

ROCLA UPDATE ON THE AMERICAS

A PUBLICATION OF THE ROCHESTER COMMITTEE ON LATIN AMERICA

ROCLA Fall 2017 Programs

P R E V I E W



September 6, 7pm
Grahame Russell,
“More of the same in
Central America.”

Grahame Russell, the Director of Rights Action, will present an update of U.S. policies toward Central America from his on-the-ground experience. He argues that, “From Democrats to Republicans, Obama to Trump, U.S. military, economic and “drug enforcement” policies perpetuate the violence and repression, poverty and racism, corruption and impunity that force tens of thousands of Central Americans to flee their homes, communities and countries, year after year, decade after decade.



October 4, 7pm
Karleen West,
“Who Speaks for Nature?
Indigenous Environmentalists
against Extraction
in Ecuador.”

Karleen West is Assistant Professor of Political Science and International Relations at SUNY Geneseo. She will discuss her latest research on the struggles of indigenous communities against international companies promoting natural resource extraction and giant megaprojects in Ecuador. Her research focuses on Latin American politics, and includes interests in ethnic politics, political parties, comparative institutions, and political behavior. She has published in several different journals.



November 1, 7pm
Daniella Burgi-Palomino,
“Human Rights in Mexico,
Immigration and Two
Borders.”

Daniella Burgi-Palomino is the Senior Associate for Mexico, Border and Migration Issues at the Latin American Working Group (LAWG) in Washington, D.C. She coordinates LAWG’s campaign to promote justice for Mexico and the borderlands. Through this campaign LAWG works with partners and activists to encourage Mexico to address impunity for human rights abuses and bring justice to victims, oppose border militarization at the U.S.-Mexico border and Mexico’s southern border, and build support for refugee protections. Daniella holds a Masters Degree in Law and Diplomacy from the Fletcher School of Law & Diplomacy, where she focused on human security and migration.

HELP PROMOTE HUMAN RIGHTS AND JUSTICE IN LATIN AMERICA

The Steering Committee is busy allocating ROCLA’s 2017 resources to organizations whose work is critical to the ongoing (sometimes desperate) struggle for human rights and justice in Latin America. Your check in any amount to ROCLA/Metro Justice will help us increase these contributions! Please send checks c/o Kathy Go-forth, 45 Lynbrook Drive, Rochester, NY, 14609. MUCHAS GRACIAS!

Each year, ROCLA also counts on your annual membership support (we do not solicit funding from government or corporate sources) to help us fund over 20 significant contributions to groups and individuals active on the ground in Latin America and solidarity groups in the U.S. Look for our annual membership appeal letter in your mailbox in late October, and help ensure ROCLA’s continued work!

Note: All programs will be held at Downtown United Presbyterian Church, 121 North Fitzhugh Street, Rochester. The church is accessible to those with handicaps and looped for the hearing impaired.

PROSPERITY AND SECURITY FOR WHOM?

ADVOCATING FOR RIGHTS-BASED POLICIES TOWARD CENTRAL AMERICA UNDER A TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

By Daniella Burgi-Palomino and Lily Folkerts, Latin America Working Group

ROCLA is privileged to print an original article written by two staff-members of the Latin American Working Group (LAWG) in Washington, D.C. Daniella Burgi-Palomino serves as Senior Associate for Mexico, Border and Migration Issues, coordinating LAWG's campaign to promote justice for Mexico and the borderlands. Lily Folkerts also works on Border and Migration Issues and serves as LAWG's Fundraising Coordinator. LAWG co-hosted a civil society briefing, at which Ms. Burgi-Palomino spoke, in parallel to the recent Conference on Prosperity and Security in Central America, in Miami, FL. The authors discuss the Conference and U.S. Policy on Mexico and the Central American Northern Triangle countries below. [Ed.]

While initially unclear, early signs point to what the Trump Administration's policy to the Northern Triangle countries of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador will look like. So far, they fit with an "America First" foreign policy that prioritizes national security and business interests and excludes human rights.

A first sign of this was the Conference on Prosperity and Security in Central America, held from June 15th-16th, 2017 in Miami, Florida, and co-hosted by the United States and Mexico. The conference's stated objectives included discussion of security, gover-



nance, and economic issues that affect the Northern Triangle countries.¹ They also highlighted increasing private sector investment in the region, improving security, and informing the U.S. strategy for engagement in Central America. Preceding the conference on June 14th, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce co-hosted an event on private sector investment. Overall, the conference is significant because it was the first high level event organized by the Trump Administration on Latin America. How it was organized, the participants, and the results may prove telling for future policy to the region.

First, the U.S. State Department and the Department of Homeland Security co-organized the conference, unusual for an event on U.S. foreign policy that officially did not include immigration. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson led the conference day on "prosperity" or private sector investment, and then Secretary of Homeland Security John Kelly led the

session on "security." While private sector representatives received invitations to the conference, Mexican and Central American civil society organizations were excluded in both preparation and participation in the event.

To highlight concerns with the exclusion of civil society in the conference, the Latin America Working Group (LAWG) coordinated over 100 organizations from the United States, Mexico, Central America, South America, and Europe in a letter to Secretary Tillerson, urging him to ensure that human rights did not take a backseat in any agreements reached during the conference.² A lack of civil society consultation on U.S. assistance to the region and the implementation of the U.S.-backed Alliance for Prosperity have been ongoing issues since the Obama Administration. Failing to consult with a broad range of civil society organizations will limit the effectiveness of U.S. assistance, result in a lack of accountability and transparency, and may prove detrimental to local populations.

The letter also raised con-

cerns with the framing of the conference, which appeared to discuss U.S. policy towards the region solely from a security and economic lens without addressing the protection needs and human rights of families, individuals, and children from the region. Holding the security discussion at the Southern Command military base in Miami, in particular, sent a dangerous signal that Northern Triangle citizen security and justice challenges could be addressed from the perspective of the military and defense. This is concerning because, alongside gang violence, human rights violations by various state security forces constitute a driving factor of displacement and insecurity in the region.

Moreover, promoting private sector investment to the region in collaboration with the IDB has the potential to fuel further displacement if the collaboration lacks government guarantees for human rights, transparency, and accountability, including protections for labor rights and mitigation of environmental impacts. And in countries like Guatemala and Honduras that rank among the most dangerous countries in the world for environmental defenders, this approach could place community leaders at even greater risk.

Following the conference, official government reports provided little information.³ What they did communicate points to a heavy focus on economics and security. Statements reinforced the goal of



Daniella Burgi-Palomino addresses civil society groups.
Photo: Latin American Working Group

driving an “investment shock” into the region via energy integration and infrastructure projects without mention of local community consultation. Combatting drug trafficking also remains a goal. Finally, reports mentioned exploring strengthened border cooperation between the United States and the countries in the region and announced working groups on business investment, combatting drug trafficking, and migration. Besides these topics, little else has been shared and civil society continues to carefully monitor any developments.

Why this matters

Defining the right policies towards Central America is of crucial importance because conditions in the region continue to push individuals, children, and families to seek protection not just in the United States but also in other countries in the region. According to one study, in both 2015 and 2016, El Salvador was the world’s most violent country. Its capital, San Salvador, was the most murderous city.⁴ The three Northern Triangle countries had a combined total of 14,870 homi-

cides in 2016, and individually each was still well above the 10 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants minimum identified by the United Nations necessary to constitute an epidemic of violence—with El Salvador at 81 murders, Honduras at 58, and Guatemala at 27 per every 100,000 inhabitants.⁵ NGO reports from early 2017 point to sustained generalized violence perpetrated by gangs and security forces resulting in forced displacement, extortion, sexual and gender-based violence, severe limitations on access to education for children, and internal displacement due to the construction of megaprojects.⁶ Asylum applications from the Northern Triangle countries of Central America remained steady throughout 2016.⁷

As we continue to see rhetoric from the Trump administration supporting an “America First” policy and harmful attacks on immigrants and refugees, LAWG remains steadfast in advocating for a sensible and compassionate U.S. foreign policy. We urge partners and individuals to put pressure on the United States and regional governments to ensure human rights come

first. Although we have yet to see how agreements from the conference will play out, a focus on hardline security strategies and private sector investment for large scale mega-development projects will only be detrimental to stability in the region and could lead to further out-migration. These results contradict the goals of creating “prosperity and security” that the U.S. Administration wants to pursue.

U.S. policies should instead prioritize supporting sustainable, inclusive economies, human rights protection, anti-corruption efforts, access to justice, and the rule of law. The U.S. should never provide assistance to support military involvement in law enforcement activities. At the same time, U.S. immigration policy should not prevent Central American individuals seeking protection from accessing asylum or deporting them without due process. For individuals from Honduras and El Salvador currently residing in the United States, we must defend and renew their Temporary Protected Status (TPS) until a long-term legislative solution and overall immigration reform is passed.

To this end, we urge you to take the actions below to ensure just policies toward the region and to protect immigrant and refugee communities in the United States.

- Support extension of TPS for Salvadorans and Hondurans: lawg.org/SaveTPS
- Urge Congress to support the Berta Caceres Human Rights in Honduras Act: lawg.org/DefendBerta (See Urgent Action, page 5)
- Oppose harmful border militarization, deportation force funding, and anti-immigrant bills: lawg.org/SupportMigrants



Lily Folkerts. Photo: Latin American Working Group

Endnotes:

1 “United States Key Deliverables for the June 15-16, 2017 Conference on Prosperity and Security in Central America,” The Department of Homeland Security, June 16, 2017, <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2017/06/16/united-states-key-deliverables-june-15-16-2017-conference-prosperity-and-security>.

2 Civil Society Letter to Secretary Tillerson Concerning the Conference for Prosperity and Security in Central America, The Latin America Working Group, June, 2017, <http://lawg.org/TillersonLetterCA>.

3 “Conference on Prosperity and Security in Central America,” The Department of Homeland Security, June 19, 2017, <https://www.dhs.gov/prosperitysecuritycon>.

4 “The World’s Most Dangerous Cities,” The Economist, March 31, 2017, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2017/03/daily-chart-23>.

5 “Violencia siguió desatada en el Triángulo Norte: 14 mil 870 homicidios en 2016,” Departamento 19, 7 de enero de 2017, <http://www.departamento19.hn/index.php/elcamino/ddhh/42993-violencia-siguio-desatada-en-el-triangulo-norte-14-mil-870-homicidios-en-2016-.html>.

6 “Informe Mensual de la Situación de los derechos de las niñas, niños y jóvenes en Honduras” (Tegucigalpa, Honduras: Casa Alianza, febrero 2017), <http://www.casa-alianza.org.hn/images/documentos/CAH.2017/1.Inf.Mensuales/02.%20informe%20mensual%20febrero%202017.pdf>; “Informe de La Misión Que La 72 Realizó En Marzo de 2017 de Honduras Y El Salvador Para La Realización Del Viacrucis Migrante 2017” (Tenosique, Mexico: La 72 Hogar—Refugio para Personas Migrantes, March 2017), <http://www.la72.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Informe-DDHH-2016-LA-72.pdf>.

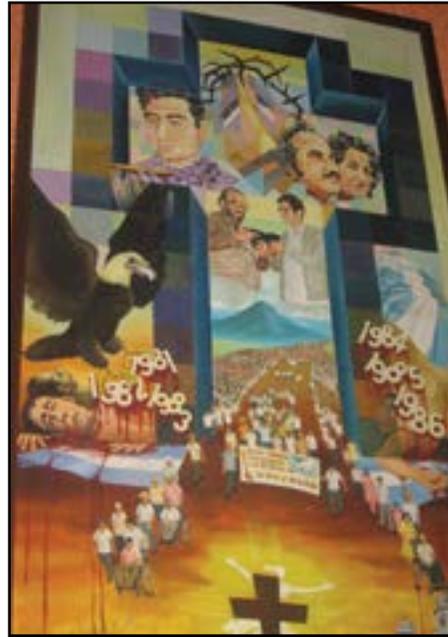
7 Bruno G. Gallo, “La violencia en Centroamérica y México dispara las peticiones de asilo en EEUU,” *Tel-emundo*, June 19, 2017, <http://www.tel-emundo.com/noticias/2017/06/19/la-violencia-en-centroamerica-y-mexico-dispara-las-peticiones-de-asilo-en-eeuu>.



A fixture on the Rochester film scene since 1989, the 28th Annual Rochester Labor Film Series will open on Friday, September 1, at 7:30 PM, at the Dryden Theatre at the George Eastman House, Rochester, N.Y. The first film, the Rochester premier of *A Better Life* (2011), will be of particular interest to ROCLA members and friends. It is set in contemporary East Los Angeles and sympathetically depicts the experiences of undocumented Mexican immigrants in different settings.

Eight additional films that address a wide range of issues in different countries and eras will be shown on Fridays in September and October (except September 15), through November 3. *All the Presidents Men* (1976), to be screened September 22, is a classic about investigative journalism and the Watergate scandal that led to the impeachment and resignation of President Nixon. In view of the current investigations of the Trump administration, it is particularly timely; David Cay Johnston, Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist and author of *The Making of Donald Trump* will lead a post-screening discussion. Don't miss this series! Tickets are available from ROCLA members or at the Dryden box office.

FATHER MIGUEL D'ESCOTO BROCKMANN 1933-1917: A LEGACY



By Magda Lanuza

Father Miguel D'Escoto Brockmann was born February 5, 1933, to a wealthy, landed family in Nicaragua. He became a dedicated Maryknoll priest, Nicaraguan diplomat and politician. His Liberation Theology beliefs led him early on to support the Sandinistas as the party of the poor, and he eventually gave away most of his land to impoverished Nicaraguans. From 1979 to 1990, he served as Nicaraguan Foreign Minister in the Sandinista government. Because of his service, which in fact grew out of his Christian beliefs, Pope John Paul II banned him from participating in any of the holy sacraments. (He remained a priest, but couldn't perform any priestly duties.) Pope Francis reinstated Father Miguel in 2014, and he was able to again celebrate Mass before his death.

Inspired by Mahatma

Ghandi, Father Miguel worked hard to bring peace to Nicaraguans who were tormented by a decade of civil war backed by the United States. He also brought the suffering of millions of Nicaraguans to the International Court of Justice in The Hague; when the verdict came, the Court ordered the United States to pay Nicaragua for the extensive damage done by the war.

Father Miguel also served as President of the United Nations

General Assembly in 2008-2009. During his Presidency, member states requested that the General Assembly organize a meeting "at the highest level" on the World Financial and Economic Crisis. The United Nations convened a three-day summit of world leaders June 24-26, 2009 at its New York Headquarters to assess the worst global economic downturn since the Great Depression. The aim was to identify emergency and long-term responses to mitigate the impact of the crisis, especially on vulnerable populations, and initiate a needed dialogue on the transformation of the international financial architecture, taking into account the needs and concerns of all member states.

I was serving in Father Miguel's UN office at the time, and knew that he had no budget for this. He did prodigious fundraising to make the conference hap-

pen. Father Miguel brought on board his niece Sofia Clark d'Escoto without pay, as well as some Nicaraguan professionals, to help him. While there was considerable opposition to his plans, the civil society groups embraced his work, but were concerned with the lack of commitment of the international community. For such networks as the Women's Working Group, this was the first time in the UN's history that a President was so committed to effecting real economic change—fixing the unjust world economic and finance system.

Although the June 24-26, 2009 Conference did not produce clear binding commitments, the final document is considered one of the best documents produced in the last years by the United Nations. Before leaving the UN building in Manhattan, NY, after a year of service, Father Miguel embarked in an international campaign to reinvent the United Nations and was known for his criticism of the ability of the five permanent members of the Security Council to veto General Assembly actions.

When Miguel d'Escoto died on June 8, 2017, he left his house in Nicaragua to become a museum for his collection of Nicaraguan popular art. ■

Magda Lanuza is a Nicaraguan specialist in international relations. She accompanied Fr. Miguel D'Escoto when he was President of the U.N. General Assembly from 2008-2009. She is also program director for Proyecto Nimian Ortiz, the Matlin family project in Nicaragua.

URGENT ACTION

SUPPORT THE BERTA CÁCERES HUMAN RIGHTS IN HONDURAS ACT!

March 2, 2017, marked the one-year anniversary of the assassination of Berta Cáceres, the beloved Honduran Indigenous and environmental rights leader. At the same time, the Berta Cáceres Human Rights in Honduras Act (H.R. 1299) was re-introduced in Congress to continue the call for justice.

The Berta Cáceres Act is a landmark bill introduced by Rep. Hank Johnson (D-GA) that currently has 60 co-sponsors in the House of Representatives. The Berta Cáceres Act has found immediate and broad support including endorsements by the AFL-CIO, the Sierra Club, the Indigenous Environmental Network (IEN), and over a hundred other faith, labor, environmental, and human rights organizations. Berta's family and organization COPINH immediately applauded the action and praised the leadership of these Members of Congress.

The bill states: "The Honduran police are widely established to be deeply corrupt and to commit human rights abuses, including torture, rape, illegal detention, and murder, with impunity" and that the military has committed violations of human rights. Therefore, the bill asks that the United States suspend all "...security assistance to Honduran military and police until such time as human rights violations by Honduran state security forces cease and their perpetrators are brought to justice."

Please call your Representative NOW and ask to speak to his/her Foreign Policy Aide! Because the bill is being re-introduced, all of the bill's co-sponsors will need to co-sponsor again. (Rep. Louise Slaughter has been a co-sponsor. Thank her for co-sponsoring and ask her to sign on again.) If your representative has not yet co-sponsored the bill, call and ask him/her to add their support as a sponsor of the bill.

In June, Witness for Peace coordinated a week of action to support the Berta Cáceres Human Rights in Honduras Act, HR 1299.

• OPINION •

THE TRUMP REGIME PLOTS CIVIL WAR IN VENEZUELA

By *Les Blough*
La Victoria, Venezuela

I don't recognize the Venezuela described in daily reports in the U.S. media as the same Venezuela where I have made my permanent home for the last ten years.

Washington and its compliant media have consistently reported negatively on Venezuela and our socialist government, demonizing our leaders, hungering for our petroleum and our geopolitical position in the Americas. It's no secret that we have the largest proven oil reserves said to be only two days away from Texas, while Saudi petroleum is a 45-day trip and U.S. fracking profits are unstable. On top of that, Venezuela has led other Latin American countries to reject U.S. domination and establish their independence and sovereignty for the first time since the Spanish conquistadors arrived.

Washington's most recent aggression in our country is the most deadly yet after the April 11, 2002 U.S. backed coup attempt to overthrow our former President Hugo Chavez. We now find ourselves in a devastating, undeclared war after being subjected to 17 years of sabotage of our infrastructure and food distribution systems, destruction of our public facilities and national currency, violent street protests, assassinations by paid mercenaries, U.S. funding of the opposition, sanctions, and demonization of the women and men we elect to serve us.

All this has led to President Maduro's decision to let the people decide by calling for a Constituent Assembly. On July 30, we elected 545 delegates from every region of the country and every social and economic strata to update our constitution. What can be more democratic in a system already declared "the most democratic in the world" by the Jimmy Carter Center?

In response, the U.S.-backed opposition held a referendum that demanded that our president resign. They immediately burned the paper ballots in public and your government is calling its ashes



Graphic: Telesur via Venezuela Solidarity Campaign, July 21, 2017

a "parallel government," as they have done in Syria. Based upon Washington's history of foreign intervention, the "parallel government" may then become the recipient of money and arms, placing us all on a path to a bloody civil war and ripping our beloved Venezuela apart.

Our Constituent Assembly has been successful and we will continue the fight for our rights to self-determination and independence. Perhaps our friends in North America should consider holding a Constituent Assembly to rewrite their 230-year-old Constitution and create for the first time an honest participatory democracy like the one we enjoy in Venezuela. ■

Les Blough is founding editor and publisher of Axis of Logic, a website launched on May 18, 2003. After 2003, he visited Venezuela on 5 different occasions to learn more about the Bolivarian Revolution and now lives permanently in Venezuela. He devotes himself full time as an activist for social and political change and as a writer, editor and publisher on Axis of Logic. You can reach Les Blough via e-mail at: les@axisoflogic.com



Graphic: Telesur via Venezuela Solidarity Campaign, July 21, 2017

On July 30, 2017, Venezuela held an election to name a National Constituent Assembly to deal with pervasive economic difficulties, political disputes between opposition parties and the Bolivarian government, and the rising violence, largely instigated by segments of the opposition. The U.S. mainstream media have almost uniformly blamed President Nicolás Maduro's government for the violence and the deteriorating economic situation, while the reality is more complex. In response to the election, President Trump has just announced new sanctions on Venezuela, continuing and enhancing the harsh policies of the Obama administration. In contrast, the ROCLA newsletter seeks to present opinions on Venezuela from the perspective of Venezuelans and experts on Venezuela. [Ed.]

Why has President Maduro called for a National Constituent Assembly?

By the Venezuela Solidarity Campaign

In a formal document which he signed in front of the National Electoral Council (CNE), President Maduro stated that the call for the Constituent Assembly was made in the context of the current social, political and economic circumstances in which there are severe internal and external threats against democracy and the constitutional order.

This refers to the right-wing opposition-led violence aimed

at bringing down the elected Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro. The violence began in early April, resulting so far in scores of deaths and over 1,200 people injured. A key tactic in the violent protests is the use of *guarimbas* or street blockades created by masked protesters.

The current violence has involved attacks on state facilities and services such as maternity hospitals, electricity supplies, food depots and public transport, and also targeted assassinations of government supporters. A ramping up of the aggression occurred in late June when a

police officer flying a stolen helicopter attacked the Ministry of Interior building and the Supreme Court, firing shots and dropping four grenades.

The purpose of the Constituent Assembly has been expounded on by former Education Minister Elias Jaua, who explained in an interview with Telesur, a private Venezuela TV channel, that its aims were "to maintain political stability, to solve the economic issues, to broaden and to strengthen the system of social welfare [and] to heal the social wounds that have come up during the conflict."

What is the right-wing opposition's response to the National Constituent Assembly initiative?

Venezuela's right-wing opposition, the so-called 'Roundtable of Democratic Unity' (MUD) coalition, originally announced in May that it would boycott the National Constituent Assembly and denounced it as an illegitimate effort to rewrite the nation's constitution. . . seemingly in contrast to the position it held in 2013, when 55 opposition leaders signed a joint statement in support of setting up a constituent assembly.

From: *Venezuela Solidarity Campaign*, "Q & A Briefing on the National Constituent Assembly" <http://www.venezuelasolidarity.co.uk/q-a-the-national-constituent-assembly-in-venezuela/>.

Dr. Francisco Dominguez, Venezuela Solidarity Campaign Secretary, commenting on the July 30 elections for a Constituent Assembly in Venezuela:

On Sunday over 8 million Venezuelans, representing a turnout of 41.5%, participated in elections for a Constituent Assembly to revise the consti-

tution, and provide an elected mechanism to help resolve the country's current difficulties.

This impressive turnout was despite many sections of the country's right-wing opposition deciding to boycott the vote, and some even calling for violent protests on the day with the explicit aim of derailing the elections. Venezuela's Public Ministry has announced that it will open a probe into the deaths reported as a result of these violent protests . . .

It is becoming clearer by the day that Venezuela's current difficulties are best resolved by dialogue, and that the majority of Venezuelans believe this and reject violence as a way to achieve political aims . . .

Hostile external intervention – such as the U.S. imposing more sanctions – will exacerbate the country's problems, not facilitate such a dialogue.

From: <http://www.venezuelasolidarity.co.uk/statement-on-venezuelas-constituent-assembly-elections/>

Guarimba

To create conditions of un-governability, the so-called "democratic opposition" had taken to barricading the roads to prevent the free movement of people and precipitate a crisis. They have set up barricades using boulders, glass, trees, trash filled bags, and anything else at their disposal. In other cases they are throwing glass and nails (called *miguelitos*, nails thrust through pieces of garden hose) onto the road to impede traffic. The police and the National Guard have cleaned city streets on numerous occasions. However, protestors hide materials and take over the streets again once the Guard departs.



Fifty-four public buses were torched in Ciudad Guyana on May 22. Photo: @TransBolivar

Walking around areas controlled by the opposition it is impossible not to notice that many streets have been covered with car oil to make the surfaces slick causing motorbikes to skid out of control. The opposition assumes that *motorizados*, those on motorcycles are government supporters. There has not only been a demonization of the *motorizados*, but also a racialization of individuals who purchased cheap Chinese motorcycles since most are from lower socioeconomic sectors and tend to be people of color. . .

Some business sectors in Táchira [a province that is an opposition stronghold] profit tremendously from the illicit trade of subsidized Venezuelan goods sent to Colombia as contraband where they obtain much higher prices. It is estimated that upwards of 30% of some Venezuelan basic food products exit the country as contraband. Shortages of basic food products have been especially evident in Táchira and Mérida where many stores shelves are empty. Gasoline that in Venezuela is heavily subsidized, costing less than 10 cents a gallon, is also part

of the contraband trade . . .

From: Miguel Tinker Salas, "What is happening in Venezuela?" <https://bolivarianyc.wordpress.com/2014/03/07/what-is-happening-in-venezuela/>

Right Wing Terrorism in Venezuela

By Frederick B. Mills, Guest Scholar at the Council on Hemispheric Affairs, and William Camacaro, Senior Research Fellow at the Council on Hemispheric Affairs

Such manipulation and meddling is obvious in the case of Venezuela. Obama's executive order declaring Venezuela an "unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States"; targeted sanctions against the government; funding for opposition organizations; as well as recent meetings between opposition leaders and U.S. officials; have provided the opposition with the confidence to stay the course for nothing less than regime change without delay. Ironically, the MUD rejects the

regional elections scheduled for December 10, 2017, for which it previously had been clamoring; repudiates the constituent assembly process; demands the release of "political prisoners"; and refuses talks with the Maduro administration mediated by Pope Francis and supported by the UN, CARICOM and other regional partners, as well as the majority of Venezuelans. . . It is urgently important to condemn not only abuses by security forces, but also the selective assassinations and hate crimes against Chavistas. . .

From: <http://www.coha.org/right-wing-terrorism-in-venezuela/>

Harsher Sanctions on Venezuela Will Only Worsen the Nation's Crisis

By Mark Weisbrot, The Hill, August 1, 2017

On Friday, a group of members of Congress published a letter opposing the threatened sanctions. It began, "We write to express our deep alarm regarding the escalating political, economic and social crisis

in Venezuela and urge you to work with our regional partners to help prevent a civil war. We strongly recommend that you support negotiations mediated by respected external actors such as Pope Francis, who enjoys credibility with broad segments of Venezuela's government, opposition, and civil society. We further encourage you to abstain from implementing unilateral economic sanctions, which could deepen the country's economic and political crisis and undermine any movements toward dialogue and negotiations."

. . . The pretext for the sanctions is that the new Constitutional Assembly will essentially carry out a coup d'état, abolishing the National Assembly — which the opposition won by a wide margin in December 2015 — and allowing President Nicolás Maduro to cancel presidential elections, which are due next year.

From: <https://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/13277>



Supporter of a National Constituent Assembly. Photo: Rosana Silva

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ROCLA UPDATE ON THE **AMERICAS**

HELP KEEP ROCLA'S WEBSITE CURRENT!

ROCLA has an informative website (see: <http://rocla.us/>) where webmaster Jim Bearden posts current information about Latin America on an ongoing basis, as well as announcements of programs and other news. If you have information, articles or action opportunities about Latin America that you believe may be of interest to ROCLA members, please email the link or content to Jim at: jeb.bearden@gmail.com. ■

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ROCLA MISSION STATEMENT

Founded in 1973, the Rochester Committee on Latin America (ROCLA) seeks to build bridges between the Rochester, NY, community and the people of Latin America. Through its monthly presentations, speakers, films, and quarterly newsletters, ROCLA educates local residents about the culture, economics and politics of the countries of Central and South America, Mexico and the Caribbean and the ways globalization, U.S. trade and drug-war policies impact the lives of their people. ROCLA also supports the work of frontline organizations involved in working for justice and democracy in the global south, including the Latin America Solidarity Committee (LASC), Nicanet, Committee in Solidarity with the people of El Salvador (CISPES), Network In Solidarity with the people of Guatemala (NISGUA), Rights Action and the Pastors for Peace Cuba Friendshipment. We also encourage our members and others to advocate for U.S. policies that support human rights and reverse the often oppressive history of U.S. involvement in Latin America. Annually, ROCLA presents its international and local White Dove Awards for outstanding leadership and service in the cause of human rights in Latin America.

Steering Committee Marilyn Anderson, Paola Betchart, Kathy Goforth, Bob and Marilyn Kaiser, Grania Marcus, Arnie Matlin, Lew Montemaggi, Peter and Gail Mott, Esperanza Roncero, Vic Vinkey, Tom Ward • **Publishing Team** Editor: Grania Marcus, Designer: Jim Anderson