

# Heroic struggle

We are  
workers  
Not  
criminals  
!!!

# Minga: Life or death in Cauca

ROBERT GREEN on the indigenous movement battling for survival: p8



Latin workers fighting on! p12



# FRONTLINE

## LATIN AMERICA

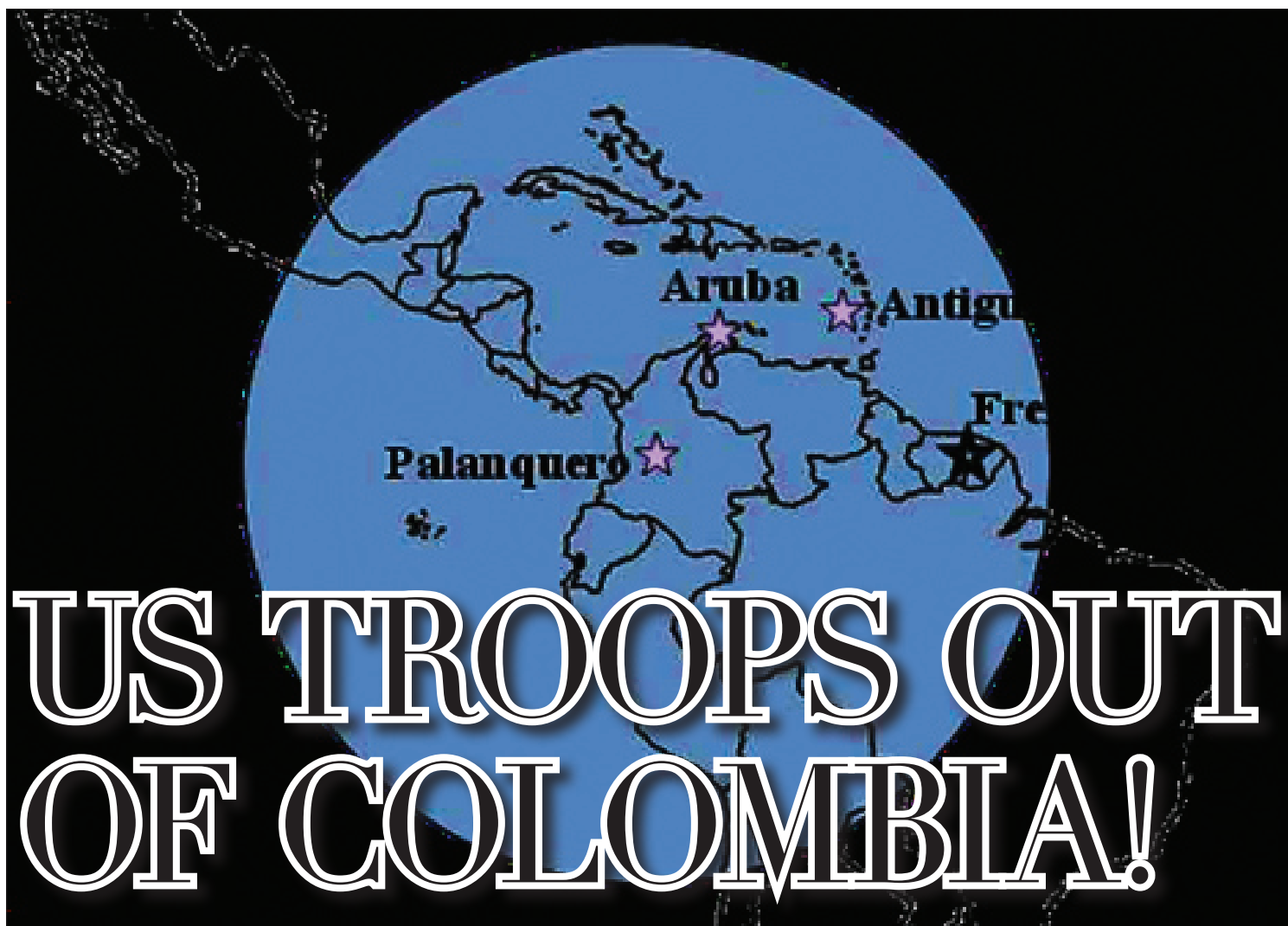
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## Military bases: Obama implements Bush policy, threatens region



Map image from 'Global En Route Strategy', Pentagon White Paper

President Barak Obama's decision to proceed with an agreement extending the US military into seven new bases in Colombia has caused a stir across the continent.

Jack Gain and Andy Higginbottom

The official pretext, the war on drugs, is patently untrue. The Pentagon's own White Paper 'Global En Route Strategy' makes clear that the principal base Palenquero has been selected for its 3,500 metre runway and facilities to maintain a fleet of C-17 transport planes capable of airlifting supplies to warfighters within a 2,000 mile radius. This covers 'nearly half the continent', taking in Cuba, Ecuador, Venezuela,

Bolivia and Amazonian Brazil. With re-fuelling facilities, the capacity extends to nearly 4,000 miles, covering nearly "the entire continent", with only Cape Horn beyond reach.

Venezuela's president Hugo Chávez presented the White Paper to fellow South American leaders at a specially convened summit of UNASUR (Union of South American Nations) held in Bariloche, Argentina on 28 August. As Chávez highlighted, the document reveals that US commanders want a base for broad interventionist objectives: "USSOUTHCOM has become interested in establishing a location on the South American continent that could be used both for counter-narcotics operations and as a location from which mobility operations could be executed".

In Colombia itself the campaign against free trade agreements, RECALCA, held consultation meetings in four major cities between 15 and 19 September. Academics warned that the new bases are a threat "to any democratic expression in Colombia and Latin America". Laura Carlsen, of the Center for International Policy, summed up the sense of foreboding: "The hope that Obama would mean a change in US policy towards the region has been devastated".

We should heed these concerns. President George W. Bush has gone unlamented, but the infamous Bush Doctrine has not. If, as Nobel Laureate, President Obama wants to make a genuine step towards peace, he should immediately withdraw all US forces from Latin America.

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## Death threat against Aida Quilcué and social organisations

Paramilitaries have again threatened social organisations across the southwest region of Colombia. Indigenous leader Aida Quilcué was amongst those threatened, a month after she returned from a trip to the UK invited by Unison Northern and the Northern TUC, and the Colombia Solidarity Campaign.

Frontline correspondent

Aida (above) is ex-leader of the Cauca Regional Indigenous Council (CRIC), spokesperson for the Minga of Social and Communitarian Resistance, and currently a pre-candidate for next March's Senate elections. Her husband Edwin was murdered by the Colombian army in December 2008 in an attack seemingly meant for Aida herself.

The threat is signed by the 'Grupo Armado Los Rastrojos – Comandos Urbanos', a new generation paramilitary militia. It states that Aida and a list of named organisations have been declared military objectives 'after a long and extensive intelligence process', and accuses them all of being guerrillas.

This comes after a shower of violence against social organisations in the region. In Cerro Tijeras indigenous reserve, Cauca department, three community members have been murdered and another seriously injured in three weeks.

Aida has been regularly followed by strange cars and individuals. Indigenous guards apprehended two men following Aida, they were armed but weren't carrying any identification, a criminal offence in Colombia.

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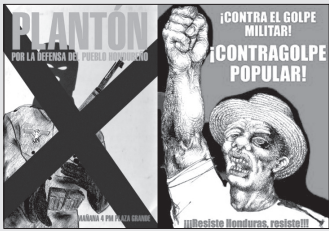
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Urgent action: Death threat  
against Aida Quilcué and  
social organisations

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On another occasion, four men in a car were seen monitoring Aida's house. The registration plate details were taken to the police to ask them to run a check on the vehicle, the reply was that this registration doesn't exist.

During her trip to the UK Aida expressed concern for her safety upon returning to Colombia, but said that she had to go back 'because she dreams that Colombia can one day be different, a country with social justice and peace, and without arms'.

Please help to protect the social organisations and individuals being threatened. You can write to the Colombian embassy in the UK at elondres@cancilleria.gov.co and mail@colombianembassy.co.uk; copy your emails to info@colombiasolidarity.org.uk

Editorial

'Speak softly and carry a big stick; you will go far.'  
Theodore Roosevelt, US President 1901-1909

In fact Theodore D. 'Teddy' Roosevelt rarely spoke softly: he was an unashamed imperialist. In 1898 he resigned as Assistant Secretary to the Navy, so as to personally participate in the war with Spain over Cuba. In 1903 he broke Panama off from Colombia to ensure US domination over the freshly-built canal zone, and with that, secure control of all shipping movements between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. In 1904 he penned the 'Roosevelt Corollary' that asserts the US right as a 'civilized nation' to be the 'international police power' in all the Americas. So it was, at the beginning of the 20th century, Roosevelt established the framework legitimising US military intervention that has been called on ever since to crush Latin American democratic and socialist movements.

In modern times US imperialist policies have been furthered by Democrat President Bill Clinton as much as by Republican George W. Bush. Clinton launched Plan Colombia in 2000, a year later Bush sent in the US marines along the pipeline bordering Venezuela – they are still there. The new factor is less a different president than US concerns that not only radical Venezuela but moderate Brazil is extending multilateral ties with China, Russia and India. The US is especially nervous that China is beginning to buy out minerals and oil supplies, following the pattern in Africa. We are moving into a new ball game, as the US prepares to use military levers to contain its rivals.

There are strong resonances between the current US geo-military focus on Colombia and Roosevelt's grand plan. Then it was control of the seas, now it is control of the skies that is strategically essential. The US has chosen Colombia partly because of its location - the bases are a dagger close to Latin America's heart as Fidel Castro points out - and partly in the belief that President Uribe heads a client regime strong enough to crush internal dissent. Worse (or all the better for

the US), Uribe's bombing raid into Ecuador and his hostility to Venezuela demonstrate a leader inclined to risk his neighbours' security in the name of the war against terror. For Uribe, like Bush, the pre-emptive strike is justified and in this mindset only certain nations' right to sovereignty is respected. Uribe is dangerous and his close alliance with Washington is intact.

Where does Europe fit into the geo-political scheme? Although it does not have the same military presence, Europe too is fond of wielding the big stick, as witnessed in its bullying of Bolivia and Ecuador to open their markets in 'free trade agreements', and all in the name of cooperation. The right-wing governments of Peru and Colombia are keen to seal free trade agreements with the EU. In Colombia's case there is a lot more hanging on the European deal than meets the eye. If an EU-Colombia agreement goes through it will unblock the logjam on similar deals with the US and Canada, so far held up due to human rights concerns. Hilary Clinton has long indicated that she is prepared to put these to one side for the sake of doing business, as her studied 'inaction' against the coup in Honduras confirms.

'Speak softly and carry a big stick' fits Obama's administration perfectly. President Obama does indeed speak softly, and yet by confirming the agreement for seven new military bases, he too has elected to hold the big stick over Latin America. Despite his award of the Nobel Peace Prize, we must be very clear about this, Obama's honeymoon is over.

Reliance on Obama for a progressive foreign policy would be a cardinal mistake. How far he will go down the militarist road depends not on his goodwill, but on the resolve and unity of South America's governments, on the strength of popular resistance, and on mobilisations inside the US and in Europe against US bases, to stop the free trade agreements and all forms of imperialist intervention. It is to mobilisation that we should turn our attention.

- No to US Imperialism!
- No to the EU Free Trade Agreements!
- Yes to Solidarity of the Peoples!

Obama and Uribe's  
militarism threatens  
Latin America

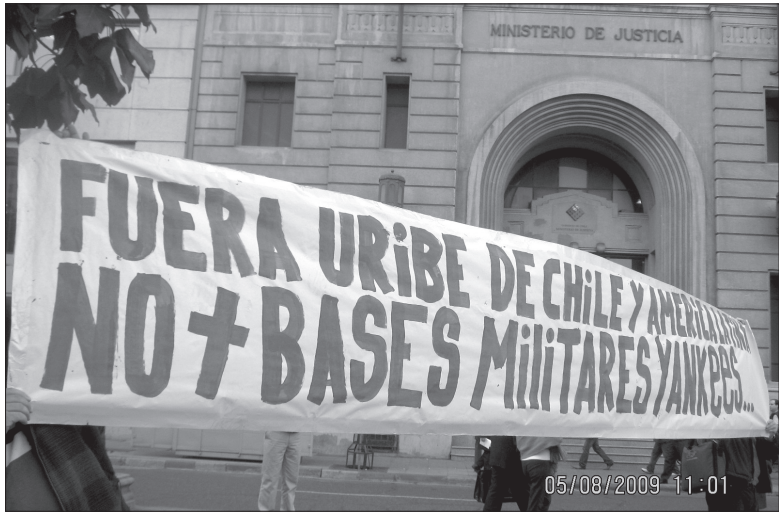
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The deal to allow the US to access seven new "cooperative security locations" at bases in Colombia is part of an alarming global strategy, revealed in the White Paper, to give the US Air Force to strike "any location in the world". The new bases bring the total number of US military installations in Latin America up to thirteen.

Fighter jets stationed at the Palanquero base, situated in Puerto Salgar in the centre of the country, can reach the borders with Ecuador and Venezuela "in less than 10 minutes." In March 2008 Palanquero was used to launch a Colombian air raid into Ecuador which killed 24 FARC guerrillas and sparked a regional diplomatic crisis.

Back in 1998 the base was 'decertified' by Washington after it was used in the bombing of the village of Santo Domingo in which 18 campesinos were killed. The reversal of this decision comes as part of a ratcheting-up of US support for the Uribe government and the toning down of criticism over human rights abuses since President Obama was elected.

In September, the US State Department 'certified' an improvement in Colombia's human rights performance and authorised an additional \$32m in aid. This was despite a UN study which found evidence that activists continue to be "killed, tortured, ill-treated, disappeared, threatened, arbitrarily arrested and detained." The US Embassy's own assessment of the Colombia's human rights performance has been sharply criticised by international observers. A



Protestors in Santiago: 'Uribe Out of Chile and Latin America. No Yankee Military Bases'

study by Amnesty International in 2007 found that 47% of civilian killings were perpetrated by military units vetted and financed by the United States.

In March, the Obama administration signalled an end to the rhetoric of a 'War on Drugs' by announcing their support for 'harm reduction' strategies aimed at reducing the demand for drugs within the US. Obama described this as an unprecedented shift to "a national drug control strategy guided by sound principles of public safety and public health." However, it went largely unreported that Obama has increased military financing to Colombia by 25% on last year. In spite of the change in rhetoric, this marks a continuation of the failed policies of interdiction and crop eradication which have seen Colombia

remain the largest cocaine exporter, the country with the worst human rights record and the largest recipient of US aid in the western hemisphere.

Obama opposed the US-Colombian Free Trade Agreement as a candidate, but in June announced his willingness to "strike a deal" with the Uribe government - in spite of an increase in the number of assassinations of trade union leaders last year.

In May 2008, Obama criticised the Bush administration's "neglect" of Latin America and promised to "renew US leadership" in the Americas. It is becoming increasingly clear that the kind of 'leadership' the Obama administration has in mind involves the renewed projection of US military might across the hemisphere and beyond.



# Afro-Colombian woman Senator Piedad Córdoba – tracing the truth to find peace

Senator Piedad Córdoba, female, black and Liberal, has, for years, initiated successful steps towards the much needed transformation of Colombian society from the long decades of civil war. Once kidnapped by paramilitary death squads, and one of the top three recent favourites for this year's Nobel Peace Prize, her efforts in the release of hostages held by the FARC guerrillas and her outspoken challenges to government corruption and impunity mean that, to a great many nationally and internationally, she stands as one of the remarkable actors of positive change.

G. Saavedra

President Uribe's response to all this can only be described as vindictive. On the one hand he has made use of the fruits of Senator Córdoba's negotiations with the FARC whilst simultaneously cooking up accusations against her of FARC complicity. Thus Piedad and others in the peace process have had to endure constant vilification by the biased Colombian media and Uribe supporters.

The latter often adding toxic doses of racist and sexist abuse to the usual nonsensical accusations of FARC association levied to anyone disagreeing with them. These accusations would be farcical in that they are consistently proven to be obvious fabrications – however they are also licences to murder: regularly accompanied by further death-threats and assassinations.

After helping to negotiate the release of several FARC hostages over the last year Córdoba has also followed up the confessions of extradited paramilitary leaders who are known to have been responsible for thousands of murders. The Colombian judiciary, opposition parties and the thousands of victimised families of decades of paramilitary violence have always insisted that the paramilitary

revelations should be heard in full by Colombians in order to bring justice to everyone concerned. To this purpose, and in order to facilitate further peace negotiations, Senator Córdoba, Ivan Cepeda, from the National Movement for the Victims of State Crimes, the released FARC hostage, Senator Javier Lara, and the other members of the US visit, have established the Colombian@s for la Paz – Colombians for Peace movement, together with hundreds of academics, opposition and human rights leaders.

What has been revealed by the paramilitary confessions is of the utmost importance. Amongst much else, Piedad's group have been told by paramilitary leader Salvatore Mancuso, (Uribe's farmhouse neighbour in Antioquia, thought to have committed at least 400 murders) of clear para alliances with uribista politicians and the siting of mass graves.

Meanwhile, Jorge Iván Laverde (El Iguano), another para leader, has confessed to have constructed incineration ovens with high ranking military officers' consent in order to get rid of the physical evidence of hundreds of mutilated victims opposing the government and big business in the north of Colombia. The body bags have been unearthed, dug out and investigated by forensic specialists and the evidence compiled by state prosecutors.

Piedad also backs the Venezuelan Bases for Peace initiative in which at least 70 peace camps will be established throughout Latin America.

Colombian@s por La Paz are asking the new Nobel Laureate for Peace, President Obama, to seriously consider withdrawing the agreement to establish military bases and join them in the construction of a just and peaceful Colombia. They deserve our full support.

Visit [www.movimientodevictimas.org](http://www.movimientodevictimas.org) or [www.colombianosporlapaz.com](http://www.colombianosporlapaz.com) for more info.

**Senator Piedad Córdoba has endured constant vilification by the media and Uribe supporters**



# Venezuela slams Colombian bases

## Chávez orders freeze on bilateral relations



Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez exposed US military plans for Latin America in the Pentagon's own White Paper in August

When in mid-July Colombia announced that it was granting the US new facilities at seven military bases, the reaction from Venezuela was immediate.

Diana Raby

On 20 July President Chávez declared that this decision would oblige Venezuela to 'revise' diplomatic relations. "Of course they use euphemisms and say they are not Yankee bases but Colombian bases which the Yankees can use. They'll be there on a permanent basis". The Colombian government, he added, "is opening the door to those who are always attacking us".

Two days later Venezuela demanded that Colombia give a detailed explanation of the reasons for this action, and shortly afterwards Chávez announced that he had issued instructions to 'freeze' diplomatic relations at the lowest level short of a complete rupture. He also ordered that the

border be closed to trade, a severe blow to Colombia which exports large quantities of textiles, agricultural products and other goods to its neighbour. Venezuela would replace Colombian imports with goods from 'truly friendly' countries such as Brazil.

The Venezuelan response was also military: Chávez announced that the country would double its military capacity, and that he was already in touch with the Russians about further arms purchases.

Concern in Venezuela was far from being limited to the government: Stalin Pérez Borges, a leader of the Socialist Workers' Front, declared that the Colombian action was part of a US imperialist offensive against Venezuela. The only defence, he said, was 'the people in arms'. Eva Golinger, the Venezuelan-US writer who exposed US involvement in the 2002 anti-Chávez coup, pointed out that through Plan Colombia funds, the Southern Command budget and special funding for the new bases, US military expend-

iture in Colombia in 2009 would reach nearly a billion dollars.

There is general agreement that the US-Colombian military escalation is not intended to prepare open hostilities against Venezuela (or Ecuador) but rather to increase espionage, infiltration and destabilisation. On 13-14 October a Venezuelan parliamentary committee reported on an investigation into the 2004 arrest of 153 Colombian paramilitaries in the suburbs of Caracas, and MP Mario Isea declared that all the evidence suggested that this was not an isolated incident but part of an ongoing plan to infiltrate paramilitaries to sow terror, destabilisation and assassinations.

Isea added that statements by the former Colombian DAS agent Rafael García pointed to the existence of a permanent plan against Venezuela with the participation of members of Uribe's government and Venezuelan opposition politicians. Particularly disturbing in this context are the actions of the opposition governors of the Venezuelan border states of Táchira and Zulia, who appear to be closely linked to Colombian paramilitaries and also indulge in separatist rhetoric.

Venezuelan officials have emphasised that they regard the Colombian bases, the Honduran coup and possible new bases in Panama as part of a coordinated plan by the Pentagon and the US military-industrial establishment to reassert control over the Latin American 'backyard'. While they have little reason to trust Obama, they believe there is a major power struggle under way in Washington which has fundamental implications for Latin America. Hence Chávez' declarations at the United Nations, where he proclaimed that the podium no longer smelt of sulphur but of hope, and rhetorically asked which Obama we were going to see, the Obama of peace and reconciliation or the Obama of war in Afghanistan and militarisation in Colombia.

# US policy: Building peace with more war

US military aid to Colombia started at the beginning of the 20th century: the US military mission became permanent in Bogotá from 1939, but cooperation became consistent after the Korean War, where a Colombian battalion fought together with the US-led UN command between 1950 and 1953.

Giuliana Cascella

Colombian officials maintained close relations with US commanders, and this resulted in wide collaboration, often ignoring congressional restrictions.

During the 1960s Colombia became the first recipient of US military aid in the continent, as part of the Alliance for Progress, a programme

to reduce the spread of communism in the region, whose initially high social component was soon forgotten. Only in 1962, when the first 'guerrilla' groups counted less than 200 men, military support for counterinsurgency amounted to \$1.5 million, aimed at improving intelligence and military capacity.

During the Cold War, military training and advice remained at a high level. In the infamous 'School of the Americas' (SOA) military and police personnel were taught the latest counter-guerrilla techniques, developed in Vietnam and Central America, which included the creation of paramilitary groups and death squads, interrogation methods using torture, and violent intimidation of civil society to prevent the spread of communism and support for the guerrillas.

During the 1980s and 1990s, with the rise of narcotraffic, military aid increased, reaching \$100 million annually by 1997. However, the rationale changed from the defeating communism to defeating drugs at the source.

In 1994, the US congress restricted military aid to Colombia to counternarcotics operations and in 1997 it further limited the delivery of assistance to foreign militaries involved in human rights violations.

But restrictions did not prevent an increase in military aid nor human rights abuses by the army.

After 60 years of increasing military assistance, what has been the outcome? More death, more displaced people, more war and more human rights abuses in the country.



News

# Unions condemn EU free trade agreement

The British Trade Union Congress has joined Colombia's three main union federations and the Andean Coordinator of Indigenous Organizations in condemnation of the Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) that the European Union is negotiating with the governments of Colombia and Peru. Three of the five nations previously grouped in the Andean Community - Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador - had already pulled out of talks.

Andy Higginbottom

Andean indigenous peoples have called for a campaign to stop the EU FTAs. They warn that "an FTA with the EU will bring new conflicts... the result of trying to impose through blood and fire the destruction of our communities to encourage the plundering of natural assets and predation of Mother Earth... European multinationals are, along with the U.S., the most responsible for global warming, and the FTA with the EU only deepen this problem."

The UK government has a special responsibility for shaping the EU's policy. The main features were put in place by the former EU Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson, who was then replaced by another Labour appointee, Baroness Cathy Ashton. The policy aims to open up every

sector to the multinationals, locking poor countries into regimes that guarantee investors' interests over social well being.

The seventh round of negotiations over the Colombia deal took place in Bogotá in November 2009, but there remained the unsettled issue of access to EU markets for Colombian bananas. There has since been an agreement to gradually reduce EU tariffs on bananas produced in Latin America, clearing the way for a final round of FTA negotiations between Peru, Colombia and the EU, expected to take place in Lima in January 2010. Spain is the current EU president, and it hopes to bring two signed deals as trophies to the summit of EU and Latin American governments in Madrid in 17-18 May 2010.

If the EU-Colombia FTA deal goes through, it could unblock the logjam of similar FTAs with Canada and the US that have been held up because of humanitarian concerns. In the meantime, on 23 December 2009 the US Senate extended the existing preferential trade agreements, known as ATPDEA, with Colombia, Peru and Ecuador, but they excluded Bolivia. This exclusion, supported by the Obama administration, is using trade policy as part of the ongoing US strategy to delegitimize and isolate the popular government of Evo Morales. This confirms the overall pattern that

has emerged from the complex web of trade negotiations, the western powers are coordinating their policies, and seeking to open up the Andes through a divide and conquer strategy.

The EU, like the UK government, portrays the human rights situation in Colombia as bad but improving, one that calls for constructive engagement. In the assessment of RECALCA, the Colombian alliance campaigning against FTAs, the EU has taken a harder commercial line than the US. The EU has been even less concerned than Bush with protection for labour rights and the environment.

For Colombia's social movements it would not be enough to have an FTA with human rights clauses included, since that would only consolidate the free market policies that drive the conflict, hence they argue for no FTA. For all its hypocritical language about 'partnership' and 'co-operation' with civil society, this is the clear message that the EU is refusing to hear.

If the FTA is signed, that does not mean it will be accepted by the people. Support groups in Europe should gather at the Linking Alternatives alternative peoples' summit that assembles in Madrid from 14 May (see <http://www.enlazandoalternativas.org/>), and plan for prolonged civil resistance against the latest wave of European imperialism.



Colombian President Alvaro Uribe is demanding a referendum on whether he can stand again

## Political news

### Re-election?

President Alvaro Uribe's intention to seek re-election has polarised political opinion, and dominates the build-up to next May's Presidential elections. Uribe has been in power since 2002, having been re-elected in 2006 after a referendum to change the constitution to allow him to stand for a second time.

Uribe's wish to run for a third term is subject to a second referendum which would change the constitution again to allow a president to serve three consecutive terms. At one point Congress seemed certain to reject the project, but after a tortuously long process it definitively approved a referendum at the

Robert Green

end of August amidst desperate behind the scenes wheeling and dealing. The turnaround astonished analysts, as only a week before the referendum had been pronounced dead following the loss of support from Uribe's supporters in the Congress.

To call a referendum for re-election requires a petition signed by at least 5% of the electorate. The re-election project was again left in limbo on 12 November when the National Electoral Council declared the signatures 'invalid' because of financial irregularities in their collection, and recommended that criminal charges be brought against its organisers. The decision brought a bitter reaction from Uribe's supporters, who have promised to appeal and overturn the decision.

The Constitutional Court must now decide whether the referendum project is compatible with the country's constitution or not, and a ruling is expected in early 2010. The referendum's progress is still far from assured because of concerns about the breaking of institutional checks on the power of the executive.

Under Colombian law, Uribe had until the end of November to declare, and until the end of January to register his candidacy (i.e. four months before the elections). Probably Uribe will only be able to register his candidacy officially at the beginning of April, if he does declare his candidacy at the end of November then he will be in breach of the Law of Guarantees, introduced to ensure an even playing field for other candidates in presidential elections when there is a candidate who is a serving president.

### Corruption – Agro Ingreso Seguro

In September, Cambio magazine broke the story of Agro Ingreso Seguro (Secure Agricultural Income), a Ministry of Agriculture programme introduced in 2007, with the stated aims of "promoting productivity and competitiveness, reducing inequality in the country and preparing the agricultural sector to face the challenge of the economy's internationalisation".

Cambio revealed that, despite being billed as an inequality-reducing programme which would help small scale farmers, the vast majority of the subsidies had in fact gone to a handful of very rich landowning families. Most of the beneficiaries had given financial support to President Uribe's electoral campaign for the 2006 election, and some of them have been prosecuted for links to paramilitary groups, such as Congressman Luis Eduardo Vives, who was convicted for his links to

# Education and students

## Classroom wars

In 2009, at least seventeen educators were assassinated, more than 3,000 threatened and around 50 forced into exile, according to teachers' union FECODE. It is in the face of this ongoing crisis that on 29 September Education International launched a detailed report Colombia's Classroom Wars\* by Dr. Mario Novelli.

This report was featured in the last issue of FLA, and it is fitting that it should reach a worldwide audience (Education International is a global union federation representing nearly 30 million teachers and other education workers). It gives invaluable background to the formation of political violence, the role of educators as trade unionists and how these two factors have intersected.

Apart from the toll of assassinations, it is striking how many educators are forcibly displaced by political violence. Novelli uses maps and time series to investigate the patterns, noting that 'what is most startling is the prevalence of Antioquia in all of the time periods. For many interviewees, Antioquia during the 1990s was seen as the laboratory for the new paramilitary project, which then spread outwards to other departments'. Current president Uribe was Governor of Antioquia at the time.

The report concludes with a call 'to prioritise improvements in the human rights situation in Colombia over the interests of foreign-based corporations seeking investment opportunities'.

\*Available at [http://download.ei-ie.org/Docs/WebDepot/EI-ColombiaStudy\\_eng\\_final\\_web.pdf](http://download.ei-ie.org/Docs/WebDepot/EI-ColombiaStudy_eng_final_web.pdf) (English) and [http://download.ei-ie.org/Docs/WebDepot/EI-ColombiaStudy\\_esp\\_final\\_web.pdf](http://download.ei-ie.org/Docs/WebDepot/EI-ColombiaStudy_esp_final_web.pdf) (Spanish)

## Students in the firing line

The National Union of Students has joined forces with lecturers' union UCU and Justice for Colombia to call for the UK Government to condemn the routine assassination and kidnapping of students at Colombian universities.

The report finds that:

- in the past three years alone (2006-8), a total of 99 human rights violations have been perpetrated against Colombian students,
- between 2006 and 2008, at least twelve Colombian university students were assassinated,
- in many cases the state security forces themselves are the perpetrators of the abuses, while in others, statements by senior government officials put students in direct danger of attack, and in virtually all of the cases, little or nothing has been done to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Available at [http://www.nus.org.uk/Global/Colombia\\_Student\\_Report.pdf](http://www.nus.org.uk/Global/Colombia_Student_Report.pdf)

### Academic freedom study

A study by James Cemmell published in May 2009 identifies different components of academic autonomy, and how they concern both teachers and students.

The Colombia chapter collates evidence from various official sources, and highlights cases such as the University of Cordoba where the Vice-Chancellor worked directly with the paramilitary AUC to force university workers' union SINTRAUNICOL to renegotiate a collective agreement on worse terms.

Available at [http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/p/0/academic\\_freedom\\_colombia.pdf](http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/p/0/academic_freedom_colombia.pdf)

# Climate of fear: Rights defenders under threat

This accessible and important report highlights how in Colombia's climate of fear it is often human rights defenders who themselves are amongst the first to come under attack. It is essential reading for anyone looking for an introduction to the human rights situation.

The report is clearly laid out, its first section explains the context - how killings, death threats and attacks, as well as break-ins and the theft of information being compiled by human rights NGOs all contribute to the climate of fear. There are figures showing the pattern of increase in attacks on trade unionists and other categories of human rights defender, plus featured cases of Afro-Colombian and church community leaders who have been targeted.

The second section highlights five key recommendations to the Colombian state authorities: end impunity for the violations; end the misuse of state intelligence; end stigmatisation and unfounded criminal proceedings and, finally, structurally improve the protection programmes for people at risk. Again the report illustrates these concerns with live case studies - of the renowned journalist Hollman Morris, of the CAJAR lawyers' collective, jurists, peace commissioners, students and supporters of political prisoners.

Perhaps the most revealing section is the annexe with quotes from Colombia's President Álvaro Uribe Veléz who persistently seeks to delegitimize journalists and human rights observers with claims suggesting they are spokespeople for terrorism. The conclusion is unstated but inescapable, it is Uribe himself who is primarily responsible for the climate of fear.

The report is available at <http://www.abcolombia.org.uk>



# Revolutionary resistance against the coup

On 28 June armed military personnel took the democratically-elected president Mel Zelaya from his home, put him in a plane and took him to Costa Rica, and then installed Roberto Micheletti as a new president. The coup had the backing of Congress, the two main traditional parties, National and Zelaya's own Liberal Party, the Supreme Court of Justice, the high command of the army, the Confederation of Private Businesses COHEP, banana multinational Chiquita and the oligarchy, that tightly-knit group of 12 families which control the country's wealth, media, land and political power.

Jorge Martin

Zelaya is a wealthy landowner, elected president on a Liberal Party ticket in 2006. Why was he so dangerous to the interests of the oligarchy? Zelaya had attempted to alleviate poverty in what is the third poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. He did not have any luck when he asked the rich for money for social programmes so he progressively sided with the Bolivarian Alternative of the Americas (ALBA) promoted by Venezuela, Cuba, Bolivia and other countries as an alternative to the free trade agreements imposed by Washington and Brussels. By getting cheap oil from Venezuela-backed Petrocaribe rather than the multinationals he broke the monopoly on fuel importation in the hands of the oligarchy. By getting cheap generic drugs from Cuba he broke another monopoly controlled by the oligarchy. The final stroke was when Zelaya sided with the unions by raising the minimum wage by 60% and blocking privatisations.

The immediate reason for the coup was Zelaya's proposal to open the possibility of changing the constitution through a Constituent Assembly. Zelaya initiated a non-binding consultation, to ask the people whether they were in favour of adding a fourth ballot box as part of the normal general elections which had been called for October. As well as voting on a president, national congress, local councillors and mayors, the people would also be asked whether they wanted to convene a Constituent Assembly. The coup closed off this

democratic consultation process.

Since then, the people of Honduras have maintained a heroic struggle, led by the National Front of Resistance Against the Coup, facing repression, selective assassinations (seven have been killed), mass arrests and a media blockade.

On Monday morning, 21 September, Mel Zelaya arrived in the capital Tegucigalpa, seeking refuge in the Brazilian embassy. Zelaya made an appeal to the people to come out to protect him, and they responded by the tens of thousands. The régime of coup leader Micheletti responded with brutal repression. The army and the police cleared off thousands of Zelaya supporters from outside the Brazilian embassy, closed down the country's airports and declared a curfew.

The masses responded with an insurrection in the working class and poor areas (barrios and colonias), in the capital and throughout the country. Hundreds of protestors were arrested, dozens injured and a few were killed by the repression of the army, the police and paramilitary forces.



# Honduras

## The empire strikes back

The Honduran crisis finally ended up on the 'dark side', through both the consolidation of the putschist regime and the institutionalization of illegitimate elections of 29 November.

Atilio Boron

Prior to the election, White House had already declared that it would accept the results as valid, in order to normalize democratic life and put an end to Micheletti's 'interim presidency', a euphemism used since the first day by Washington to characterize the Honduran oligarchy's coup d'état. This way, the gross violations of human rights and abuses of democratic freedoms that accompanied the electoral campaign would be condemned to oblivion.

This painful outcome had been anticipated by several rightwing US Republican politicians...South Carolina Republican senator Jim DeMint ...pointed out to the media that 'Secretary Clinton and Assistant Secretary Shannon have assured me

that the U.S. will recognize the outcome of the Honduran elections regardless of whether Manuel Zelaya is reinstated'.

The significance of this resolution of the crisis goes far beyond Honduran politics: it marks the beginning of a new regressive stage, in which the United States returns to its traditional policy of supporting both military coups and authoritarian regimes sympathetic to imperial interests, as well as ratifying the hypocritical character and empty democratic rhetoric permanently enunciated by Washington. The lesson is worth learning: from now on, democracy will mean any regime that unconditionally submits itself to U.S. designs; on the contrary, if independence and self-determination are defended, a country will be considered authoritarian, populist or despotic.

Uribe and Calderón are democratic, regardless of whether the former flagrantly violates human rights, has close relations with drug-dealers and paramilitaries and unceasingly sabotages any possible peace agreements and the humanitarian prisoner exchanges needed for

Colombia's pacification; and regardless of the latter's overnight dismissal of 46,000 electrical workers from the Compañía de Luz y Fuerza del Centro and his demented escalation of the militarization of Mexican political life. On the other hand, Chávez, Correa and Morales are populist and authoritarian, dangerous for their neighbors, because they promote various social reforms and sow the seeds of discord in their respective countries...

Facing this painful backward movement of US American foreign policy, many consider that the victory of Honduran pro-coup factions shows the decline of US American hegemony. On this basis, they end up clearing Barack Obama, supposedly because in spite of his efforts he was unable to guide the Honduran crisis toward a resolution compatible with democratic institutionalization. How sustainable is such an interpretation?

There is no doubt that the prevalence that the US used to have upon its neighbors south of the Río Bravo has weakened, but it is far from having disappeared.

Did Obama act with all his will to solve the Honduran crisis according to the imperatives of democracy and human rights? Definitely not. His initiatives were hesitant as a result of the two lines of thought driving the formulation of US foreign policy. One of them is reactionary to the bone and deeply influenced by the necessities and strategies of the military-industrial complex, and finds its expression in Hillary Clinton; the other - much more diffuse - would prefer to establish more respectful relationships with the countries of the area without abandoning past hegemony, bringing it more or less up to date: its main representative is Obama. The President was clearly overcome by his rivals in this conflict, as from the beginning they were able to impose their strategy on the Honduran crisis.

The hegemonic decline hypothesis is refuted if one observes that, in spite of its weakness, Washington has managed to sign a treaty of military cooperation with Colombia that, as Fidel Castro reminded us recently, amounts to a practical annexation of that South American country to the United States. That initiative is proof of the formidable capacity of pressure, dominance and control that the empire still has.

It's not that the United States could not modify the results of the Honduran crisis, but that beyond Obama's preferences, the dominant class in the United States and its political representatives in the state apparatus, did not desire a different outcome to this conflict, even knowing the dire implications that this decision would have for peace and political stability in this Central American country.

• This is an abridged version of the original piece. For full text see <http://www.atiliorboron.com>



# Bolivians demand Irish terror probe

Cristian Dominguez is the Secretary of Natural Resources for the peasant organisation, CSUTCB and comes from the Amazonian department of Pando. He and José Sagarnaga of the Bolivia Solidarity Campaign handed a letter to the Foreign Affairs Ministry in Dublin on Friday 20 November, drawing attention to the Irish-based company Integrated Risk Management Services (IRMS).

Gus Silva

this company and right wing extremist terrorist groups in Europe and the connections they have with our country Bolivia...The proof that exists against these mercenary groups is conclusive, but we are worried that they are still active in our country, Bolivia'.

IRMS provides 'security services'. It previously employed Michael Dwyer who was killed in an armed clash with the Bolivian police in April 2009. The Bolivian authorities say that Dwyer was part of a failed conspiracy to assassinate President Evo Morales. A Colonel Gyla Attila, another IRMS employee, recruited Dwyer.

'The presence of Irish citizen Michael Dwyer in

Bolivia coincided with terrorist attacks perpetrated in 2008 and the first months of 2009, aimed at destabilising the process of change'.

'Cristian Domínguez, Secretary of Defence of Natural Resources and the Environment of the Bolivian Confederation of Peasant Workers (CSUTCB) ...is a survivor of the massacre of Pando in 2008, which was organised and carried out by those who are experts in organizing wars of secession. Mr Dwyer and the machinery he was a part of should be investigated for their responsibility in these events which left men, women and children dead, and many survivors scarred for life.'

The letter urges a full and public investigation 'between



# Ecuador

## Government-indigenous talks

President Rafael Correa took office as Ecuador's President in January 2007. He declared Ecuador's national debt illegitimate and was re-elected in April 2009. Two months later Ecuador joined ALBA, the Bolivarian Alliance of the Americas.

President Correa visited the UK between 26-28 October 2009. He held a series of academic conferences and was enthusiastically welcomed by the Ecuadorian community. Correa has called for international aid to help limit environmental damage and fight climate change (see previous editions of FLA). However Correa's policy of 'responsible mining' has generated a real debate, including in sectors who are sympathetic to his government's overall programme.

We publish below articles representing the two main perspectives. Fidel Narváez argues that Correa continues in a progressive direction, whilst Jennifer Moore gives more substance to the concerns of the indigenous peoples' alliance CONAIE on the mining issue. It is vital both perspectives are heard.

What are the conditions under which responsible mining would be possible? For an example of the violence with which multinational mining corporations currently impose their interests, see the Toronto Star report on Copper Mesa at <http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/article/729148>. The newspaper suggests that regulation is needed. We add that international mobilization is an indispensable to complement local and national efforts to protect the environment and communities.



CONAIE and government agree ongoing talks – 5 October

A week after confrontations between the police and indigenous peoples protesting government policies on 27-28 September 2009, emergency talks between President Rafael Correa and 150 delegates from the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE) took place on 5 October. The two parties reached agreement on six points:

- That the dialogue should be set on a permanent basis
  - The ongoing commission should have high level government representation, resources and a plan of work
  - Strengthening of the bilingual intercultural communication
  - The formation of a mixed commission to seek consensus on the Water Law
  - Investigation of the death on 30 September of Bosco Wisum of the Shuar indigenous people
  - Analysis of the reform of the Mining Law.
- The CONAIE delegates and government representatives confirmed that the talks had been positive, constructive and peaceful.

## 'Left versus the left'

After almost three years of enthusiasm and expectation following the arrival of a progressive government in Ecuador, that government now faces pressure from the most representative indigenous movement (CONAIE) and the more radical environmentalist groups. Although the government characterised as the Citizens' Revolution has driven transformative changes in the political and economic structure of the country, meeting many of the longstanding demands of civil society, these indigenous and environmental groups are demanding more participation in the making of laws that complement the new Ecuadorian constitution.

Fidel Narváez

Ecuador has made a 180-degree turn in foreign policy, radically reframing its relations with the Washington-Bogotá axis, integrating itself alongside Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia in ALBA, terminating the US military base in Manta, expelling CIA agents and World Bank officials and confronting the oil transnational companies. In the last three years, there has been unprecedented social investment in education, health and housing, as well as tax reforms and wage increases, that demonstrate a clear political will to redistribute wealth through a state plan. This is fundamentally different to the neoliberal model.

How then to explain that the most penetrating opposition comes exactly from sectors that in theory should be supporting a revolutionary process?

It is necessary to recognise that the government has treated CONAIE mistakenly: it has not managed to keep the movement as an ally. Nevertheless, within the CONAIE

there are groups with extreme positions that erroneously attack the government, as if it were neoliberal.

The biggest questioning is of the 'extractivist model' and its associated oil and mining activities. The new Mining Law, and the Water Law that is currently going through parliament, despite perhaps being the strictest and most protective of the environment of their type [worldwide], are still not sufficient for those groups completely against mining. The new Ecuadorian constitution, considered the 'most green' in the world, offers the necessary tools for the population to oppose activities that affect nature.

The dilemma is that there is not a single example in the world of a country that has managed to escape the extractivist model in the immediate term and it makes little sense to think that a country whose economy depends totally on petroleum can do so. President Correa has been clear in saying that the country must leave that inherited model of neoliberalism, but to be able to leave it behind, it is necessary to build a new economic structure, with resources to gradually change the model. In fact, Ecuador's National Development Plan establishes that goal specifically, and I do not know another country that has done this.

The government and the indigenous movement are now in a crucial dialogue that should be an opportunity to move forward together. Otherwise, the scenario of 'left against left' is the worst one for the process of change, because the only winner can be the right wing.

• Fidel Narváez is a human rights defender, member of the APDH of Ecuador and the Ecuador Movement in the United Kingdom, MERU.

## Correa and Ecuador's indigenous movement at loggerheads

On 28 September 2008, Ecuador grabbed the world's attention with the passage of its new constitution. Winning 64% of the vote in a national referendum, the new Magna Carta recognizes rights for nature, the right to water and declares the small Andean nation a plurinational state.

Jennifer Moore

However, the national indigenous movement led by the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) were not celebrating the anniversary. Instead, anticipating participation from the Amazon to the Coast, the CONAIE called a nation-wide mobilization against new government policies. Contentious issues included oil and metal mining expansion into indigenous and campesino lands and headwaters, a new water law, regional reorganization in accordance with national development plans and threats to the autonomy of indigenous institutions.

Discontent with President Rafael Correa's Citizens' Revolution, which the indigenous movement claims fails to defend their constitutional rights, has been emerging for two years. But indigenous and campesino resistance to large-scale gold and copper mining and a fast-tracked new mining law has met with intolerance on the part of the President.

Just two weeks after the constitution was passed, the President had sharp words for these groups. There is a 'danger', he warned, to the realization of his political project. But he singled out neither the old oligarchy nor multinationals such as the Canadian-financed mining companies that

dominate the large-scale sector. Instead, in one of his weekly national radio addresses, he said that the real threat lies among the 'infantile' and 'fundamentalist' environmental, indigenous and leftist groups who are staunchly opposed to metal mining.

"It's absurd to be seated on hundreds of billions of dollars and for romantic notions, novelty, fixations or whatever, and to say no to mining. Yes to mining, but to environmentally, socially and economically responsible mining," he said.

Ecuador has been reliant for more than 40 years on oil exports, which contribute roughly 40% of the national budget. But oil reserves are depleting and gold and copper deposits are an anticipated source of state revenue. Correa argues that the cutting-edge technology of multinational corporations will minimize environmental impacts and that greater state control and redistribution of mining revenues will ensure such activities contribute to national and local development plans.

But mining law reforms in which Canadian companies had a privileged role, combined with ongoing attacks against their organizations, do not address the concerns expressed by CONAIE, whose leadership is very familiar with the ecological and human costs of decades of oil extraction in the Northern Amazon.

Shuar Federation President Pepe Acacho was present when CONAIE presented its appeal to the Constitutional Court in Quito in 2009 to have the new mining law declared unconstitutional. His organization represents 500 Shuar indigenous centres and 50 such associations across three southern Amazonian provinces, where some of the largest gold and copper finds have

been made. He dismisses Correa's accusation and says it does not change their stance. "We have an irreversible position," he states. "'No' to any type of extractive industry on our territory which includes mining, oil, logging and hydroelectric generation."

Ecuador's disastrous history of oil extraction and small-scale mining, he says, is "sufficient reason to decide that they will not permit this kind of activity on their territory, where biodiversity and fauna and flora are still intact, and where the Shuar people still live in coexistence with the forests, rivers, lagoons and jungle."

CONAIE's appeal claims that the government failed to consult with indigenous peoples about the law. The appeal also challenges a final disposition in the law that ranks it above others, and argues that in declaring mining a 'public utility' and failing to recognize the right to free, prior and informed consent, it has put indigenous territorial rights in jeopardy.

On the eve of another indigenous-led mobilization, President Correa responded by alerting the country on national television to the hidden interests of 'foolish' social movement leaders. "Don't let yourself be deceived", urged Correa, who won a historic re-election in the first round in April, "by these same old manipulators".

However, Correa did not win overwhelmingly in the Southern Amazon. And, in addition to upcoming struggles in the streets, new indigenous leadership there have other visions of development that they are working on and which are poised to present a challenge to the President's plans well into his new term.

• Jennifer Moore is an independent Canadian journalist writing from Ecuador



## Peru



Bagua, 5 June

Photo: intercontinentalcry.org

# Massacre in the Amazon

Three MI-17 helicopters flew over Devil's Curve, the part of the highway that joins the jungle with the northern coast, which had been occupied for the past 10 days by some 5,000 Awajún and Wampi indigenous peoples. The copters launched tear gas on the crowd (other versions say that they also shot machine guns), while simultaneously a group of agents attacked the road block by ground, firing AKM rifles. A hundred people were wounded by gunshot and between 20-25 were killed.

Raúl Zibechi

The population of the nearby city of Bagua, some thousand kilometers northeast of Lima near the border with Ecuador, came out into the streets to support the indigenous people's demonstration, setting fire to state institutions and local office of the official party APRA. Several police officers were attacked and killed in the counter-

attack, and other indigenous protestors were killed by police. At the same time, a group of 38 police who were guarding an oil station in the Amazon were taken hostage. Some were killed by their captors, while some 1,000 Indians threatened to set fire to Station Number 6 of the northern Peruvian oil pipeline.

The versions are contradictory. The government claimed days after the events that there are 11 indigenous dead and 23 police. The indigenous organizations reported 50 dead among their ranks and up to 400 disappeared. According to witnesses, the military burned bodies and threw them into the river to hide the massacre, and also took prisoners among the wounded in the hospitals. In any case, what is certain is that the government sent the armed forces to evict a peaceful protest that had been going on for 57 days in the jungle regions of five departments: Amazonas, Cusco, Loreto, San Martín, and Ucayali.

More: <http://americas.irc-online.org/am/6191>

# British mining company faces damages claim after allegations of torture

British mining company, Monterrico Metals, is facing a multi-million pound claim for damages after a group of protesters were detained and allegedly tortured at an opencast copper plant that the firm is seeking to develop in the mountains of northern Peru. Tensions between the powerful corporation interests and poor subsistence farmers had resulted in 2005 in a protest against the mine.

Ian Cobain, The Guardian 18 October 2009

When the protesters marched to the mine they found armed police waiting for them. After firing teargas at the

protesters, the police detained 28 people and bound their hands behind their backs. The detainees were hooded, beaten and whipped. Two of them were women who suffered sexual assault. A further three protesters were shot and wounded by the police; evidence shows that one of them, Melanio García, 41, was left to bleed to death at the mine.

Monterrico denies its involvement in the police operation, but eyewitnesses say that the mine manager was directing the police. A Peruvian journalist who was detained along with the protesters has been handed a series of photographs of the events, allegedly taken by a Monterrico supervisor, which the protesters say support

their allegations of abuse by the police.

The photographs, some taken outside the mine and others on the company's property, corroborate the protesters' allegations.

On Friday 16 October Richard Meeran, a solicitor with Leigh Day, the London law firm bringing the High Court case, obtained a freezing injunction which obliges the company to keep at least £5m of its assets in the UK; this with the aim of preventing the company from evading its responsibility for compensation.

Watch the video at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/oct/18/peru-monterrico-metals-mining-protest>

# Peru's politics of repression

Peruvian president Alan García has deepened repression against social movements who oppose his 'modernisation' policies. The criminalisation of protest, a legal framework to promote impunity, neoliberal policies and strengthening its armed forces have increased the strategic role of the country for the right in Latin America.

Mónica Bruckman

After the execution of two peasants in February 2008 by members of the police in Ayacucho, president García declared: "the police have acted with conviction and decision, I congratulate them, it is really good that they defend Peru (...) This is a lesson for those who promote strikes and disorder; to let them know where they will end up".

These threats are based on a legal apparatus created under Fujimori and made yet harsher by García, which permits the criminalisation of social movements and the impunity for the repressive armed forces. It exposes demonstrators and supporters to up to twenty-five years of prison, arbitrary arrest without judicial order and ten days isolation.

To this repression one can add the neoliberal policies of the president and his party, the Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA). APRA has shifted from the anti-imperialist ideology of its founder to the 'modernising' doctrine of García, criticising what he calls the 'dog in the manger': the dog who neither eats nor allows anyone else to eat. The 'dogs' would be the social movements, indigenous, environmentalists and the left, which according to García are the enemies of modernisation.

The pinnacle of this modernisation is the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) signed with the US in December 2007. It has the main ingredients of neoliberalism: privatisation of natural and energy resources; concessions for logging in the Amazon forest to appeal private capital; sale of indigenous

and peasants communities' land; expansion of the mining industry due to reduction in taxes over this activity; the privatisation of irrigation water for agriculture. Even the sea has been divided into lots and given to the big corporations.

For indigenous people the privatisation of their lands is more than an economic issue; it threatens their interpretation of the world. The Earth represents for them not only a means of production, but a space where their children can live and be happy. Defending the environment is for them the same as preserving life itself. Therefore they fight against decree No 1.090 (Forest and Fauna law) and No 1.064 (judicial regime for the exploitation of agricultural land) that ratify the commercialisation of the Amazon and of the communities' land.

After twelve months of protest to demand the repeal of those laws, and a regional strike of almost 60 days, the government refused to start negotiations and declared a state of emergency. On 6 June in Bagua, the violent intervention of state forces, aimed at evacuating thousands of indigenous that were blocking the main roads, culminated in a tragedy: twenty four policeman and ten civilians were killed (and an unknown number of disappeared). García denounced the 'subversive' elements and blamed external forces for having organised the indigenous protest to assault Peru. The government has refused to investigate the facts, but on the 7 August a prosecutor started an investigation against sixteen officers of the national police for disproportionate use of force against indigenous people.

Peru has a strategic role for the rightwing in the US but also in Latin America. From there they can operate freely against the left governments that put at risk their interests. This can be seen with the increase of US military in Peruvian territory, especially in zones of high levels of social conflict, but also on the Pacific coast. Moreover, the

growing military integration between Peru and Colombia is worrying. The government has supported the inauguration of US military bases in Colombia. The narrowing relations between the two presidents, Uribe and García, place Lima in a strategic continental role of holding back the advance of the left in Latin America.

Historically, social movements in Peru have had a huge capacity for mobilisation and protest. In 1978 they prompted to the fall of the military dictatorship of Francisco Morales Bermudez; again in 2000 they brought about fall of the Fujimori regime. In 1985 they were close to government with the candidate of the United Left (IU), Alfonso Barrantes. During the last elections in 2006, their support to Ollanta Humala permitted to the Partido Nacionalista to become the second force in the country.

The brutal policies of Alan García engenders polarization and therefore creates the conditions for an offensive from these progressive political forces. Repression is a powerful weapon, but also dangerous: it can turn against those who use it.

Original article in Le Monde Diplomatique - Edición Argentina, September 2009.



## Fujimori crimes

On 7 April 2009 Peruvian justice condemned former president Alberto Fujimori to 25 years of prison for crimes against humanity committed under his administration.

Giuliana Cascella

The trial and the sentence represent an unprecedented step towards the protection of human rights in Latin America and in the world. This shows that the regional trend in which human rights violations have been left in total impunity, or only lower rank officials were punished, can be reverted.

Hopefully other countries where state crimes continue to take place will follow this first step and finally it will be understood that terror cannot be countered with terror.



# Minga There

# Life or death in Cauca

The Minga of Social and Community Resistance – the grass roots mobilisation to Liberate Mother Earth – has at its heart the ethnic communities scattered across middle heights of the eastern and central Andean ranges in south-west Colombia. The beautiful Cauca valley region has been targeted by timber, water and mining multinationals seeking to extract its natural abundance, and with that has come a military and paramilitary occupation. Cauca is right now the scene of a dirty war aimed at destroying indigenous, African and peasant collective opposition to the corporate takeover.

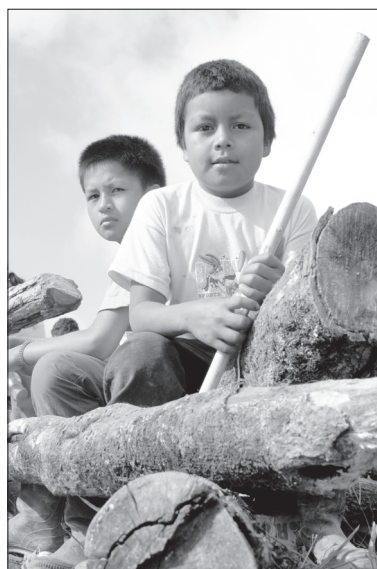
## October 12 mobilisation

The Minga has been mobilising since 2004, building up to the mass movement witnessed in October and November 2008 (see FLA April 2008). The movement held demonstrations, marches and public events in Cali, Bogotá, Popayan, Cartegena, and Tolima department on 12 October, the 'day of disgrace' marking 517 years since Christopher Columbus 'discovered' the Americas.

Events in the south-west began on Saturday 10 October, when 'mingueros' gathered at the La Maria indigenous reserve in Cauca and set off the next day on foot. Stopping at Villa Rica and Jamundi, the marchers had swelled to 30,000 people by the time they arrived in Cali three days later. They installed a 'pre-Congress of the People' including city dwellers in debate on five main points: human rights and the ongoing conflict; sovereignty, land and territory; the impacts of the economic model and proposed free trade agreements (FTAs) with the EU, the US and Canada; unfulfilled agreements between the state and social sectors; unity between social sectors.

The Minga's methodology is to include everyone. One participant said, "You can really feel the spirit of the Minga – its all about everybody working together... we eat together, walk together and sleep together, everybody chips in together for the common good. That's how it must be if we want to change this country."

This process is revitalising collective memory, and preparing for a new round of resistance. The Cali pre-Congress rejected Spain's proposal to hold joint celebrations on 20 July 2010 to mark the bicentenary of Colombia's independence with the simple question: "What independence?" To underline the point, the gathering condemned the 'invasion processes' that are currently taking place against indigenous and



Nasa children in Chorrera Blanca, July 2009

## ROBERT GREEN on the indigenous movement fighting for survival



'Indigenous March of the North of Cauca' over 44 kilometres between Santander de Quilichao and Corinto on 23 and 24 July 2009

other ancestral territories.

Danger is never far away: whilst participating in the congress, Minga leader José Goyes, who carries the scars of previous assassination attempts, received a phone call from an individual who told him, "Son of a bitch, we've been looking for you for days, but before we shoot you we're going to give it to you in the face you faggot, then we're going to finish you off with lead".

## Death project

There is now alarming evidence of a 'death project', as termed by ACIN, the grouping of indigenous peoples in the north of Cauca. The project combines official and unofficial modalities of violence to attack the population most involved in the Minga aiming to break up their social cohesion and resistance.

22 Oct – a fax from the paramilitary group calling itself Black Eagles New Generation (Aguilas Negras Nueva Generación) arrives at the Cali office of the campaigning NGO Nomadesc. The fax declares eight organisations in the region and 5 Afro-Colombian leaders to be its military targets. In subsequent days there is intense harassment by unidentified agents of Nomadesc workers and students in their human rights courses.

Cerro Tijeras indigenous reserve, close to Suárez in north-west Cauca. Four assassinations: 29 Oct – Marly Huila Guamanga; 11 Nov – Reinaldo Bomba (and his mother Emilia blinded); 13 Nov – Nilson Campo (plus Egidio Ovando Huila is gravely wounded, dying in hospital on

28 Nov). Army patrols control entrance and exit to the reserve, as we witnessed when we went there in July.

7-9 Nov – in the Tacueyo reserve in Toribio the army carries out operations against the FARC guerrillas, with great effect on locals; shooting into houses and indigenous work groups, and explosions near the school. 9 Nov – army harassment at Santander de Quilichao, battles around Corinto.

12 – 23 Nov – forced disappearances of Over Erney Muñoz and Jesus Alvarado Muñoz heralds a series of attacks including violence against women in the village of San Juan de Guadua in Argelia, forcing 14 families to flee. Last year 17 other families are forced out. The attacks are carried out by paramilitaries under the protection of the José Hilario López battalion, army Third Brigade.

1 Dec – the corporation Electricadora del Pacífico, EPSA, owned by Union Fenosa that runs the Salvajina dam and hydroelectric project close to Suárez, holds a public meeting. Company officials denounce 'the leaders and organisations in the region that are opposing progress and for two years obstructing the work we have been doing'. Three days later death threats arrive on the mobile phones of community leaders against EPSA's expansion plans.

4 Dec at 9.31 am – Licifrey Ararat, a member of Process of Black Communities and miner elected to the Community Council of La Toma, receives a text message 'SOB you don't decide for the community you have 8 days to go'.

5 Dec – the Nasa community in

Ullucos reserve, Toribio declares five humanitarian sites as 'spaces for meetings, autonomy and resistance'.

## 'Despojo' and 'gamonalismo'

This madness has method in it. The regime of violence against rural civilians is a well-worked model that has been applied successfully in other regions – the social experience is one of despojo, a word whose meaning can only be adequately conveyed in English through both 'dispossession' and 'plunder'. Despojo amounts to forcibly evicting local inhabitants that stand in the way of profitable mega-projects.

The pattern is of seemingly random yet horrific acts intended to spread fear in the community at large, followed up by systematic assassinations of individuals identified as resistance organisers. These operations could not take place without both the involvement of military intelligence, and free passage for the assassins. In effect, the Colombian government has declared war on the majority of its own people in order to further the profitable alliance between a corrupt super-rich minority, traditionally

landlords known as gamonales, and the multinationals. This state-corporate criminality has engulfed not only Cauca but official Colombia at every level, it is what Hector Mondragon calls 'gamonalismo of the 21st century'.

## Our role

Once again we are witnessing how devastatingly cruel the Colombian ruling class is towards any alternative social movement. Our role outside the country must be support campaigns for the integral human rights of all Colombians, and in particular to highlight the aspect that we are most able to address directly, the role of the multinationals.

Specifically, we accompany the Minga and will project its message outwards. The time has come to 'walk the word' of civil resistance internationally. For the people of the Minga are not only fighting to Liberate Mother Earth in Cauca, Colombia and Latin America, they are fighting for environmental and social justice for us all. The pre-Peoples Congress was preparation for a National and International Peoples' Congress in July 2010. This grand event will further develop the Minga's proposal for 'another Colombia...and another world'.

## Toribio: The War in the Cauca Region

Latin Pulse brings you an episode of the Colombian TV show Contravía made by award winning journalist Hollman Morris and his team.

<http://www.linktv.org/video/4192/toribo-war-in-the-cauca-region>



## Minga Here

# The Minga walks the word in London

517 years after the 'discovery' of America, many people still 'celebrate' the Day of the Race, an ambiguity which the native indigenous people do not understand as this was the beginning of their systematic extermination, and in the past few years it has again become outright ethnocide with the approval of wealthy countries and multinational corporations.

Carlos Cruz and Gustavo Silva

Not as part of the celebration of the American conquest but in the condemnation for the 517 years of permanent exploitation, the social

movement in the whole world has joined the Minga and the movement of popular resistance.

In London, Colombia Solidarity Campaign, El Polo UK, Bolivia Solidarity Campaign, Hands off Venezuela and other organisations that make up the Coordinadora Latinoamericana, formed the international Minga to protest against assassinating and corrupt governments - especially those of Colombia, Peru, Spain and the United Kingdom - as well as the multinationals which are looting Latin American natural resources.

The Minga started at 4:00pm outside

the Colombian Embassy, where a communiqué of protest was handed to the embassy employees present, then moved on to the Peruvian Embassy, and the Spanish Embassy (where they were having a party), then the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (who could not accept a letter out of office hours) and finally the Department for Climate Change where we joined with groups in the Campaign Against Climate Change.

Altogether about 200 people marched in protest and in support of all our brothers and sisters of the Minga and the rest of Latin America.

# On the path of resistance

## Colombia Solidarity Campaign visits indigenous communities

Colombia presents itself to the world as a democratic country, with no civil war but with terrorist groups that threaten the government, and drug trafficking seems to be on its way out thanks to US help and the paramilitaries who gave up their weapons through programs designed with the support of the European Union.

Antonio Urbina

All of this is far from the truth, as the Colombia Solidarity Campaign's delegation found out on our visit in July and August 2009. The delegation was able to interview the principal social agents, access the conflict zones and witness the struggle and resistance movements in different regions. This was possible thanks to the trust which we have built up over many years, augmented by friends in the Brotherhood and Solidarity Network, an organisation which coordinates the activities of groups in Europe and North America with the Colombian social movements.

In the suburbs around Bogotá we could see how the urban social movement and the indigenous Minga of resistance get together to work against forced displacement and the privatisation of the public sector, and at the same time encourage the popular self-administration model and look for common points.

From Cali we were able to visit some of the more threatened indigenous reservations.

After arriving using public transport, you can clearly see the presence of the paramilitaries (as in Morales and Suarez), we managed to get to the reservations thanks to escorts provided by the Indigenous Guard. You are not allowed to enter these territories without the authorisation of CRIC, the Regional Indigenous Council of

Cauca. This is one of the points of the conflict; the indigenous organisations, thanks to their bravery and resistance have guaranteed their rights over the land and no local business or multinational can explore their natural resources without a due process of consultation with the community (1991 Constitution, law 70, 004 and 005 decree 1320).

Nonetheless, the evidence that the reservations have natural resources (nickel, iron, mercury and gold) have awakened the greed of giant multinationals that are entering the reservations illegally: Anglo-Gold Ashanti (South Africa), Cosigo Resources (Canada), Smurfit Kappa (Ireland) and Union Fenosa (Spain) amongst others. When fraudulent and concealed land purchases do not work, and these tricks fail in the indigenous territories thanks to their continuing collective consciousness, the violent pressure increases. The local front-men are readily identifiable, but it is more difficult to prove their links with the ultimate beneficiaries, the corporations. There is also a common factor that we were able to verify, as soon as people refuse to give up their land the paramilitary violence increases as do threats against their community leaders, their houses are burnt and their leaders are killed.

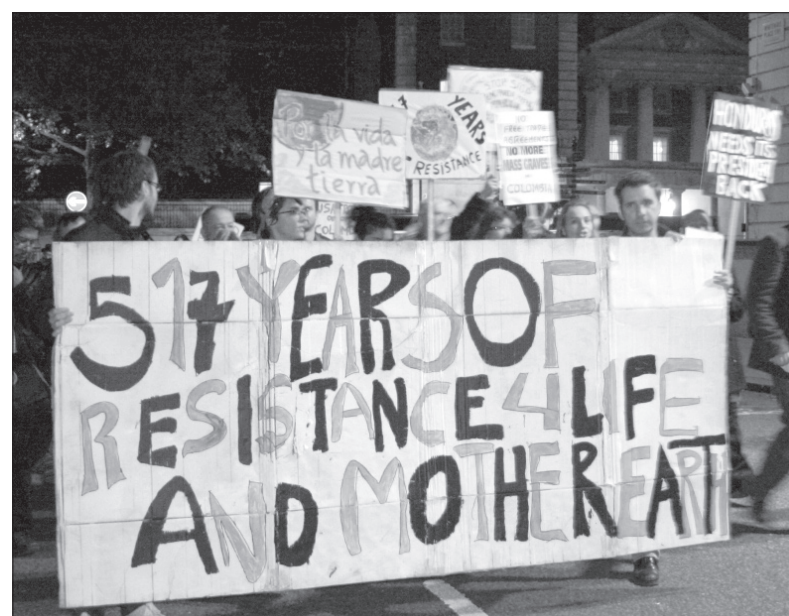
We visited and heard evidence of recent assassinations in the communities of Chorrera Blanca, El Mesón, Cerro Tijeras, La Maria Piendamó, Corinto and La Toma (Cauca Department) and also Rio Sucio, Escopetero y Pirza, Loma Prieta y Marmato (Caldas Department).

The objective of all this violence is clear: to destroy the collective resistance movement so that the people can be displaced from their land. Once they have been displaced the path is clear for the multinationals to move in. The delegation was able to

corroborate the massive commitment of the indigenous leaders and the support from their communities to this collective struggle which will not give up regardless of all the threats. One of the most notable aspects is the developing alliance between the indigenous and Afro-descendent communities, as they are both victims of the same threats.

The delegation had the opportunity to accompany the 'Indigenous March of the North of Cauca' over 44 kilometres between the towns of Santander de Quilichao and Corinto on 23 and 24 July. The principal motive was to denounce the violence against the communities and to name the army, the police and the paramilitaries responsible for most of the killings; and the guerrilla groups who have at times killed indigenous people accusing them of helping the enemy. This march highlighted the situation of these indigenous organizations as they have to face violence from both sides in order to defend their territory. It is also important to mention that some of the organizations we talked to spoke of the importance of distinguishing between the violence from the state and its paramilitary agents, and violence from the guerrilla groups.

The delegation had the opportunity to interview union representatives and academics in Cali, Medellín and Bogotá; they all emphasised the perilous situation for trade unions, student movements and left wing political parties. For all of them, the example moulded by the Minga of Resistance has opened the path to a new coordination of resistance and struggle that outgrows traditional left-wing organization and reaches many hitherto invisible sectors. The coordination between La Minga and other social movements is a development full of challenges but it is also one that has given new hope.



The Coordinadora Latinoamericana's 'Minga' march on 12 October 2009

## Aida Quilcué – 'walking the word'

Aida Quilcué, spokesperson of the indigenous 'Minga' movement in Colombia and a candidate for the country's Senate, was 'walking the word', sharing experiences with trade unionists and the Latin American community in Britain in late September, writes *Cristina Vega*.

"The Minga is a civil resistance movement to free Mother Earth from destruction by the multinationals" Aida explained. In October and November 2008 the Minga held a six week long campaign of road blocks and marches from Cauca in the south west to the capital city Bogotá. The indigenous movement decided to 'Walk the Word' to force attention of their desperate situation onto the national agenda.

The persecution of Aida's people has become even more atrocious than the assault on trade unions, with 85 indigenous people assassinated in the first nine months of 2008 alone. The worst threat is to leaders who speak out, as happened to Aida after she won a sharp debate with president Uribe, challenging his policies. In Colombia such defiance does not go unpunished. A month later Aida's husband Edwin Legarda was assassinated in an army ambush on 16 December, and her twelve-year-old daughter narrowly escaped being shot on 11 May. Aida is unbowed, "In being here I am fulfilling a vow which I made publicly to the Attorney General at Edwin's funeral. I will go to the end of the earth to find justice and tell people the truth about what happens in Colombia."

Aida returned to Colombia where she confronts a shocking and perverse frame up: "Not content with killing my husband, the authorities now seek to implicate me in his death, saying that I provided military intelligence to kill him. This is another demonstration of how they make fun of the victims."



Aida speaking in Bolivar Hall, London

She remains defiant: "The Minga will mobilise against US military bases, against free trade agreements which we know only serve to increase misery and erode rights, against systematic human rights violations by the army, paramilitaries and guerrillas, against the destruction of Mother Earth by an economic system which sees the earth as a material good which must be used to make money...but above all for a different Colombia and a different world, because we believe it is possible and that things must change one day. We have reached the limit. If we don't do it now then who will?"

Jean Lambert, the Green Party MEP for London who joined Aida on the platform in Bolivar Hall condemned 'the deforestation and pollution that an EU deal would mean we should be demanding no Free Trade Agreement.'

Aida had been invited by Unison Northern Region and the Northern TUC to Newcastle, where she met over a dozen trade union branches and addressed a public meeting of TUC International. Aida's programme in London was coordinated by the Colombia Solidarity Campaign and the UK branch of Polo Democrático Alternativo working with the Coordinadora Latinoamericana, Todas Las Voces and community groups.



# Mining

## Ethnic minorities hit hard by mining boom

Colombia is going through a mining boom. Minerals constitute 20% of all exports, with coal exports of US \$5 billion in 2008 being the biggest earner. With royalties taking less than 10% of income, the lion's share of the benefits go to multinational corporations.

According to a study by the Centre for Indigenous Cooperation (Cecoin) 65% of mining concessions are on indigenous communities' or areas with a majority Afro-Colombian population, posing a threat both to the environment and their traditional way of life. With international corporations moving into gold investments, the trend is set to accelerate even more

dispossession of communities off their ancestral lands.

Under Colombia's 2001 Mining Code, concession areas are located in 31 mining districts covering an area of some 15 million hectares. The study found that mining contracts, licenses, permits and authorizations currently in force cover 2.9 million hectares; with bids and requests for another 30 million hectares in process.

Patricia Tobon, an Embera indigenous representative, points out that the Uribe government "has decided to auction off the territorial and economic rights of these communities, imposing a large-scale extraction-based economy that runs counter to rights of these peoples."

## World's largest mining company challenged

“While you are getting a good standard of life ... we Wayuu are eating food contaminated with coal ... Why, when you have money in your bank accounts, why are our people living in worse conditions?” - Karmen Ramirez, Wayuu from Colombia.

Richard Solly

London is the centre of mining finance, and mining is one of the most polluting industries. These two facts combine to bring the world's largest mining corporation BHP Billiton, and those protesting against it, together at the company's Annual General Meeting (AGM) on 29 October.

Although BHP Billiton is not a household name, its activities have a massive global impact. The company's commitment to increased extrac-

tion and promotion of both coal and uranium for power production make it one of the global drivers towards global warming; and the corporation trails behind it a catalogue of human rights abuses, affects on the livelihood and food security of communities, worker health and safety issues, and environmental problems.

It was the record Cerrejon Coal Company in Colombia (one-third owned by BHP Billiton) that took centre stage at the AGM. Representatives of communities being removed to make way for expansion of one of the opencast coal mine asked the company for fairness in the negotiations, and made requests to ensure this would happen. They complained of health problems from the dust caused by the current mine operations, and fears for their own security in a country where raising legitimate concerns against companies can make people targets for assassination.

Afrocolombian community representatives Yoe Arregoces and Wilman Palmesano made a special appeal to the company to take measures to guarantee the security of the communities and their leaders. Karmen Ramirez, who works with Wayuu communities affected by the transshipment of coal, made an impassioned plea to the company and shareholders to respect the rights of the local people.

Yoe, Wilman and Karmen met with the two other companies that own Cerrejon, Anglo American and Xstrata, to press their concerns and demands. The delegation met with the official point of contact in the UK for raising an OECD complaint against the Cerrejon companies, and the secretary of the Churches Ethical Investment Commission.

BHP Billiton's activities in the Philippines and Australia were also criticised at the AGM, as documented in the Alternative Shareholders Report.

## Cerrejon coal mining causes community fury



The community of Tabaco, devastated by the El Cerejon mine

Conflict continues around the massive Cerrejon coal mine in the northern Department of La Guajira. The mine is owned by three mining multinationals listed on the London Stock Exchange: Anglo American, BHP Billiton and Xstrata.

As reported in the last FLA, the African descendant community Tabaco, displaced by the mine in 2001, finally reached a resettlement agreement with the company last December. But there has been strong criticism of the low financial compensation. Provision of infrastructure to the new community – roads, drainage, electricity – is the responsibility of the local authority, and therefore relies on good will from the local mayor. The land being bought is sufficient for housing but not for farming, it is unclear how people will make a living.

Other communities face displacement, but there are disagreements over the number of people subject to relocation. Again, the company refuses to acknowledge the need for productive land in the relocated settlements, even though it is essential for the communities to continue their agricultural activities. People have found it almost impossible to support themselves as mining expansion has encroached on agricultural land, and while the relocation process is under way – a process which may take two years – people have no livelihoods.

Richard Solly

The Independent Panel of Investigation recommended that the company do more to ensure that people could make a living – including provision of services and financing of small-scale economic projects – but it has not done so.

People live in extremely difficult conditions, blasting from the mine damages homes, coal dust in the air causes skin and respiratory problems, land on which people used to work is swallowed up by mining activities or fenced off in readiness for mine expansion. The communities are being 'strangled'.

Community members accuse Cerrejon of bad faith, undermining their community leadership, taking decisions without consultation, publishing relocation timetables on the company's website without informing the communities, calling meetings at short notice and causing confusion and divisions by cancelling meetings already agreed at the last minute, informing only some of the participants and not others.

At the same time, Cerrejon mine workers who are members of the SINTRACARBON trade union are concerned about the inferior working conditions of non-unionised contract workers at the mine.

SINTRACARBON is also worried about exposure to coal dust. The union says that it is a hazardous substance under Colombian law and that because of this the company is legally bound to pay higher social security contributions than it is currently paying, in order to facilitate earlier retirement for mine workers.

## Rio Tinto and Muriel Mining

A revealing tale of parliamentary scrutiny. In April 2009, Colombia Solidarity Campaign submitted a report to an inquiry on British business and human rights which was being undertaken by the British Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights (JCHR). Based on information from the Inter-Church Commission for Justice and Peace (CIJP), our report concerned exploration for gold, copper and molybdenum by Muriel Mining, a US registered company controlled by Swiss interests.

Richard Solly

The Muriel exploration is on Indigenous Embera and collectively owned Afrocolombian territory around the borders of the Departments of Antioquia and Chocó. Exploration is accompanied by military occupation and displacement and encroaches onto the Cerro Cara de Perro hill, sacred to the Embera people. Local Embera and Afrocolombian people are angry that the exploration has been carried out without the consent of the communities most directly affected by it.

British-based mining multinational Rio Tinto has an 'option' for a joint venture with the company, it has entered into a legal agreement giving it the right, in the future, to work with Muriel on the project, sharing the costs and the profits. For this reason the Campaign submitted its report to the JCHR. Neither Fr Henry Ramirez Soler of the CIJP nor our Campaign was invited to give oral evidence to the parliamentary committee, but a Rio Tinto representative of Rio Tinto was. Sir Brian Fall gave evidence on 30 June. In remarks which clearly alluded to the Campaign's report,

he said: "Individual cases which have been mentioned ... The most aggressive set of complaints that I have noticed in the evidence concerns the Murindo deposit in Chile and there we have a problem of an NGO saying that the consultation process was inadequate, not up to the legal standard required and that the concession was invalid... the Supreme Court of Chile has very recently heard the case and decided that the consultation process was up to the mark and the concession is valid. It is very easy for NGOs to throw stones into the pool. It is difficult to answer each time. What we are trying to do at the moment, with respect to Chile, and we have hired a local consultant with a reputation for dealing with sensitivity with this company/NGO interface ... We are not at the moment doing any exploration in Colombia."

When the Campaign contacted the clerk to the JCHR to query why Sir Brian had talked about Chile when the Murindo deposit is in Colombia, we were told that since it was obvious he meant to say 'Colombia', the written record would be changed. However, as the tape recording of the session makes clear, that is not what he said.

So, in Colombia, resistance continues to an exploration project which violates Indigenous and Afrocolombian territory, while settlers displaced from land being turned over to palm oil cultivation are moved into the area in violation of the collective rights of those already there and are encouraged to support the mining project as, they are told, it will bring jobs and prosperity; and in England, history is rewritten to avoid embarrassment to those seeking to profit from the violation of Indigenous and Afrocolombian rights.



# The bloody road to El Dorado

OLIVER EDWARDS on the trail of Anglo Gold Ashanti

South African based Anglo Gold Ashanti (AGA) is one of the 'Big 3' gold mining corporations in the world, the others being Barrick Gold (Canada) and Newmont Mining (US). Until 2008 AGA was the gold subsidiary of Anglo American, but it now operates as an independent company.

Without an ounce of gold produced, AGA's impact in Colombia has already been shocking. The company has carried out a systematic nationwide search for 'greenfield' production sites, it has staked claims over 13.1 million hectares, and explored 11.2 million hectares. Spreading out from its first explorations in Sur de Bolívar, there has been a pattern of paramilitary violence threatening communities wherever the company has registered an interest. The deadly touch of AGA is like King Midas, except in reverse.

From this wave of exploration, the company retains 423 claims over 825,000 hectares. Its single biggest asset is the La Colosa mine in Cajamarca, with reserves estimated at 12.3 million ounces, with each ounce now priced at over US \$1,100 it would seem that AGA has truly found El Dorado.

But what do the people who live there want? We visited Cajamarca and another site of AGA interest, La Toma to find out.

## Cajamarca

As Anglo-Gold Ashanti surge with their fiercest offensive in Cajamarca, locals are standing up to the company to let them know they are not welcome. Straight from the corporate 'responsibility' script, the company recently offered paint to brighten up the school. The company were told their bribes were not wanted. Instead, a group of parents did a whip-round in the community and bought their own. We met them as they painted in symbolic defiance of the corporate giant, neatly sidestepping AGA's attempts at cherry-picking social investment.

AGA are desperate for community backing. They have organised three song-and-dance parades in Cajamarca. These showpiece events are designed for two reasons. First, they are an attempt to convince the community that they are a responsible corporation that can be trusted to look after the extraction of their minerals. They work on the tired trickle-down logic of capitalism that the local bourgeoisie will reap the economic benefits. Second, they are



Valley in Cajamarca, 'the orchard of Colombia', threatened by Anglo-Gold Ashanti mine

trying to tick the box of "community consultation", required by law. This they claim is achieved by explaining their plans to the public at these events. But behind their "community friendly" mask is their real face of evil. Cajamarca lies in the department of Tolima, in a geo-strategically crucial area at the centre of the Bogotá-Medellín-Cali gold triangle. To see the landscape in real life is breathtaking. Dense rich green agriculture plasters the hillsides of the lush valleys of this important food producing region.

AGA have acquired 113,594 hectares of mining rights, their plan is to turn this area into the world's largest open-cast gold mine. One Cajamarca resident summarised his concerns, "we are very worried about AGA's plans to open an open-cast mine. We have yet to see a single example in the world of an open-cast

gold mine that has brought any benefits whatsoever to the local community".

Opposition comes from a variety of groups along both environmental and social lines. They are united in their key demands. One is a full, independent, socio-environmental impact study. The other is what the law requires, a genuine public consultation. The latter would effectively require a regional referendum. As one local landowner Jorge Torres says, "everyone that would be affected has their own opinion, so practically there should be a vote... Right now, there is no information about the effects of the mine."

Environmental concerns are multiple. Waste processing is an important issue, along with the visual impact of the mine. Within many areas that AGA have mining rights lie nationally protected forest areas. It would be impossible to guarantee this protection if the mine went ahead. Local groups point out the proximity of the El Machín volcano. Ten miles away, it is the second most in danger of erupting in the world. Fears are that agitating El Machín may end up covering Cajamarca in a 20cm layer of lava.

Residents are also concerned about the social effects. A common argument used by multinationals to gain access to territory is the employment it would bring. This argument is used by AGA. However, the type of labour required would be a particular skill set not found amongst locals. Realistically, most labour would be imported from outside the region. Residents are concerned about the effects this will have on the local community as trust networks are disrupted. A mass influx will almost certainly attract social problems such as prostitution, robbery and alcoholism.

In a country with the second highest internal refugee population in the world (after Sudan), opening new megaprojects can only increase the

displacement of peoples from their territories. Thousands of farmers and their families will be forced to move to clear land required. Nearby cities of Armenia and Ibagué will be further strained with mass immigration. Meanwhile the crisp green farmland will be turned upside down into an apocalyptic mud bath stretching as far as the eye can see in every direction.

The next few months remain crucial to see how Cajamaricans will continue to organise against the mine and the multinational. Symbolic actions such as those seen at this village school will inspire others to say 'No' louder and more forcefully. The word on the street is that the people don't want the mine, but can they manifest that into effective resistance to raise the costs above what AGA can afford?

## La Toma Mass Eviction on Hold

La Toma is another AGA battleground, with over 90% of the territory's 7,000 hectares sought by the company for exploration. Currently, 403 hectares of concessions are held by two private individuals not linked to the local community. They are actively expropriating the land occupied by the black community at La Toma for over 350 years.

117 families due to be evicted on the 6 August from their ancestral territory remain in occupation. Thanks in part to international and local pressure, the eviction was put on hold. On the day itself, community leaders, regional human rights representatives, local NGOs, the press and an owner of 99 hectares of mining concessions met in a heated discussion, but no firm conclusions came from the meeting at the municipal offices in Suarez, in

Cauca. Héctor Jesús Sarria, one of the two owners of mining concessions in the land due for eviction, agreed to meet the community at a later date with his lawyers. He denied responsibility for the eviction, or the power to stop it.

What this means for the occupants of the land since 1636 is complete uncertainty. The eviction is still legally active and they could be forced to leave any day. Nonetheless, the spotlight thrown on the area has significantly reduced the chances of the families leaving lightly. An international Urgent Action was issued days before, casting the world's eyes on the Suárez municipality. Twelve human rights observers travelled from Cali to observe proceedings.

Artisanal gold mining is one of the only remaining forms of subsistence left for the community of La Toma after the valley was flooded in the 1980s to build the Salvajina dam. This submerged the best farmland creating a crisis in traditional agriculture and eliminated subsistence fishing.

The law should be on the side of the black community of La Toma. How this will translate into reality remains to be seen. The municipalities of Suarez and neighbouring Buenos Aires were highlighted as emblematic cases in Judgement 005 of the Constitutional Court in 2009. The Court ordered the protection of these lands as ancestral, "of ethnic significance and part of the patrimony of these communities".

But in a country where 97% of crimes remain in impunity, it is clear AGA are happy to benefit from the illegal actions. In their 2008 Company Report, they proudly announce they are in their most 'aggressive' phase of expansion in Colombia. It appears they are willing to please their shareholders at all costs. Their methods are certainly covert. Using mining concessions owned by individuals with no direct link to the company, they hope that bit by bit they can add more pieces to their puzzle. This way, local opposition is fractured as they don't know who to fight.

Community participation is a concept exploited by multinationals through "astro-turfing" (fake grass-roots). In the case of mining, and particularly in black communities, a condition for granting mining concessions is full and informed consent of the community. The concern is with violent eviction hanging over them, and the ever present threat of assassination of radical voices, there is little space for a democratic hearing of community concerns.

**Update:** Anglo Gold Ashanti (AGA) official Clara Marquez announced on 1 November that her company is withdrawing its interest in La Toma. Marquez stated that although AGA spent US \$60,000 in trying to buy the loyalty of the La Toma community, the company has decided to concentrate its efforts in Cajamarca – Tolima, because the deposits there offer a better investment return.



Villagers paint their school with their own paint, NOT provided by Anglo Gold



## LAWAS

# Latin American Workers Association: Heroes not pariahs!

The Latin American Workers Association (LAWA) has issued a stinging public complaint concerning its treatment at the hands of officials in the trade union Unite. The document explains how from 2003 LAWA recruited cleaners into the union (then the T&G) feeding into the better-known union-backed Justice for Cleaners campaign. These initiatives encouraged a new wave of cleaners' struggles in 2008 and 2009.

*Frontline correspondent*

Many migrant cleaners fought not only for the right to be unionised, but against the immigration checks and raids that are continually used to exclude and oppress them. LAWA has been a key grass roots organisation demanding that no-one is illegal, that the state's division of workers should be rejected. But the union apparatus has failed to accept the humanitarian stance that no-one is illegal.

During the course of 2009 the previous indifference of Unite officials 'turned into extreme hostility triggered by two issues: LAWAS's support for sacked cleaners at the Willis building in the City of London, and its ongoing commitment to a full regularization of undocumented workers'. Unite evicted LAWA from its office in September 2009.

The LAWA statement concludes that it faces a new beginning:

'And so an era has ended. But despite the problems, the last year has been a very positive one for LAWAS. The campaigns it supported breathed new life into the organisation and won it many friends across different unions and in the Latin American community.'

'As a result the annual assembly held in August 2009 was the largest ever and a new committee was elected which for the first time represented almost all the main Latin American nationalities resident in London.'

'With its new temporary premises in the National Union of Journalists, it is up to that committee and all Latin American workers to secure the future.'

'This means fighting inside unions, including Unite, so they are led by the members, and joining with workers of all nationalities and backgrounds in doing so. It means working with those officials who are not corrupt and self-serving, and unmasking those who are.'

'And it means recognising the achievements of struggles, but also preserving the right to criticize aspects of these and act independently when necessary.'

The full text of 'Latin American Workers in Unite: From heroes to pariahs' is posted at [www.colombiasolidarity.org.uk](http://www.colombiasolidarity.org.uk)

On these pages we report the extent of LAWA's mobilisation as a positive example that should be emulated and built on. Contact LAWA via their website at [www.lawas.org.uk](http://www.lawas.org.uk) or email [latin\\_americanworkers@hotmail.com](mailto:latin_americanworkers@hotmail.com)



Above: Trade union and community support outside the picket at Alberto Durango's appeal against dismissal at the offices of Lancaster cleaning company in Canary Wharf, May 2009. His dismissal followed a trap laid by the company and immigration authorities. Following his dismissal cleaners at Schroders bank elected Alberto as an additional shop steward.



Above: Willis shop steward Edwin Pazmino speaks to supporters in May 2009 before handing in petition to Unite asking for support in their 5 month battle for reinstatement. Below: LAWAS activist Alberto Durango and a Ford-Visteon worker from Enfield in May 2009, who took part in a lengthy and largely successful occupation after the company made the workforce redundant without compensation.



Above: The Strangers into Citizens march for an amnesty for undocumented migrants, 4 May 2009. Latino organisations grouped in the Coordinadora Latinoamericana, together with a range of other campaign groups from the Campaign Against Immigration Controls to the Federation of Iraqi Refugees called for papers for all undocumented migrants, as opposed to the march organizers' call for a limited amnesty and acceptance of tighter border controls in the future. The Coordinadora's position was expressed in the document 'Amnesty for some or papers for all?' online at <http://thecommmune.wordpress.com>

Below: The weekly picket outside the Willis Building in the City, which lasted 8 months. Originally aimed at reinstating Justice for Cleaners activists sacked at the building by contract cleaners Mitie, the protests intensified after an immigration raid at the building. January-August 2009.





LAWAS



Top: Emilia (right), a fighter for latino cleaners at Fitness First gyms whose wages were being withheld by ICM managers working for subcontractor ICM, with the LAWAS banner on 1 May 2009. Bottom left: Miguel Puerto of LAWAS, speaking at a rally following the end of the SOAS occupation organised by SOAS Unison in June 2009. Bottom right: Juan Carlos Piedra speaking on a picket line. From September 2009 onwards protests at University College London (UCL) organised by the university unions (Unite, Unison, UCU) to demand his reinstatement. Tape recordings revealed that cleaning company Office & General had sacked him for trade union activity and for denouncing immigration raids in the universities. Unite was pressured into representing him and he was reinstated, although protests continue against ongoing harassment. Main pic: The occupation at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies in June 2009 following the mass arrest and deportation of latino cleaners there brought together students, unionised faculty members, support staff and Latin American workers, as well as activist groups like Feminist Fightback.

# Friends and family halt deportation

John Freddy Suarez Santander arrived in this country along with his family when he was only six years of age. When he was still under age, at seventeen, he committed a criminal offence. Two years after being released from prison, the British Government made an order that all immigrants with a criminal record should be deported.

After that decision, John Freddy was captured with an order of deportation. He began a long legal battle to avoid this deportation. The case has reached the European Court of Human Rights because he is being punished twice for a criminal act for which he has already served time: being sentenced to prison, and on top of that, an additional punishment of deportation. The principles of international law state that laws cannot be applied in a retroactive way and that no one can be punished twice for one act. Deportation of people with a criminal record was

approved as law eighteen months after John Freddy had been sentenced. The European Court has said that criminal acts committed by youngsters should not be seen as a criminal record, but as the basis on which to rehabilitate the youngster into society. Freddy has never committed another criminal offence and has 'rehabilitated' himself. He is now a father to a four-year-old boy and lives in the U.K.

The last option that the family had to stop this deportation was to go to the airport with a letter addressed to the passengers on the same flight which was being used to deport John Freddy. The family appealed to their conscience and asked them to refuse to board their flight because a young man's rights were being violated.

All the family went at the airport wearing white t-shirts with John's picture and with hundreds of letters for the passengers asking for their support in avoiding the deportation. Many of

the passengers received this letter. The police arrived and gave the family the order to leave the place within fifteen minutes. The family were aware of the risk, but were motivated by the determination shown by all its members, including the little ones who said "we are not moving from here". A while later police informed us of the excellent news that John Freddy was not to go on that flight. Loud applause was heard in that area of the airport, and in between tears and shouts the family hugged each other. It had been hard work but they had achieved their objective.

His case has not yet been fully resolved: they are looking forward to the European Court of Human Rights ruling and making the British government recognize John Freddy's right to stay with his family.

The whole family, Suarez Santander, calls upon everyone to fight against deportations, not only for John, but for all of us immigrants.



John Freddy's supporters protest against his deportation in Heathrow airport



# Activities



**Colombia Solidarity Campaign** is affiliated to the **European Network of Friendship and Solidarity with Colombia**, which has eleven affiliates in Spain and ten from other countries. For more information : <http://www.redcolombia.org/>



## London Branch

**Public Meetings:** Third Tuesday most months at the Apple Tree pub, 45 Mount Pleasant, London, WC1  
**7pm Tuesday 16 Feb:** Loco Colombia – Scandals and Elections  
**March 16, April 20**  
For more info email: [info@colombiasolidarity.org.uk](mailto:info@colombiasolidarity.org.uk)

## Bristol Branch

Aims to create awareness of the social injustices being perpetrated in Colombia. We hold talks, films and share information about continuing human rights abuses and what we can do from our city to aid the resistance.  
For more info email: [bristolcolombiasolidarity@gmail.com](mailto:bristolcolombiasolidarity@gmail.com)

## Sussex

**Sussex Colombia Solidarity:** Take action for real justice, democracy and peace in Colombia.  
Email: [sussexcolombiasolidarity@riseup.net](mailto:sussexcolombiasolidarity@riseup.net)  
Web: <http://sussexcolombiasolidarity.wordpress.com>

## Norfolk

**Norfolk Latin America Solidarity Forum:** Covers issues on Colombia, Bolivia and Venezuela.  
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## Merseyside

**Merseyside:** Monthly meetings and solidarity activities.  
Email: [colsol.liverpool@btopenworld.com](mailto:colsol.liverpool@btopenworld.com)

## Colombia: stories that kill

Made by Link TV. A well put together overall view of the situation in Colombia for an English-speaking audience. <http://www.linktv.org/video/4071/colombia-stories-that-kill>

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# Body Shop palm oil protests

The desire to lower our ecological footprint has increased the demand for eco-products and bio-fuel cars, the desire to go green has increased the demand for palm oil, but it has become a neo-colonialist project with devastating effects, writes **Chris Knestrick and Christopher Hatton**.

The green revolution in the global north turns the colour of blood in Colombia, where President Uribe plans to become the main producer of palm oil in the world, with 6 million hectares of palm by the year 2020. There has been much violence associated with the production of palm oil, and Afro-Colombians along the Pacific Coast are most affected. To make room for more land for plantations, many communities were forcefully displaced and leaders were killed by paramilitaries.

On 29 October 2009 Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) held vigils and leafleted outside 16 different Body Shop outlets in London to raise the concerns of 123 families of the Las Pavas community forcibly displaced from their land on 14 July 2009. The Body Shop obtains 90% of its palm oil from Daabon Organics, a Colombian company involved in the forced eviction.

Body Shop promotional material advertises that 'all people have a right... to be treated with respect' and that 'for years we've campaigned against



Protests hit 16 Body Shop outlets against forcible displacement

injustices, stood up for the vulnerable'. CPT in Colombia has previously appealed to The Body Shop to address this unjust action by their supplier. As The Body Shop had recently indicated that it was not responsible for the evictions, CPT decided to raise the concerns of the Las Pavas community in a more direct nonviolent way.

So on 30 October, in a three-way telephone conference between The Body Shop, CPT Colombia & CPT

UK regarding the Las Pavas situation. Company representatives asked for additional photographic evidence and said they intended to take their views and those of the Las Pavas community to a face-to-face meeting with Daabon Organics. The results are not yet known. CPT encourages its constituency to continue applying pressure on Daabon Organics by responding to the 13 November 2009 Urgent Action at <http://www.cpt.org/node/7843>

# Cais Maloka inspires Brighton

Javier Sanchez of Cais Maloka in the Cauca Region visited Brighton and inspired everyone in town and University with his humane descriptions of the social and ecological work towards peace and justice being done on their

collective farm in this region of South West Colombia.

A total of at least 70 people attended the two gatherings in Sussex with many participants pledging their solidarity and will to visit Cais Maloka in the near future

and contribute to this very admirable venture.

Despite paramilitary death threats to Afro, Indigenous, mulatto and mestizo participants of the project, the farm is bringing visions of a new Colombia into being.

More initiatives such

as this are being planned in order to support Colombian civil society in the reconstruction of a social fabric further torn apart by the Uribe government's dead-end military strategies of the last seven years.

# Climate change and multinationals: A view from Colombia's grassroots

World leaders in Copenhagen failed miserably to tackle climate changes, and, as Hugo Chávez and Evo Morales pointed out, the rich countries especially are still refusing to confront its structural causes in capitalism. Evo Morales has called for an international social movement conference on 22 April. Grass roots Colombian social movements confirm that multinational

oil and mining corporations, especially BP and other British based companies, have destroyed their environment, their human rights and social fabric.

Isaac Marín, a campesino leader from eastern Colombia, took part in a UK 'Consciousness-raising Tour' from 10 - 17 November 2009. Isaac's first involvement had been with the National Association of Peasant Farmers ANUC-UR, holding several positions at the regional level. He is a founder member of the group COS-PACC, the Social Corporation for Community Advice and Capacity Building. COS-PACC works with community groups in Casanare in the eastern Andes, where BP started extracting oil in the early 1990s, throwing the region into a state of siege. As Isaac explained, "Harm is caused to communities in the oilfield area when BP attacks local council committees and peasant associations. The corporation does not permit the trade unionisation of its plants, and workers and local civic leaders have been stigmatised by BP as agitators and subversives, putting their lives in danger. Such tactics break up

local organisations and discourage anyone from making just demands on the corporation. BP funds the Colombian Army's 16th Brigade that is committing crimes against civilians in our areas, especially their assassination and then dressing the corpses to pretend they were guerrillas, the so-called 'false positives' scandal." Isaac illustrated the environmental impacts of BP's operations: "the corporation is responsible for harmful effects due to the high volumes of water used to pump out the underground oil, to land slippages on the mountainsides, and to bad management of industrial water with mud and oil outflows poisoning local rivers and the species that inhabit them. More problems arise from permanent gas flaring. These issues demonstrate bad environmental management that damages the ecosystems of the Casanare plains and the Eastern cordillera."

Isaac met with groups in Liverpool, Bristol, Brighton, Cambridge, Newcastle and London. In Bristol, Isaac participated in a panel as part of Environmental Justice Week. The

# European meeting of La Red de Hermandad y Solidaridad con Colombia

On 31st October 2009, several European groups arrived in Valencia from Germany, France, UK, Switzerland and Spain for a two-day solidarity network meeting. A representative of the Movement of Victims of State Crimes (MOVICE) brought the latest and detailed political and social news from Colombia.

The meeting dealt with organizational issues such as network coordination and the continuity of *La Casa* in Bogotá, a meeting and reference point for international solidarity and human rights activists and also for Colombian member organizations who use the *Casa* frequently for meetings and activities.

The most important campaign the network is planning for 2010 is 'Defend and regain our Land: Stop the Plunder' (*Por la defensa y recuperación del Territorio: Paremos el Expolio*) which will focus chiefly on supporting the struggle of indigenous and Afrocolombian peoples and peasants in defence of their land from multinational plunder. The campaign will also denounce Human Rights violations against the communities and will condemn the installation on Colombian soil of seven US military bases, the latest act of aggression suffered by the Colombian people.

Bristol discussion raised vital questions linking environmental justice with international solidarity. As Colombian communities struggle to defend their territories against corporate plunder, what can be done to build links with those affected by the seemingly unquenchable thirst for profit? How can corporations like BP be made accountable? And how do we connect our common concern to stop climate disaster with the issue of the global North's ecological debt to the South? The Cambridge Action Network responded positively to Isaac's visit and decided to launch an active campaign. Within days they had organised a leafleting of the city's Mill Road winter fair asking how can corporations like BP be made accountable, and have other activities planned (for more information contact email [camactonbp@googlemail.com](mailto:camactonbp@googlemail.com)).

COS-PACC continues in its long-term work with the communities and invites supporters to visit Colombia in July 2010. These are the links of solidarity between peoples taking action against the multinationals that we need to build on to save the planet