

Colombia



Action on

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CSN's representative Eunice Gibson and Senator Piedad Cordoba in La Macarena. Photo by Eunice Gibson

The Humanitarian Crisis in the Eastern Plains of Colombia

by *Attorney Eunice Gibson, CSN's National Secretary*

Ugly stories of cruelty and murder in Colombia are nothing new to me. I scan Colombian media every day to update the Colombia Support Network web site with the latest information on the malefactions of the U.S.-funded Colombian Armed Forces and National Police. Sometimes it's hard just to read about it. When we visit our Madison/Dane County sister community of Apartadó, we sit down in the houses and community centers and hear people tell of their experiences. A man told us how Army soldiers shot his baby right out of the arms of her grandmother. A young man told of being beaten by soldiers at the 17th Brigade headquarters. Some of the relatives of the victims of the 2005 massacre at San José de Apartadó, obviously terrified, told us what happened and how they knew that Army soldiers took part in the massacre.

So the stories I heard during my visit to La Macarena this past July were not new. As always, they were terribly sad, but there was a new element. Instead of frightened witnesses telling their stories to a few visiting gringos, these witnesses

The Humanitarian Crisis in the Eastern Plains of Colombia continued

stood up on a big stage, holding microphones, and talked to some 1,500 angry citizens. How could this happen?

I first read about the cemetery at La Macarena in a Miami newspaper, *El Nuevo Herald*, on January 29, 2010. The story described a large Colombian Army base that abuts a village cemetery. Local officials had complained that Army helicopters kept bringing unidentified bodies of “guerrillas killed in combat” to be buried in the cemetery. Cemetery space was running out, and the statutory process for the handling of unidentified war dead had not been followed. At the same time, the people living in the area reported that they had seen their loved ones killed, or that their loved ones had disappeared. When they tried to find out what happened, they found their loved ones dressed in camouflage and reported as “guerrillas killed in combat,” part of Colombia’s notorious “false positives” scandal.

In December 2009, a group of British elected officials and labor leaders visited La Macarena. They saw the cemetery and reported that they were appalled at the accounts of residents who had lost their loved ones. This was the story reported in the Miami newspaper and it got the attention of Colombian officials. Estimates of the number of unidentified bodies varied wildly, from 2,000 to fewer than 500. (How many unidentified dead people is too many?)

Colombian Senator Gloria Inéz Ramírez Ríos introduced a resolution calling for an official Senate hearing to be held in La Macarena. The resolution passed and Senator Ramírez

invited lawyers and elected officials from different parts of the world to attend the hearing, to be held on July 21, 2010. I attended the hearing as a representative of the Colombia Support Network. European NGO’s financed the organization and publicity of the hearing and they were astonishingly successful.

Numerous foreign delegations, as well as some 1,500-2,000 area citizens and some well-known government officials, streamed into La Macarena’s large meeting hall on July 22, 2010. The walls were decorated with large posters identifying the various NGO’s involved in the organization of the hearing/rally. There were also slogans, including “No More False Positives” and “Punish the Murdering Soldiers.” Along with the posters on the wall were numerous enlarged photos of the dead and missing. Since these families don’t own digital cameras or regularly patronize professional photographers, some of the families used wedding pictures. That brought me to tears.

Just like the congressional hearings you see on C-Span, the testimony of witnesses was interspersed with political speeches. The witnesses’ testimony was heartbreaking. Some people were able to obtain the bodies of their murdered loved ones. A very old man was told that he could receive his son’s body if he paid, but he had no money. One woman was told to go to the dump to look for her daughters’ bodies. Another woman, who sobbed throughout her testimony, obtained her son’s body, but was distraught because they said he was a “guerrilla killed in combat.” “He was

not,” she insisted. “He was a soldier.”

Two or three times a member of the audience would shout something like “Soldiers are killers.” The audience would cheer wildly. The elected officials were highly critical of the government and they received loud applause and cheers. Colombian Congressman Iván Cepeda challenged the Colombian government to see to it that no one who attended the hearing/rally would suffer retaliation. (At this writing, one of the witnesses has already been murdered and another has been displaced. Because of constant threats, he has had to move several times.)

To close the hearing, Fr. Javier Giraldo, Colombia’s foremost defender of human rights, who had spent three days taping testimony in preparation for the hearing, asked people sitting in front to pick up one of the lighted candles that stood near the stage. Someone gave me a candle to hold. We stood in a circle. Many of those standing with me wore large pictures of their dead or missing loved ones. While we held our candles, Fr. Giraldo told a story, “It seems that some people decided to found a city. Only the leaders knew that the ground they chose covered a cemetery of unmarked graves. The city was built, with tall buildings and bright lights. But the people who lived there were restless. They felt fearful and suspicious of each other. They could not sleep. Finally they realized that the dead had come back in their own way, entering their houses, their dreams, and their happiness. They could not stay there. They could not live

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Action On Colombia is the official newsletter of the Colombia Support Network, a national peace and justice network of groups and individuals working to promote respect for human rights in Colombia and a just relationship between the United States and Colombia through grass-roots activism.

CSN supports a nonviolent, negotiated resolution to the conflict in Colombia.

CSN is the only current project of Wisconsin Interfaith Committee on Latin America

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in buildings built upon the nameless dead. Neither can we.”

Then Fr. Giraldo asked those who had lost loved ones to raise their candles.

The woman next to me raised her candle. The man on the other side of me raised his too. They were not crying, but I was. Fr. Giraldo knew how to help us

all feel the oneness of sadness, but also the oneness of survival. Colombia's dead need not be nameless. Rather, we will all fight together to see that justice is done.



Marchers at the IV Social Forum of the Americas in Asuncion, Paraguay

Photo by Marc Becker

Americas Social Forum

by Marc Becker, Professor at Truman University and a CSN member, August 24, 2010

Almost 10,000 activists gathered in Asunción, Paraguay in August for the Fourth Americas Social Forum (ASF). The meeting opened with a massive march that featured peasant and women's issues. The forum ended with the reading of a declaration that pledged an ongoing struggle for equality, sovereignty, and integration based on the principle of solidarity between peoples.

The Americas Social Forum embraces the slogan “Another World is Possible” as a counter to claims that no alternative exists to a world based on militarism and neoliberal economic policies of the privatization of public resources.

Each forum draws heavily on the local population, and in turn encourages local organizing efforts. In the case of Paraguay, the international farmers organization *Vía Campesina* brought a large delegation with many people speaking the local Guaraní language and drinking traditional “mate” tea. Agrarian reform, food sovereignty, and the planting of transgenic soybeans became key issues for debate.

Militarism remained an important topic of conversation at the forum, particularly in light of last year's military coup in Honduras, the arrival of the Fourth Fleet off the coast of Latin America, and proposals to place US military bases in Panama, Costa Rica, and Colombia.

The World Social Forum was initially organized as a meeting of civil society, and explicitly excluded governments, political parties, and armed actors. Since 2001, South America has turned significantly to the left. Many people now warmly welcome the new leftist governments to the forum. At the closing, presidents Evo Morales from Bolivia and José Mujica from Uruguay joined Paraguay president Fernando Lugo on the stage to the wild cheers of the participants. “Our America is on the march,” Lugo proclaimed, “but we have not yet arrived at our desired destination.” “We have a lot of work left to do,” he said, “and the Americas Social Forum is one of the torches that lights our path forward.”

A Multinational's Ultimate Dream: To Have an Army at its Service

A note from CSN:

The fact that communities around the world protest oil exploitation for the damages it produces is nothing new. But through a grotesque misuse of power, the multinational corporation Emerald Energy has successfully dictated the overruling of a security council (this is the name given in Colombia to a local meeting between civilian and military authorities when a crisis arises) decision that led to the re-incarceration of several peaceful demonstrators. On October 18, 2010 a security council was held in Mocoa, Putumayo to determine the fate of six illegally detained and severely injured protestors, and the decision was made to set them free. Upon receiving the verdict, Emerald Energy successfully reversed this decision by ordering the Colombian Police (a branch of the Army) to continue to detain the protestors. In other words, the Colombian Army, funded with the tax dollars of the Colombian people and with money from US taxpayers, is a private entity at the service of a private company. Colombian Sovereignty has been forfeited in the interest of the profits of this foreign oil company. Simón Bolívar, the Liberator of Colombia, must be turning in his grave as these events occur during the 200th anniversary of the independence of Colombia from Spain. If there has been a change in the Colombian Constitution transferring control of the military to multinational corporations, it has not been widely publicized.

Emerald Energy, located in London, is a member of China Sinochem Group Corporation, a Chinese petroleum company. For more information on Emerald Energy, visit: <http://www.emeraldenergy.com/>

For more information on China Sinochem Group Corporation, visit: <http://www.sinochem.com> and choose the "English" option at top right

Please see the following public communiqué received recently from the affected rural communities in Putumayo, and please do take the action recommended below.

Public Comunicué

Puerto Asís, October 18, 2010

*Translated by Emily Hansen,
CSN's Assistant Program Director*

The indigenous, Afro-Colombian and peasant communities of the Puerto Vega-Teteye Corridor in the municipality of Puerto Asís in the Department of Putumayo, Colombia want to bring to public attention the fact that:

Since April 2010 the indigenous and peasant communities of this region have exercised our constitutional right to demonstrate and hold social protests against the serious impacts of the petroleum exploitation that has occurred between 1961 and today, leaving in its wake corruption, death and destitution for the Putumayo communities.

We denounce that in these past few days serious transgressions have been committed by President Juan Manuel Santos, Commander in Chief of the Public Forces, who, through the use of the Mobil Antidisturbances Squadron (ESMAD), the national police and the Army has illegally detained six (6) indigenous members of the Nasa community, among them our elders and ancestral authorities. These community members were forcibly detained at 5:30 p.m. on October 17, 2010, during the peaceful demonstration that we held in the municipality of Villagarzón. These citizens were brutally beaten

by ESMAD units and were denied the attention of emergency medical responders that the hospital of Villagarzón had volunteered. The ambulance sent for these community members was not even allowed to enter the military facilities. The military finally allowed the victims to receive medical attention at 11:30 at night after pressure from humanitarian organizations.

The community members, Traditional Authorities and Wise Elders of the Nasa Community, forcibly and illegally detained by the State, are:

1. Lisandro Campo Cuetia, identity card No 6.660.364, who suffered profound wounds to the skull, legs, abdomen and back due to a brutal beating by the ESMAD units. While receiving medical attention, the military man in charge gave him twelve stitches, and Lisandro had a high fever and could not move. Our Elder is 62-years-old.
2. Juan Carlos Cunda Dizu, identity card No 15572014, was beaten on his legs by ESMAD units and has still not received medical attention. The ESMAD members continued beating and kicking him even when he was handcuffed.
3. Edwin Achipis, Nasa youth of 19-years-old and governor of the Nasa Kwimate Kwesx indigenous chapter of the municipality of Orito, under the jurisdiction of the San Juan Vides police station. Our Ancestral Authority was detained by a member of the National Army who later turned him over to ESMAD units who in turn brutally beat him and broke his skull using Edwin's own

ceremonial staff that he always carries with him as an indigenous governor.

4. Jose Olimpo Canas Secue, identity card No 97.425 762, from the El Descanso reservation, is a Traditional Authority and was Governor of this Chapter in 2004, and is also Ex-Advisor to the Nasa community. Our Traditional Authority was beaten on his legs.

5. Mario Campo Toconas, identity card No 6.306.122, Elder of the Nasa community, 53-years-old, who has a broken little finger on his right hand that was put into a splint by first aid workers, and an antibiotic ointment was applied. Mario had a high fever and severe head pain, but did not received medical attention until today.

6. Daniel Baicue, Nasa indigenous, approximately 38-years-old. Daniel was hospitalized in the second rate hospital in Puerto Asís because he was brutally beaten and tortured by members

of ESMAD. This seriously wounded community member has eight children and his wife is pregnant.

The community members were detained when they were taking part in a peaceful demonstration on the road near the Costayaco 10 petroleum well. Several peaceful demonstrations have been held since April, 2010 in Villagarzón. These detained community members are in the custody of Quartermaster General Daniel Gil of ESMAD, of the Antinarcotics Base of Villagarzón, which is situated in front of the Costayaco 10 well. The Security Council held in Mocoa today decided to free the detained indigenous community members, but Emerald Energy, the petroleum company of which the indigenous community was making their demands, canceled the decision. Emerald Energy opposed the freeing of the community members, Traditional Authorities and Wise Elders of the Nasa Community.

Background

In 2006 the communities between Puerto Vega and Tateye held a peaceful demonstration that concluded in an accord with the government to work out all of the problems with the human rights, social investment, governmental prerogatives and prior consultation claims that the communities had made, but for which they had never received favorable concrete actions. This situation compelled the indigenous, Afro-Colombian and peasant communities of Colombia-Ecuador border region to once again organize themselves in October 2009 to demand recognition for their individual and collective rights. This demonstration once again prompted the signing of an accord with the national government, but the results desired by ACSOMAYO,

continued on next page



Image of a community holding a "Tulpa," which is the word used by peasant and indigenous communities to signify communal decision making around a cooking pot. The appeal regarding Emerald Energy was written during a Tulpa.

the Indigenous Communities and other organizations who also have the right to demonstrate in the region of the Putumayo River (Puerto Leguizamo) and in the municipalities of Orito and Villagarzón, have not been produced. United through this process of incomplete promises on the part of the government, the social and public organizations of the department have, through their own efforts, come to construct an alternative regional proposal that they have called the Integral Peasant, Indigenous and Afro-Colombian Development Plan of the Putumayo. This proposal has been worked on in the office of the Departmental Committee of Social, Peasant and Afro-Colombian Organizations of the Putumayo. The proposal has been presented to State institutions at the local, regional, national and international levels, and has shed light upon the fact that initial accords have not been carried out due to the serious crisis affecting us that revolves around this State's inability to govern. The indigenous, Afro-Colombian and peasant communities of the Puerto Vega-Teteye sector believe that this crisis is a political mechanism used by political directors of traditional parties to impede the development process proposed by our communities, and we believe that this crisis contributes to the increase of corruption and bureaucracy that has systematically caused destitution and the erosion of our organizations and communities.

We demand, as an organized community, that the accords agreed upon by the departmental government and the representatives of the communities and organizations are carried out in an effective manner, and we call upon the national government to URGENTLY create a space where we can share our alternative development proposal that we have been constructing for the last ten years in the Departmental Committee's office. This

proposal seeks to provide a promising future that prioritizes the quality of life of each and every one of the individuals in the Putumayo region.

We hold the President of Colombia, Juan Manuel Santos, Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, responsible for the physical well being of the participants in this peaceful demonstration.

We make an urgent call to the Ombudsman's office to address this situation and make the Armed Forces respect the fundamental right to freedom, life and physical and moral well being of our companions, traditional authorities, and the Elders of the Nasa people, who have been detained in an illegal manner through use of unacceptable force by the State. We call upon the Inspector General's office and the Attorney General's office to investigate the abuses committed by the Armed Forces and punish those responsible.

We call upon the Putumayo Community and its organizations to come together to insist that the national government respect our fundamental constitutional rights and that they listen to our approach and proposal. We are sovereign owners of our territory and of our destinies even though we must put our lives and integrity at risk in the interest of carrying out our peaceful demonstrations. We will be organized in a massive and lasting manner to attract the attention of the national government so that we will no longer be stripped of our resources, and we call upon the International Human Rights Organizations that are focused on this issue to seek the completion of AUTO 004 of 2009, the International Right to Human Rights and the International Agreements and Treaties relating to human rights and international human rights.

Signed,

Permanent Assembly of Indigenous,

Afro-Colombian and Peasant Communities of the Puerto Vega-Teteye Corridor and Peasant Communities of the Putumayo River Region of the Rural Neighborhood of La Perla Amazonica

"Always together and always against the current"

—Against the Current Corporation on Human Rights

"For an electronic copy of this action please visit <http://colombiasupport.blogspot.com/2010/11/ultimate-dream-of-multinational-to-have.html>"

***CSN invites you to write to Colombian Vice President Angelino Garzón demanding answers to the following questions:

1. Under what authority did Emerald Energy, located in Mocoa, Putumayo, order the Colombian Police to keep citizens detained after they were set free by the local Security Council on October 18?
2. How is it possible for a multinational corporation to give orders to the army to detain citizens?
3. Do communities not have a constitutional right to protest damage caused by oil development in their area?
4. Has there been a change to the Constitution that denies communities the right to protest the damages caused by oil exploitation in their area?

Contact info: Vice President Angelino Garzón: comunicacionesvp@presidencia.gov.co

Please send copies of your message to the following:

—Emerald Energy's headquarters in London: admin-ee@emeraldenergy.com

—Inspector General Alejandro Ordoñez: quejas@procuraduria.gov.co / dcap@procuraduria.gov.co / webmaster@procuraduria.gov.co

—Minister of Mining Carlos Rodado: croddado@minminas.gov.co

Senator Robledo on Foreign Mining Interests

*Press office of Senator Jorge Enrique Robledo,
September 14, 2010*

*Translated by Steve Cagan and Diana Méndez,
CSN Volunteer Translators, and edited by Teresa
Welsh, a CSN Volunteer Editor*

AngloGold Ashanti and other transnationals have concessions for an area of 16,603 sq miles of land in Colombia; an area as large as the Departments of Boyacá and Cundinamarca combined. But due to tax exemptions, Drummond, a coal company, has underpaid Colombia by roughly \$500 million USD between 1995 and 2007. Due to unfavorable settlements in Cerromatoso in northern Colombia, the nation may have lost roughly \$105 million USD since 1998. The government's audits have been terrible. Audits cannot be delegated and must not be done by private companies.

During the debate that took place in the Fifth Commission today Senator Jorge Enrique Robledo argued that the large-scale transnationals of the mining industry impose conditions upon Colombia, and that the country gets the worst end of the deal. The companies do not pay the taxes and royalties that they should. They are not subject to proper audits and they do whatever they please in terms of labor law and industrial safety. In contrast, smaller and medium-sized mining companies are subject to daily punitive policies that are intended to drive them from the market.

After reiterating that foreign investment is welcome as long as it is beneficial and does not affect sovereignty, Robledo condemned the fact that “in this country the chain tends to break at its weakest link when the interests of the country and foreign monopolies are in conflict.” He especially condemned as abhorrent the labor conditions in the mines, where the daily contractor system rules, where there are twelve-hour shifts, and wages are 70% lower than for payroll personnel. Occupational diseases are spreading but the Professional Risks Administration refuses to recognize them for what they are.

To illustrate his point, the Polo senator cited various critical cases. Among them, the cases of the Frontino Gold Mines in Segovia and Remedios (Antioquia), the

Colombia Goldfield in Marmato (Caldas), Greystar resources in the Páramo (mountain ecosystem) of Santurbán (Santander), AngloGold Ashanti in Cajamarca (Tolima), Cosigo Frontier en Taraira (Vaupés), and the goldmine of the Suarez River in Cauca. Robledo expressed his solidarity with the civic strike of Segovia and Remedios over the firing of 1600 workers. Robledo also warned of the serious damage caused by the open pit mining that is being planned in Marmato La Colosa and Santurbán. Regarding the coal mines in César, where Drummond and Glencore are located, Robledo quoted Salud-Hernandez Mora, saying that, “What we have here is a criminal conspiracy. A plot to make rivers disappear, ruin life projects, devastate a region, and line a few pockets.”

Robledo referenced Cerromatoso where, according to auditing firm Audit Age S.A., the nation was underpaid by roughly \$11.5 million USD due to unfavorable settlements between 2004 and 2008, and Robledo accused Ingeominas (the Colombian Institute of Geology and Mining) of having accepted an arbitration tribunal with a foreign company when Colombian law prohibits this. Further, due to unfavorable settlements in the Prodeco-Glencore contract, Colombia lost \$420,000 USD. Robledo added that Drummond failed to pay Colombia nearly \$500 million USD for value-added tax, compensations and refunds between 1995 and 2007. Robledo asked the government neither to renew the Cerromatoso contract nor to proceed with new contract negotiations with any transnationals unless these contracts have been debated before the Fifth Commission of the Colombian Congress.

The Democratic Polo senator warned that Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos will continue piling privileges on foreign investors of large-scale mining and persecuting the smaller and medium-sized companies. Robledo closed the debate by quoting León Teicher, President of El Cerrejón [Largest mine in Colombia, and one of the largest open-pit coal mines in the world—SC], “Just like this country was fortunate to have President Uribe for so many years, we are lucky to have President Santos in office ... I think that the Virgin has come back to appear before us.”

CSN Attends the LASA Conference



Carol Sundberg displays our newsletter at CSN's booth at the Latin American Studies Association conference in Toronto this past October. Our purpose there was to promote the 2nd edition of Ana Carrigan's best selling book *Palace of Justice*, and to promote our sister communities projects.

Photo by Cecilia Zarate-Laun

The Colombia Support Network

Action on Colombia

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Organizations listed for
identification purposes only

December 1, 2010

Dear Friend:

Christmas is drawing near, and with it come messages of peace on earth and generosity toward those who suffer. This is the time when we consider our good acts and the effects they may have on our fellow human beings who are suffering and need to be consoled and supported. It is a time when we may pause to think about the tragic effects of wars, especially for children, women and the elderly, who suffer in so many areas of conflict where peace is but a seemingly unreachable dream. This is also a time to consider that giving generously helps us to grow personally when we recognize that our donation contributes to a better world.

For many years I have followed closely the work of the Colombia Support Network (CSN), which focuses upon rural communities in Colombia, and I have admired CSN's persistence and courage in bringing to our knowledge the horrendous crimes committed by different actors in the conflict in that long-suffering nation and not letting difficulties of many kinds deter them from carrying out their invaluable support for those who have suffered from the violence. CSN's excellent quarterly newsletter continually educates us; its urgent action messages lead us to act rapidly to prevent or to denounce very serious violations of human rights; and their delegations bring us to feel close to those who are really suffering from the full weight of the war and the abuses it brings. CSN's sister community programs bring together the peoples of the United States and Colombia in a way which so effectively binds them together that it removes barriers of language, culture and distance, making us all better human beings and leading us together to feel that we are part of the same humanity and part of the same planet.

It is for these reasons that I urge all who receive this newsletter, whether electronically or by mail, to give heartfelt consideration to sending a contribution so that CSN may continue fulfilling and putting into practice the multiple tasks it has undertaken. These cannot be completed without your support.

May the spirit of peace and love that the Holiday season brings be with you throughout the New Year. This is my fervent wish for you and your loved ones.

Sincerely,



Father Daniel Berrigan, S.J.
CSN Advisory Council Member



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