

CUSLAR NEWSLETTER

Fall 1997

Latin America:

Environmental

Tragedy



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"Un-Natural" Disasters

" 'Development' could not but entail destruction for women, nature and subjugated cultures, which is why, throughout the Third World, women, peasants and tribals are struggling for liberation from 'development' just as they earlier struggled for liberation from colonialism." -Vandana Shiva

Multinational corporations in Latin America are engaged in an all-out war on the environment. Disputes over the control and use of natural resources, the health consequences of toxic wastes, pollution and pesticides, and major industrial developments affect the entire region. The recent murders of environmental activists in Honduras, Colombia and Costa Rica starkly illustrate the gravity of these conflicts. For people who depend on the land for survival, its protection is not a luxury, it is a necessity.

In 1992 the World Bank announced its new major policy goal, "working for a better environment." The Bank accompanied this policy with grand speeches and lengthy epistles lauding its new direction. However, despite high-profile rhetoric, as the articles in this issue illustrate, the new "pro-environment" World Bank operates no differently than the old World Bank.

The World Bank has continued its primary agenda of furthering neoliberal economic reforms rather than concerning itself with environmental protection. Together with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Bank has forced Latin American nations to promote exports and outside capital investment. Toward this end, each nation courts multinational corporations, competing with other nations to provide the most favorable conditions for investment: low wages, a passive labor force and lax environmental laws. The quest for capital has resulted in a huge increase in exports of natural resources including seafood, wood products, agricultural products and raw minerals.

The World Bank maintained that increasing exports would benefit the environment, claiming that corporations engaged in resource extraction would move to conserve ecosystems as the cost of a damaged environment negatively affected profits. To the contrary, weak environmental regulations encouraged short-term profit seeking, as multinational companies cut, mined, and dumped indiscriminately, leaving clean-up to the natives.

A second World Bank demand exacerbates the environmental crisis: the insistence that Latin American countries reduce the size of their governmental budgets. As funds and staff for environmental protection agencies have shrunk, so have their abilities to monitor corporations and enforce the minimal existing regulations.

The World Bank and the IMF insist upon environmentally harmful policies because international capital demands them. The details of each struggle differ, but the genesis of the problem remains rooted in the inappropriate model of development used by profit-seeking outside interests: multinational corporations.

-Erin Sheehan

The Committee on U.S./ Latin American Relations (CUSLAR) is a Cornell University based group, founded in 1965, which seeks to promote a greater understanding of Latin America and the Caribbean. The members of CUSLAR are united in our concern about the role of the U.S. in the social, political, and economic affairs of the region. Within this context we support the right of the people of Latin America and the Caribbean to self determination, and support their efforts to free themselves from a legacy of colonialism, exploitation, and oppression. CUSLAR works for peace, justice, and greater mutual understanding in U.S./Latin American relations through education, solidarity and support of human rights.

If you are interested in writing or editing for the Newsletter, please call the CUSLAR office at (607) 255-7293. Articles and letters to the editor should be sent to: CUSLAR, G-29 Anabel Taylor Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853. You can also email us at: cuslar@cornell.edu The CUSLAR Newsletter is published three times a year.

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Peru Goes Under the Shell

By Pratap Chatterjee

The highland forests near the tiny, remote indigenous village of Cashiriari in central Peru's Urabamba region are abuzz every day with several large, black ex-army Chinook helicopters, Soviet-designed Antonov aircraft and an Angolan hovercraft named the Manta. This commotion is a recent development. The Machiguenga peoples have hunted and fished here for 5,000 years. Close by live the Kugapakori peoples, who have lived in fierce, self-imposed isolation from the rest of the world.

Below the forests is a natural gas field which the giant oil corporation Shell has named Camisea. Shell geologists estimate Camisea contains 11 trillion cubic feet of natural gas and 600 million barrels of liquid natural gas, enough fuel to meet the capital city of Lima's energy needs for a century. The company has already drilled a first well, and it plans on drilling three more. Shell says it is taking great pains to design a model of environmental management and local participation, welcoming input from interested observers or experts. "We need criticism from the outside," says Alan Hunt, the chief executive of Shell in Peru.

Shell has a history in Peru. More than a decade ago it

drilled a series of wells in an effort to find petroleum. The company withdrew in 1986 when it found only natural gas and failed to strike an agreement with the Peruvian government. Local leaders allege that Shell contract workers abused local women at that time. Human rights activists and environmentalists say that the Shell operations attracted outside loggers who brought diseases that killed a major part of another indigenous community of Nahua peoples who have lived in isolation for centuries.

This time around, the company claims that it will obtain the permission of local people before doing any work; it will not build any roads, so as to prevent the intrusion of settlers, loggers or miners; it will forbid hunting and fishing by all staff; it will employ the best available technology to ensure minimal pollution; and it will clean up every last scrap of waste.

The company has hired the Smithsonian Institute in Washington to map local plants, mammals, insects and aquatic systems at each clearing. To prevent social problems, Shell has hired Peruvian anthropologist Alonso Zarzar, to help the company work with the communities.

Zarzar has prepared detailed guidelines for Shell and has conducted workshops to ensure that the company's 360 local and expatriate contract workers do not violate local customs or engage in disruptive practices. Shell is also seeking to ensure that all its workers and visitors are vaccinated against

diseases that might spread to local communities.

To reduce its impact on surrounding forests, the company delivers all its supplies by plane or barge to Nuevo Mundo, a small riverside village. Here, 300 contract workers are completing a new airport and a command center for the company's work in the region. From Nuevo Mundo, smaller craft transport materials to the wellheads, which are two days upriver or a short helicopter ride away.

At the wellheads, several hours walk from the nearest river, giant yellow earth movers have begun to excavate hillsides. Eventually, the company plans to build a pipeline through the forests and over the Andes to Lima, approximately 500 kilometers to the west, and perhaps another pipeline to Cuzco. There is also talk of transporting the gas to Bolivia, where it could be piped to Brazilian metropolises such as Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro through a pipeline being built by Texas-based Enron.

The kinder, gentler Shell's efforts notwithstanding, Peruvian activists observe that despite the hiring of a leading anthropologist, local people have no idea of what is happening at the drilling site or what future operations might involve. The people of Cashiriari started complaining shortly after Shell set up operations late last year. One villager, Pilar Vargas, says that the Cashiriari River, which is normally chocolate-brown,

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Brazilian Amazon: Disappearing Faster Than Ever

By Erin Sheehan

Multinational timber companies are threatening the world's largest rainforest wilderness: the Amazon. Within the past year several of Southeast Asia's biggest forestry conglomerates--known for abysmal environmental records back home--have greatly increased their ownership of Amazonian rainforests... and they are not planning on creating a wildlife preserve. The heart of the Amazon is being opened to wholesale industrial logging. Annual deforestation rates in the Brazilian Amazon have increased 34 percent since the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. The Wall Street Journal estimates Asian multinationals control about 30 million acres in the wider South American tropical forest region, having quadrupled their interests in late 1996. The figure is expected to increase rapidly in the next two years.

The Asian timber industry represents a concentrated core of capital investment and has been characterized by an aggressive efficiency. Timber companies in the state of Sarawak, Malaysia have practiced highly intensive industrial logging, harvesting much of the state's timber resource in only a decade. The logging has had major environmental consequences including silted rivers, eroded soils and declining forest diversity and health. Indigenous Dayak tribes have experienced severe social dislocation as a result of the loss of traditional lands. After exhausting much of Asia's timber supplies, the multinationals have expanded operations throughout the tropics.

Multinational timber companies have entered the Amazon either through long-term harvest leases or by purchasing major interests in Brazilian timber firms.

According to the Associated Press, major players include Malaysian companies such as the WTK Group, Samling, Rimbunan Hijau and Mingo, Fortune Timber of Taiwan.

The recent timber acquisitions have surprised many government observers, prompting the federal government to launch an investigation into the purchases. According to Eduardo Martins, the head of Ibama, Brazil's national environmental protection agency, "Multi-million dollar investments in the Amazonian logging industry would spell disaster... We don't want that kind of investment."

Brazil has about 80 environmental inspectors for an area the size of western Europe. The lack of effective enforcement means that though sound forest laws and harvest practices may exist in theory, they are frequently flaunted. A recent survey of 34 logging sites in Para state has revealed that none have





met the International Tropical Timber Organization harvesting requirements that Brazil has agreed to comply with by the year 2000. A 1996 raid by Ibama found over 30,000 cubic meters of illegally-cut timber floating down the Purus River towards waiting sawmills.

Amazonino Mendes, the pro-logging governor of Amazonas State, has stated that logging will be regulated to limit environmental damage. However, even in the unlikely event that the loggers do follow forestry laws, the excessive scale of their operations could easily accelerate the pace of Amazonian deforestation by road-building, thereby greatly increasing forest access to hunters and slash-and-burn farmers.

Historically, the Amazon rainforest's size, inaccessibility, typically poor soils and potent diseases have protected it against large-scale logging and development. Things are changing rapidly as major new highways dissect the basin, providing a major artery for timber companies to access north-central Amazon. One new highway runs from the city of Manaus, northward to Venezuela; making Manaus a major hub for new timber development. The number of

timber mills there has increased from 10 to nearly 100 in five years.

In addition to harming the environment, timber companies are also mistreating the people currently occupying the land. When the companies first arrived, they promised riches to the indigenous people. When these funds failed to appear, the people complained to the companies, which have refused to respond to the charges. The Brazilian Justice Ministry has received repeated complaints about indiscriminate logging without compensation or permission on the land of the Parakana Indians, but no official action has been taken.

Industrial loggers are invading the Amazon rainforest wilderness, changing forever the

ecological, social, spiritual, and economic composition of this area. By opening up the heart of the Amazon to large-scale logging, the Brazilian government aids and abets accelerating rates of deforestation. The stakes are high--the fate of the world's largest rainforest ecosystem.

The Rainforest Action Network has been working extensively on this issue and will provide more information on request. Send inquiries to: Rainforest Action Network, 450 Sansome Street, #700, San Francisco, CA 94111.



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The MAI: What You Don't Know Can Hurt You!

By Lyndy Worsham

"I hope we shall crush in its birth the aristocracy of our moneyed corporations, which dare already to challenge our government to a trial of strength and bid defiance to the laws of our country."

- Thomas Jefferson

The engines of economic globalization have gained startling speed over the past decade fueled in part, by the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). However, the most recent and pernicious power grabbing attempt by transnational corporations is the introduction of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI).

If you've never heard of the MAI, don't feel left out. Supporters of the MAI, including the European Union, the United States, powerful banks and transnational corporations, have tried to conduct negotiations in complete secrecy, sidestepping basic democratic principles and proceeding without the knowledge or scrutiny of the public, the media or elected officials. Fortunately, Public Citizen, a public interest group based in Washington, DC, recently managed to obtain the MAI draft text.

The MAI is a new international economic agreement currently being negotiated by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), a Paris-based international policy organization comprised of 29 countries, including the world's

largest economies with the highest foreign investment rates. 447 of the world's largest 500 transnational corporations are also members of the OECD.

The MAI creates a corporate bill of rights through investment protection, investment liberalization, and investor-to-state dispute settlement procedures. The MAI consists of a set of rules which place new restrictions on what governments can do to regulate international investment and corporate power. These rules seek to protect and expand the power of corporations and wealthy international investors by guaranteeing them: 1) a stable investment climate, 2) easy repatriation of profits, 3) open-market access by establishing

National Treatment and Most Favored Nation designations, 4) freedom from complying with regulations and legislation pertaining to environmental, social and health safeguards and 5) freedom from any obligation to serve local needs.

The MAI dwarfs NAFTA in a number of ways. First, the MAI is geographically broader by its inclusion of 29 countries, not just three. Second, it includes all economic sectors and establishes National Treatment, which requires countries to treat foreign investors at least as well as domestic investors. Third, unlike NAFTA, the MAI is binding for 20 years. In short, the MAI is a gigantic leap in corporate power far surpassing NAFTA and WTO.

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The MAI will ban performance requirements, which are laws requiring foreign investors to invest in the local economy and to behave responsibly in exchange for market access. For example, selective purchasing laws such as the Massachusetts Burma law, which restricts state agencies from purchasing goods or services from companies that do business with oppressive regimes, could be outlawed as discriminatory.

The rights of corporations to repatriate profits will be paramount over local community concerns. The US Community Reinvestment Act, which requires absentee-owners to reinvest profits in the communities where they operate could be challenged as a violation of foreign investors' rights.

Also impacted are laws and regulations that protect natural resources and environmental quality. For example, laws requiring that glass and plastic containers be made from a minimum percentage of recycled materials and laws limiting foreign ownership and land use could be removed as obstacles to free trade. Other important environmental laws such as the Endangered Species Act (ESA), Clean Air Act and hazardous waste laws could be challenged under the MAI by transnational corporations based in OECD countries, which have lower environmental standards.

The MAI could also help push threatened and endangered species to extinction. For example, a South Korean-based transnational corporation, which profits from selling bear parts, could attack US hunting regulations as a barrier to free trade.

Perhaps the most alarming element of the MAI grants private investors and

corporations direct legal standing to sue governments and seek monetary compensation at international tribunals for failure to provide all of the MAI's benefits. Such private legal rights of corporations against governments do not even exist in the extraordinarily powerful and far reaching WTO.

In order to better understand how the investor-to-state dispute mechanism of the MAI works, take the case of Ethyl Corporation, which is suing the Canadian government under a similar provision in NAFTA's investment chapter for imposing a ban on the toxic gasoline additive, MMT. Ethyl Corporation claims that the Canadian ban on MMT violates provisions of NAFTA and seeks restitution of \$251 million to cover losses resulting from the "expropriation" of both its MMT production plant and its "good reputation." The Ethyl case is an example of how the MAI will apply NAFTA-like standards worldwide, overturning environmental and health standards on a global scale.

Secret negotiations about the MAI have been ongoing since 1995, but obtaining information about the agreement was impossible until February 1997 when the negotiating text was leaked.

The MAI text is currently about 90 percent complete. After

the agreement is finished, it will be introduced in Congress in one of two ways: as a treaty, requiring 2/3 Senate ratification, or as an executive agreement, requiring a majority vote in the House and Senate. Shortly thereafter, other OECD countries, and eventually developing nations, will be asked to sign on.

The proposed MAI is a wish list for corporate interests, serving to dismantle environmental safeguards, governmental sovereignty, social justice and welfare, labor rights, food production systems and more. Action is needed to prevent the implementation of the MAI. Please write your Members of Congress to express concern about the MAI at the US House of Representatives (or US Senate), Washington, D.C. 20515.

To get more information on the MAI, visit Public Citizen's web site at <http://www.citizen.org> or write to Public Citizen at 215 Pennsylvania Avenue SE, Washington DC 20003

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Eco-News Updates

BELIZE: Trees have begun to fall in Belize's 103,000-acre Colombia River Reserve, one of Central America's last great tropical rainforests. Atlantic Industries Limited and other Malaysian-backed companies have access to 1.1 million acres of "national land" in the Toledo district, where the majority of the 30,000 inhabitants are Maya Indians who hold no deeds to their traditional lands.

Besides their importance to Maya culture, contiguous jungles in Guatemala, Belize and lowland Chiapas, Mexico, protect rare mammals, birds and plants. The Colombia River Reserve alone harbors 224 bird species. 43 of these migrate from North America during winter and are declining because of habitat degradation.



percent growth rate of exports in general. Meanwhile, the government has authorized the US-based Trillium Company to log 250,000 hectares of Magellan oak despite claims that oak forests could be decimated within 30 years.

CARIBBEAN: Cruise ships are dumping on their island ports, reports the International Press Service. Barry Wade, managing director of a Jamaican environmental firm, says 6,300 ships dock at Caribbean ports each year. Cruise ships tourists produce four to ten times as much garbage as generated by people on shore, and the ships often dump waste directly into the sea, endangering marine life, human health and the environment.

CHILE: International scientists are warning the Chilean government to regulate the exploitation of native forest while the lumber industry's economic impact is still relatively small. Wood-chip production grew at an average annual rate of 155 percent between 1989 and 1995, exceeding the 13.3

BOLIVIA: Cargill, the world's largest agricultural trading company, has enlisted the Bolivian government's services to dredge its grain port in Puerto Aguirre. Dredging operations are the first step in a grand plan to turn the Paraguay and Parana rivers into an industrial waterway for huge barge convoys. The megaproject threatens the Pantanal, the world's largest remaining wetlands system, as well as drinking water in three cities along the channel. Dredging will release heavy metals, hydrocarbons and pesticide residues trapped in the rivers' sediment and poison the region's water supplies. Plans call for dumping the polluted sediment in the Pantanal, which would contaminate the wetlands and block fish migration routes.

ECUADOR: According to a study in Ambio, new trails built to accommodate ecotourists and "sustainable" harvesting of forest products are causing the forests' fragile soil to wash away. In

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Ecuador, a typical rainstorm washes out an average of 364 pounds of soil along each kilometer of a 12-foot-wide path.

CUBA: The Cuban government has enacted a tax to boost energy efficiency in the state-owned sugar

occupied the Chile's Indigenous Affairs Bureau and Environmental Protection Board to protest the licensing of the Ralco Dam saying "The Chilean government has once again shown its colonizing mentality by not respecting our people or the law." They suggest the development of alternatives to the



industry. In essence, the government is taxing itself. Under the "autotax" plan, sugar processing plants get taxed when they exceed recommended energy use. Cuba also plans to create a national environment fund by taxing industrial emissions and foreign investments.

CHILE: Several environmental and indigenous groups are protesting the proposed construction of a hydroelectric plant on the Bío-Bío River, which runs through indigenous territories. The groups claim that the project, which will build at least five dams on Chile's largest river, will destroy a unique ecosystem, and cause cultural ethnocide by displacing the native Pehuenche people. The project will flood 9,000 acres of farmland and rare temperate rainforest in Southern Chile. The first dam was completed in March, and the second dam is in progress. The project is being funded by the World Bank. On June 10, a group of Pehuenches

dam project to satisfy the local demands for power that will not violate indigenous lands.

URUGUAY: Increasing rates of soil erosion due to sudden switches to export crops and intensified production techniques are impacting an important wetland. Rice growers producing mostly for export are encroaching on the Banados del Este, an internationally recognized wetland and an important wintering habitat for migratory birds. Dramatically altering the viability of the marshland ecosystem and threatening six bird species with extinction, large-scale rice cultivation requires 10 million liters of water per hectare.

PARAGUAY: Construction of the Multilateral bank-funded Yacyreta dam on the Parana river between Argentina and Paraguay is nine years behind schedule and billions of dollars over budget.

Continued on Next Page

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These ecobriefs were compiled by CUSLAR volunteers from reports from Earth First! Journal, Earth Island Journal, Latin America Press, Connection to the Americas, Greenpeace: International Toxics Investigator, Earth Culture, Multinational Monitor, World Watch Institute, and the Rainforest Action Network.

Eco-News Updates Continued from pg. 9

An internal World Bank document calls the project an economic, ecological and social disaster. At completion, expected no earlier than 1998, the project will flood vast tracts of wild land, destroy fisheries, create an ideal habitat for malaria and schistosomiasis, and cause the relocation of some 50,000 people, including the indigenous Mbya Guarani, who will be forced from their ancestral lands. Thousands of displaced Paraguayans have filed complaints with the World Bank, alleging that the institution violated the World Bank's own policies on resettlement, environmental assessment, indigenous peoples and wild lands.

PERU: Grass-roots groups are attempting to protest a proposed inter-ocean highway that would link the coast of Peru to the coast of Brazil. The project would threaten three important ecological reserves, including Manu, home to the world's most diverse biosystem. The greater watershed region is also home to 37 indigenous communities from 17 ethnic groups. Fearing that construction is unstoppable, opposition groups are hoping that the World Bank, or the Inter-American Development Bank will demand an environmental-impact study that may keep the door open for debate and compromise.

ARGENTINA: The poisoning last winter of some 20,000 Swainson's hawks in Argentina prompted a U.S. endangered-species biologist to blame the export of pesticides banned for use in the United States. Videotaped evidence from the pampas, where farmers use the acutely toxic chemicals to combat grasshoppers, show roosting groves littered with fresh hawk carcasses. Forensic evidence points

to an insecticide sold to farmers by Ciba-Geigy, through its Argentinian subsidiary. At four sites, about 280 miles west of Buenos Aires, 4,000 dead hawks were found. Conservative estimates put the annual number of pesticide-linked Swainson deaths at 20,000 - five percent of the world's population.

BRAZIL/BOLIVIA: The World Bank and IFC are financing about a third of the cost for a 3,200 km pipeline from gas fields in Bolivia to markets in Brazil. On the Bolivian side, the gas pipeline will impact the Gran Chaco Park - the largest tract of subtropical dry forest in the Americas, with one of the highest mammalian species diversities on the continent. The park is a 3.4 million hectare protected area of great biological diversity inhabited by indigenous peoples. In Brazil, the pipeline will cross 70 km of the Pantanal, the largest wetlands in the world. The proposed pipeline will fragment the forest system, inhibiting the free movement of some species, while opening trails which bring in poachers and hunters of alligators, mammals and rare birds. It will alter the water course supplying the swamp and wetland areas, by blocking drainage and raising the ground water level, and accelerate the erosion process in fragile zones.

SURINAME: Two North American corporations have been granted licenses by the Surinamese government to mine at least two million ounces of gold over the next ten years at the Gross Rosebel mine. However, at the mine site there are several villages of Maroons who have lived in the general area for more than 400 years since they settled there to escape slavery. The Maroons are concerned about the impact gold mining will have on their lives. They point to the August 1995 spill in Guyana that dumped more than 3.2 million cubic meters of cyanide-laced mud into area rivers. The Surinamese government assures the Maroon people that they have nothing to fear.

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NAFTA's Environmental Legacy

"This legislation [NAFTA] seeks nothing more than to protect poor children from becoming sick." -Rep. Ron Coleman, (D-TX), 1993..

Environmental conditions along the US/Mexico border have deteriorated dramatically since the passage of NAFTA. Despite assurances from the Clinton Administration that the legislation was actually good for the environment, the results have shown something else altogether.

The promise of improved public health and a cleaner environment for the U.S.-Mexico border relied on three things: a decrease in the concentration of the maquiladoras, wealthier citizens and state and local governments in the border area, and strong NAFTA institutions to improve the enforcement of environmental laws and coordinate and fund cleanup projects.

The reality is that border industrial activity has increased since NAFTA, leading to an

increase in the creation of hazardous waste, with data showing an sharp increase in hazardous waste production since January 1994. Much waste is still washed down the drain

by the American Medical Association. Contamination by toxic industrial wastes and chemicals has been linked to clusters of cancer, rare birth defects and immunological diseases on both sides of the border.

Near Brownsville, Texas and Matamoras, Mexico, scores of babies have been born with deadly anencephaly, a defect resulting in an exposed or missing brain. The cause of an anencephaly remains unknown, although several studies have revealed connections between toxics and anencephaly.

The world's highest rate of lupus occurs in the Nogales, Arizona and Nogales, Mexico border area. Here, plants produce and

use toxic chemicals and solvents, and lead smelters and glass factories operate burning old tires as fuel without environmental controls. Since NAFTA went into effect, instead of leaving the area, at least 150 new plants have opened. The lupus rate in Nogales continues



untreated. According to Oscar Canton Cetina, Chair of the Mexican Ecology Commission, "Each year, seven million tons of toxic waste are, without control, illegally dumped in drains and marine waters. Only one percent are under surveillance in the country."

The Mexico-U.S. border area is an environmental and health disaster area called a "cesspool of infectious diseases"

**Excerpted from
"NAFTA's Broken
Promises: The Border
Betrayed," by Public
Citizen**

Continued on pg. 18

Spotlight on Cuba

By Cris McConkey

Embargo Defied: Donations Reach Cuba

CUSLAR participated in the seventh successful Pastors for Peace Caravan to Cuba this spring. The Caravan directly challenged the 37-year old U.S. embargo on Cuba and delivered over 400 tons worth of badly needed humanitarian aid to the island in May. Local donations included six kidney dialysis machines, clothing, diapers, pediatric medicines, water test kits and food.

The caravan stopped in Ithaca on May 9 to pick up donations and to draw attention to the local effort. A celebration dinner held to welcome the caravanistas was a raging success, thanks to the dedicated efforts of many tireless volunteers. An evening of delicious food and superb entertainment was enjoyed by all who attended.

More than 150 participants from across the United States, Canada and Europe, including two CUSLAR members from Ithaca, gathered at the International Peace Bridge in Buffalo, NY on May 14. By transporting boxes marked as intended for Cuba without the required permit, they were breaking the law.

During each of the previous Pastors for Peace Caravans the government has

attempted to stop the caravan efforts, insisting that the group apply for government permission to ship its cargo, which it has always refused to do. This time, however, in a surprise move, the U.S. Treasury Department allowed the aid to go to Cuba unlicensed. The dramatic shift in U.S. Treasury policy led Pastors for Peace spokesperson Reverend Lucius Walker to comment that "The floodgates have now been opened for aid to Cuba."

A second contingent of the Caravan crossed into Mexico from San Diego, California on May 16. Although they experienced no official delays at the border, the caravan was ambushed and attacked en route by a right-wing group calling themselves Alpha 66. According to a Pastors for Peace press release, "Eight members of the organization, which describes itself as a 'commando military' group, rammed caravan vehicles with their cars, jumped on vehicles, hurled eggs and insults, and assaulted members of the caravan." The brave caravanistas proceeded, however, and triumphantly crossed the border into Mexico.

Yet another Pastors for Peace Caravan is slated for next June. Anyone interested in helping get urgently needed aid to Cuba should contact the CUSLAR office.

American Association for World Health Issues Report on Embargo

The U.S. embargo has had a devastating impact on the

health of Cuban women, children, the elderly, and people with chronic diseases, according to a one-year study conducted by the American Association for World Health (AAWH). The 300 page report, titled *The Impact of the U.S. Embargo on Health and Nutrition in Cuba*, was released in March.

The research team surveyed U.S. medical and pharmaceutical companies, visited health treatment centers in Cuba. They interviewed medical professionals, government officials and representatives of non-governmental organizations, churches and international aid agencies in Cuba.

The report charges that U.S. restrictions on sending medicines to Cuba has caused an increase in the number of patients who lack access to essential drugs. As most pharmaceutical drugs are developed and patented by U.S. firms, therefore unavailable in Cuba, Cuban doctors have access to less than half of the new medicines available on the world market. In addition, both equipment and drugs from non-U.S. sources tend to be higher priced, and shipping costs are greater, stretching Cuba's limited resources even more.

Although the U.S. Treasury and Commerce Departments can issue licenses for the sale of medical supplies to Cuba, the licensing requirements are so complicated that most pharmaceutical companies are unwilling to pursue the license, and those that have applied have had applications denied on the

**Cris McConkey is an
Ithaca-based solidarity
activist**

grounds that the exports "would be detrimental to U.S. foreign policy interests." No U.S. parent company has received a license since the passage of the Cuban Democracy Act in 1992. The Treasury and Commerce Departments' stated policy is that "applications for validated licenses will generally be denied."

Cuba suffers from an inability to purchase replacement parts for its U.S. built equipment, including X-ray machines, neonatal respirators and public water supply pumps and pipes. U.S. law prohibits third country manufacturers from reexporting to Cuba any goods made up of 20 percent U.S. manufactured components. Third country exports of goods containing as little as 10 percent of U.S. manufactured components must receive a license from the U.S. Treasury.

The U.S. Treasury has discouraged the donation of medicines by both U.S. citizens and third country sources by requiring a lengthy licensing process and imposing cumbersome restrictions. Charitable organizations in the U.S. have also found that the absence of direct flights to Cuba results in delays and higher shipping costs.

The authors conclude that a humanitarian catastrophe due to the embargo has been averted in Cuba only because the Cuban government has maintained a high level of budgetary support for a health care system designed to deliver primary and preventive health care to all of its citizens. Cuba has prioritized health care spending in the last five years, increasing the share of the national budget that goes to health care from 5.8 percent in 1989 to 7.6 percent in 1995.

The intensification of the

U.S. blockade since 1992 has made it one of the strictest embargoes in the history of the United States. In the words of a New England Journal of Medicine editorial, "The sanctions are a 'war against public health'...we have the moral imperative to ask for the end of the sanctions." (April 27, 1997)

On June 18 the Cuban Humanitarian Trade Act (HR1951) was introduced in the House of Representatives. The bill would exempt most trade in food and medical supplies from the standing blockade laws. Please contact your Congressional Representatives to urge them to sign on as co-sponsors of HR1951!



"Sun, you are guilty of shining light on Cuba" - Mr. Jesse Helms

Cuba charges U.S. with Biological Warfare

(French Press International June, 1997) Cuba has become the first country to demand a Bacteriological Weapons Treaty investigation after charging the United States with letting loose an insect

plague to curb the Cuban food supply. Havana has asked for an official consultative committee meeting of parties to the treaty to examine its charge that Washington last year unleashed a wave of *Thryps palmi* (a damaging insect) on the island. Cuba presented documents it says support its claim to Russia, the steward-country for the Convention on Bacteriological Weapons.

In May, Cuban authorities alleged that a single-engine "US State Department plane" flew over Matanzas province just east of the capital October 21, 1996, and released a white or greyish substance. The crop-dusting plane took off from Cocoa Beach, Florida and had permission to fly over Cuba to go to Grand Cayman and on to Colombia. A Cuban commercial jet passed near the U.S. plane and reported that the U.S. crop-duster released a light-colored substance.

Cuban agricultural authorities in December determined that a crop-wrecking outbreak of the insect *Thryps palmi*, which had been in the Caribbean since 1985 but not reported in Cuba, was focused in the area overflowed by the U.S. plane. They found it was a third or fourth-generation bug, placing its origin about October, 1996.

The United States replied that the plane was merely signalling its position for the Cuban jet with smoke as a routine courtesy, adding that the tanks used for spraying were full of fuel for the flight.

Cuba counters that the tanks would not have been full of fuel for that length of flight, and maintains that the U.S. plane was not equipped with smoke signals. The Cuban jet pilots claim that the substance released was a liquid, not smoke.

Chiapas Lacandon: Facing an Uncertain Fate

By Orin Langelles

The land of Chiapas ranges from cool dry highlands, flat depressions and the mountains of the Sierra Madre De Chiapas, to dense jungle (selva). Biologically diverse, the Selva Lacandon is one of North America's last remaining tropical rainforests, part of a larger ecosystem extending through Guatemala and into Belize. It is second in the Americas only to the Amazon Basin.

The Selva Lacandon comprises only four percent of Mexico's land mass, yet is home for more than one-third of its bird species, 25 percent of its mammals, and 77 percent of the country's amphibians and reptiles. It's an important habitat for many endangered species, including the tapir, jaguar, ocelot, spider and howler monkeys, white tortoise, and certain neo-tropical migratory song-birds. Rich in natural resources, it's also the birthplace of the insurgent Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), which is fighting to prevent the environmentally irresponsible extraction of those resources

which include oil and natural gas reserves hidden deep under the Selva Lacandon.

In an attempt to enclose the rainforest and further open the remaining frontier, road building projects are underway around the northern part of the selva. The roads will provide quick military access. They will also hinder animal migration and provide an infrastructure for resource extraction. Although the best mahogany was felled for foreign markets long ago, the timber industry is sure to follow the new paved passages. Timber giant Boise Cascade already has a huge harvesting and processing operation in nearby Guerrero state.

In the Selva Lacandon, indigenous resistance to the Spanish conquest continued until the 16th century's close, when most of the Mayans were relocated from the jungle to the highlands for use as cheap labor. Most remained until the 1940's, when they started migrating back toward the selva as population and demand for land increased, a trend that accelerated in the 60s and 70s. Although the new inhabitants set up farming *ejidos* (collective land holdings), the government encouraged and provided credits to *campesinos* who converted land into cattle pasturage. This caused further encroachment into the selva. Currently, *campesinos* hoping to escape poverty, the Mexican military, or soil depleted from agro-chemical use are moving further into the selva. With nowhere else to go,

their only hope is to clear a parcel of land to feed their families.

Further exacerbating the crisis, the International Finance Corporation of the World Bank has announced that it will promote plantations of rubber, oil palm and bamboo in the Chiapas rainforest. "Indians would go into debt to become, essentially, workers in an agro-industry in which their sole function would be to provide cheap raw material to the corporations who would receive all the value-added," says Research Anthropologist Dr. Ronald Nigh, a 28-year resident of Chiapas. "Schemes like these conjure up visions of a future Lacandon Rainforest converted into a dismal concentration camp, tended by the army, where jungle has been replaced by monoculture plantations and free men and women have become prisoners of yet another system to remove their resources and wealth and leave them at the lowest rungs of society."

The Lacandon urgently needs protection from the many forces competing for its resources. For more information contact the Native Forest Network, POB 57, Burlington, VT 05402.

**Orin Langelles,
campaign coordinator
for the Native Forest
Network's Eastern
North American
Resource Center,
recently visited
Chiapas.**

CUSLAR will be showing the NEW Native Forest Network video, *The War for Eternity: The Rainforest and Zapatistas of Chiapas, Mexico*, produced by Orin Langelles, this Fall. Watch for time & place to be announced.

In Review

Jon Lee Anderson, *Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life*. New York: Grove Press, 1997. 814 pps.

"Let me say, with the risk of appearing ridiculous, that the true revolutionary is guided by strong feelings of love....Each and every one of us punctually pays his quota of sacrifice, aware of receiving our reward in the satisfaction of fulfilling our duty, conscious of advancing with everyone toward the new man who is glimpsed on the horizon."

-Ernesto Che Guevara

"We cannot elude the call of the hour...Wherever death may surprise us, let it be welcome, provided that this, our battle cry may have reached some receptive ears and another hand may be extended to wield our weapon and other men may be ready to intone the funeral dirge with the staccato singing of the machine guns and new battle cries of war and victory."

-Ernesto Che Guevara

Drawing upon a wealth of already available autobiographical texts and numerous biographies, Anderson incorporated previously unpublished and undiscovered texts released by the Cuban government and from the personal collections of family and friends. Adding to the rich texture of the book are numerous intimate portraits culled from the still vivid memories of Che's acquaintances in Latin America and throughout the world. The result is a riveting text through which Che emerges, not as an idealized revolutionary icon or Communist demon, but as the "most complete human being of our time," as Sartre later proclaimed him.

Much of Che's childhood development is credited to his struggle with debilitating asthma, an illness which troubled him throughout his life. Che developed a voracious passion for literature and

philosophy, spending many hours in the solitude of his room. He compensated for his illness by becoming a daredevil, an eccentric and a difficult student who frequently questioned the lessons of his teachers. Eventually, in his hope to cure his asthma he attended medical school, specializing in allergies, and finishing in record time.



Particularly interesting are the many accounts of Che's travels prior to his association with the Cuban revolutionary army. During the course of these voyages Che becomes politically savvy. The seeds of revolutionary consciousness emerge for the first time on the back of La Poderosa II, the motorcycle which carried Che and Albert Granado through South America. As Che wrote in his diary, he returned home to Buenos Aires a changed man.

The dual experience of intense poverty among the indigenous population and the CIA-sponsored overthrow of the progressive Arbenz government left an indelible brand on Che's mind. He resolved to unite Latin America against what he saw as the common cause of suffering, U.S. economic imperialism.

Shortly after leaving Guatemala, Che went to Mexico, where he trained with the July 26 guerrillas for the war to come in Cuba, learning political philosophy and military strategy, at which he excelled. As one of the few survivors of the fateful landing of the Granma on Cuba's shores, Che's skill in battle became essential to the jungle campaign in the Sierra Maestra.

Anderson's biography clarifies the relationship between Fidel Castro and Che; Castro

Continued On Next Page

Reviews, Continued from pg 15

was a political pragmatist throughout the Cuban war, while Che's aggressive Marxism was only confirmed by their struggles with Batista's forces.

The last ill-fated campaigns of Che's life, in Africa and Bolivia remain perhaps the least understood chapters of Che's life. Anderson's examination of the circumstances which led to Che's execution do not fully answer the debate among aficionados about his violent death. Indeed, where would Che find a place if he were with us today? At Castro's side welcoming European multinationals into Cuba? It somehow seems unlikely.

Anderson's biography critically humanizes the Che legend; his end may have been what was called "revolutionary suicide" in the sixties or, perhaps one chapter in the "new" post-colonial struggles. As an international revolutionary, Che Guevara waged a notable war against multinational empires. Anderson admirably portrays the life of this complex man for us. I recommend this book highly as an excellent resource for both the scholar well versed in Latin American history and the casual reader who may be approaching the subject of the Cuban revolution for the first time.

-Jeff Vogt

Juan Felipe Herrera, *Mayan Drifter: Chicano Poet in the Lowlands of America*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1997. 272 pgs.

"It is not only by shooting bullets that tyranny is overthrown, but also by hurling ideas of redemption, words of freedom and terrible anathemas against the hangmen that people bring down dictators and empires." - Emiliano Zapata

On the eve of the Zapatista rebellion, the poet/drifter Herrera traversed the Highlands and Lowlands of Chiapas in a quest for the soul of his forefathers. In the state of Chiapas, the Lacandon, the Tzeltal, the Tzotzil, the Chamula and others inhabit a land besieged by petrochemical exploration, rainforest decimation and the appropriation of *ejido* (communal) land by cattle ranches and export agriculture. Herrera ventures into this land with "the fiery will to speak and crash through the collective crimes wrapped around us all."

In the *zócalo* of San Cristobal de las Casas, Herrera witnesses a demonstration of Indians

mourning for the murders and rapes which are ever-present in the villages of Chiapas. Portraying the lives of the indigenous people on fincas and plantations, writing of crimes that sociologists and anthropologists cannot and do not document, Herrera's complex realities are not merely "ethnographic allegories."

Mayan Drifter elaborates on the spiritual desolation that continues to haunt the wandering Chicanos, the displaced refugees, and all those in diaspora throughout our troubled Americas. Upon his arrival at Na Bolom, Jaguar Hotel, Herrera recognizes himself in the features of the indigenous maids who serve the tourists. He writes:

We resemble each other
An ancient mother held in common
Our timelessness, our brown-green color
Our penchant for a religious smile

It is this "penchant for a religious smile" that illustrates the vast cultural differences between the indigenous Maya and the neo-liberals who continue to intervene in the traditional economies in Chiapas. The fertile land has been stolen, flooded and squandered as the displaced Maya starve while trying to grow corn and beans in the rocky Highlands. Herrera seeks to reconcile these two visions of the Americas.

Since the Zapatista uprising, there have been many words written about the realities in Chiapas. In my estimation, the poetry and drama of Juan Felipe Herrera captures the human experiences inspiring this revolt. Enter Jaguar Hotel and leave with a new perception of the paradox that is America. This book transcends the limited discourse of the academy; it recognizes that we need quality of existence as well as economic development. It records the communal festivals celebrating our humanity as well as individual achievements. Comparing communal lives and struggles with liberal valorizations of individual achievement, as we build a lasting peace we can incorporate the inspired muse of Juan Felipe Herrera into that vision.

- Ed Dvorak

Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life and *Mayan Drifter: Chicano Poet in the Lowlands of America* are available at the CUSLAR library, along with many other exciting new books! Come check us out at G-29 Anabel Taylor Hall, on the Cornell campus.

Central America's Largest Rainforest Threatened

A delegation of U.S. and Nicaraguan environmentalists recently visited Nicaragua's Caribbean Coast to investigate reports of irresponsible logging practices. They traveled up the Rio Coco to the isolated Bosawas Reserve, visited displaced Miskito and Sumu communities near the gold mines of Bonanza and Rosita, surveyed new logging roads on sacred indigenous land in Wakamby and met with numerous governmental and non-governmental organizations.

Logging in Nicaragua's North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN) is already widespread, but Nicaragua's central government has recently granted new logging concessions to the Korean multinational SOLCARSA (also known as Sol de Caribe).

Close to the boundaries of the largest tract of virgin rainforest in Central America, known as the Bosawas Reserve, lies Wakamby. Wakamby is a large tract of uncut tropical hardwood forest. SOLCARSA is cutting a road into Wakamby about 11.5 kilometers from the existing road. This area was

given in a concession as if it were private land, but it is not - it is indigenous communal land. To date, this new project has cut only 4.5 kilometers, but given the speed of the operation, the 40 kilometers to Puerto Caezas, the regional capital and largest port, should not take long. Plans are underway to lengthen that city's dock to accommodate the anticipated increased trafficking of lumber and other products.

In Wakamby, the Miskito people hired to build the road earn the equivalent of \$3-\$5 U.S. dollars per day. They are happy to get the work, but complain about the wages. They keep eight chainsaws running constantly and are taking out an average of 80 trees per day. Once the road is constructed this average will increase considerably.

The community of Finicia is a mix of Sumu and Miskito indigenous people located just outside the mining town of Rosita. When SOLCARSA entered this area last year, the household heads were offered the equivalent of \$120-\$160 U.S. dollars to relocate. They were also promised money to cover moving expenses, a school and scholarships, electricity, drinking water, jobs and more. Since the deal had already been signed with the leading member of the Regional Council, Efrain Josejos, the leaders felt that they had little ground on which to stand up to the company. When community members continued to show concern and displeasure with the deal, they were visited

by 30 authorities, including members of local and regional government and the local police. The police threatened to blockade the road to their community if they did not agree to move. The people relocated, using up the small amount of money given by SOLCARSA, but none of the other promises has been upheld.

Finicians have been asked to move again to make space to store the wood that is being cut around them. They fear that the company will come and clear all their fruit trees to make more room for their milling operations. They are afraid of being forcibly evicted and left with even less than they have now - essentially a small single-room bamboo shack with a few pots and pans, one change of clothing per person and no bedding. When the village leader, an elder, lodged complaints with legal officials about broken promises by the corporation, the local court decided in favor of SOLCARSA. The elder was told that the promises that were given to the community were from the previous company administration and that the new administration had no obligation to uphold them.

When members of the community tried to pick up scrap lumber from trash heaps to improve their houses, they were turned away by company

**Submitted by the
Native Forest Network
Eastern North
American Resource
Center and the
Burlington/Puerto
Cabezas-Bilwi
Nicaragua Sister City
Program**

Continued on next page

Nicaragua Continued from previous page

officials. SOLCARSA burns the scrap rather than allowing the dislocated people to use it.

The Nicaraguan North and South Atlantic Autonomous Zones make up 50 percent of the land mass of the nation but contain a diverse population (Miskito, Sumu, Creole, Garifuna, Mestizo and Rama) of barely 500,000 people. This region is becoming internationally known for its abundance of natural resources, accompanied by almost no existing barriers to rampant exploitation, and an impoverished labor force that can be hired for low wages.

Although legally granted political autonomy by the Sandinista government in 1987, the limitations of the region's law are becoming more and more evident. The central government is reluctant to relinquish control of the region's natural resources. Although the majority of the land is the property of indigenous communities, therefore constitutionally protected from being sold, large sales are still common.

Please participate in CUSLAR's campaign to send letters of protest to Nicaragua's Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MARENA) demanding that the logging concessions granted to SOLCARSA be rescinded and that the rights and sovereignty of the indigenous people be respected. Send letters to CUSLAR, G-29 Anabel Taylor Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853. We will forward all submissions to MARENA.

NAFTA Continued from pg. 11

to grow.

On both sides of the border from Texas to California, tuberculosis and hepatitis rates have soared since NAFTA. Part of the problem stems from the increased demand on the infrastructure of the water supply at the border. Since 1994, the maquiladora work force has increased more than 20 percent. This growth has led to increased industrial and residential sewage problems. There have been no appreciable changes or improvements in the public water or sewage treatment infrastructure.

As both the maquila and border area populations have grown since NAFTA, so has airborne pollution from industry, cooking and heating fuel and increased commercial and private transportation in the border area. Every day, 3,500 trucks sit at the US/Mexico border just at Laredo, Texas, running their engines and diesel operated refrigerator units for extended periods of time as they sit and wait to cross the border. The emissions create hazardous smog and dangerous levels of airborne pollutants.

Since NAFTA the Mexican economy has been ravaged by the collapse of the peso and astronomical interest rates. The ailing economy has caused a cut in local, state, and federal governmental funding aimed at arresting the deterioration of public health and the environment along the border. Several border water treatment projects that were under construction before NAFTA have been halted due to a lack of funding. Because Mexico imports most of the equipment

necessary for hazardous waste disposal, sewage treatment and other environmental cleanup, the collapse in the value of the peso has made this equipment more than 50 percent more expensive. The United States Congress has also cut funding for some border clean-up projects.

The efforts of the Commission on Environmental Cooperation, the Border Environmental Cooperation Commission (BECC) and the North American Development Bank (NADBank) have been disappointing at best. The Commission on Environmental Cooperation, for example, has not heard a single case involving the failure of the Mexican government to enforce environmental laws; they have, however, rejected two petitions by U.S. groups involving the failure to enforce the U.S. Endangered Species Act and a law protecting forests on federal lands. Meanwhile, the NADBank only provides loans at market interest rates. These loans are not based on environmental need but rather on the ability of the community to repay the loans.

CUSLAR's video collection includes *Borderline Cases*, (Bullfrog Films, 1997) a documentary examining environmental matters at the United States - Mexico border. This excellent film is available to the community for public and private showings. Contact the CUSLAR office for more information.

Shell

Continued from pg 3

now occasionally turns black. "We also have trouble hunting and fishing," she says. "It took us just two hours to hunt for animals before the operations began. Now, it takes a day and a half," due to the decline in wildlife.

An environmentalist visiting the area notes that, apart from a few token trees, Shell has no erosion controls on its operations, which are situated in the headwaters of the Cashiriari and Camisea rivers. Shell's technical manager Tom Kelly defends the work on the site. "We have only been moving earth for a few weeks. We have plans to protect the site from erosion," he says.

Other Shell representatives say that animal scarcity may reflect human population pressures. "We have studies going back to the 1970s

which document complaints about fishing and hunting declines," says Miguel Ruiz-Larrea, a Shell ecologist. "I don't want to say that our helicopters and cutting operations are not having an impact, because it is clear they do have some impact. But I think there are a number of other factors involved." The company says it will begin to plant the native cetico tree on the land it no longer needs, although local people say they would prefer a mixture of local species. "We would like to plant other trees, but we don't have seeds for other local trees like sapote and shimbillo," says Ruiz-Larrea. "In any case, cetico is what grows naturally and quickly in cleared areas here."

Environmentalists say that the current problems are minor compared to what will occur when Shell begins the actual extraction of natural gas. Waste material from the wells could contain heavy metals such

as arsenic, cadmium, lead and mercury, which are highly toxic. It could also contain suspected carcinogens, including poly-aromatic hydrocarbons. Natural gas escaping from the well may have to be burnt off in massive flares, while pressurized gas pipelines run the risk of explosions - not infrequent occurrences even in countries like the United States where the industry uses the best available technology.

Shell promises that it will take all possible precautions to prevent problems. Initially, all wastes will be treated; the company later plans to reinject wastes deep below the water table, where Shell says they will not contaminate the local environment.

To date, however, the company has not conducted safety audits of its operations. Nor is it equipped to deal with any major catastrophe. A small indication of what might happen in the future occurred this February when Shell staff brought in fuel oil by barge to Nuevo Mundo for four new steel storage tanks at the base. Five oil spills occurred in the river, and twice as many on land. One of the barges was taken out of service because of recurring problems. From the Nuevo Mundo base, the fuel oil is being transported to the wellhead in large tanks winched under the helicopters; these tanks routinely spill as they are dragged along the ground.

Shell officials have a detailed emergency response plan on paper, but they do not have professional clean-up equipment such as skimmers, booms and buckets available. Nor does the company have any professional staff here to respond to emergencies. After the

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Shell

Continued from pg 19

February spills, local people were pressed into emergency service, using makeshift equipment to mop up the mess. Contaminated soil was dug up and stored on site. Workers say that when it rains, rainbow sheens run through the soil.

The local communities, which have never experienced these problems before, are not quite sure where to turn. In exchange for the two hectares of land for the first well in Armihuari, the company has promised the village of Cashiriari that it will supply electricity for three communal houses, as well as tin roofs and medicines.

The land use agreement (Shell admits that it has used more than agreed initially) does not guarantee any compensation in case of accident, contamination of the local rivers, or destruction of the forests. Tomas Vargas, the treasurer of the village who also runs the local health clinic, argues that the company representatives took advantage of the local community, which did not realize it could ask for any of those guarantees.

Nuevo Mundo is receiving little more than Cashiriari. Shell has agreed to pay the community \$1,600 a month for the right to construct an airport to receive flights directly from Lima to service the company's operations center situated next to the village.

Shell arranged the Nuevo Mundo deal with Alquilino Rios, a local leader. Other local leaders, including Efrain Barazo and Job Korinti from the neighboring village of Kirigueta, have bitterly criticized the agreement. They suspect the company of making plans to

encroach on their territory.

"The Shell maps showing the territory of Nuevo Mundo include an old gas well called Mipaya that is on our land," says Korinti. Shell officials, however, say they have no immediate plans to exploit Mipaya.

Doris Balvin, a Peruvian environmental lawyer who tracks the impact of mining operations, says that the compensation packages amount to little more than Christmas presents. In January, she visited the communities around Camisea and translated Shell's maps from English to Spanish for local leaders like Tomas Vargas.

"If Shell really wanted to work with the communities, why have they not provided them with enough information? The agreement was signed in a hurry and the local people had no chance to consult a lawyer," she says.

Anthropologist Zarzar defends the agreement. "It is extremely hard to work in this area," he says. "For example, the communities keep their hunting grounds secret from other communities in order to protect sacred resources. How are we to decide what just compensation to give them when we cannot determine the exact impact on their life?"

"It's my job to ensure that Shell provides appropriate benefits to the community," he adds. "We have to make sure that all the compensation will help

the community as a whole and to make sure that we develop social capital for the long term."

Zarzar agrees that the communities have a right to a lawyer, but he says it is up to their leaders to get such help. "I even attended the regional meetings of the Machiguenga organizations to tell them about our plans months before the agreement was signed," he points out.

Meanwhile, the activities of Shell have exacerbated existing divisions among the Machiguenga, who have traditionally been represented by rival organizations. The villages of Camisea, Nuevo Mundo and Segakiato are represented by the Center for Native Machiguenga Communities, while the three other villages in the region - Cashiriari, Kirigueta, and Shivankoreni - are represented by the Council for the Machiguenga People of the River Urabamba (COMARU).

Shell helped create an "indigenous council" with these two groups as well as other local, indigenous, non-governmental groups. The plan fell apart recently when COMARU withdrew from the council, increasing tensions among the communities. "We wanted to work with the communities in devising a mediation system to settle any complaints, but so far, we have not succeeded," admits a Shell spokesperson.

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