

# Concerns raised about pesticides in Costa Rica

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*We are grateful to Fabiola for permission to translate and summarise her article in Semanario Universidad, the Costa Rican weekly paper. Translated and summarised by ENCA member Jill Powis with minor additions by Stephanie Williamson.*

A virtual seminar 'From the global pesticide complex to the agripoisons crisis in Costa Rica' discussed worrying aspects of Costa Rica's pesticide licensing system and use. It was jointly organised by a number of Costa Rican organisations: Biodiversity Coordination Network (RCB), CoecoCeiba - Friends of the Earth Costa Rica, Bloque Verde (Green Block) and Frenasapp (National Front of Sectors Affected by Pineapple Production).

Soledad Castro, doctoral researcher at Barcelona's Autonomous University, presented the results of research into Costa Rica's pesticide licensing system carried out from 2018-21 with Marion Werner, professor and researcher at the University at Buffalo, New York State.

She explained that a total of 1,800 pesticides are still licensed for use in Costa Rica without up-to-date studies on their potential risk to health and the environment. The problem goes back to 2004, when Costa Rica's Comptroller General formally declared that the pesticide licensing system needed to be changed. Health and environmental risk assessments would be mandatory, with evaluations carried out in Costa Rica

itself before pesticides would be licensed. In 2007 new legislation gave a 10 year deadline for these old licences to comply with the new requirements, which, however, led to a huge backlog of license updating.

In 2016, executive decrees were issued relaxing these requirements, a move described by critics as a form of deregulation. Following legal challenges, these decrees were suspended by the Constitutional Court and then countered by legislative attempts to extend further the 'useful life' of these outdated pesticides. There is now a Registration of Agrochemicals bill before the Legislative Assembly under which an affidavit would be sufficient for a substance to be approved for use and studies carried out in other countries would be acceptable. The State Phytosanitary Service confirmed to the researchers that 1,800 pesticides licensed before 2007 are still being used, without any updated risk assessments carried out. Soledad Castro expressed concern at their social and ecological impact.

Fernando Ramírez, researcher and professor at the Regional Institute for Research on Toxic Substances (IRET) of

Costa Rica's National University explained that 80% of the pesticides applied in Costa Rica qualify as highly hazardous. Furthermore, Costa Rica uses 10 times more pesticides per hectare than the United States – on average 25kg/ha of

active ingredient as compared to 2.5 kg/ha in the States.

Since 2007, Costa Rica has become an exporter of pesticides, mainly due to its high importation of technical grade active ingredients for making formulations – mixing them with adjuvants to make their application more effective. The formulated products are then exported to other countries. Costa Rica mainly imports active ingredients from India (63%), China (30%), the United States (3%) and Poland (2.5%).

According to Henry Picado, a researcher with the RCB and member of Bloque Verde, Costa Rica's pesticide industry has large yearly profits of \$2.5 billion for imports and \$700 million for exports, while, according to agronomist Elidier Vargas, the state annually loses \$22-\$27 million in tax exemptions to the sector. It is concentrated in only a few hands - according to statistics from the Ministry of Economy, Industry and Trade (MEIC), 63% of glyphosate, 50% of paraquat and 98% of 2,4-D, respectively, are imported by one company each.

Costa Rica is also one of the cheapest countries in Latin America to license a pesticide product, with an average cost of \$400, as compared to \$1,500-\$4,500 in Mexico, \$2,000 in Uruguay and \$8,500 in Argentina.

While the industry accumulates profits and enjoys tax exemptions and very low licensing costs, 64.3% of the fresh food consumed in Costa Rica contains pesticide residues. "It's basically an invasion by these businesses of our homes, our tables, our bodies," Picado said.



## Briefs on energy developments in Central America

Compiled by ENCA member Martin Mowforth

### The good – expansion of geothermal energy in El Salvador

In October (2022) the Hydroelectric Executive Commission of the Río Lempa (CEL) announced a \$620 million (USD) investment to increase its capacity to generate geothermal energy. The investment would add 90 megawatts (MW) to the country's current production.

The two current geothermal energy projects (Ahuachapán and Berlín) jointly produce 190 MW and are operated by LaGeo, a company which forms part of the CEL Group. This percentage represents about 25 per cent of El Salvador's energy matrix. It is understood that the funding will be provided by the government of El Salvador.

Further exploration of geothermal potential is also taking place elsewhere in the country.

### The ugly – still far off resolving the energy crisis in Honduras

At the beginning of October, the Honduran online news sheet *Proceso Digital* reported that the Honduran Association of Renewable Energy (AHER by its Spanish initials) had claimed that the country is far from resolving its current energy crisis.

AHER Director Samir Siryi said that not all the energy generating companies would be able to meet their target of production agreed with the government's National Electrical Energy Company (ENEE).



He also pointed out the problems of high technical and non-technical losses of energy which require investment that is not forthcoming. He stated that the electricity sub-sector would need an investment of \$3,000 million, of which \$1 billion would be for electricity distribution, \$800 million for transmission and \$1.2 billion for energy generation.

### The bad – second crack discovered in Costa Rican HEP dam

In September the Costa Rican Electricity Institution (ICE) announced that a second crack had been discovered in the Reventazón Hydroelectric Dam. ICE officials reported that the crack has appeared in one of the tunnels that links with the reservoir behind the dam and that it could cause a total collapse of the tunnel which would affect the dam's functioning during repairs.



The first crack was discovered on the reservoir side a few months before the \$1.5 billion project was opened in 2016. The dam is an important source of Costa Rica's energy supply and is often touted as 'clean' energy despite the human displacements and ecosystem alterations that such schemes cause. Although the ICE boasts about the Reventazón Dam's productive capacity, it has never lived up to the energy generation levels that were originally projected for it.

The first crack caused the closure of the energy plant for several months and it is possible that if the second one worsens, it too may necessitate closure of the plant. The ICE, however, have assured the public that the structural integrity of the dam is secure.

## Dengue outbreak in El Salvador

On 28<sup>th</sup> October, TeleSur reported that over 15,000 cases of dengue fever were suspected in El Salvador. It was hasty to add that only 57 of these were absolutely confirmed and that another 38 were deemed to be probable cases. 13 of the confirmed cases were children under 14 years old.

Despite the difference between the suspected and confirmed cases, the figure is nevertheless alarming and is four times higher than the equivalent figure at this time last year. The data were taken from the Epidemiological Bulletin of the Salvadoran Ministry of Health which provides the following warning to the population.

*We take care of your health and that of your family!*

*Our fumigation team is carrying out anti-vector actions in the cemeteries of our country; in this way prevent dengue, Zika and chikungunya to families who visit this coming November 2.*

They also ask visitors to cemeteries not to take objects such as flowers that need to stand in water in order to avoid the spread of the mosquito that transmits dengue fever.

*(Source: TeleSur, 28 October 2022.)*

## Costa Rica's roads in chaos?

As Costa Ricans and frequent visitors to the country already know, the state of Costa Rican highways is far from good. Potholes, diversions and city congestion add a lot to the time and cost of car journeys in the country.

In September a stretch of the Panamerican Highway near San Ramón was closed for at least three months for emergency repairs, and some say that this is a considerable time underestimate. The section of the road in need of repair was recently hit by a landslide which swept a bus and several other vehicles off the road causing the deaths of nine people. The road had been reopened only the day before after an inspection by the Ministry of Public Works (MOPT).

Additionally, journeys on Route 27 from San José southwards along the Pacific coastline towards Panama, are now taking three times longer to complete than they should. Recently, various routes from San José to the Caribbean coast have also been closed because of landslides.

In October, Costa Rican President Rodrigo Chaves declared a national emergency due to the poor road

conditions. Clearly, these difficulties are due in part to the heavy rains and consequent landslides, but as Chaves also made clear, "... the infrastructure in this country is truly deplorable ... This is due to the carelessness and ineptitude of how the country has been administered."

It is reported that the National Emergency Commission (CNE) will issue 'imminent danger declarations' due to the appalling infrastructure conditions. The Legislative Assembly is expected to approve a bill for the urgent approval of credit to begin repairs in the dry season. President Chaves has sought \$700 million (USD) from an environmental fund of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and will seek further funds as a loan from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB).

Various transport specialists have warned travellers to expect considerable delays over the coming weeks and months. The President of the CNE, Alejandro Picado Eduarte, said "We cannot allow the rainy season of 2023 to cause the same conditions as this year and inflict more damage. Above all, we must activate measures to protect life."

ENCA looks forward to receiving reports from our own Costa Rican friends and contacts to inform us of how and if the road conditions improve over the next few months.

## Sign-on letters

*When we as an organisation are asked by other organisations to add our collective name to a campaign letter, protest letter or lobbying letter we use the ENCA Internal e-list group to conduct a kind of democracy or consensus exercise. Normally these exercises ask members of the Internal group if they have any objections to ENCA signing on to the relevant letter and a deadline date is given for a response. The deadline usually depends on the deadline given by the requesting organisation.*

*August was a busy month for ENCA's email exercise in consultative democracy.*

### Guatemala

On 15<sup>th</sup> August, the US/Canadian organisation **Rights Action** asked ENCA to sign on to a solidarity letter with the families and plaintiffs of the **Military Diary Case in Guatemala**. In May 2022, Judge Miguel Angel Gálvez ordered the opening of the trial for the first nine accused of illegal detention, torture, forced disappearance, murder, extra-judicial execution, sexual violence and crimes against humanity of at least 183 people between 1983 and 1985.

One of the reasons that ENCA supported this letter is the known and evidenced links between the corrupt actors and private security companies with which the accused were associated and the clandestine structures that maintain corruption and impunity in the present. In the face of such corruption and impunity at high governmental and business levels, there is little hope of any real national, regional or local development in Guatemala. The trial, therefore, is crucial for present-day society in Guatemala despite its distant history.

As the case moves slowly forward, a central concern and demand of the sign-on letter was the guarantee of safety for the families, plaintiffs, lawyers, >>



prosecutors and judge of the case. The international solidarity shown by the contributes to the visibility of the struggle that relatives and survivors have carried out for decades.

### El Salvador

Shortly after the Rights Action sign-on letter request, the **Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES)** sent a request for our sign on to their letter denouncing **political persecution and human rights violations in El Salvador and calling for the release of political prisoners.**



This referred of course to the **State of Exception** declared by President Bukele during which so many human rights were, and still are, denied to the Salvadoran people, and during which it has become a crime to be young as that leads to police and authority suspicion of gang membership. During this State of Exception, many thousands of young people have been picked up and detained.

Social movement and solidarity organisations have held rallies denouncing the authoritarian Bukele regime and demanding an end to mounting human rights violations.

Beginning in 2021, the Bukele administration has also illegally imprisoned or forced into exile over 40 former opposition leaders from the leftist FMLN party. Since March 2022, those targeted captures have been expanded to the population at large: Under the ongoing State of Exception, tens of thousands of regular

citizens have been arbitrarily and illegally rounded up and incarcerated in the country's already overcrowded prisons. As of mid-August, approximately 60 people have died in custody.

We have since been informed by CISPES that their international solidarity letter really made an impact with the letter appearing in the Salvadoran news outlets *Diario CoLatino* and *Diario El Mundo*.

### Honduras

Also in August, ENCA was asked to support a petition created by the **Black Fraternal Organisation of Honduras (OFRANEH)** demanding an end to the **criminalisation of Garífuna defenders** by the previous government officials who still control the Honduran Public Ministry which includes the Justice Department and Attorney General, despite the recent change in government.

The Ministry has stated that it is investigating with a view to bringing criminal charges against OFRANEH and its investigative body (SUNLA) that was set up to make its own investigations into the disappearance two years ago of four Garífuna leaders.

After the 9<sup>th</sup> August protests demanding justice for the disappeared, the Ministry ordered their investigative body, the ATIC (Technical Agency for Criminal Investigations) to investigate Miriam Miranda the General Coordinator of OFRANEH; Dr. Luther Castillo, member of OFRANEH and the current government's Minister of Science and Technology; and Edy Tábora, a member of the Board of SUNLA and a lawyer for OFRANEH for Disturbing the Peace (1-3 years prison) and Kidnapping (3-5 years). This is a response to a non-violent protest August 9 - 11th in which the participants entered the Public Ministry's building and temporarily occupied it while trying to deliver their

demands to the Attorney General's office.

This case also gives us all an indication of the difficulties faced by the new Honduran administration of President Xiomara Castro while so many of the gangster-ridden previous government of Juan Orlando Hernández are still in place.



Because this case came so hot on the heels of the previous two sign-on letters, we circulated the details of the case to individual members of the ENCA Internal e-list group asking for individual responses and support rather than carrying out our usual group email democracy exercise.

*If any ENCA members have opinions about how our system of decision-making about such sign-on letter requests can be improved, we would be very pleased to receive new ideas and thoughts on this matter.*

Contact ENCA via our website

**ENCA.org.uk**