

LATIN AMERICA & HAITI WEB SITE

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We publish articles describing life in different Latin American countries and Haiti; these will include human interest pieces, political analysis, discussions of US relationships. We will emphasize pieces about indigenous peoples, labor and human rights, and descriptions of legislative initiatives that affect these countries and the US. We will publish literary pieces. Some of our articles will be reprinted from other sources. **WE WILL CONSIDER SUBMITTED MANUSCRIPTS.**

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ECUADOR

Sumak Kawsay and the Indigenous People of Ecuador

By Charito Calvachi-Mateyko

Margaret Mead knew even in 1974 that societies that are permeated by the strength of aboriginal cultural wisdom are the true hope to counterbalance unchecked ruthless operations of commercial greed. Ecuador, a country located in the Equatorial lane, which has experienced its share of corporate exploitation, may just be the country of hope—thanks to the Indigenous people movement.

Where else do you find a country in the midst of writing a new Constitution, where National Assembly members participated in an Indigenous *Pachamama* (Kechua language for Universe) ceremony with the elders of the CONAIE (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador) to commit themselves to establish Ecuador as a plurinational state in the Constitution? That is, a state officially comprised of several cultures and nations.

Anthropomorphic figures from the Manta Wankavilka culture were blessed and given to Ecuador President Rafael Correa and President of the National Assembly Alberto Acosta to include in the new Constitution the principle of *Sumak Kawsay* (Good living) on April 2008. The idea is that human beings relate to Mother Nature and not only to production and a corporate-driven economy. These 136 figures represented water, fire, air and earth—the four elements of life. Naturally, this world view is perceived in the distant boardrooms as out of step with the corporate culture. To the “elitist” people inhabiting the corporate boardrooms, our people are primitive, backward, basing their economic or material life on compatibility and sustainability with nature. These elitists are fixated on the neo-classical economic model which places no value on nature even as this

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Three of the most important leaders of the Indigenous movement in Ecuador the day of the inauguration of the III Congress of CONAIE in Santo Domingo de los Tsa-Chilas province of Ecuador, January 10, 2008. (L to R) unidentified person; Manuel Calazacon, governor of the Tsa-Chila nation; Humberto Cholango from ECUARUNARI; Dr. Luis Macas, former president and founder of CONAIE.

fatal flaw misdirects economic life toward a climate change-induced collapse of the planet, a mischievous sophistication that is full of economic violence for the peoples and places of the world. This type of thinking tries to excuse and legitimize 500 hundred years of exploitation of people and the planet—what their hubris calls “progress”.

No serious studies have been done to determine the percentage of Indigenous people in Ecuador. Diverse sources start at 15 percent to 45 percent. But the breadth of diversity among Indigenous people living in this small nation is as diverse as its geography. In the Amazonian jungle there is the presence of Shuar, Achuar, Siona, Secoya, Cofan, Waorani, Zapara, Shiwiar, Andoa and Kichuas people; in the Cost region, the presence of the Tsachila, Epera, Chachi, Awa, Manta and Wankavilka people; and finally in the Andean Sierra the Kichua people comprised of Palta, Sarakuru, Kanari, Puruwa, Chibuleo, Tomabela, Salasaca, Kisapincha, Waranka, Kitukara, Kayampi, Otavalo,

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Karanki, Natabuela and Pasto peoples. The acknowledgement of this pluralism in the new Constitution (Plurinational and Pluricultural) is a key for their

survival. Only a state with such definition would recognize the presence of 14 nations and 18 Indigenous groups in the affairs of the country. However, from their inception, the mission of CONAIE has been to protect the well being of the whole Ecuadorian nation, not only to protect Indigenous rights. Understand, this is not merely a human rights movement, but a paradigm shift of consciousness.

The national holiday of the “discovery of America”, later euphemistically named the “Day of the Encounter of Two Cultures”, is called by Indigenous people “The 516 Years of Resistance”. This history describes the struggle, marches, strikes and organizing of every kind that earned them a seat on the decision-making table, that was not graciously given to them. The first four dark centuries since 1592 were those in which every rebellion was met with killings, labor exploitation and oppression of every kind. My Ecuadorian 35 year-old friend told me just three days ago how traumatic it was for him at age four to see his father, an *hacendado* (landowner), beat the Indigenous people who worked with a *latigo* (whip). He remembers their bleeding backs. A powerful Indigenous persistence marked the 1980s as the beginning of the consolidation of the Indigenous organizations in CONAIE, which brought together other organizations already in existence such as the “Confederation of Peoples of Kichua Nationality in Ecuador” from the Sierra, the “Confederation of Nationalities and Indigenous Peoples of the Ecuadorian Coastal Region”, and the “Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazons”. Once the CONAIE presence was established, this organization pushed the Ecuadorian government to create the bilingual and intercultural educational system. Other agencies dedicated to Indigenous rights and health were put in place. The “Advisory Council for the Development of the Indigenous People and Nations of Ecuador” was created along with the “Fund for the Development of the Indigenous Peoples”. In 1998, working together in the legislature and assisted by pressures from the grass roots movement, CONAIE gained



March of the Indigenous people of Ecuador in different parts of the country to protest the Free Trade Agreements in the last five years. Photo courtesy of ECUARUNARY web site.

the incorporation of “Collective Rights of the Indigenous People” into the Constitution. Strikes were organized that paralyzed the country and resulted in the ousting of the corrupt Presidents Abdala Bucaram (1997), Jamil Mahuad (2000) and Luis Gutierrez (2005).

This is the way they operate. Indigenous people knew that the elites’ presumption of unbridled power only existed in their minds and in institutions of power concentrated in the national capital Quito. The economy of this city which is located high in the Andean clouds at 9,400 feet elevation, is entirely dependent on daily transport on a few twisting mountain roads. Those roads pass through the territories of the Kanari, Puruwa, Salasaca, Kisapincha, Waranka, Kitukara, Kayampi, Otavalo and Karanki. Indigenous minds conceived these roads as the arteries of the elites’ conception of the nation state. They sat on these roads, blocked them and took possession of them. After elites perceived that their life blood was cut off and that they were surrounded, they were able to accept they were not the unitary holders of power. After 500 years of protracted resistance, Indigenous people had effectively altered their relationship to power. The “Indians” were not there to be possessed any longer. These alterations took place in the minds of both elites and in the minds of the Indigenous people. This is of historic and permanent significance for Indigenous people everywhere because as the US Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter once said, “A mind once stretched, never returns to its original shape”.

The Ecuadorian Indigenous movement and its accomplishments are a model for countries such as Bolivia, whose Indigenous representation, at 75 percent, is even higher than that of Ecuador. The first Indigenous candidate for the Ecuadorian presidency (in 2006), Dr. Luis Macas, often mentions to me the exchange of ideas between the Indigenous people of these two countries.

Ecuador today is a clash of the corporate board room-imported culture of remote control versus *Sumak Kawsay*. Our Uncle Sam is the middleman. Remember the saying: "Policy ends in government; it begins in the board room". Nowhere in recent history has this been clearer than in the origins of NAFTA, which was drafted word for word by a "K" Street think-tank, the Business Round Table, representing the 100 leading CEOs of the US corporate culture. In confronting them the Indigenous peoples of Ecuador have exercised their newly recognized power. They offer relentless opposition to the Free Trade Agreements as pushed by the Bush administration. Their general strikes and national non-violent mobilizations routinely practically paralyze the country. In 2006 as the US government and corporate representatives met in Quito, the Indigenous people called a general strike and mass mobilization protesting the Ecuadorian Free Trade Agreement. The government of President Palacios, an interim president in 2006, sent the militia to check buses on the road to prevent Indigenous people from coming to the capital. A group of elders, women and children

who were coming by foot from Latacunga to Quito realized this and decided to cut thru the pine forest to avoid the encounter. "We don't want to see the militia, who are our own impoverished people, having to arrest and belittle us," the elders explained. The Ecuadorian Free Trade Agreement was eventually rejected.

We must never forget that the larger struggle is about who has the power to frame the issues, the power to create reality in words. As is so often the case, when the structures of corporate power are challenged, the corporate-owned media is hardly the place to get the story. You can only fully understand the massive change in power relationships taking place today in Ecuador by reading the web pages of the Indigenous people as they conceive their struggle. Some of those are: <http://www.conaie.org/> <http://www.ecuarunari.org/> <http://www.confeniae.org/> <http://www.sarayacu.com/> <http://www.alainet.org/index.phtml.es> <http://www.conaice.org/> <http://www.movimientos.org/noalca/index.phtml.es> Go there. Stretch your mind.

The sacrifices of our Indigenous people humble us and their good nature and non-violent actions inspire us. Hopefully sooner than later we will turn to them to save our planet and understand the art of good living.

HAITI and VENEZUELA

The National Endowment for Democracy

By Ronald F Coburn

This article was previously published in the Pledge newsletter.

The National Endowment for Democracy (NED) is an almost entirely US Congress-supported non-government organization (NGO), i.e. a private foundation, that has become more visible in recent months due to partial unraveling of its role in recent

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political events in Haiti and in Venezuela. Because of its interventions in political events in Nicaragua, Haiti and Venezuela, I prepared this piece believing that it is our duty as citizens of the US to have knowledge about the activities of our government. In writing this piece I am dependent on published articles¹⁻⁷ and some of my statements are taken directly from these publications.

A few sentences about the CIA are pertinent because the NED has taken on some of the roles that the CIA performs. As is commonly known the CIA goes back to 1947 and has functioned as a US spy organization in the Cold War with the Soviet Union, and to this time. However, it is clear it had another function, of covertly supporting US interests in foreign countries, particularly interests that are market and labor oriented. As is

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well known, a US government foreign policy was to support friendly military dictators in the Philippines, Iran, the Southern core of South America and in Central American countries and the CIA was involved in each of these areas. To disguise their programs, the CIA established relations with cooperating US foundations through which it channeled funds to foreign recipients, a model that NED also uses. The Vietnam war, the Contra-Iran money laundering affair and Watergate produced scandals involving CIA intelligence. In part because of this, in 1983 under President Ronald Reagan the US Congress passed legislation forming the NED as a private foundation, a NGO that was touted to be independent of the US State Department and the CIA. The NED has a lofty stated goal - a bipartisan mission of promoting democracy throughout the world. The NED operates by directing money through four institutes that are, like the NED, private foundations: The International Republican Institute (IRI), the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), the Chamber of Commerce's Center for Private Enterprise (CIPE) and the AFL-CIO's American Center for International Labor Solidarity. Multiple other foundations and organizations also directly receive funds from the NED. Although the NED is, as stated above, publicly funded, the activities of these four institutes and other recipients of grants are not reported to our Congress. According to William Robinson², NED employs so complex a system of intermediaries that operative aspects, control relationships and funding trails are nearly impossible to follow and final recipients are difficult to identify. Ninety-seven percent of NED funding flows from the US government including the State Department and, thus, is theoretically controlled by our House of Representatives. However¹, there are right-wing donors like the Bradley Foundation, the Whitehead Foundation and Olin Foundation, as well as corporate donors, including ExxonMobil, Enron and Texaco which likely influence NED policy. The NED total budget is modest, but in 2005 the Bush Administration doubled its funding to \$80,000,000/annum. Although the NED was originally designed with a view of creating a broad base of political support, identification of members (former and present) of the Board of Directors indicates a close alignment of its activities with US foreign policy interests. These members have included former US Secretaries of State Kissinger and Albright, former Secretary of Defense Frank Carlucci, former National Security Council

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I n s t i t u t e¹.

So what does the NED do to promote democracy around the world? I first

read over the reports of the long-time NED president, Carl Gershman. Speaking to the House of Representatives Committee on International Relations³ Gershman stated that the NED was operating in 80 countries and programs included supporting open markets, the rights of workers, human rights, women's rights, the healing of war-torn societies, the strengthening of political parties in other countries, and what he described as many other key facets of democracy. He described the continuation of global grant programs to organizations in South Korea, North Korea, Cuba, Vietnam, China, Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine, the Czech Republic designed to overcome barriers to democratic progress. President Gershman seemed particularly proud of NED "Courage Tributes" given to the Iranian Student Movement, the Democratic Mayors of Columbia, The Civil Society Movement in Democratic Congo, the Mothers of Tiananmen Square and a human rights group that works in Chechnya. I note that in this report there is no mention of programs operating in Haiti, Venezuela or other South American countries that have recently elected left-leaning governments. In a more recent report presented to the House of Representatives Subcommittee on International Terrorism, Nonproliferation and Human Rights⁴, the NED was depicted by Gershman as a human rights organization which in 2003 to 2004 provided 170 grants to programs in 50 countries, including Latin Ameri-



President Carl Gershman of the National Endowment for Democracy

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can countries, to protect political rights and civil liberties, and to protect against of unjustified detention, exile, terror or torture. These awards, according to Gershman, were consistent with the objective of NED not to neglect those who keep alive the flame of freedom in closed societies.

However, it appears that from the viewpoint of activists concerned with economic and social justice for the people living in Latin America and Haiti there is a darker side of the NED and its associated institutes.^{2, 5-7} Despite the lofty goals of NED, it was clear early on that the “development of democracy” goal was an umbrella for the use of this NGO to support the foreign policies of the US government, following similar operations of the CIA. The well researched² NED operations in Nicaragua starting in about 1990, discussed below, were directed to control the politics of that country. Also there is no doubt that Nicaragua was not the only foreign country where NED operated, and is currently involved, in interventions into political and economic life. The mechanisms for these interventions are the funneling of money via grants to support governments that are favorable to US interests. Also to avoid the coming to power of governments that are not seen as favorable to US interests including the interests of US corporations who want to operate with minimal restrictions. 170 other NGOs charged with “development of democracy” have been created or sponsored by the US government^{1, 5}, so we may only be beginning to see how the US government is using NGOs to support its foreign policies via interventions in foreign politics by funding foundations and political party-associated groups. It is likely there is coordination of political activities between these NGOs and the NED. Philip Agee⁷ writes about the coordination of the CIA, the US Aid of International Development (USAID) Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) and NED in their campaign to dispose of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela.

We outline here some of the known operations of the NED in Nicaragua, Venezuela and Haiti since these serve as examples of NED activity and the scope of their programs. As early as 1990 NED developed its large program in Nicaragua to insure the defeat of Daniel Ortega for the presidency of this country. This story is best documented in Robinson’s book² and articles by Philip Agee⁷. The CIA had already intervened in the Nicaraguan elections in 1984 and of course this agency supported the Contras in the civil war with the Sandanistas. In 1990, 9 million dollars were spent by the NED, along with CIA and the

US AID/OTI⁷, to support the US-chosen presidential candidate, Violeta Chamorro. Intervention techniques involved multiple grants to opposition organizations, a model for later interventions in Haiti and Venezuela. This insured the defeat of Daniel Ortega. The NED and its affiliate organizations continued to try to make certain that the Sandinista Front was not reelected again.

In Venezuela the administration of George W. Bush is intervening in political processes with a combination of activities very similar to those the US carried out in Nicaragua since 1980.^{6, 7} Along with US journalist Jeremy Bigwood, Eva Golinger has begun to uncover, using the Freedom of Information Act, interventions of NED and its foundations in three political events, the failed coup in 2002 aimed at removing the democratically elected President Hugo Chavez, the massive strike in 2004 aimed at precipitating anarchy, and the 2005 recall election.⁶ (These events also have been described in the Spring 2006 Pledge Newsletter on delcopledge.org). The NED funneled about \$1 million dollars to US and Venezuelan groups who wanted to stop the bolivarian revolution. This involved funding of at least 17 Venezuelan NGOs apart from its financing of many others through its four associated foundations.⁶ Activities organized and funded included, seminars and conferences and training courses, campaigns to register voters and support to an extensive network of political parties, the use of the mass media, and manipulation of exit polls. After the failed coup of April 2002, the US government widened its program to include the CIA and AID/OTI. Although Chavez survived as president, NED, CIA, and USAID/OTI programs continue to this day.⁶

Of course, the US government has a long history of intervention in Haitian politics; however, the role of the NED and its associate NGO, the IRI, has only been publicized in recent years. In the 1990 presidential election, NED supported Marc L. Bazin, a former World Bank official, providing a large fraction of his total US-supported campaign funds. Despite this Aristide was elected with a huge majority of the vote. I can not find evidence that the NED was involved in the 1992 coup. However, prior to the second coup that removed President Aristide from office in 2004, the NED funded grants to groups that opposed Aristide, including the Democratic Convergence, and the Group of 184. This campaign which was called the “Haiti Democracy Project” supported organized demonstrations, civil disorder and anarchy. Grants were also provided from the IRI

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operating in the Dominican Republic which facilitated organizing and arming “freedom fighters” who later marched into Haiti and forced the removal of Aristide, an event coordinated with a US military intervention. In the time period prior to the recent election, the NED and other USAID-linked organizations again were active in supporting anti-Lavalas groups, operating a demonization campaign, fomenting civil disturbances and murders, and evoking terror in City Soleil and elsewhere. However, as we know these interventions were unsuccessful in that Andre Preval was elected President.

In conclusion: we all know that in the US it is illegal for foreign countries to become involved with our political process.

Why not be consistent and make it illegal for our government to use our tax dollars to promote interventions in the political processes of foreign countries?

1. National Endowment for Democracy, SourceWatch, - www.sourcewatch.org
2. W.I. Robinson, *A Faustian Bargain: U.S. Intervention in the Nicaraguan Elections*, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1992.
3. NED President Carl Gershman. The House Committee on International Relations, July 9, 2003.
4. NED President Carl Gershman, The House Committee on International Terrorism, Non-proliferation and Human Rights, June 9, 2004.
5. Anthony Fenton, Democracy Now, January 23, 2006.
6. Eva Golinger, *Venezuelanalysis.com*, November 14, 2004.
7. Philip Agee, *Venezuelanalysis.com*, September 06, 2005.

HAITI

U.S. Role in Haiti Hunger Riots

By Bill Quigley

Riots in Haiti over explosive rises in food costs have claimed the lives of six people. There have also been food riots worldwide in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cote d’Ivoire, Egypt, Guinea, Mauritania, Mexico, Morocco, Senegal, Uzbekistan and Yemen. *The Economist*, which calls the current crisis the “silent tsunami,” reports that last year wheat prices rose 77 percent and rice 16 percent, but since January rice prices have risen 141 percent. The reasons include rising fuel costs, weather problems, increased demand in China and India, as well as the push to create biofuels from cereal crops.

Hermite Joseph, a mother working in the markets of Port au Prince, told journalist Nick Whalen that her two kids are “like toothpicks – they’re not getting enough nourishment. Before, if you had a dollar twenty-five cents, you could buy vegetables, some rice, 10 cents of charcoal and a

little cooking oil. Right now, a little can of rice alone costs 65 cents, and is not good rice at all. Oil is 25 cents. Charcoal is 25 cents. With a dollar twenty-five, you can’t even make a plate of rice for one child.”

The St. Claire’s Church Food program, in the Tiplas Kazo neighborhood of Port au Prince, serves 1,000 free meals a day, almost all to hungry children – five times a week in partnership with the What If Foundation. Children from Cite Soleil have been known to walk the five miles to the church for a meal. The cost of rice, beans, vegetables, a little meat, spices, cooking oil, propane for the stoves, have gone up dramatically. Because of the rise in the cost of food, the portions are now smaller. But hunger is on the rise and more and more children come for the free meal. Hungry adults used to be allowed to eat the leftovers once all the children were fed, but now there are few leftovers.

The *New York Times* lectured Haiti on April 18 that its agriculture industry in shambles, needs to better feed itself. Unfortunately, the article did not talk at all about one of the main causes of the shortages – the fact that the U.S. and other international financial bodies destroyed Haitian rice farmers to create a major market for the heavily subsidized

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rice from U.S. farmers. This is not the only cause of hunger in Haiti and other poor countries, but it is a major force.

Thirty years ago, Haiti raised nearly all the rice it needed. What happened? In 1986, after the expulsion of Haitian dictator Jean Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier the International Monetary Fund (IMF) loaned Haiti \$24.6 million in desperately needed funds (Baby Doc had raided the treasury on the way out). But, in order to get the IMF loan, Haiti was required to reduce tariff protections for their Haitian rice and other agricultural products and some industries to open up the country’s markets to competition from outside countries. The U.S. has by far the largest voice in decisions of the IMF. Doctor Paul Farmer was in Haiti then and saw what happened. “Within less than two years, it became impossible for Haitian farmers to compete with what they called ‘Miami rice.’ The whole local rice market in Haiti fell apart as cheap, U.S. subsidized rice, some of it in the form of ‘food aid,’ flooded the market. There was violence, ‘rice wars,’ and lives were lost.” “American rice invaded the country,” recalled Charles Suffrard, a leading rice grower in Haiti in an interview with the *Washington Post* in 2000. By 1987 and 1988, there was so much rice coming into the country that many stopped working the land.

Fr. Gerard Jean-Juste, a Haitian priest who has been the pastor at St. Claire and an outspoken human rights advocate, agrees. “In the 1980s, imported rice poured into Haiti, below the cost of what our farmers could produce it. Farmers lost their businesses. People from the countryside started losing their jobs and moving to the cities. After a few years of cheap imported rice, local production went way down.”

Still the international business community was not satisfied. In 1994, as a condition for U.S. assistance in returning to Haiti to resume his elected Presidency, Jean-Bertrand Aristide was forced by the U.S., the IMF, and the World Bank to open up the markets in Haiti even more. But, Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, what reason could the U.S. have in destroying the rice market of this tiny country? Haiti is definitely poor. The U.S. Agency for International Development reports the annual per capita income is less than \$400. The United Nations reports life expectancy in Haiti is 59, while in the US it is 78. Over 78 percent of Haitians live on less than \$2 a day, more than half

live on less than \$1 a day. Yet Haiti has become one of the very top importers of rice from the U.S. The U.S. Department of Agriculture 2008 numbers show Haiti is the third largest importer of US rice - at over 240,000 metric tons of rice. (One metric ton is 2200 pounds). Rice is a heavily subsidized business in the U.S. Rice subsidies in the U.S. totaled \$11 billion from 1995 to 2006. One producer alone, Riceland Foods Inc of Stuttgart, Arkansas, received over \$500 million dollars in rice subsidies between 1995 and 2006. The Cato Institute recently reported that rice is one of the most heavily supported commodities in the U.S. – with three different subsidies together averaging over \$1 billion a year since 1998 and projected to average over \$700 million a year through 2015. The result? “Tens of millions of rice farmers in poor countries find it hard to lift their families out of poverty because of the lower, more volatile prices caused by the interventionist policies of other countries.” In addition to three different subsidies for rice farmers in the U.S., there are also direct tariff barriers of 3 to 24 percent, reports Daniel Griswold of the Cato Institute – the exact same type of protections, though much higher, that the U.S. and the IMF required Haiti to eliminate in the 1980s and 1990s.

U.S. protection for rice farmers goes even further. A 2006 story in the *Washington Post* found that the federal government has paid at least \$1.3 billion in subsidies for rice and other crops since 2000 to individuals who do no farming at all, including \$490,000 to a Houston surgeon who owned land near Houston that once grew rice. And it is not only the Haitian rice farmers who have been hurt. Paul Farmer saw it happen to the sugar growers as well. “Haiti, once the world’s largest exporter of sugar and other tropical produce to Europe, began importing even sugar— from U.S. controlled sugar production in the Dominican Republic and Florida. It was terrible to see Haitian farmers put out of work. All this sped up the downward spiral that led to this month’s food riots.”

After the riots and protests, President Rene Preval of Haiti agreed to reduce the price of rice, which was selling for \$51 for a 110 pound bag, to \$43 dollars for the next month. No one thinks a one month fix will do anything but delay the severe hunger pains a few weeks.

Haiti is far from alone in this crisis. *The Economist* reports a billion people worldwide live on \$1 a day. The US-

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backed Voice of America reports about 850 million people were suffering from hunger worldwide before the latest round of price increases. Thirty three countries are at risk of social upheaval because of rising food prices, World Bank President Robert Zoellick told the *Wall Street Journal*. When countries have many people who spend half to three-quarters of their daily income on food, “there is no margin of survival.”

In the U.S., people are feeling the world-wide problems at the gas pump and in the grocery. Middle class people may cut back on extra trips or on high-priced cuts of meat. The number of people on food stamps in the US is at an all-time high. But in poor countries, where malnutrition and hunger were widespread before the rise in prices, there is nothing to cut back on except eating. That leads to hunger riots.

In the short term, the world community is sending bags of rice to Haiti. Venezuela sent 350 tons of food. The US just pledged \$200 million extra for worldwide hunger relief. The UN is committed to distributing more food.

What can be done in the medium term? The US provides much of the world’s food aid, but does it in such a way that only half of the dollars spent actually reach hungry people. US law requires that food aid be purchased from US farmers, processed and bagged in the US and shipped on US vessels—which cost 50 percent of the money allocated. A

simple change in US law to allow some local purchase of commodities would feed many more people and support local farm markets.

In the long run, what is to be done? The President of Brazil, Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, who visited Haiti recently, said “Rich countries need to reduce farms subsidies and trade barriers to allow poor countries to generate income with food exports. Either the world solves the unfair trade system, or every time there’s unrest like in Haiti, we adopt emergency measures and send a little bit of food to temporarily ease hunger.”

Citizens of the USA know very little about the role of their government in helping create the hunger problems in Haiti or other countries. But there is much that individuals can do. People can donate to help feed individual hungry people and participate with advocacy organizations like Bread for the World or Oxfam to help change the U.S. and global rules which favor the rich countries. This advocacy can help countries have a better chance to feed themselves.

Meanwhile, Merisma Jean-Claudel, a young high school graduate in Port-au-Prince told journalist Wadner Pierre “...people can’t buy food. Gasoline prices are going up. It is very hard for us over here. The cost of living is the biggest worry for us, no peace in stomach means no peace in the mind... I wonder if others will be able to survive the days ahead because things are very, very hard.”

“On the ground, people are very hungry,” reported Fr. Jean-Juste. “Our country must immediately open emergency canteens to feed the hungry until we can get them jobs. For the long run, we need to invest in irrigation, transportation, and other assistance for our farmers and workers.”

In Port au Prince, some rice arrived in the last few days. A school in Fr. Jean-Juste’s parish received several bags of rice. They had raw rice for 1000 children, but the principal still had to come to Father Jean-Juste asking for help. There was no money for charcoal, or oil.

Jervais Rodman, an unemployed carpenter with three children, stood in a long line Saturday in Port au Prince to get UN donated rice and beans. When Rodman got the small bags, he told Ben Fox of the Associated Press, “The beans might last four days. The rice will be gone as soon as I get home.”



CHILE

Remembering the CIA-Orchestrated 1973 Killing of Chilean President Salvador Allende

By Pablo Neruda, Chilean Nobel Laureate poet, from his poem "Machu Picchu."

Pablo Neruda was closely associated with President Allende. Neruda died shortly after the assassination of Allende and his funeral was the first mass demonstration against the dictatorship of President Augusto Pinochet.

Almighty death beckoned me many times;
I was like unseen salt inside the waves,
And what its invisible taste was scattering,
Was like something half sinking, half rising,
Or like vast structures made of wind and blizzards.

I came to the edge of the iron blade, to the narrows,
Of the air, to the shroud of farming and stone,
To the starry void of the final footsteps
And the dizzying, spiral highway:
But such a wide sea you are, oh death! you don't come
 wave after wave
But like a stampede of nocturnal clarity,
Or like night's absolute numbers.



Celebrating a friendship between Allende and Neruda.

MEXICO

The Merida Initiative

By David Loeb

Concern is mounting over the Merida Initiative proposed by the Bush administration and the effects that it would have on human rights and economic well-being of the Mexican and Central American people. This measure will grant the government of Mexico \$1.4 billion, mainly in the form of

security aid to the region's militaries. The Bush administration proposes a first installment of \$500 million be included in the Iraq Emergency Supplemental Funding Bill. Now is a good time to urge Congress that the aid be re-

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shaped to fight poverty and contribute to human rights of the region's people.

The initiative threatens human rights in Mexico. Many human rights groups in Mexico have expressed concern that counter-narcotics aid for the military is a recipe for unchecked human rights violations. The Washington-based Latin America Working Group stated: "The aid is a hodgepodge of assistance programs" according to but is dominated by the provision of hardware such as helicopters and inspection equipment for the Mexican Military."

There is ample concern that the military is not trained for

civilian policing and may abuse its authority. There have been a number of incidents where soldiers injured or killed civilians with little provocation. Amnesty International has documented abuses committed by the military in several regions in Chiapas, Oaxaca, Tamaulipas and Coahuila.

This is a good time to urge that the Merida Initiative be demilitarized and fund programs to fight drug trafficking through education, health care and other human services instead of increased "security aid." Call your representatives at the Congressional switchboard. The number is (202) 224-3121.

Human Rights Violation in Mexico

The case of Miguel Angel Tornez Hernandez and his family.

By David Loeb

On March 31, 2008 four police officers and a public official were killed near El Salto in the municipality of Ayutla de los libres as they were distributing funds to the poor. According to the authorities, they were robbed of 600,000 pesos and the officers' weapons. Miguel Angel Tornez Hernandez says that he was driving his car nearby when he was hijacked and forced to witness the shooting and drive the attackers from the scene. When his truck broke down, he was forced out and down a ravine.

On April 1, police officers went to Mr. Tornez' home and arrested his mother, his aunt, two sisters, aunt and three of their small children. They were held at a police station in order to force them to reveal his location. His sister reported she was tied to a chair, beaten, blindfolded and a bag was put over her head to force her to tell of his location. The family was released later that day.

When Miguel Angel Tornez went to give testimony about the attack, he was detained without charge. He was blindfolded and shocked with electricity in order to force a confession to the crime. He was placed in *arraigo* or pre-trial administrative detention for up to 90 days. The prosecutor's office gave Mr. Tornez a lawyer and the State Human Rights Commission investigated and confirmed his torture in a medical report. A local court ruled that he had been tortured by being threatened and assaulted. Mr. Tornez was moved on April 5 to another detention facility run by the Federal Attorney General's office in Mexico City without informing his family. Amnesty International is concerned that the investigation was not conducted fairly or impartially and that the practice of *arraigo* detention is a form of arbitrary detention that exposes the detainee to the risk of coercion and ill-treatment. Amnesty demands Tornez not be ill-treated and either be charged with a criminal offense or released. Furthermore Amnesty International urges that his family be protected and that all testimony extracted during torture or ill-treatment be ruled inadmissible.

David Loeb is an activist who has worked with several different organizations interested in US and Mexican relationships. He is a core member of Amnesty International Group 112 located in Philadelphia.

Last Laughs

