittances account for more than 10 percent of the gross domestic product. Families in these countries use the money to cover basic expenses, such as food, housing, education and health care.

The Bank said that annual average growth of remittances was 17 percent up to 2009, when employment levels dropped dramatically in the United States, Spain and Japan, where many of the emigrants moved in search of work. —*Latinamerica Press.*

LATIN AMERICA/CARIBBEAN Remittances (US\$ millions)

Country	2008	2009
Mexico	25,145	21,132
Brazil	7,200	4,746
Colombia	4,842	4,134
Guatemala	4,315	3,912
El Salvador	3,788	3,465
Dominican Rep.	3,111	2,790
Peru	2,960	2,665
Ecuador	2,822	2,495
Honduras	2,701	2,483
Jamaica	2,033	1,798
Haiti	1,870	1,641
Bolivia	1,097	1,023
Nicaragua	1,000	915
Argentina	955	853
Chile	880	756
Venezuela	832	733
Paraguay	700	691
Costa Rica	624	535
Guyana	415	356
Panama	325	291
Trinidad & Tobago	130	116
Uruguay	130	116
Suriname	120	103
Belize	110	100

Source: IADB

CHILE

Ramiro Escobar in Santiago

Transition over?

Right-winger's presidential win signals a democratic advance, but gray areas remain over social issues.

The election of right-wing billionaire businessman Sebastián Piñera as Chile's next president suggests that the country's two-decade old transition period has come to an end.

Chile returned to democracy in 1990 following the 17-year dictatorship of Gen. Augusto Pinochet.

Chile's transition has advanced but has also presented some dilemmas, mainly in the social sphere, where signs of inequality and unresolved issues of the dictatorship remain visible.

In some ways, the process had already begun winding down during the 2000-2006 government of Ricardo Lagos, who oversaw 58 constitutional reforms, including the reduction of presidential terms from six to four years with no immediate reelection, and the elimination of eight appointed — not elected — senators. The president was given the power to change military chiefs, which before was left to the National Security Council, now a

civilian advising body.

The dictatorship leaves its mark

But the current constitution was implemented in 1980, during Pinochet's government, and some supporters of ex-President Eduardo Frei, who governed from 1994-2000, and who failed as the candidate of the ruling Concertación Democrática in this year's election, proposed openly to change it.

For Tomás Mosciatti, director of the influential Bío Bío radio station, the transition is over because Pinochet is dead, and because Piñera's ministers have not participated in the dictatorship. But he says the outgoing Concertación government legitimized parts of the legal and political model Pinochet left behind that promotes a bipartisan system, in which smaller parties are marginalized.

Human rights in the lurch

When Piñera presented his Cabinet, he said that Chile has begun another transformation into a developed country without poverty, in which 2 million of the 16 million Chileans live today.

But the gap between rich and poor remains one of the highest in the region. Some political analysts, like Eugenio Tironi, say that the strong business presence in his Cabinet shows Piñera may not be focused on closing that gap.

Piñera's position on human rights is foggy as well. He met with retired military officers during his campaign and promised to speed up court cases against those officers facing human rights charges stemming from the dictatorship. □

CHILE

Rocío Alorda in Santiago

Exposing fault lines

Earthquake reveals unpreparedness, irresponsibility and chaos beneath Chile's façade of development.

The devastating 8.8-magnitude earthquake that struck Chile before dawn on Feb. 27, has exposed sub-par preparedness and regulations that could have minimized the damage in one of the region's most seismically-active countries.

In less than three minutes, much of infrastructure and housing that Chile build over the past three decades, a reflection of its celebrated development, was destroyed. The earth-

quake, aftershocks and tsunami swept away seaside communities, knocked down buildings — some as new as one-year-old — and destroyed roadways and bridges.

Concepción, Chile's second most-populous city that was 90 kilometers from the epicenter, was one of the worst affected.

While the confirmed death toll is not as high as the government originally stated — 279 as of March 4, instead of close to 800 — the government's poor response to the massive earthquake proved tragic.

The Chilean navy had ruled out a tsunami, and advised authorities on the issue. But minutes after the quake struck, an 8-meter wave ravaged the coastal towns of Constitución and Dichato. Adm. Edmundo González, head of the navy, took responsibility for not warning the seaside towns of Maule and Bío-Bío about the wave.

"We weren't very clear in the tsunami alert and we share responsibility for many deaths," González told Radio Cooperativa.

President Michelle Bachelet, who leaves



RODOLFO ALONSO

The earthquake exposed real estate developers' irresponsibility from poor construction.

office on March 11, was harshly criticized for not receiving international aid right away, and instead accessing the damage.

Inequality revealed

Poverty affect close to 14 percent of Chile's 17 million people, but the area where the quake hit, the level was more than 20 percent, with the rate reaching 35 percent in some of the poorest communities, according to the 2006 Socioeconomic Characterization Survey.

The government's response of sending in the military to keep order, following looting—which included not just food and water and other basic goods, but televisions and appliances—drew criticism from some who argued they were there to protect private property, not protect people.

Some witnesses around Concepción, said they had blocked off their streets with cars and they were keeping a round-the-clock watch to protect themselves from looters.

The destruction of buildings that completely pancaked or were partially damaged and are no longer inhabitable, exposed lax enforcement building standards during Chile's economic boom that were not as rigid as they should have been.

Buildings constructed less than five years ago were presented some of the worst damage, revealing lax enforcement of building standards.

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, or ECLAC, said that Chile can still overcome the global economic crisis, which affected government income in the world's No. 1 copper producer when prices plummeted during the crash in 2008. ECLAC said it is putting together a team

to access the economic damage on Chile.

President-elect Sebastián Piñera, said that the earthquake will impact employment.

"This earthquake, in addition to having destroyed infrastructure, could have a very severe impact on employment levels," he told reporters. His said he is developing a plan, called "Levantemos Chile," or "Let's Rise, Chile" for economic recovery including reconstruction of schools, health centers and telecommunication infrastructure.

Fraying social fabric

Alicia Muñoz, president of the National Association of Rural and Indigenous Women, said that when her team arrived in the town of Cobquecura, in the Maule region, "we realized that teams are not organized, neither from the municipality, or social organization."

"No one knew how to distribute the food, let alone coordinate with the people," she said.

This was the case around southern Chile, where social organizations deteriorated during the 1973-90 dictatorship and for paternalist social policies. But some student organizations had a quick response, such as those in the University of Chile, where hundreds of young volunteers rapidly set up a food and clothing drive for victims in the south.

"We're aware of the cruel reality that our country is facing now," said a statement of the University of Chile's Student Federation. "So we are going to add our energy and abilities to what's being done to overcome this serious crisis that is causing thousands of compatriots so much pain and suffering."

Some other rural, indigenous and women's organizations have also joined in.

"We've started this campaign where we want to generate solidarity that demands social organization and that is focused on the participatory and inclusive reconstruction," said Francisca Rodríguez, director of the National Association of Rural and Indigenous Women and the Latin American Coordinating Group of Organizations of Campo-Vía Campesina.

On March 8, the International Women's Day, several organizations are running a drive to bring help to women. □

"We've started this campaign where we want to generate solidarity that demands social organization and that is focused on the participatory and inclusive reconstruction." — Francisca Rodríguez

Opposition on shaky ground

A series of powerful aftershocks, the largest measuring 6.9 – on the Richter scale, rolled through central Chile March 11, putting a natural exclamation point on what was already a historical event for the South American country – the swearing in of billionaire businessman Sebastian Piñera as president.

With the ground literally shaking underneath, Piñera bowed his head to receive Chile's red, white and blue presidential sash, a symbolic moment that marked a substantive political shift for the country.

For the first time since the end of the 1973-90 dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, Chile has lurched to the right. In fact, Piñera is Chile's first democratically elected conservative president in more than half a century – since 1958, when Jorge Alessandri assumed the mantle of government after narrowly beating then Sen. Salvador Allende. Exiting stage right is the center-left Concertación Democrática coalition of former President Michelle Bachelet, which governed for two decades and oversaw Chile's delicate transition from dictatorship to democracy.

As if the changing of the political guards wasn't significant enough, Piñera's inauguration also came less than two weeks after Chile was slammed by its worst natural disaster in 50 years: a monster 8.8-magnitude earthquake that struck in the early hours of Feb. 27, killing some 500 people and causing an estimated US\$30 billion in damage.

In disaster's wake

Piñera has already made it clear his main priority now is recovery and reconstruction, meaning his lofty campaign promises – a million jobs, an end to poverty, corruption and crime, and improvements to the health care and education systems – will have to wait. Instead, his first tasks will be to modify the 2010 budget, cutting where necessary in order to secure emergency relief and reconstruction funds; loosen environmental and building regulations to stimulate construction; and instate tax break incentives for private donation.

“The best way to honor our dearly departed loved ones, our disappeared or homeless brothers, and the thousands of anonymous heroes, is to work tirelessly in order to overcome this emergency and

Country's first conservative elected president in more than 50 years takes office.

rebuild our homes, our schools and our hospitals,” Piñera said in a nationally televised address March 18.

For now, at least, the Concertación is agreeing to back the president's efforts. Indeed, in a meeting held five days before the change in government, the heads of the coalition's four member parties offered Piñera a temporary “truce.” The truce was put to an early test just over a week later when both chambers of Congress passed the new president's first piece of legislation: the so-called “bono marzo,” a 40,000 pesos (\$80) bonus to be issued to more than 4 million poor and lower-middle class Chileans.

“Our first task is to favor all the policies that seek social reconstruction after the earthquake,” new Senator and interim Socialist Party head Fulvio Rossi told reporters March 11.

Analysts agree the situation favors Piñera politically. Not only does it allow him to operate with minimal opposition, but it also gives him what until recently seemed an unlikely opportunity to make good on his call for national unity, a message he has pushed consistently since winning the runoff election in January.

What's not clear is if this truce – for however long it lasts – is in the best interest of the country as a whole. Critics say Chile needs to do far more than simply rebuild and could benefit from some healthy political debate.

Development rifts exposed

The earthquake, argue groups like the Chilean Association of Nongovernmental Organizations, known collectively as ACCION, exposed serious flaws in the country's development model, which stresses privatization, direct foreign investment, outsourcing of traditional state functions and deregulation in gen-



New government's top priority is recovering and rebuilding the areas most affected by earthquake.

eral. While the model has certainly generated wealth for some, critics say it has also widened the gap between rich and poor, an income breach that may have factored into the violent looting that broke out in Concepción and other cities hit hard by the earthquake.

Communication has also been a major problem. With cell phone service, landline service, water, electricity, gas and even the damaged highways themselves all in private hands, it has been extremely complicated for authorities to coordinate a basic response. Nor does the government have the raw information it needs to properly assess the situation, according to Flavia Liberona, an ACCION spokesperson and head of a Santiago environmental group called Terram.

“Three weeks after the earthquake and we still don’t have an exact number of deaths,” she said. “The authorities say they’ll let us know when they have all the information available, but when is that going to happen? Maybe a year from now?”

One interpretation of the so-called truce is that the Concertación, afraid of alienating a Chilean public eager for immediate solutions, decided it can’t afford politically to be too overly critical of Piñera’s reconstruction efforts. Another possibility is that the center-left coalition, fresh off its first ever presidential defeat, simply has yet to plant its feet and

“Our first task is to favor all the policies that seek social reconstruction after the earthquake.”

— Fulvio Rossi

grow into its new role as opposition.

“None of the [Concertación] parties has yet to have internal elections. Those debates have been postponed until around June. Rather than a truce with the government, this is about the Concertación still needing to realign its internal forces,” said Claudio Fuentes, director of the Universidad Diego Portales’ Social Sciences Research Institute.

Whatever the reason, Concertación acquiescence does little to actually help the country – both in the short and long term, said Fuentes, who thinks there’s room for debate even over the government’s immediate recovery strategies. Should Piñera relax environmental laws? Should he offer tax incentives to spur private donations? Would he do better to generate revenue by raising taxes on large corporations?

“There are a lot of subjects where [the opposition] could go after the government – the sale of his LAN stocks, the government’s delay in designating many key bureaucratic posts,” said Fuentes, speaking of Piñera’s remaining 11.3 percent stake in the Chilean airline. “Obviously attention also needs to be focused on certain priority issues, like how to finance (the recovery and reconstruction). This requires a debate on taxes, on the reassignment of funds, the use of savings. That debate needs to happen.” □

VENEZUELA

Valentina Pacheco Perdomo in Caracas

Quieting the critics

Government orders cable companies to take RCTV off the air.

President Hugo Chávez’s government sent in police to suppress hundreds of demonstrators – mostly students – protesting an order to again shut down cable station Radio Caracas Televisión Internacional, or RCTV, for refusing to obey an order to change its legal status that would change its programming and obligate it to air the president’s weekly address.

Two people died in the demonstrations.

RCTV was taken off the air on Jan. 24 after

Diosdado Cabello, minister of Public Works and Housing and director of the National Telecommunications Commission, announced that cable companies must enforce a month-old law that requires that cable TV stations broadcasting 70 percent domestically-produced content must change their legal status to national stations, as opposed to international stations.

If the cable station becomes a nationally-produced one, programs are allowed only one commercial break, which would cut down on the possibility of chopping Chávez’s long addresses to the nation.

The government gave RCTV a month to readjust its programming to comply with the law, to either become an international station or national, but station executives refused, calling the law arbitrary.

Ruling party lawmakers threw their support behind the telecommunications regulator. Dep. Israel Sotillo, vice president of the Media Commission in Congress, said taking RCTV off the air would be temporary “until the station follows the law.”

“The media issue is a delicate issue,” said Ingrid Bournat, who supports the measure. “We know the power that the media has and above all, the impact that they’re generating in

civil society with the manipulation of information.”

Unrest

Protesters took to the streets around the regulator’s headquarters shortly after the government announced the station would be taken off the air.

In May 2007, the government denied RCTV a concession renewal for transmission, accusing it of sugarcoating the failed coup against President Chávez on April 11, 2002. The station was taken off broadcast television and put on cable, becoming RCTV Internacional.

In a Jan. 21 statement, RCTV said: “The government needs this new closure to slow the growth of RCTV Internacional, a leading subscription television station that caused an increase in pay television in the country to capture 63 percent of the market. It’s an attempt to cover up the overwhelming failure of TVEs [state-run Televisora Venezolana Social], which is illegally broadcast from Radio Caracas Televisión and is still operating with stolen equipment from RCTV.”

RCTV began operating in 1953 and is considered the oldest private station in Venezuela. It also has the largest audience and maintains a critical line against Chávez’s government.

The closure “is just one more demonstra-

“We will continue in the democratic struggle with the votes to kick [Chávez] out of the presidency.”

— Ana Celia Goetz

tion that there is no freedom in this country, that there’s no freedom of expression, that they don’t respect human rights,” said Ana Celia Goetz, a protester in Caracas. “They want all the media under their dominion. We have to continue fighting in the streets. We don’t have weapons; they have the weapons, but we will continue in the democratic struggle with the votes to kick [Chávez] out of the presidency.”

No freedom to choose

Student groups, which led the 2007 protests against the first RCTV closure, have again been some of the most visible and vocal opponents to the measure.

Roderick Navarro, of the Universidad Central de Venezuela’s Student Centers Federation, said he and his colleagues would stay in the streets until the government puts RCTV back on the air.

“It may be that this measure is disguised as something legal, but the persecution by the executive branch for those who don’t applaud their actions like seals is evident,” he said.

The president of the National Journalists College, William Echeverría, slammed the government’s decision. He said to *Latinamerica Press* that “every Venezuelan has the right to think what he or she wants; the state shouldn’t step in and decide what we can see or do.”

The fate of RCTV’s 1,500 workers is still unknown. □

HAITI

City in ruins as rescuers, aid workers scramble

Aid trickles in, but disorder and destroyed infrastructure hinder relief efforts.

Aid and rescue workers rushed to find survivors and bring desperately needed supplies to quake-ravaged Haiti, where a 7.0-earth-

quake leveled the capital and destroyed dozens of villages on Jan. 12.

The poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, with a poverty rate of over 70 percent, Haiti has been hit with a series of natural disasters between 2001 and 2008, including hurricanes, that have killed more than 18,000 people. The Jan. 12 earthquake may have left between 50,000 and 100,000 dead, a broad range given the massive destruction and disorder that has taken hold of the improv-

erished capital, Port-au-Prince, just 15 kilometers from the epicenter of the deadly temblor.

Survivors searched desperately for survivors in the rubble, covered in dust from thousands of collapsed buildings. Emblematic buildings of the capital, including the Presidential Palace, United Nations headquarters, as well as the main hospital were destroyed.

A report by the Haiti Support Group, a nonprofit organization, citing Health Minister Alex Larsen, said up to 1 million people may be homeless and 250,000 are injured.

“We hear on the radio that rescue teams are coming from the outside, but

nothing is coming. We only have our fingers to look for survivors,” Jean-Baptiste Lafontin Wilfried told the organization.

There is “no sign” of heavy-lifting equipment to move the rubble, it added.

“The rapidly decomposing bodies are also posing a major problem,” it said.

“What is happening is that there is no help in the streets,” Jacky Dodard, a Port-au-Prince resident told the Haiti Support Group. “Personally, I haven’t seen any help. “So everybody is trying to drop their dead bodies somewhere. They don’t know what to do with the dead bodies.”

—*Latinamerica Press*.

HAITI

Leslie Josephs in Alajuela, Costa Rica

In soccer, a glimmer of hope

Haiti's national U-17 women's soccer team makes emotional appearance at regional championship.



Haiti's women's U-17 soccer team fights back tears at the CONCACAF championship.

For the girls of Haiti's Under-17 soccer national squad, it's more than just a game. Every member of the 20-girl team was left homeless after the 7.0-magnitude earthquake ravaged their country on Jan. 12.

The girls are living in makeshift installations near their stadium in Port-au-Prince, where soccer has gone from a sport to a home and teammates have become family.

Less than two months after the earthquake, which killed more than 220,000 people, the team, struggling with loss and depression, departed for the U-17 women's championship of the Confederation of North, Central American and Caribbean Association Football, or CONCACAF, in Alajuela, Costa Rica, giving their fellow Haitians back home a small sign of hope and recovery in the wake of death and destruction.

Challenges on and off the field

The team was at practice in the Port-au-Prince stadium when the quake struck, just before 5 p.m. They slept in the stadium and the next day went to look for their parents.

"They walked six or seven hours to their homes," Georgelie Berry, the vice president of the Haitian Football Federation, said on the sidelines of the team's practice. Many of the players live in the provinces outside of the Haitian capital.

For the players, the trauma is still fresh.

"Before the earthquake, the team was strong. There have been a lot of problems," said Berry. "None of them have houses. After the earthquake, they say they don't feel well. Their heads hurt. They're thinking about their families. But we're here to win."

But almost every team member took to the field on March 10, the opening match of the

"They walked six or seven hours to their homes."

— Georgelie Berry

championship leading up to the Women's U-17 World Cup in Trinidad and Tobago this September. Madeline Delice, 16, could not, however. Her mother and father were both killed in the quake and Berry says she has been unable to play. Delice, a goalkeeper, her hair in short braids that reach midway down her cheeks, sat at the sidelines, holding a small Haitian flag as she watched her teammates open the championship in a tough match against the United States.

"During training, they would cry before, during and after. They would cry and cry and cry," said Haiti's coach James Morisset. "We're obligated to come here, and we're going to do the best we can to make the Haitian people smile."

The United States, the eight-team championship's favorite, beat Haiti 9-0. When the match ended, Haiti's Alexandra Coby fell to the ground in tears. Several members of the US squad approached her and embraced the goalkeeper.

"After the game I saw that some of the girls were crying a little bit," said US coach Kazbek Tambi. "On one hand they came here to play great soccer and to win, and on the other hand, the fact that we were playing Haiti and beat them by a relatively big score, there was a little bit of sadness even within our group that that was our first opponent."

After their defeat against the United States, the crowd at the stadium, including the Cayman Islands' squad, which went on to beat Haiti, 1-0, sealing their elimination from the Women's U-17 World Cup, chanted "Hai-ti! Hai-ti! Hai-ti!" Their loss in the CONCACAF championship failed to overshadow the signal their presence at the tournament showed to Haitians and their neighbors. □

Chinchilla wins in landslide

Right-wing candidate cruises to election win to become first woman elected president.

Laura Chinchilla made this tiny nation's history on Feb. 7 when Costa Ricans overwhelmingly elected her the country's first woman president.

But while the former vice president and security minister broke the mould for Central America's oldest democracy, her win follows a shift toward the right around Latin America, the reverse of the previous election cycle half a decade ago.

Chinchilla captured close to 47 percent of the vote, according to the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, more than double the votes of her two closest rivals.

Her win clipped the hopes of Costa Rica's struggling left. Three-time opposition candidate Ottón Solís, who was defeated by current President Oscar Arias in a contested vote in 2006, and led a movement to block the Central American Free Trade Agreement with the United States, came in second with 25 percent of the vote.

The day after the election, Solís, a center-leftist of the Citizens' Action Party, and a staunch supporter of environmental issues and domestic trade rights, said he would end his political career and ruled out a fourth run for president in 2014, weakening the already weak left-leaning currents in this country of 4 million people.

Otto Guevara, the right-wing candidate of the Libertarian Movement, who saw a rapid rise in the polls just before the election, came in third place with around 22 percent of the vote.

Win for women?

Chinchilla, whom Arias groomed for the presidency, evoked fear in some voters that she would rule Costa Rica staunchly along the lines of their National Liberation Party, Costa Rica's oldest and most powerful political party.

In her victory speech in a hotel parking lot, Chinchilla thanked "the pioneers who cleared the path to women's political partici-



Laura Chinchilla

pation in Costa Rica."

"All of them, and also the men who accompanied us in this cause, have made it possible that a daughter of Costa Rica could today be president of Costa Rica," she said.

More than 60 percent of women voted for Chinchilla, a conservative who opposes abortion and gay marriage, who ran on a platform advocating free trade and a hard-line against crime, especially violent crime stemming from the drug trade, but few women's issues.

But younger voters stuck with Solís, as did many of Costa Rica's environmentalists.

The country prides itself on its environmental protection: half of Costa Rica is covered with trees. Arias' government has called for deep emissions cuts from industrialized nations and set a goal to be carbon neutral by 2021.

Nevertheless, Arias has lifted a moratorium on open pit mining, and his critics say he invited over-development of real estate along the Pacific Coast.

Some environmental activists worry that Chinchilla will continue Arias' line closely. She is in favor of attracting new foreign investment, especially in the wake of the financial crisis that hit Costa Rica in the form of plummeting tourism, its main source of income, and real estate investment.

"I think this government has been the most aggressive in environmental terms in the last 20 years," said Alberto Cortes, an environmental studies director at the University of Costa Rica. "It seems to me that it has made decisions that are enemy to nature. This government subordinated environmental policy for business reasons." □

Has mining infiltrated universities?

Debate rages over higher education funded by mining royalties.

Three Argentine universities last year rejected the use of public funds generated by mining, sparking a nationwide debate on whether to use money stemming from the lucrative, but environmentally questionable industry.

Opponents of using these funds argue that mining companies could try to play a role in curricula, while others say the money could help cushion school budgets.

Throughout 2009, 26 departments at the state-run National Universities of Córdoba, Río Cuarto and Luján rejected the use of mining funds. The calls were initiated a year earlier by the Esquel site of the Universidad Nacional de la Patagonia “San Juan Bosco,” which turned down these funds.

When doing so, the advising council of this university, a public institution, highlighted that Esquel had rejected large-scale mining because of reported environmental damage, which it first signaled in 2003, when more than 80 percent of the community rejected gold mining at a nearby pit. The council added that the university was not alien to the local population’s will.

Currently, mining-generated funds at the National Inter-University Council, which coordinates policies for 40 state-run universities across Argentina, total 50 million pesos (US\$13.2 million).

Amid growing opposition to open-pit mining in the Andes over the past eight years, the distribution of 36.8 million pesos (\$9 million) from the Yacimiento Minero Aguas de Dionisio, or YMAD mine among the state-run universities caused an outcry from some parts of the academic community.

Origin of the funds

The gold-copper reserves of Aguas de Dionisio were discovered in 1948, and were taken over by the local Catamarca government, the Universidad Nacional de Tucumán and the central government, for which they created the mining company, known as YMAD. During the sweeping privatizations early in the 1989-99 government of President Carlos Saúl Menem (1989-99), YMAD was sold off to Minera Alumbrera Ltd., a holding of Swiss mining giant Xstrata Plc, which held 50 percent; Canadian miners Goldcorp Inc. with 37.5 percent and Yamana Gold with 12.5 percent.

Four percent of the mine’s revenue was destined for the state-run universities.



Local community rejects mining projects, citing environmental damage.

Over the last decade, reports surfaced of toxic chemicals and spills from a 316-kilometer tubes that runs to Tucumán province.

Rejecting funds

On June 10, Nobel Peace Prize winner Adolfo Pérez Esquivel sent a letter to the inter-university agency and to presidents of each of the state-run universities, urging them to reject funds that “come from the destructive and contaminating activity that every day causes more human rights violations for populations” near the mines.

Raúl Montenegro, an evolutionary biology professor at the Cordoba university and president of the Foundation for the Defense of the Environment, argued that the mine required 95 million liters of water a day to operate in the semi-arid region.

Accepting money from large-scale, open-pit mining could threaten the rights of local communities, said Mirta Antonelli, a philosophy researcher at the Cordoba university.

This “goes beyond environmental impacts to the nucleus of social fabric, cultural diversity, human rights and the psychological suffering of the local residents,” she told *Latinamerica Press*.

But not everyone in the universities opposes funds from mining. “Not incorporating this money in the budget — which, as all money, could be considered dirty, since we’re talking about the mother of products from the capitalist system — would logically lead us to renounce the very budget for public universities, which, as we all know, is composed of funds coming from very questionable activities,” Hugo Trincherro, dean of the Philosophy Department at

the University of Buenos Aires, said in a statement in August. “For example, the money that comes from soy production.”

Jair Zolotow, president of the University of Buenos Aires’ Social Science Department’s Student Center, the only department that rejected the funds at that university, said that while the money is part of the 20 percent the state receives from the mine, “accepting it is a form of legitimizing business activities and allowing companies to end up setting the agenda in lesson plans.” □

Funds “come from [a] destructive and contaminating activity.”

— Adolfo Pérez Esquivel

The costs of climate change

Latin America lost a major battle in Copenhagen.

Latin America, home of the greatest biodiversity and natural resources on earth and region of developing nations is one of world's smallest emitters of greenhouse gases and one of the most affected by global warming, as rising temperatures cause the rapid melting of glaciers, and the abnormal rainfalls that have brought devastating droughts and floods.

Both the world's poorest and most vulnerable nations along with the top contributors to global warming, including the United States and China, were among the 192 countries that met in Dec. 7-18 at the United Nations Climate Change Conference, but they failed to agree on a binding carbon emissions reduction pact.

The 12-point agreement that was eked out

at the last minute by the United States, Brazil, South Africa, India and China — the world's main producers of greenhouse gas emissions — recognized that keeping global warming increases to under 2°C would require “deep emissions cuts.”

The agreement committed rich countries to a \$30 billion fund for climate change mitigation in the 2010-2012 period, and an additional goal of \$100 billion a year for poor nations to offset the effects.

Regional opposition

Still, it fell short of establishing emissions targets, a move that was criticized from Sweden to Bolivia, whose president, Evo Morales, called the talks “a failure.”

Costa Rica, a major advocate of rich nations providing poor countries with climate change mitigation funds, was also skeptical.

“I think that the amounts that certain countries — Europeans, the United States, Japan — have spoken about to help developing countries with climate change have been extremely small,” Costa Rican President Oscar Arias told journalists in San Jose Dec. 14. Arias said billions of dollars in arms spending around the globe “that the world doesn't need” should be used to fight climate change. Costa Rica is aiming to become carbon neutral by 2021, and has one of the most extensive forest protection systems in the region.

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, even though his country, which fell short of the leadership role expected of it at the summit, carved out the last minute climate change deal, said there remains a great deal to be done.

“We finished with a deal,” Lula said on Dec. 21, after the summit. “After a lot of tension, we forged an agreement with China, India, South Africa, Brazil and the United States that resolves the problem of the Kyoto protocol.”

“The sensation we left with is that leaders around the world will have to always have this issue as a priority so we can find a definitive solution to guarantee the existence of Planet Earth is maintained.”

Regional initiatives

While the region's leaders have complained that the area suffers profoundly from the effects of climate change despite having some of the lowest contributions to the phenomenon, it boasts some of the world's most dramatic conservation efforts.

Before the summit ended, Ecuador finalized the creation of the Yasuní Trust Fund, a two-year-old initiative of President Rafael Correa for \$350 million a year from the international community to not drill in the oil rich Ishpingo-Tambococha-Tiputini field, which is estimated to hold close to 850 million barrels of crude. The field sits on the Yasuní National Park, Ecuador's largest, which is also home to a number of indigenous communities.



GABRIEL HERRERA

Latin American and Caribbean indigenous populations are among the most vulnerable populations of climate change.

Little responsibility

According to the World Bank, Latin America and the Caribbean are responsible for just 12 percent of the world's green house gas emissions. Peru, home to 70 percent of the world's tropical glaciers, is one of the 10 most vulnerable countries to climate change in the world.

By the end of the century, climate change could cost the region some \$250 billion, according to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean's recent report, "The Economics of Climate Change in Latin America and the Caribbean," an increase from \$8.6 billion in the 2000 to 2008 period.

From 1970 to 2008, storms, droughts and flooding have cost the region \$80 billion.

The study estimates that an investment

PERU

Ramiro Escobar in Lima

Earthquake preparedness still lacking

Public policies fail to address potential disasters in seismically active Peru.

It took the devastating 8.8-magnitude earthquake that destroyed parts of neighboring Chile on Feb. 27, for Peru's government to scramble to form an earthquake preparedness plan, even though less than three years earlier, an 8.0-magnitude quake rocked Peru's south-central coast, killing more than 500 people.

Following the quake in Chile, President Alan García announced that the country would install a tsunami alert system, despite the fact that there was a tsunami alert following the August 2007 earthquake in Peru. He also unveiled a National Prevention Plan against Earthquakes, even those experts have been clamoring for one for years.

Poverty's weight

Pedro Ferradas, who heads the disaster prevention program at the international technical support and sustainable development organization ITDG-Soluciones Practicas, said consecutive governments have not done enough

equal to 1 percent of the world's economy or \$70 trillion is required to mitigate the effects of climate change. If this is not achieved, the phenomenon could cause a global recession in which the world economy would shed 20 percent of its value.

The report also found that the number of people affected by climate change in 2025 could be as high as 81 million and as many as 178 million in 2055. Caribbean nations are already confronting water shortages amid low rainfall, since most of the islands depend on surface water. Andean nations Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, where glacier melt has notably accelerated in the last three decades, have faced similar problems, which are having a visible impact on the agricultural and human water supply. □

to strengthen state-run disaster response bodies.

The National Civil Defense Institute, which was founded in 1973, during the 1968-80 military government, "is a vertical authority, that works from the top down" and that it has "deficiencies."

Some experts, such as José Sato, of the Center for Disaster Prevention and Studies, argues that Peru faces potentially disastrous natural phenomena constantly, such as floods, droughts and landslides, and that the government is overdue for instating better plans.

Close to three years after the Aug. 15, 2007 earthquake, which destroyed the southern port city of Pisco, and was followed by a slow and chaotic aid distribution, residents are still demanding aid from the government for recon-



Many deaths could be avoided in southern Peru's earthquake in 2007 with a prevention plan.

struction. García made big promises to Pisco, and a government-run commission he appointed to oversee the reconstruction effort crumbled amid claims of inefficiencies.

“Poverty is our greatest vulnerability,” said Sato, who believes disasters are not natural, but social. The lack of coordination between government institutions and response teams create a dangerous cocktail with the population’s poor quality of life and the absence of the state to see imprudent living conditions.

Many people in Peru build their homes on the sandy ground of the country’s coast — home to more than two-thirds of the population — or with weak materials, such as cheap adobe, or near riverbanks, threatened by floods or any movement of the land in this seismically active country. In some cases, construction permits are granted for construction in precarious areas.

Ferradas warns that current legislation impedes fluid communication between municipalities and civil defense. Every municipality must have a Civil Defense Committee, led by the mayor, and including police and other government officials, and in some cases, churches, but in many cases these committee members are not trained to handle potential disasters.

Useless deaths

In February, thousands of tourists were stranded in Aguas Calientes, the small town

“Poverty is our greatest vulnerability.”

— José Sato

and gateway to the Inca citadel of Machu Picchu, Peru’s top tourist destination, when heavy rains flooded train tracks and hiking trails. Hundreds had to be airlifted out of the town.

An Argentine woman and a Peruvian guide were killed in a landslide.

In the same department, Cuzco, in the villages of Zurite and Taray, seven people were killed from the heavy rains and landslides, illustrating again just how ill-prepared Peru is for potential disasters.

Sato added that the government’s major error is waiting until these disasters happen. He suggested that the population should become more involved and should receive education for preparedness, such as evacuation drills and other preventative measures.

But government inaction is not just three years old, since the Pisco earthquake. One of the worst natural disasters in world history took place in Peru’s Andes 40 years ago, and still did not convince the government to instate strong prevention policies. In the Andean department of Ancash in May 1970, a massive earthquake struck, and the impact chipped off a piece of glacier from Peru’s highest mountain, Huascarán, burying the entire village of Yungay, killing tens of thousands of people. Now, four decades later, it looks unlikely that the government could respond to a large-scale earthquake on the coastal desert capital, Lima. □

GUATEMALA

Drought again threatens famine

El Niño brings dry weather, threatening food supply.

The late rainy season this year caused by El Niño is expected to further strain food supplies in Guatemala, where drought-caused famine killed hundreds last year.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur for the Right to Food, Olivier De Schutter, said the lower rainfall and food shortages could affect 2 million people in the impoverished country of 14 million.

René Mauricio Valdés, the UN’s Guatemala representative, said in a press conference in Geneva that the rains, which generally begin in May, will likely begin in the second half of the year, worsening the drought and killing important crops.

Guatemala’s Food Security Secretary Lily Caravantes said that last year, 145,000 families lost their crops and

that the situation could worsen this year with the delay in the start of the rainy season.

In September, President Álvaro Colom decreed a “state of public calamity” amid the food crisis.

Guatemala has the highest level of malnutrition in Latin America, and the fourth worldwide, as 43 percent of children under five do not have enough to eat, according to the United Nations.

Last year, 240 adults died of starvation in the country’s “Dry Corridor” — the departments of Baja Verapaz, Chiquimula, El Progreso, Santa Rosa, Zacapa, Jutiapa and Jalapa — mainly women and 54 children, a figure that could rise this year. Between January and February, the government recorded 4,000 cases of severe malnutrition in this region.

The United Nations says 77 percent of the families in this area used up their food reserves, and that their corn — a staple crop — has been destroyed. Nearly 20 percent of Guatemalans have been affected by the drought, the worst in 30 years.

Valdés said that climate change has become more pronounced, especially in Guatemala, one of the “10 countries most vulnerable to climate change in the world.”

De Schutter recommended the government increase social programs and raise the minimum wage of 56 quetzales (US\$7) a day. —*Latinamerica Press.*

Pioneering alternative development program at risk

Preservation of country's largest national park threatened by push for petrodollars.

President Rafael Correa's double about-face on an intrepid plan to preserve one of the most biodiverse corners of the Amazon rain forest has put the initiative at risk.

Correa had invited the international community for donations of US\$3.50 billion over 10 years if Ecuador did not drill in the oil-rich fields located in the Yasuni National Park, the country's largest.

The Ishpingo Tiputini Tambococha, or ITT fields, sit within the park, which is also home to a number of indigenous communities, and hold 856 million barrels of crude, which could generate US\$7 billion for the cash-strapped government.

The diversity of plant and animal life in Yasuni is one of the most dramatic in the world, and the park is constitutionally protected from extractive industry.

Correa's broad social programs, including universal health care and education, as outlined in the country's new constitution, requires a constant injection of cash, which the ITT fields could provide.

But in April 2009, nearly two years after the proposal was first announced, Correa formally asked the international community for \$3.5 billion, half the amount he said the government could earn if it drilled in the ITT.

Ecuador planned to sign an agreement with a group of donor countries, including France, Germany, the Netherlands and Hungary, represented by the United Nations Development Fund, during the UN Climate Change conference in Copenhagen in December, but Correa refused, calling it an interference in Ecuador's sovereignty.

Correa backpedals

Correa's administration complained that the government

would have lost control of ITT fields if under the agreement conditions the donations would be managed by the United Nations Development Program, according to Alexis Mera, Correa's legal secretary.

Then the agreement broke off.

"If that's how it is, keep your money and in June we'll start exploiting the ITT," Correa said. "We're not going to jeopardize our sovereignty. Understand that the ones making the greatest sacrifice are the citizens of Ecuador. In any other part of the world they would have drilled the oil."

Foreign Minister Fander Falconí, a longtime confidant of Correa's, who both thought up the initiative and led the Ecuadorian's negotiating team, quit over the incident, arguing that he had long fought for socially and environmentally conscious development for Ecuador and that the failed talks for ITT's preservation distanced him from the president.

"The Yasuni ITT initiative deserves a much more explicit commitment than setting a six-month deadline to compile the required financial resources as its transcendence marks a different political project, which in essence proposes a change in lifestyle," Falconí said in a press conference. "A change (that is) perfectly supported by the constitution."

"He didn't only lose a foreign minister," said Alberto Acosta, Correa's former energy minister and founder of his Alianza País movement. "Correa lost one of the best advocates for the movement's ideology."

Other government officials followed suit, such as Francisco Carrión, the former ambassador to the United Nations.



Yasuni National Park is one of the world's greatest centers of biodiversity.

Floundering to regain course

Correa tried to calm the situation by assuring the public that he will continue with the ITT initiative, claiming that leaving the oil under the ground is a priority of his government. On Jan. 14, he started a new negotiating team headed by former Foreign Minister María Fernanda Espinoza and Vice President Lenin Moreno.

"We're going to fight for this cause with much more vigor," said Moreno, who said it is a personal issue for him since he is from the Yasuni area.

But the political damage had already been done and now Correa faces an uphill battle to regain the confidence of international governments willing to pay and of environmentalists who championed the initiative.

For now, only Hungary has signed on.

Correa has faced strong criticism from environmentalists, some of whom suggest he may be two-faced with the proposal, because if it fails,

oil exploitation would generate billions of dollars for Ecuador.

"Now I see clearly what has happened," Correa said during his weekly radio address. "We haven't been negotiating with the supposed donors, but instead, with infantile environmentalism. Now those are appearing who are managing the process and they are the ones who wanted to put inadmissible conditions on the country." □

Activists murdered

Police have not ruled out links between mine and activists' murders.

Three anti-mining environmentalists were murdered in central El Salvador in the second half of last year. Police are investigating the killings. No suspects have been detained, but local residents are denouncing a possible link between a gold mine and the activists' murders.

The local subsidiary of Canada's Pacific Rim Mining began exploring for metals in the El Dorado mine in the central Cabañas department in 2002. Since then, environmental, religious, human rights and community groups have tried to force the mine out, fearing health and environmental damages from the use of cyanide to extract gold.

In December 2008, El Salvador's government denied Pacific Rim rights to drill in the mine, just ahead of elections. Then-President Antonio Saca turned out the permit, in a failed effort to win votes to maintain his conservative Republican National Alliance in power.

The company went to the International Center for the Settlement of Investment Disputes, the World Bank's Washington-based arbitration court, demanding US\$70 million in lost investment from the denied drilling permit.

The victims

President Mauricio Funes, who took office last June, marking the first leftist government in El Salvador, has also denied the company the permits.

As Pacific Rim continued pushing for a green light for drilling in the mine, which it says holds 1.4 million ounces of gold, three activists were killed.

Thirty-seven-year-old Marcelo Rivera Moreno was the first. The member of the Friends of San Isidro Cabañas Association, a community group, and one of the most vocal activists against the mine, was found dead on June 30 in a well, 12 days after he disappeared.

Ramiro Rivera Gómez — no relation to Rivera Moreno, 53, of the Cabañas Environmental Committee, was gunned down while he was traveling on a rural road in his pick-up



Local residents stand up against open-pit mining in their community.

truck after men armed with M-16s opened fire on Dec. 20.

After an attempt on his life in August, Rivera Gómez began traveling with a two-officer police escort. They were not able to protect him, however.

His fellow committee member, Dora Alicia Sorto, 32, was shot dead on Dec. 26, when she was returning home from washing some clothes in the river. She was eight months pregnant and her two-year-old son was wounded in the attack, but survived.

Environmentalists and community members say that the company is supporting the attacks with a terror campaign to quiet the activist, but no solid proof has been found.

"This is getting to extremes," Ricardo Navarro, director of the Salvadoran Center for Applied Technology, told *Latinamerica Press* during a vigil for the victims on Jan. 8. "We already have true environmental martyrs in Cabañas, and I personally hold that they are morally responsible," he said. "To me, it's not about whether the company's president ordered the killings, but that they came here to take gold and silver and they're the ones who have generated this climate of violence."

Since the company arrived, there have been waves of homicides and other violence in the area that had traditionally been more peaceful than the rest of the country, which has a murder rate of 52 per 100,000 residents, according to police figures.

Crimes motives

The National Police had first attributed the deaths to domestic disputes, which was quickly rejected by the activists and community

“Where Pacific Rim began mining exploration, high levels of conflict occurred.”

— Howard Cotto

members, who saw the theory as a smoke-screen to detract from any possible role by Pacific Rim.

Howard Cotto, the police force’s subdirector, told *Latinamerica Press* that the police is open to all possibilities and is not ruling out even the company’s involvement.

“Even if we suggest that the motive of all the crimes have to do with mining or not ... what is clear is that in all the areas where Pacific Rim began mining exploration, high levels of conflict occurred,” he said.

“But it’s not right that we, as an institution, say one way or another if we don’t have the proof yet.”

In an interview with *The Real News Network* reporter Jesse Freeston on Jan. 6, Pacific Rim’s president, Tom Shrake, denied any link between the company and the killings, and said disputes in the community were long present before the company arrived.

Gold fever

Refuge purchases of gold following the 2008 financial crisis drove prices up to more than \$1,200, and fueled a gold fever in Central America.

In their book: “The Dark Side of Gold: The Impact of Mining in El Salvador,” Florián Erzinger, Luis González and Ángel M. Ibarra note there are 29 mining exploration projects active in El Salvador since 2006 and 25 would be drilled by 11 transnational companies, and use up to 160 million liters of water, applying 950 million metric tons of cyanide, to extract 12 million ounces of gold and 78 million ounces of silver. □

BRAZIL

José Pedro S. Martins in São Paulo

WSF at 10

Social movements rally for justice at the 10th annual World Social Forum.

In the wake of the global economic crisis, social movements made a renewed call for justice at the 10th annual World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil. The forum, held this year Jan. 25-29, has for a decade served as an arena for alternatives to globalization by civil society and social movements that counters the World Economic Forum, held in Davos, Switzerland.

“If before movements and civil society were fragmented, there is much more unity and activities today,” said Brazilian businessman Oded Grajew, one of the founders of the forum.

Grajew and other participants, which totaled 35,000 from 39 countries, said the global economic meltdown of 2008 is just one more example that the mainstream economic model has failed and its heavy reign on society has brought social, economic and environmental consequences.

Lula takes center stage

“I’m aware that Davos no longer has the glamour that people thought it had in 2003,” said President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. Lula did not travel to Davos, where he was awarded with the first-ever “Global Statesman” award, due to a case of hypertension.

His words were met with loud applause before 7,000 forum participants in Porto Alegre.

Lula, who has long been publicly critical of rich countries’ failure to effectively fight poverty, is still facing a hefty list of demands from his constituency, including land reform, as elections in October approach and Lula works to bring his successor to office.

“Necessary and urgent”

Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos, one of the most vocal participants in the World Social Forum, suggested changing the event’s theme to “Another World is Necessary and Urgent” from “Another World is Possible.”

Participants reiterated their commitment to fight deforestation, agrochemicals and monoculture.

“We know that these triumphs will come from the organized people’s struggle,” said the event’s final declaration, referring to defense of the environment.

Brazilian social movements, in particular, called for greater unity in the country’s struggle to improve income distribution, fight poverty and defend the environment. Participants also called for an end to military bases in Latin America and the

Caribbean and safe and sane environmental policies. □

“I’m aware that Davos no longer has the glamour that people thought it had in 2003.”

— Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva

Environment continues to suffer

Old economic models continue to plague Bolivia, despite president's discourse.

President Evo Morales cruised to a re-election victory in December on the same lofty social and environmental promises that brought him to office four years earlier. But for an economy whose income is largely based on the extraction of natural resources, some activists fear it's all talk.

"We've changed the discourse, but not the model," said environmental activist Marco Ribera Arismendi, who has worked for ecological issues in Latin America for three decades.

"We had great hopes in this government to solve or make a change on these issues," added Ribera Arismendi, a member of the Environment Defense League, one of Bolivia's largest environment organizations. He argues that hopes have waned among his colleagues, who monitor social-environment problems in Bolivia, which he says are caused by extractive industry models from abroad.

Little space for criticism

Bolivia's dependence of oil and gas extraction, iron and lithium mining, and the advance of large-scale infrastructure projects have worried *campesino* and indigenous communities.

But their complaints and insistence that this style of development is incompatible with indigenous communities' cosmovision of living in harmony with nature, often fall on deaf ears.

Jenny Gruenberger, the Environment Defense League's director, hopes the new constitution that calls for indigenous autonomy will help preserve the environment.

"Defense of cultural diversity goes hand-in-hand with defense of biological diversity," she said.

She says that Morales does back environmental issues, but that the rest of Bolivia has to catch up.

"It's very valuable that our president has a strong pro-ecological discourse," she said. "But the reality inside the country is still not up to the level of that discourse, perhaps because there are other priorities. But what we



Environmentalists criticize dependence on natural resource extraction.

say is that if we don't take measures now, soon it will be too late."

From the southern Tarija department, community teacher William Ávalos worries that Morales' words will remain as only that.

Morales "stresses the Andean cosmovision that says we are not matter, but energy, that needs to be in balance with the environment, with nature," said Ávalos.

"But he's only presenting it as discourse," he added. "In practice, there are still many problems. For example, the country's economy support is gas, and if we keep extracting gas, I'd say that they are damaging [the environment]. I've spoken with indigenous peoples who have said: 'they're talking out gas [from under us] and they're promising us houses. But we want to be compensated for what they're taking away; we want land.'"

Ávalos says that while an environmental conscience is growing in Bolivia, the trend has not caught on in the powerful so-called "half-moon" region, the departments of Santa Cruz, Beni, Pando and Tarija, where most of the country's natural resources are concentrated, included natural gas.

"In Tarija, Caraparí, the gas capital, should be a model city, with services, schools, hospitals ... Evo has said this. But you go to Caraparí and there's none of that. Just a cloud of dust.

“I’ve spoken with indigenous peoples who have said: we want to be compensated for what they’re taking away; we want land.”

— William Ávalos

And they keep extracting gas. So, I don’t know if the ecologically-friendly vision works in that way.”

Extractive industries rule

Despite the 2006 nationalization of the mining sector, there have been little advances in funneling the money to government coffers. The government has not modified the royalty system that foreign companies must pay to extract minerals, which is still 5

percent the international market price of the material extracted, the same as in most Latin American countries. New large-scale open-pit mining projects continue to spring up, despite potentially detrimental environmental and social impacts.

The cash-strapped government lacks the funds to cover social programs and anti-poverty initiatives, and has announced new oil and natural gas extraction drilling, despite the environmental implications.

Hugo del Granado, who until recently was an executive for the state-run hydrocarbon company Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales Bolivia, has criticized the government for not investing in the gas sector fast enough.

“We need more infrastructure investment,” he said. “We’ve gone from neoliberalism to another extreme: a paralyzing state-controlled monopoly.”

He suggested spending less on social programs, including subsidies for households with school-aged children, senior citizens and pregnant women, which he called a “drain” on hydrocarbon earnings.

“Social and environmental issues do not matter to the government’s hydrocarbons sector,” said Ribera Arismendi. □

MEXICO

Indigenous women “prisoners of conscience”

Amnesty International finds two Hñahñu women unjustly jailed.

Amnesty International said Feb. 12 that the Mexican government sentenced two indigenous Mexican women for allegedly kidnapping six police officers without any proof of their crime.

The organization declared Alberta Alcántara Juan, 31 and Teresa González Cornelio, 25, of the Hñahñu indigenous community, “prisoners of conscience.” They were convicted and sentenced to 21 years in prison for the kidnapping of members of the now defunct Mexican Federal Investigation Agency in March 2006. Both are awaiting a retrial.

The officers had said the women had held them hostage during a raid on a

market in a community in Santiago de Mexquititlan in the central state of Queretaro. The women said the agents tried to illegally take their merchandise, while the agents alleged that the women took them hostage to avoid a seizure of their pirated goods.

Amnesty International said the only evidence against the women is a photograph in a local newspaper showing them next to the agents.

“There is absolutely no credible evidence against Alberta and Teresa,” said Rupert Knox, Mexico researcher at Amnesty International. “We believe they have been framed as a convenient target because of their marginal status in society as wom-

en, poor, and indigenous.”

“The case is emblematic of the discrimination and unfair trials that many indigenous people face in Mexico’s criminal justice system,” said Knox. “The Mexican government must release them both immediately and without conditions. Reparations must also be awarded.”

According to the Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez Human Rights Center, an organization that has provided legal support to Alcántara Juan and González Cornelio, “the state prosecutor has tried to keep the two women in prison as a reprisal against the vendors who defended themselves from the agents’ abuses, all the more since Teresa and Alberta were

who demanded identification when the agents tried to violently seize people’s merchandise.”

During the trial, the state did not provide Alcántara Juan and González Cornelio with an interpreter, as Spanish is not their native language, and the public defender never explained to them their legal rights or the process.

“This case is a clear example of the nonexistence of due process, of illegal punishment of expressions of protest and the discrimination that indigenous women face in the judicial system in Mexico,” said Luis Arriaga Valenzuela, the Human Rights Center’s director.

—*Latinamerica Press.*

“Food must be produced locally”

Claudia Giaccone is an agronomist and a chief officer at the southern regional office of Sub-secretariat of Family Farming of the Santa Fe Province, one of Argentina’s most important farming areas. Since 1996, Argentina’s governments have promoted transgenic soy monoculture, but not all state sectors agree with this kind of farming.

In an interview with LATINAMERICA PRESS collaborator **Juan Nicastro**, Giaccone explains how she is looking for an alternative by working with small-scale farmers and the challenges facing her work.

What does your office do?

We started in April 2009. We want to recover family farming, debunking the myth that there are no farming families. We go from village to village where there are dozens of farmers who before provided to the towns and have been displaced by big supermarkets that sell food from far away.

We looking for people who had gardens and recuperating them so they can produce environmentally-friendly food, and we put them in alternative fairs. I know it’s very complicated. Everyone says the supermarket is going to swallow them up, but we try to convince people that they can have healthy food near their houses and leave the other products that come from far away and are full of preservatives by the wayside. We’re promoting farmers’ markets for producers with chickens, goats, pigs, etc.

What is grown in those gardens now?

They grow soy. It’s an extensive food production model, a well-oiled technological system. It’s easy and profitable for the farmer, which has meant a lot for the country in terms of exports, profits, balance sheets and income.

There hasn’t been so much debate about soy until the dispute over farm export taxes in March 2008 [during the farmers’ strike that halted most of the country]. I think it’s very healthy that after the crisis we’re starting discuss land use, whether land is a natural resource or a social asset, whether the resources are public and if so, how to manage them, and that we are all responsible for it, because private property is not an absolute, untouchable right, and there are public uses that are above it.

After that tension and strong discussion, the issue is getting clearer, and now we are thinking about how – because it’s not easy – we can turn around the problems of that model without affecting one of the country’s means of production. That’s why the current discussion about expanding agricultural lands, because this involves deforestation, or about the use of agricultural chemicals, because these hurt the population and animals. The crisis must help us discuss this more deeply with the whole community, not just those directly affected.

Are organic crops an alternative?

Yes. We’re close to drafting some new legislation for the province. One proposal is to overturn the entire agricultural model, though this is very difficult. We know that it must happen in stages and that it’s a process because the soy farming is now embedded in the producers, even at a cultural level.

It’s going to be very difficult but another law would help, by creating ecologically-friendly farming zones on the outskirts of urban centers. It would give a 500-meter-wide belt around

cities for ecologically-friendly farming, mainly for food, because food sovereignty, diversity, quality and quantity are the objective. It can be done. We know that it would require more manpower and lower profits, but we have to work so people understand the profit-based models have bad consequences.

We have to take advantage of the evidence of the climate crisis, which not everyone knows about today. This gives us the opportunity to ask ourselves what we are doing to the planet. And those farming belts would help us recover the concept that food must be produced locally. That way you can have food within reach, near your home and you’re also creating new jobs, fulfilling the objective that every community should be the motor of its own development.

How will those changes be implemented?

You can’t implement them quickly or amid conflict. It will be little by little. There are already two communities in this province with ordinances like these: San Genaro and San Jorge, for a 500-meter belt for environmentally-friendly farming, which means that you can’t fumigate with agrochemicals. These are opportunities we can’t miss. We have to discuss them maturely and sincerely, revealing studies and figures

that are not well known.

Going from village to village, we find that person who lives off of the soy fields and can’t even have a flower in his or her house, not even a plant on their lawn because it would die, let alone the family farmers with cows with diseases, children born with deformities. The damage they’re suffering is very clear.

The changes that we all must make are not against the soy producers. They are for them too, because they live with these toxins, and their children and neighbors suffer the consequences. We have to advance without losing that discourse on productivity, of the external market, of the industrialization of the products our land provides us, but while analyzing how we’re going to work, with what substance and how to make the most excluded in rural areas a priority: the thousands of landless farmers. If all the players are involved, we can be very optimistic. □



JUAN NICASTRO

“We have to work so people understand the profit-based models have bad consequences.”

— Claudia Giaccone

Leatherback nesting ground at risk

Government seeks to downgrade national park to avoid paying millions in expropriation fees to landowners.

Up and down Costa Rica's Pacific coast are thousands of beach houses, hotels and condominiums, part of the real estate boom that started here in the 1990s, fueled largely by wealthy foreigners looking to escape cold northern winters.

But on Playa Grande, a strip of pristine, powdery sand that is the last major nesting ground for endangered leatherback turtles in the eastern Pacific, the boom has not hit. Yet.

The government of outgoing President Óscar Arias is trying to push through Congress a reform that would open the area to real estate development that has overrun parts of the coast, threatening the already endangered turtles.

Las Baulas National Marine Park was created in 1991 in an effort to protect the species whose nesting populations had shown a rapid decline years earlier.

The park means that 125 meters of land from the average high-tide point are protected. The few dozen lived-in housing units along the coast are required to use specially designed red and green lights at night so as not to disturb the turtles as they are nesting. Last year, Arias' government proposed downgrading the national park to a refuge, which would protect only 75 meters of land, so that home-owners within the park could continue their stalled construction projects and move in, saving the government hundreds of millions in expropriation fees.

Two-pronged problem

Still, despite nearly two decades of protection efforts under the national park, the turtle populations are still declining, in large part

because of long-line fishing, and by gillnet boats that trap the turtles during their migrating season, near the coasts of Peru and Chile, both nations with giant fishing industries.

"Seven or eight years ago, we were counting 100 turtles a night," said park guide Danilo Campos. "Only 28 came out the entire year last year."

Coupled with potential development along the beach, the results could be disastrous.

According to Randall Arauz, the founder and director of Costa Rican environmental organization Pretoma, protecting the turtles on Costa Rican soil is easier than stopping the long-line and gillnet boats in the eastern and southern Pacific waters, an international problem.

"What the fisherman catch on these long-lines, are the reproductive females," said Arauz. "Costa Rica has nothing to do with all this adult mortality. All these international long-line boats are coming to fin sharks."

The leatherback turtles nest from Mexico to Costa Rica, from November to around February to March. Arauz says the leatherback beaches in Nicaragua and Mexico as well as another in Costa Rica have all seen their populations tumble, and thanks to the 20 years of protection efforts here, Playa Grande has become the only remaining leatherback nesting ground in the region.

"And why is that? Now the leatherbacks we have nesting are the ones we started protecting 15 years ago," he said.

Contradictory policies

Costa Rica, which is known for having one of the most stringent environmental policies in the Americas is now seeking to loosen its laws.

Over the last 15 years, lots were sold behind the nesting beaches, within the national park borders. In order to maintain the park, the government would have to pay off the housing owners.

Last year, the Ministry of Environment, Energy and Telecommunications proposed a bill to strip Las Baulas of its national park status and cut the protected area by almost two-thirds.

"If we would have allowed these developments in the 1990s, these turtles that we're protecting now would have no habitat to come back to," said Arauz. "We have to stop the development."

Some homeowners who purchased lots some 15 years ago have already constructed houses. One owner said he was only waiting for his windows to be installed.

"Now the leatherbacks we have nesting are the the ones we started protecting 15 years ago."

— Randall Arauz



Playa Grande is the last major leatherback turtle nesting beach in the eastern Pacific.

But if the law to downgrade the park does not pass in the 57-seat Congress by the end of the legislative term on April 30, the government will have to pay the homeowners to expropriate the property, even though it's built on a national park.

"There's at least 40 owners. They sold the lots to people ... who thought 'what a beautiful beach. How much does that cost? Oh, a lot cheaper than California. And ... 'what, you're telling me it's a national park and I can't build?'" said Arauz.

Arauz added that the buyers were either ripped off and were not told the property was on a national park, or were advised but didn't care.

"We're not going to let you get away with it," he said.

Major environmental organizations such as the World Wildlife Fund, Conservation International, Oceania, the Nature Conservancy have thrown their support behind maintaining Las Baulas' national park status.

In early March, the Comptroller's Office of Costa Rica, issued a report that harshly criticized the Environment Ministry for "weak" management of the park.

It said the bill sprung up because of the "unmanageable situation," in the park, and to only avoid paying for the land, the value of which, the owners say has risen since they purchased it.

"But the problem and the threats to the turtles' habitat could continue slowly over the years, which could be environmentally irreversible."

If the demotion bill does not pass, the government would have to pay as much as US\$500 million by some estimates.

"If it gets demoted, the following day, we're filing a lawsuit," Arauz said. □

MEXICO

Indigenous rights defenders under attack

Amnesty International urges government to protect activists in increasingly hostile environment.

International organization Amnesty International is urging the Mexican government to protect human rights activists, some of them fighting for indigenous rights, citing threats and violence that hinder their work.

In the report "Standing up for Justice and Dignity: Human Rights Defenders in Mexico," released Jan. 21, Amnesty International

details the cases of 15 human rights defenders in the country who have been subjected to threats, imprisonment, false criminal charges and even death.

"Defending human rights in Mexico is life-threatening and the government is not doing enough to tackle the problem," said Nancy Tapias-Torrado, researcher on human rights defenders at Amnesty International.

"When one human rights defender is attacked, threatened or killed, it sends a dangerous message to many others and denies hope to all those on whose behalf the defender is working."

The report included the case of Obtilia Eugenio Manuel, 32-year-old founder and president of the Me'phaa Indigenous People Organization in the Guerrero state, who had been the target of death threats, intimidation and surveillance since 1998, when the Me'phaa and Mixteco indigenous communities started to organize. Her family was forced to relocate when the intimidation became "so serious" over the past few years.

Another victim was Jesús Emiliano, 42, a lead-

ing member of the Peasant Farmers' Democratic Front of Chihuahua in northern Mexico, a pro-campesino organization. Emiliano had been arbitrarily detained by federal authorities in 2007 for sabotage, which was later dropped five days later by a judge, citing lack of evidence, Amnesty International said. "Irregularities were acknowledged by the judge who dismissed the case, but no action was taken against the federal authorities for wrongful arrest," said the report.

"The Mexican government must urgently develop an effective and comprehensive programme of protection for human rights defenders," said Tapias-Torrado.

—*Latinamerica Press.*

“Glyphosate kills Mother Nature”

Rodolfo Páramo, a retired pediatrician in the central Santa Fe province, is a vocal activist against the use of glyphosate. The toxic herbicide, produced by US seed and agrochemical giant Monsanto, is sprayed on fields of transgenic soy, which now cover 17 million hectares (42 million acres) in Argentina.

Páramo lectures throughout Argentina along with community groups that have suffered from the use of this chemical.

LATINAMERICA PRESS collaborator **Juan Nicastro** spoke with Páramo in the Cosquín National Folklore Festival, in the Córdoba province in January about his campaign on the potential health damage agrochemicals pose. In December, Santa Fe's judiciary ruled against fumigations with glyphosate less than 800 meters from family homes.

How did you first realize the effects of agrochemicals?

After working seven years in the neonatal care unit in the José María Cullen Hospital in Santa Fe, I was transferred to the village of Mal Abrigo, in the north of the province, where I worked in pediatrics. It was there in 1994 and 1995 that we started to see births with deformities, mostly in the neural axis, from the brain to the vertebrae. [We found] anencephalia, or the lack of a brain. The vertebrae were not closed in some places, mainly in the cervical and lumbosacral area, leaving the medulla exposed.

Some 10,000 people live in Mal Abrigo and there are 15 to 20 births a month. In one year, we had 12 babies born with malformations, an extremely high rate. In Santa Fe we had the normal rate: one case of congenital malformation for every 8,500 to 10,000 live births. The figure in Mal Abrigo was terrifying. We started to investigate. I suggested that there was a substance in the environment that blocked folic acid, which protects against malformations in the nervous system. That led to me to find out what product was being used in the fields.

In January 1996, Felipe Solá, deputy agriculture secretary of the government of ex-President Carlos Menem [1989-99], formally authorized the use of transgenic RR Roundup Ready seeds, which are resistant to the herbicide Roundup, Monsanto's glyphosate.

But [Swiss transnational] Syngenta had been selling Monsanto soy and used Roundup before it was authorized nationally.

I continued to research. I spoke with agronomists during a time when the [mechanical crop sprayers called] spiders – or mosquitoes as they are also called – would finish spraying the fields and enter the village dripping the chemicals everywhere. It still happens in many places. In other villages, like in Mal Abrigo, the government prohibited the storage, entry or distribution of the mosquitoes or spiders within the town's urban perimeter. And like magic, the number of deformities in new-

borns went down.

But the number of cases of cancer, especially rapidly advancing cancer, shot up, above all in young people, who didn't respond to traditional anti-cancer treatment.



JUAN NICASTRO

“Amaranth is Monsanto's new enemy.”

— Rodolfo Páramo

Are there precedents of such harmful effects in other parts of the world?

Many. Remember that in Bhopal, India, more than 20 years ago, a chemical [US transnational] Union Carbide was producing spilled and there were 20,000 deaths in 10 minutes, and people there are still suffering from the effects.

At first, they thought I was crazy. That I had come to be a nuisance. Around 2000 we got a judge to rule, with scientific proof, to remove the grain silos from Mal Abrigo's center. Showing that in an urban area, they are disastrous for the community. While I was working in Santa Fe, I didn't see the number of children with respiratory problems that I saw in Mal Abrigo. There was environmental pollution there because the grains were left out to dry but also, at the same time, they left in the air the substances that covered those seeds, that herbicide.

The Universidad Nacional del Litoral [in Santa Fe] had been doing a study since 1997 and last year published a report that showed that there are concentrations of glyphosate in the green and mature soy grains. Also, when they studied the soy, they found residues of the insecticide endosulfan, which is highly toxic, so much so that the German transnational Bayer is going to take it off the Argentine market this year.

Does glyphosate kill everything except soy?

Almost everything. In the United States, some had to abandon their fields, some 5,000 hectares [12,350 acres], because what was thought to be a new weed. A damning for them, a blessing for us: amaranth, a grain that is a basic food of the native peoples of the Andes that kept them strong and healthy, and no herbicide can destroy it. Amaranth is Monsanto's new enemy.

What do you think is the most efficient way to confront this situation?

For people to become aware. There are many products made from soy, more and more. I studied in a public university and I have the obligation to give back to society what it gave me through that free education I received. The people paid for my education. If I, as a professional, see that something is being ignored but that it's killing people, I have to react, study and spread what I learn. And glyphosate doesn't just kill human life. It kills soil's bacteria and fungus. It kills Mother Earth. □



LUIS ANGEL

Communities along the Ecuadorian-Colombian border met in Puerto Asís to discuss the mounting impacts of the violence.

COLOMBIA/ECUADOR
Luis Ángel Saavedra in Quito

Lawless border

Residents caught in the cross fire of attacks from both sides of the border.

While Colombia and Ecuador say they are overcoming a diplomatic collapse following the Colombian military's March 2008 raid on a guerrilla camp on Ecuadorian territory, residents living near either side of the border say otherwise.

Generalized insecurity, repeated military incursions, violence against civilians, impediments to food deliveries, and an overall absence of the state is plaguing the jungle zones on both sides of the border, Colombian and Ecuadorian citizens have said.

But both countries say they are working toward restoring diplomatic relations, which broke off after Colombian army and air force attacked a camp of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC.

Colombia "has overcome its difficulties with Ecuador," said Colombian Foreign Minister Jaime Bermúdez Merizalde on Feb. 9 at the Union of South American Nations summit in Quito.

Days earlier, Colombian President Álvaro Uribe thanked "the Ecuadorian government for its recent efforts in neutralizing some members of the FARC," referring to a Jan. 18 mission in which Ecuador's army killed three suspected members of the guerrilla group, Colombia's largest.

But members of the Fuerzas Unidas Farming Cooperative and the Federation of *Campesino* Organizations of the Sucumbios Border Region, both based in Ecuador, say the Ecuadorian army had actually gunned down three *campesinos*, two Colombians and an Ecuadorian, who were bringing food to Puerto Mestanza, Ecuador.

"Orlando Tapia Molano, Sabrino Pérez and Francis Tamayo were *campesinos* we all knew. Mr. Tamayo was a vendor in Puerto Mestanza", said Calito Párraga, president of the Fuerzas Unidas Cooperative.

The state prosecutor for the Sucumbios province, Felipe Villota, backs up the story and said that an inspection of the bodies showed that they neither had on military clothing nor carried arms.

"I have proof that they weren't armed nor had military uniforms," said Villota. "The people are indignant [and] denounce the abuse and mistreatment by the troops and affirm that they opened fire. They saw what they did."

Villota said there are at least 15 witnesses to the attack.

Joint missions

According to the *campesino* federation, there have been 14 incidents of violence against the local population by Ecuadorian soldiers and Colombian paramilitaries since August 2009. Considered the most grave was the killing of Miguel Lapo and Miguel Pinzón, leaders of the Ecuadorian communities of Bermeja and San Martín, at the hands of Colombian paramilitaries on Sept. 28.

"I have proof that they weren't armed nor had military uniforms. The people are indignant [and] denounce the abuse and mistreatment by the troops and affirm that they opened fire. They saw what they did." — Felipe Villota

The federation has also denounced incursions by the Ecuadorian navy onto the Fuerzas Unidas cooperative to intimidate Colombian refugees and community leaders, such as Wilson Ernesto Chapid, whose house was ransacked on Aug. 7 by 40 Ecuadorian soldiers. Claudia María Palma was beaten along with her 15-year-old daughter by an Ecuadorian navy patrol on Aug. 15 by defending one of the workers who was being beaten by the military.

Condemned to starvation?

Populations along the border have their food supply at risk as well. According to a 1994 bilateral agreement, border residents can buy and move US\$700 worth of food a month across the border but they run the risk that their food will be intercepted by either countries' military, who sometimes seize food they suspect of supplying the FARC.

The region does not produce food and the soil has been devastated by Colombia's long-time aerial fumigations of suspected coca fields with the toxic glyphosate. Communities along

the border and even into Peru are also suffering from FARC's actions.

Colombia's Puerto Leguízamo was the victim of three months of armed blockades called by the FARC, that impeded products from crossing the Putumayo River. A severe drought has also made the Putumayo unnavigable and now importer cannot make the six-hour journey from Puerto Asís to Puerto Leguízamo with provisions.

Colombian authorities refused to allow food importers from taking another route.

"I don't understand that attitude," said Colombian lawmaker Eúler Guerrero. "I don't understand how they ... could deny a city the right to eat."

Colombia's fight against the FARC, which has spilled over into Ecuador, has denied both nations' communities the right to food and survival and to private property as soldiers often uproot the *campesinos*.

Ecuador has yet to respond to the Jan. 18 murders, even though the case has been presented to Defense Minister Javier Ponce. □

CUBA

Hunger striking prisoner dies

Protesting political prisoner dies nearly seven years after his capture.

The death of a Cuban political prisoner following his three-month hunger strike led to a flood of criticism against the island's government and calls for it to release its political prisoners.

Orlando Zapata Tamayo, 42, a dissident, died on Feb. 23. He was arrested on March 20, 2003 in an operation called "Black Spring" in which 75 government dissidents were detained. They were sentenced to between 14 and 30 years in prison.

According to Amnesty International, Zapata Tamayo was originally sentenced to three years in prison in 2004, for disrespect, disturbing order and resistance, but later was convict-

ed of "disobedience" and "disorder in a penal establishment," and was serving a 36-year sentence.

Zapata Tamayo began his hunger strike on Dec. 3, demanding that the government recognize him as a prisoner of conscience and to protest the alleged mistreatment he received during his incarceration. He died in the Hermanos Armeijeiras Hospital in Havana, where he was transferred in February to receive life support, which he refused.

His mother, Reina Luisa Tamayo, rejected President Raúl Castro's condolences and called her son's death "premeditated murder."

"My son lost his life; it was premeditated murder," she said in comments published by Blog Generation Y. "My son was tortured the whole time he was in prison, he was the object of suffering for this family."

The independent Cuban Human Rights and National Reconciliation Commission said, following Zapata Tamayo's death, four other political prisoners and a dissident journalist began hunger strikes. Prisoners Diosdado González Marrero, Eduardo Díaz Freitas, Fidel Suárez Cruz and Nelson Molinet, and journalist Guillermo Fariñas said that they are seeking im-

"The tragic death of Orlando Zapata Tamayo is a terrible illustration of the despair facing prisoners of conscience who see no hope of being freed from their incarceration."

— Gerardo Ducos

mediate release of the 26 political prisoners suffering from health problems.

"The tragic death of Orlando Zapata Tamayo is a terrible illustration of the despair facing prisoners of conscience who see no hope of being freed from their unfair and prolonged incarceration," said Gerardo Ducos, Amnesty International's Caribbean researcher. "A full investigation must be carried out to establish whether ill-treatment may have played a part in his death." —*Latinamerica Press*

PERU

Outcry over Bagua violence report

Indigenous groups blast government-appointed group's account of bloody clashes between protesters and police.

A government-appointed commission stopped short of blaming Peru's president and entire executive branch for the bloody clashes between indigenous protesters and police in June that left more than 30 people dead.

The report, released Jan. 12 by the Coordinating Group for the Development of Amazon Peoples, created by the government after 10 indigenous protesters and 23 police were killed on June 5 in the Amazon town of Bagua in demonstrations against pro-investment decrees, found that the central government hurried through decrees thoughtlessly.

The decrees-law, which were passed under the free trade agreement with the United States, sought to open up the Amazon to large-scale investment projects, sparking protests from local indigenous groups who argued their land and human rights were being trampled upon.

But the special commission, comprised of eight ministers, Amazon regional presidents, indigenous representatives and members of Catholic Church, did not blame the government for the violence and repression that reportedly took place in Bagua, but instead blamed the opposition Nationalist Party, army reservists, teachers, community defense groups, and the indigenous protesters themselves for inciting the violence.

"The indigenous movement was overwhelmed by its own collective, unable to control the excesses that unraveled into violence and death," the report said.

The nongovernmental Legal Defense Institute called the report "totally partial, politicized and ideological." The report was not endorsed by the main indige-

nous representative and a religious missionary.

The commission also recommended the government improve forestry legislation to prohibit the use of forests and protected areas for economic activity, and to take local indigenous customs and beliefs into account, while preserving valuable soils and water resources in the areas before authorizing any extractive industries.

Peru, which is two-thirds Amazon jungle, has auctioned off more than 75 percent of its jungle to gas and oil concessions, mostly to foreign companies.

The commission also called on the government to previously consult indigenous communities before passing any legislation that affects their way of live or livelihoods.

Saúl Puerta, national secretary of the Inter-Ethnic Association of the Peruvian Jungle, or AIDSESEP, an umbrella indigenous organization, rejected the report,

"We wanted to negotiate with the government to reach a true reconciliation, but we haven't been able to reach any agreement. We made our proposals and not one was accepted by the executive branch." — Saúl Puerta

saying that it was accepted by the government without any further discussion.

"We came to the table with every intention of reaching a solution with the government," Puerta said. "We wanted to negotiate with the government to reach a true reconciliation, but we haven't been able to reach any agreement. We made our proposals and not one was accepted by the executive branch."

Issues remain over damages to indigenous victims' families, striking down the investment decrees, the creation of an independent investigative commission and the return of AIDSESEP's president, Alberto Pizango, who has been in Nicaragua under asylum since June.

"We have the will to dialogue," said Daysi Zapata, the organization's acting president. "But if the government wants to close itself off, we have a clear and defined position because our bases are waiting in the Amazon."

—*Latinamerica Press.*

Women still facing high risk of HIV/AIDS

Violence, economic dependence and poor education programs threaten women's health.

The fight against HIV/AIDS has taken an unsettling turn for women, who had little to celebrate this March 8, International Women's Day.

According to the United Nations, HIV/AIDS is the world's No. 1 cause of death for women of fertility age, between 15 and 49.

On March 2, the Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS, or UNAIDS, unveiled its Agenda for Accelerated Country Action for Women, Girls, Gender Equality and HIV (2010–2014), an ambitious plan to conquer gender inequalities that can cause the spread of the virus, and better attend to deficient education and health care for women.

Physical and sexual violence, a lack of education and economic power undermine women's efforts to have greater control over their sexuality and in safe decision-making, such as the use of

contraceptives.

"Thirty years after the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, CEDAW, many girls and women still do not have equal opportunities to realize rights recognized by law," said World Health Organization Director-General Margaret Chan. "Social exclusion, 'honor' killings, female genital mutilation, trafficking, restricted mobility and early marriage among others, deny the right to health to women and girls and increase illness and death throughout the life-course.

HIV infections in women have increased in Latin America and the Caribbean, especially as the age initial sexual activity declined. Panel speakers at the Sixth Central American Congress on HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections held in San Jose, Costa Rica

March 1-5 said that the region's women and young people face the highest risk of contracting the virus.

In Latin America, there were 170,000 new HIV infections in 2008, according to UNAIDS. The Caribbean, which accounts for only 0.7 percent of people living with HIV, "has been more heavily affected by HIV than any region outside sub-Saharan Africa" with an adult prevalence of around 1 percent, UNAIDS said.

Following the devastating 7.0-magnitude earthquake in Haiti in January, UNAIDS called for more international aid to help combat the spread of the disease.

"It is unprecedented to have such a huge natural disaster in a country with a high HIV prevalence," said Michel Sidibé, the organization's director.

UNAIDS estimates that there were 120,000 people living with HIV in the country before the quake in Haiti, and more than half of those infections were in women.

"Now, more than 1 million people are living in temporary shelters, putting them at greater risk of violence that includes sexual and gender based violence," said Sidibé. "Programs are urgently needed to reduce vulnerabilities to HIV and ensure protection."

—*Latinamerica Press.*

ECUADOR

Indigenous group kicks out oil company

Government and company mutually agree end contract.

The Sarayaku Kichwa indigenous group in Ecuador's Amazon jungle saw a happy ending to its 14-year struggle to end two oil giants' presence on its land.

In December, Argentina's Compañía General de Combustibles, a subsidiary of US oil company Chevron, and Burlington Resources, of the United States, agreed to end their oil contracts with the government amid pressure from the local indigenous community.

The government had granted the two companies a concession to explore and drill in on two lots in the area in 1996, without consulting the Sarayaku community, in the Pastaza province.

The concession violated an agreement signed seven years earlier in which the government guaranteed the Sarayaku community's rights to the land and banned oil exploration there.

In early 2003, the government put the military in control of the indigenous area so the indigenous community members did not even have free movement on their own lands, and the oil companies began to intimidate the local population.

A year later, the community presented a case against the Ecuadorian state before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, a body of the Organization of American States, that sought protection for the community. The following year, the oil companies had to suspend their activities since the Inter-American Court on Human Rights ruled that the government must protect the community.

The government has not complied with the part of the sentence that called for the removal of 400 kilograms of explosives planted by the Argentine company in the indigenous area, and on Feb. 3, the community appealed to the court to pressure the government into complying with the sentence. —*Latinamerica Press.*

At term's end, notable strides in equality

President Bachelet ends her five-year term with high popularity and significant advances for women.

President Michelle Bachelet “made women more visible,” said María Pía Aqueveque, a young economist and professor. “Almost everything changed,” Aqueveque said enthusiastically of Bachelet’s term.

On Jan. 19, a day after the second-round presidential runoff when billionaire businessman Sebastián Piñera, of the right-wing Coalition for Change, topped former President Eduardo Frei of the ruling Concertación Democrática, Bachelet signed a new law that would allow the emergency contraceptive, or “morning after pill,” to be distributed free of charge in public health centers, a measure that the Supreme Court had blocked in 2008.

The ruling had sparked an outcry from citizens who said it was a classist one as it prohibited low-income women from accessing the contraceptive.

“We’re corrected a tremendous injustice,” said Bachelet. “We’re consecrating reproductive rights.”

Bachelet’s revolution

But her victory was only one in a series of women’s rights policies since the first Concertación government took office in 1990. It was only since she took office in March 2006 that Bachelet made these reforms a priority.

“I could talk to you about many measures,” Laura Albornoz, the former minister of the National Women’s Service, or Sernam, told *Latinamerica Press*. “But the essential thing is that the president created a new atmosphere. She showed that women can run the highest national office efficiently.”

Just after Bachelet took office, she said: “Without the presence of women, we cannot beat poverty or be a competitive country.”

One of the first measures she took was to

have gender equality in her Cabinet. She instated a quota system for governors’ offices and other state jobs, and signed into law a fund that gives Chilean mothers US\$600 for each child that they can access when they reach the age of 65.

Under her mandate, a reform of the domestic violence law that protect victims was passed, and categorizes it unequivocally as a crime. Thirty-one women’s centers and 16 new shelters were established during her term.

She also pushed for equal pay for equal work with a new law that requires employers to guarantee this.

According to the Labor Office, as of 2006, women without formal education were receiving around a quarter less than their male counterparts for equal work. The trend worsened according to the education level. Women with primary and secondary school education receive about 70 percent of what men with the same education level earn. But women with higher education earn just over 61 percent of what their male counterparts earn for the same job.

“Women are speaking up more,” said Camila Benado, a councilwoman of Huechuraba, a low-income Santiago community. Like Aqueveque and Albornoz, Benado says Bachelet’s agenda has put gender issues back into the social and culture arena.

Piñera’s change

Will this change when Piñera takes office? One of the issues that remain out of discus-

“But the essential thing is that the president created a new atmosphere. She showed that women can run the highest national office efficiently.”

— Laura Albornoz

sion is abortion. There is a blanket ban on the practice in Chile, regardless of the risk to the mother’s life, a policy that was instated during the 1973-90 dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. Any efforts to modify this have failed so far.

Some of the ultra-right wing politicians that championed this blanket ban are members of Piñera’s Coalition for Change, including the Independent Democratic Union, as well as members of the ultra-conservative Catholic groups Opus Dei and Legionaries of Christ, whose politics could extinguish the hopes of Aqueveque, Albornoz, Benado, and millions of other Chilean women who have fought for women’s rights. □

Doctors obstruct legal abortions

Women at risk as doctors refuse to terminate pregnancies, despite lifted ban.

Nearly four years since the Constitutional Court decriminalized abortion in certain cases, women still face challenges to receive the procedure as many doctors and even judges have improperly declared themselves conscientious objectors.

In May 2006, the court lifted a ban on abortion in the case that the mother's life or mental or physical health is in jeopardy, if the pregnancy is the result of rape or incest, or if the child has fetal malformations.

Ariadna Tovar, a lawyer with Women's Link Worldwide, a gender equality advocacy group, says doctors or the health care providers they work for have collectively declared themselves conscientious objectors to the procedure.

Judges are doing the same, she says.

Under Colombian law, judges must verify if the case is rape or incest, or if there is a fetal malformation, but some judges refuse to even hear the cases, passing them on to other judges that may do the same, or, based on their personal or religious beliefs, simply deny the woman the right to voluntarily interrupt the pregnancy, she adds.

Decree suspended

Even though the blanket ban on abortion was lifted, government has created a legal void. In 2006, the government issued a decree that regulated the abortion procedures according to the court's ruling. However, the State Council, an administrative tribunal, suspended the decree, arguing abortion and other women's health issues must be regulated by Congress and not the executive branch, creating confusion and a legislative black hole, said a spokesperson at the Social Protection Ministry who asked not to be named for lack of authoriza-

tion to comment.

Last year, the Constitutional Court ruled that no judge could be a conscientious objector and refuse to hear an abortion case and that no health care service could refuse to performing abortions on the same grounds.

The court said, however, that the doctor who performs the abortion may object but must present their reasons in writing.

These abortions must be made available everywhere in Colombia, and the court called on the Education and Social Protection Ministries for a campaign promoting sexual and reproductive rights that informs women that abortion in Colombia has been decriminalized in these cases.

Solicitor General Alejandro Ordóñez, a staunch objector to abortion for religious reasons, asked to block the request for the educational campaign, arguing that Congress should decide about conscientious objection.

The Catholic Church has also led a strong opposition of conservative groups against the campaign, alleging it promotes abortion.

This lack of clear information for women has led to a further vulnerability of women's fundamental rights, including health.

"They demand other evidence: medical board audits, more exams, when the only thing they need is a medical certificate."

—Ariadna Tovar

More obstacles

The extensive evidence requested by health care providers that qualifies women for abortion is sometimes seen as excessive and puts women in a race against time.

"They demand other evidence: medical board audits, more exams, when the only thing they need is a medical certificate," said Tovar, adding that patients are often moved to another health care center, dragging out the process as the pregnancy advances.

President of the private Colombian Association of Integral Medicine Companies, Juan Manuel Díaz, says that the its health care centers are following the Constitutional Court's order to allow abortion in certain cases. "The decision must be made in the least time possible, given that after 16 weeks, the risks to the women are higher."

According to official figures, 30,000 women die every year in Colombia from clandestine abortions. The Social Protection Ministry says that since the court's 2006 ruling permitting abortions through 2009, 342 women have legally interrupted their pregnancies.

"The implementation (of the ruling) is gradual because it creates cultural changes and destroys myths," said Tovar. "But there is a sector that is still reticent to accept sexual and reproductive rights in general. We are identifying obstacles, determining sources where they're coming from and figuring out how to get rid of them."

In November, the national health care regulator fined Coomeva, a health care provider, some US\$92,000 for denying a voluntary abortion to a 13-year-old who had been raped. □

“Being part of the left doesn't mean you don't face *machismo*”

Dunia Mokrani Chávez is a political analyst and a member of *Grupo Comuna*, a civic group, composed mostly of academics, critical of the government. She is also one of the founding members of *Samka Sawuri*, or “Dream Weavers”, a women's collective that promotes gender equality. Mokrani is a researcher at the Center for Andean, Amazonian and Mesoamerican Studies and coordinator of the Conflict Monitoring Committee of the Latin American Social Observatory.

LATINAMERICA PRESS collaborator **Juan Nicastro** spoke with Mokrani about the deeply rooted oppression of women in Bolivian society.

Why are women's organizations necessary in Bolivia?

There is a very specific form of patriarchal domination here. That is what's being discussed now, and the good thing is it's not just a discussion reduced to some feminist circles; it's widespread. If women didn't organize to confront this kind of oppression, it would never end. If other types of oppression will be reduced, patriarchal [oppression] won't just disappear on its own.

That's an important issue within organizations themselves, such as the Bartolina Sisa *Campesina* Women's Union, in which they decided to make themselves visible as *campesina* women, not just as members of the United Union Confederation of Campesino Workers of Bolivia. But this has been questioned too: many popular and labor organizations feel that the feminist discourse creates divides and their class or ethnicity is most important. Our *compañeras* say that our fight is not against men, but just so our voices are heard.

What are some of the worst examples of patriarchal domination?

Violence is probably the clearest form – daily violence, including political, economic, sexual and social. For example, there are many cases of female town councilwomen who have been forced to resign so a male alternate can take her place, and even cases of physical violence when they refused to resign. This is because there was a quota law that required political parties to have a certain percentage of female members. Often, those women entered into public life despite the patriarchal structure that gave them titles, only

to take them away later.

Or perhaps a *compañera* tells us that being a lawmaker has resulted in divorce, as while a male deputy will never have problems for not being home, the woman will. Those are problems that are pending.

Another issue is invisible labor, such as the productive work at home. One of the reasons this kind of work is not considered a job is because it is in the domestic sphere.

Also, 99 percent of the country's organized retail workers are women, but they are led by two men. In the case of nurses, most are women but a man is their association's leader. And why is that? The women themselves say that men handle certain spheres well. There are many cases in which female leaders have been looked down upon by the very community members they represent, just for being women. Some lectures, debates and meetings are held in bars. Union representatives meet in bars and if a woman comes in to discuss, it's frowned upon. So they don't look down at them, or for their children or husband's sake, the women leave their posts.

Is there discrimination against women?

Women had been beaten or killed in October 2003 [during the gas protests] or beaten in Santa Cruz [in August 2008, during protests against the central government], or beaten in Sucre [in May 2008 in strikes against *campesino* and indigenous groups], or killed in Pando [during a paramilitary massacre against a *campesino* and indigenous march in October 2008]. They were indigenous *campesina* women, and for the aggressors, their lives were worth less than a professional woman in the city or that of a man. There was particular cruelty against women in the middle of a new racism sprout. There, we saw *machismo* and fascism together.

The women have participated actively in assemblies and in social mobilization, but that did not translate proportionally into seats in Congress, in institutional decision-making spaces.

A male deputy spoke of the men's supposed superiority and the proof of his theory is that labor groups are mostly women but supposedly have always



JUAN NICASTRO

“There are many cases of female town councilwomen who have been forced to resign so a male alternate can take her place.”

— Dunia Mokrani Chávez

needed a male leader. Our *compañeras* are told that women don't have the ability. And we tell them that this is what the dominant classes have always told the indigenous throughout history and, and now it's being reproduced by men against their own partners in the struggle.

What's being done to change this?

Within our collective, we believe that in order to decolonize, you have to also get rid of the patriarchal structure. A lot of this colonial state is run by the patriarchy. From the government itself, the question is subordinated; it doesn't receive enough attention. You run the risk of believing that other struggles are going to take on women's struggle. There aren't easy conditions to work on the gender issue. Being part of the left doesn't mean you don't face *machismo*.

We see that there is something that's not being discussed enough: the liberal structure in the social sphere has led to a series of ministries of indigenous issues, gender issues, generational issues. So it's clear that a government like this one is not going to have an indigenous issues ministry, that's the first thing President Evo Morales said: "we indigenous are no longer an issue." We're in everything, but little by little, this has translated to the issue of women, and is simply resolved saying that women are also involved in everything, something that's just not true. Just uttering that women are involved in everything does not give us access.

So it's not clear how this process of change assumes women's struggle. We have heard deputies of MAS [the ruling Movement to Socialism] party tell fellow lawmakers that women are not able to represent the people. So there

is something that is still unclear, that is, how this process can assume these struggles, not subordinate them. We're missing a clearer position to fight this kind of oppression.

What is your view on the current state of the process of change?

This process of change has been the project of an alliance of organizations and it has now become "the power" in a dispute over whose is the process of change, whether it's the MAS or the organizations that have been left on the margins, sadly, because all of them have been subordinated by the MAS, and they have wanted to snatch that process of change from us. We all wanted that change and it shouldn't be trapped by the state, by a political party. I think there are small advances but great steps back as a result.

Sometimes we don't know what to do, because we want to have changes and the women need those changes faster. At any rate, despite small steps, we're united to continue dreaming. The name "Dream Weavers" has been questioned ... [but] I think we're still dreaming.

There is a change, from nothing to something, and it's above all hope because an indigenous man has risen to the presidency. As many old women in the countryside say, one of their sons is now running the state. But this change has created other ways of doing politics. The present state is a colonial state in all of its old forms. It had always been run by the dominant classes, and now it is run by other players, but not necessarily to change itself. You see some *compañeras* who are now empowered, but some times they are empowered against their own *compañeras*. □

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