



Rodriguez-Saleh leading a huge demonstration against mining in Santurbán. (Courtesy of Bob Thatch)

Evolution and Leadership of FENALCO Santander in opposing the Angostura Project

by Erwing Rodriguez-Saleh
Executive Director of FENALCO Santander

I began my work as Executive Director of the National Federation of Merchants (Federación Nacional de Comerciantes, FENALCO) for Santander Department on September 6, 2010. At the time I took office in my new position I committed to protecting, defending and guiding the interests of the merchants of the Department of Santander and also to evaluating and keeping posted on those mega-projects which will affect not only merchants but also the common citizen.

In that same month I began to review the Angostura Project of the Canadian firm Greystar. I consulted experts and began to gather information about and study the topic. This allowed me to realize the great damage which this project would bring

Evolution and Leadership of FENALCO Santander continued

to the ecosystem of the Paramo (water-producing highland) of Santurban and, especially, the serious danger the project would present to the sources of water which are generated there and which supply water to Bucaramanga and its metropolitan area.

After I had informed myself about the project, I invited experts and shared documents about the topic with the members of the board of directors of FENALCO Santander. Documents in favor of and against the project were reviewed, and we also listened to the arguments of Greystar. That is how FENALCO Santander came to take a position against the Angostura Project. My board of directors empowered me to do what I thought appropriate and to support some initiatives which led to meetings. At that time I gave priority in the agenda of FENALCO Santander to sustainable development. In a press release we announced that we supported all initiatives of sustainable development, considering it to be that development which satisfies the needs of the present without compromising the resources and possibilities of future generations. We also affirmed that we merchants ought to think as real businessmen who look to the long term and who do not look only at the short term. We do not carry out our role properly if in satisfying our needs of today we destroy the environment and exhaust the resources, such as water, of future generations. Thus on repeated occasions we expressed the view that we cannot fail to take into account the realities of the world at this time: in



Pristine water produced by the páramo of Santurbán. Picture Tatiana Villamizar

the face of drastic climatic changes which are the fruit of aggression against the environment, we are only left to think about models of economic development based upon schemes of sustainable development. All of our communications on this topic were consulted with the more than 500 affiliates of FENALCO Santander, who supported our initiative.

Last December I had the opportunity to discuss this topic with Yamid Amat, director of the prestigious national newscast CM&, who took an interest in it and sent a team of journalists from Bogota to the city of Bucaramanga and to the Paramo of Santurban, from January 4-7 of this year to carry out the respective investigation. CM& is the first of the information media which treated in depth the concerns about and the implications of the

Angostura Project were it to be carried out. Later other national news media became interested in the topic, among them the daily newspapers El Tiempo, El Espectador, El Colombiano, La Republica and El Nuevo Siglo; news media such as RCN and Caracol, Radio and Television, and Especiales Pirry; Semana and Dinero magazines; and W Radio, FM Radio, and Radio Nacional de Colombia. News agencies such as AP and EFE and foreign journalists such as John Otis and Steven Ambrus also became interested in the implications of the Angostura Project.

FENALCO Santander became a leader of the opposition to the Angostura Project. The environmental organizations, which had already been working on this subject for some time, warmly welcomed the leadership

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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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assumed by FENALCO Santander. On January 13 we delivered a letter to President Santos in which we explained the arguments for which the environmental license should not be granted to the Angostura Project. At the end of the letter we expressed our support for the “locomotives” of development of his administration in the measure in which these travel upon “the rail of sustainable development.”

On January 19---the day on which the last special program of CM& on the Paramo of Santurban was broadcast---the Great March: We Defend the Water of Bucaramanga was officially announced. My board of directors supported my initiative and the concept “I am a Defender of the Water of Bucaramanga” was created. On February 25 we achieved bringing out more than 40,000 persons, a true public hearing, which constituted an action which achieved a change in the attitude of the governing officials and of Greystar itself. There are no precedents in our country of a march called by a trade association and of such magnitude.

On March 16 I was invited as Executive Director of FENALCO SANTANDER to Bogota to the program Debate Caracol Hora 20 directed by Nestor Morales. The next day Greystar stopped its project of large-scale open-pit mine development. On March 29 in the Forum Gran Santander United for Defense of the Environment, held in the city of San Jose de Cucuta, I committed myself as a trade association leader to continue to create awareness among businessmen so that they will give priority in their agendas to Sustainable Development.

Bogota, D.C.

May 2, 2011

Dr. Juan Manuel Santos
President of the Republic of Colombia
Bogota

Dear Mr. President:

We send you our cordial greeting. We, the relatives of the disappeared of the Palace of Justice, learned of your recent declarations with great sorrow and concern. In your declaration you called the sentence handed down against General Jesus Armando Arias Cabrales for the forced disappearance of our relatives unjust, and you pointed out that you “hope that the appeal presented by the military officer’s defense to the Superior Court of Bogota will succeed”. In response, we profoundly reject these statements. Mr. President, the sentence which you termed unjust was handed down by Criminal Court Judge 51 of the Bogota Circuit, Doctor Maria Cristina Torres, after she had carried out an analysis of more than 100 items of evidence collected and provided in this case---in which General Arias Cabrales was given appropriate guarantees---and she arrived at the conclusion that General Arias Cabrales was responsible for the deeds with which he was charged. General Arias Cabrales was the Commander of the Thirteenth Brigade and in command of the military operation to retake the Palace of Justice. It was proven in Court that our relatives left the Palace of Justice alive, in the custody of the National Army. More than 25 years later they continue to be disappeared. As the Judge stated in her sentence, “There is no doubt that he (General Arias Cabrales) was informed and voluntarily gave his permission for the carrying out of the punishable offense, with full control of the deed in one of its 3 dimensions, that of voluntary will.” (Footnote: Republic of Colombia, Judicial Branch, Criminal Court 51 of the Bogota Circuit, Bogota, D.C., April 28, 2011, by which a sentence is issued in the case against Jesus Armando Arias Cabrales, for the crime of aggravated forced disappearance, in a homogeneous and successive procedure, without finding a basis for nullification to invalidate the proceedings.)

Your declarations are totally contradicted by demonstrations carried out to commemorate the 25 years since the events of the Palace of Justice, in which in a public event, at which the international community was present and to which we were personally invited, you, President Santos, stated that as President of the Republic you undertook as your duty “to rescue the truth, however painful it may be, concerning what happened in the Palace, and to accompany the victims, the relatives who have every right to know the truth.”

In this same event, after the “eternal flame” had been lit, you pointed out that this symbolic act “serves to provide a memory of that which occurred, to



CSN delegation meets the relatives of the disappeared from the Palace of Justice Holocaust

derive lessons from the past and to commit ourselves to seeing that acts such as these not happen any more in our history.”

Your recent declarations, besides not honoring your promise, are disrespectful of the democratic institutions of the Colombian State, which have complied with their duty to investigate and punish serious violations of human rights within a contradictory process provided with the corresponding procedural guarantees, and constitute an undue interference in the administration of justice, at the same time as they undermine the principle of separation of powers recognized in international norms of human rights and the Constitution which you swore to respect.

Your duty as President of the Republic, the highest office in the Executive Branch, is to abide by the decisions of the Judges of the Republic and to watch to see that they are effectively carried out. You above all ought to know that in a State of Law the military forces have a constitutional obligation to guarantee the life and safety of all Colombians, fully subject to legal and constitutional mandates. The omission or exceeding of the limits of their powers, or the use of these to undermine fundamental rights of citizens, erodes the foundations of the Social State of Law and merits the maximum moral, political and juridical repudiation of all its institutions.

Finally, Mr. President, we remind you that these public

declarations put at risk the relatives of the victims and their representatives, we who for more than 25 years have called for justice and truth on the part of the Colombian State.

For the above reasons we request, Mr. President of the Republic, as the maximum civil authority and as the maximum Commander of the Armed Forces, that you make a public rectification of your declaration, honor your word, and reaffirm your commitment to “rescue the truth, however painful that may be, concerning what happened in the Palace, and accompany the victims, the relatives, who have every right to know the truth.”

Cordially,

The relatives of Norma Constanza Esguerra, Gloria Estela Lizarazo Figueroa, Lucy Amparo Oviedo, Gloria Anzola de Lanao, Ana Rosa Castiblanco, Cristina del Pilar Guarín, Luz Mary Portela Leon, David Suspes Celis, Bernardo Beltrán Hernández, Hector Jaime Beltrán Fuentes, Carlos Augusto Rodríguez Vera, and Irma Franco Pineda, the persons disappeared from the Palace of Justice. (Signatures of the relatives follow.)

Christian Salazar High Commissioner in Colombia for the United Nations’s Office of Human Rights

REPORT ON THE CSN NATIONAL CONFERENCE

by Jack Laun

The CSN annual National Conference was held at Edgewood College in Madison on June 3-4, 2011. Chapter representatives provided reports on their communities and CSN plans for the coming year were discussed and decided upon. A special invited guest, award-winning Colombian Journalist Hollman Morris, discussed his work and presented a film on a confrontation between the FARC guerrillas and the Colombian Armed Forces in and near the community of Toribio. The film was shot by Hollman and his crew while the conflict was underway, presenting stark images of how rural communities have suffered from war. Hollman was recognized by Harvard University as a Nieman Fellow for the courage and talent he has demonstrated in filming controversial events. As he showed us in news film clips, former President Uribe's discomfort with Hollman's revelatory reporting moved him to charge falsely that Hollman was helping terrorists.

We also received a path-breaking power point presentation from CSN advisory council member Professor Al Gedicks, who discussed the ways in which multilateral mining projects in Colombia, and elsewhere in Latin America, have failed to deliver the benefits promised by their promoters, and instead have constituted a "resource curse". Professor Gedicks' report suggested that the large-scale mining projects, being promoted by President Juan Manuel Santos as an engine of economic development, will not effectively increase employment or provide an economic bonanza to help rural communities.

We also discussed the continued abuses by the Colombian Army, as



Fraylejonas are the grey plant that transforms vapor into water

CSN Secretary Eunice Gibson reviewed the findings of her detailed 5-year study of the abuses committed by military personnel. She also described her visit with Colombian human rights leaders to La Macarena, where a huge burial ground of unidentified persons is located right next to an Army installation, suggesting that the persons buried there may be "false positives".

Actions we expect to focus on in the near future include opposition to the Colombian-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (FTA). We discussed the numerous ways in which the proposed FTA will harm Colombia, and particularly rural communities such as our sister communities. We also received presentations on the popular protests in Wisconsin and in Spain, as well as in Bucaramanga, Colombia, as people have taken to the streets to protest respectively union-busting, lack of jobs for young people, and threats to the community's water supply. This popular reaction against neo-liberal policies and multinational capitalist interests may lead to policies more favorable to the people in general, and not simply to a

highly privileged few. We hope we will be able to celebrate the implementation of a "people's agenda" at next year's National Conference.

The Colombia Support Network

Action on Colombia

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THE SECOND DEATH OF DON QUIXOTE

Tribute To Augusto Ramirez Ocampo

By Cecilia Zarate-Laun

CSN learned with great sorrow of the death of former Minister of Foreign Relations Augusto Ramirez Ocampo, who died at 77 years of age on the evening of June 14 at his home in Bogota. From a Conservative family, but with progressive ideas sometimes more advanced than those of many liberals in Colombia, this illustrious diplomat was a tireless fighter for a negotiated political solution to Colombia's internal conflict and a passionate defender of the 1991 Constitution, which he helped to design as an elected member of the National Constituent Assembly. He was a former Mayor of Bogota, a university professor and the director of the Institute for Human Rights of the Javeriana University. He had been also Director of the Regional Bureau for Latin America of the United Nations Development Program.

A tireless worker for peace in Colombia, Ramirez Ocampo was a member of Comision Nacional de Conciliacion between the government and the ELN and later was a Member of the National Reconciliation Commission. As Minister of Foreign Relations Ramirez- Ocampo always facilitated bringing together representatives of the Government and of the guerrillas, because he was convinced that the solution

to the conflict was not military. Sometimes he seemed like Don Quixote in his search for a negotiated solution. His efforts were frequently boycotted by both the extreme right and the extreme left. Serene and gracious he always maintained his principles and convictions with the firmness of a true humanist. It did not matter to him if he was going against the current, because his principles were always first for him.

His diplomatic talents and contributions extended beyond Colombia's borders, as one of his great achievements was the Contadora Accord, the Latin American diplomatic initiative which brought an end to the internal war in El Salvador. And he also fought in the OAS for the restoration of democracy in Haiti.

I wish to recount a personal incident. During the Sandinista government in Nicaragua in 1986 I was in Managua when the M-19 took the Palace of Justice in Bogota. At that time some Nicaraguan workers had been murdered by the Contras in a rural area and a mass was offered for those who had been killed. I attended the mass. Comandante Tomas Borge also was in attendance at the mass. Suddenly some young men of the M-19 in Managua asked permission to speak about what was happening in Bogota and the priest who

was conducting the mass agreed to let them speak. Afterwards the United States State Department did everything possible to involve the Sandinista government in the incident in order to provoke a break in relations between Colombia and Nicaragua. As an eyewitness to what had happened at the mass, I wrote to Ramirez Ocampo, who was then Minister of Foreign Relations, and he valued my testimony in addition to that of others in deciding not to break with the Sandinista government, in spite of the pressure brought to bear upon him by the United States government. This small story describes the innate diplomacy and serenity which characterized Augusto Ramirez Ocampo.

In his later years his life project was the defense and protection of the Constitution of 1991. In that respect he was a strong critic of Presidential re - election and he always called for cordiality upon seeing the foreign policy of President Uribe, because he believed in a diversified foreign policy. Since he was a promoter of Latin American integration, the solitude of Colombia during the Presidential administrations of Uribe concerned him.

In my conversations with him he said that he sincerely admired the democratic soul of the people of the United States, and he said that he had lived for several years in this country and believed that initiatives from the base like CSN were what contributed to change this society. He was a great admirer of the philosophy and the principles of CSN, because he said they were an expression of that which is best in United States society, such as generosity, democratic conviction, and the sense of wanting to connect to the rest of the world.

Continuing his legacy by preserving the Constitution of 1991, working for a negotiated solution to the conflict and seeking an integrated Latin America are the best ways of honoring the memory of this true statesman and humanitarian. We send our sincere condolences to his family and ... and may he rest in peace.

June 17, 2011



Augusto Ramirez- Ocampo, photo from El Espectador by Diana Sánchez

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE COLOMBIA-U.S. BILATERAL TRADE AGREEMENT SUBMITTED TO THE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE BY THE COLOMBIA SUPPORT NETWORK

The proposed Colombia-U.S. “Free Trade Agreement” (FTA), if passed by the U.S. Congress and implemented by the two countries, will have several negative effects upon Colombia. Among these are the following:

1. The Colombian government has failed to provide adequate protection for unionized workers and their leaders. While President Obama expressed concern about the large number of union workers being murdered in Colombia—a large number of them by paramilitaries hired by U.S.-based companies, such as Drummond Coal and Chiquita Brands—insufficient steps have been taken to reduce these killings, which continue unabated. And very few murders of union members result in convictions. Without a strong commitment to ending this union-busting-through-murder phenomenon and impunity for these crimes, violence will continue to threaten workers seeking to protect themselves and their employment from employers’ repressive actions. And the U.S. should press Colombia to outlaw a procedure permitting Colombian employers to sponsor “cooperatives” as an alternative to labor unions. These “cooperatives” are associations which eliminate a direct employment relationship between the workers and the employer, who is then able to avoid providing benefits to the workers and whose wage payments to them are often scandalously low.

2. Colombian campesinos, small-scale farmers with very limited economic resources, will suffer the loss of their traditional markets. Subsidized food crops from the United States will undercut prices in Colombia for such products, leaving the campesinos with nowhere to market their products, such as corn, rice and other staple products. This will increase poverty in rural areas, already a very serious concern, since hundreds of thousands of campesinos were forced off their lands during the Presidential terms of Alvaro Uribe Velez from 2002-2010. Colombia has some 4

million internally displaced persons, and the FTA will only add to this problem.

3. Some larger Colombian agricultural producers, such as those of cotton and sugar cane, may find imports from the U.S., subsidized by the U.S. government, threatening their markets, for example for cotton and sugar.
4. Colombian manufacturing businesses will face increased competition from the entry of U. S. manufacturing concerns into the Colombian market on a preferential basis. This combined with intellectual property protections allowed to the U.S. companies will likely force some Colombian businesses to close. For example, Colombian pharmaceutical manufacturers may find it impossible to compete and to market their products successfully.
5. Indigenous peoples in Colombia are very concerned that intellectual property provisions relating to patent rights may have the effect of cutting off their access to traditional medicines, a fundamentally important part of their culture.
6. Preference for products produced in the United States may result in the decline and disappearance of traditional Colombian products. Thus favorable treatment for wheat may undermine local growing of quinoa and other traditional cereal crops.
7. As products from the U.S. take market share from local Colombian products, the advertisements for such products will become ever more pervasive, leaving native Colombian

culture and mores ever more difficult to preserve.

PLEASE take action immediately :

Call now to oppose the US-Colombia Free Trade Agreement!

The proposed Colombia-US Free Trade Agreement (FTA) is about to come up for a vote in the US Congress. This FTA will cost US jobs, as multinational businesses take work to low-paying jobs in Colombia to avoid paying higher wages and benefits in this country. In Colombia, meanwhile, labor leaders continue to be murdered and threatened. The Obama Administration has linked passage to greater protection of workers and an end to legislation promoting employer-controlled “cooperatives” as a union-avoidance technique, but these proposed changes have not shown tangible results. Meanwhile, the elimination of trade barriers to entry of US agricultural products will decimate the markets for peasants’, indigenous’ and Afro-Colombians’ products, and intellectual property provisions threaten Colombian indigenous peoples’ access to medicinal herbs, while several Colombian industries are threatened by elimination of import duties.

Please call your Congressional representatives to tell them you oppose the Colombia-US FTA, because it will cost US jobs while failing to protect Colombian workers and peasants. Click here to Find Your Representative

Read more details of why it portends disaster for Colombia’s countryside <http://colombiasupport.blogspot.com/2011/06/bilateral-us-colombia-free-trade.html>



Fresh produce at the greenhouse in “La Aromática” farm is sold in local markets. These markets are threatened by the FTA. The farm is a joint project of Movimiento Campesino Cajibío and our CSN Central New York Chapter (Syracuse, Cortland and Ithaca).



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