

Are women's human rights abused when the state does not prevent, investigate or punish male violence against women?

by Claudia Hasanbegovich*

A while ago I spent four months in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and Havana, Cuba, to research the question posed in the title of this paper. How do these states respond to requests of help by their female "citizens" to stop male violence against women? Under the framework of my doctoral thesis (PhD in Social Politics), I carried out a feminist study using research techniques from sociology, anthropology and Gender Analysis of the law (Fascio Montejo, 1999). I interviewed 43 female survivors of domestic violence and 36 agents of the state (policemen, judges, lawyers and doctors) and compared and analysed the legislation of both countries. The results are presented in this paper.

I found that 95 per cent of the Argentinean and 61 per cent of the Cuban women interviewed were treated with disparagement during childhood socialisation, as a way of teaching them their place in society. The Argentinean women interviewed had to negotiate access to education and paid work, first with their parents and later their husbands. This did not occur in Cuba because the Revolution made women's activities a political issue. The empirical results are reflected in the participation of women in the labour market in Argentina and Cuba, which stands at 30 per cent and 70 per cent respectively. The study also found different responses from the different justice and police systems when the women requested protection from their abusers. On average, the Argentinean women made 33 such requests over a 6 year period. In Cuba, the figure was 2.9 requests per woman, and protection was granted within an average of 3 months. The study also found a correlation between suicide attempts and a lack and/or ineffectiveness of the state's response. Therefore, while nine per cent of the Cuban women attempted suicide, forty per cent did so in the Argentinean case.

The statistics and the stories of the women indicate that the state plays a decisive role as facilitator of either the entrapment or empowerment of female sufferers of male violence, acting as either abuser or guarantor of human rights. The statistics therefore demonstrate that male violence is political



Photo: Rebeca Eileen Zúñiga-Hamlin. March in Tegucigalpa. November 2006

by nature, and that when the state refuses to intervene to stop the aggressor, it is directly responsible for the perpetuation of domestic violence and its impact on women's health.

The Argentinean statistics support first hand accounts. Although they are not representative, taken with the results of other international and national reports, the interviews show that where the state promotes inequality between men and women in both the private and public spheres women find it very difficult to have relationships free of violence. The opposite is true in the Cuban case. This is particularly evident in the promotion of female participation in the labour market, and in the implementation of the law. As one Cuban female lawyer noted, "In Cuba, it is the crime that is judged, not the gender of the victim and perpetrator." The Cuban women interviewed found it easier than their Argentinean counterparts to find relationships free of violence after separating from an aggressive partner.

continued on page 2

CONTENTS

- Tourism Development and Central American Women's Lives 3
- Femicide and Anti-Violence Activism 4
- Art, Gender and Resistance 5
- CAWF Supporting Innovation 6
- Making Invisible Work Visible 8
- Women's Rights in the Informal Economy 9
- Appeal on Behalf of Nicaraguan Miskito Women 12

Editorial: Disaster Capitalism in Central America

by Rebeca E. Zúniga-Hamlin

Naomi Klein has recently coined a phrase to describe Iraq, Katrina, and the crisis in global capitalism more generally. It fits equally to events in Central America. Disaster capitalism refers to the practice of taking advantage of societies suffering extreme stress to impose a savage form of capitalist accumulation. Stress can be caused at the societal level by natural events such as hurricanes, like Felix that devastated the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua in recent months, exacerbated by the all too unnatural neglect of national and international actors. Stress can also be directly caused by human actions, as occurred in the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, toppling regimes to leave a society ungoverned and ungovernable. In Latin America, such attacks have an old legacy, including the post-WWII overthrow of Arbenz in Guatemala, the 1973 coup against Allende in Chile, and the sustained campaign during the 1980s against the Sandinistas of Nicaragua. External pressure serves to dis-

articulate states and societies, leaving citizens unprotected by their governments and disconnected from each other. The process is the same as that induced in individuals through torture, stripping them of their identities and reducing them to blank slates on which to experiment. Today's experiment is being called globalization, and it is a form of capitalism in which market actors face no restraints in their pursuit of profit.

The people of Central America respond the best they can, forming social movements to fight for their rights, and driving their governments towards more democratic practices. The women's movement has been part of this struggle to place the priorities of people before profit, yet they fight an uphill battle. The disasters have been great, and governments have been free to respond to the most powerful economic actors, who use their wealth to secure low taxes, state subsidies, freedom from regulation, and especially access to cheap women's labour.

One way governments keep women's labour cheap is by denying rights, including

rights to equal political citizenship, economic justice, and control over their own bodies and health. The elimination of therapeutic abortion in Nicaragua is the latest attack on women's rights, one further step in removing obstacles to an experiment in savage capitalism. This part of the experiment is particularly brutal, as it directly leads to deaths of innocent women, denied care or afraid to seek it when simple procedures could save them. Instead, they die, and those that survive are left in fear that speaking out will lead to chipping away at other rights.

There is only one response. Women and men from both North and South must organise and demand that their voices are heard. The experiment in savage capitalism has led to wealth for the few and death and despair for many. The first thing to overturn is the punishment of pregnant women in Nicaragua, reinstating the right to therapeutic abortion. Next, the entire experiment of savage capitalism must be rolled back, and in its place a citizen's capitalism instated, in which people come before profit.

continued from page 1

Of the existing theories on male violence, the theory of patriarchy (Dobash & Dobash, 1980) and its adaptation (Hasanbegovic, 2001) were extremely useful in analysing the results of this study. Of particular use were the aspects relating to cause, reproduction and the response of the state to male violence. Private patriarchy consists of traditional gender identity, the dependencies formed, and the violence suffered by women during childhood and in adult relationships. Public patriarchy is the discriminatory response of the state in depriving female victims of male violence of access to justice. This form of patriarchy "entrapped" the Argentinean women into violent situations, and contributed to the duration of suffering during and after separation, and health complications; suicidal acts and/or thoughts to "escape the feeling that there was no way out of the situation". The public patriarchy also gives impetus to political resistance. Women have formed associations and mobilised to defend their children against the Argentinean state.

This is not to say that the public patriarchal order has been eliminated in Cuba, nor that it does not exist in the private sphere. However, patriarchy has been eroded to allow women's greater economic independence, greater participation in the labour market, and the formation of the female identity as a "worker". The Cuban women interviewed were more conscious of their right to defend themselves and to leave a violent relationship, even when they did not know the exact process, where to go or how to access legal aid. The weaker form of patriarchy in Cuba allows women to access justice and police protection, and discriminatory state response was the exception, not the rule. This contrasts with the Argentinean study, which found that state

discrimination and re-victimisation of the women was the norm.

Cuba does not conform to the majority of international organisations' legal or social recommendations for dealing with domestic violence. However, the state appears to respond far better to women who suffer from domestic violence. This suggests that the uniformity and universality of said recommendations should be re-evaluated (Pahl et al, 2003). Legislative reform on this issue should focus on the *implementation of the law*, and assuring that the law is enacted *without discrimination against women*, rather than looking to add specific wording to existing laws, which does not reach the intended beneficiaries.

This study also demonstrates that state violence is complicit with violent men, producing an almost intolerable situation for women and provoking a series of health problems. However, it also triggers change. The Argentinean women have mobilised largely through the identity of the "mother". In fighting for their children, these women are "transformed". They become women that challenge their patriarchal socialisation; they become political women; they become women that subvert the places traditionally assigned them by the patriarchal order.

This article suggests that male violence can destroy women's lives; that when the state "does not implement the laws to punish and prevent violence", it leaves indelible marks. When the state abuses women's rights, it transforms male violence into individual catastrophe, robbing women and their children of vital years. It ignores the violent man's crime and places guilt with the woman for challenging their "places" as "private property of their partners". The female survivors of the Argentinean public patriarchy who managed to have their ex-partners violence stopped, are invested with

the joy of survival and adolescence; enjoying activities that were forbidden to them when they were younger.

In contrast, the Cuban case shows that when the state guarantees women's rights, male violence becomes a fact of the past. Perhaps this explains why the Cuban women interviewed did not become political activists. Nor did they denounce their government, even with guaranteed anonymity in the confidence of a politically-independent foreign researcher such as myself.

The study also suggests that the value the state places on its female citizens manifests itself in the way in which it legislates, interprets, and executes the law to guarantee private lives free of violence. It manifests itself in the extent to which the state guarantees women's full economic, social, intellectual and political development, actively or passively. I propose, therefore, that we cannot talk of *democracy* where women are second class citizens, where gender discrimination exists, or where the agents of the state (male and female) put sexist prejudice before the law with "total impunity". In other words, the existence of a "parallel state" (Copelon, 1994) is a consequence of the lack of democracy for female victims of crimes committed against them by their partners. It is paramount that legislative reform is enacted with effective mechanisms of control over agents of the state in order to guarantee the implementation of the law without discrimination, and the punishment of those who employ their ideology instead of the law. Until this ceases to occur and while women continue to fight against violence in private, these pseudo-democracies are better classified as gender dictatorships.

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Tourism Development and Central American Women's Lives: Promoting Empowerment or Reinforcing Inequality?

by Lucy Ferguson*

Tourism is becoming an increasingly significant development strategy for Central American governments. Along with *maquila* production, remittances and non-traditional agricultural exports, tourism is a growing aspect of Central American export profiles. In particular, tourism has been seen as a tool for 'poverty reduction' in the region. The negative impact of mass tourism in Mexico and the Caribbean – such as environmental degradation, sex tourism and exploitative labour practices – has been well documented and is familiar to many. However, the type of tourism being promoted in Central America is of a more 'low-impact' nature and as such has not received significant attention from researchers. Many in the field of tourism studies have claimed that 'ecotourism' or 'community-based tourism' are in some ways less exploitative than mass tourism and have more potential to promote greater gender equality. However, recent research into the impacts of tourism development in Central America suggests that the picture is in fact more complex than such analyses might suggest.

What is interesting about Central American tourism – in comparison to other development strategies such as *maquila* production – is that it generally takes place in rural, somewhat remote areas, with the effect of ushering in capitalist development at a much more rapid pace than surrounding areas, villages or regions. In the three communities I visited – Monteverde in Costa Rica, Copán Ruinas in Honduras and Placencia in Belize – tourism had all

but replaced agriculture as the primary income-generating strategy for the majority of residents in less than twenty years. One of the most significant social changes in these communities has been the substantive incorporation of women into the workforce. In many ways this is due to the nature of the tourism industry in itself, where flexible, unskilled and semi-skilled workers are required to staff the growing number of hotels, restaurants and bars in these villages. As might be expected, the opportunities for decent, well-paid work in tourism are highly stratified by gender, ethnicity and nationality. For example, most of the participants in the research expressed clearly defined ideas about the 'best' kinds of jobs in tourism – usually a tour guide, business owner or diving instructor – and which people were most suited to those jobs. The number of women in such jobs was relatively small, with most women concentrated in somewhat less rewarding jobs in hotels, restaurants and bars.

Despite the relatively flexibilised and highly insecure nature of tourism employment, the majority of women workers interviewed discussed how such work had broadened their social horizons through contact with people from all over the world as well as offered some leverage in the home and community through earning an independent income. However, as with most experiences of incorporation into the paid workforce, most women had not found that their domestic tasks had been diminished. Many of the more conservative community members interviewed argued that women had 'forgotten their family responsibilities' and suggested that tourism communities were

experiencing a 'disintegration of the family'. In response to these kinds of perceptions, policy-makers in Central America have begun to intervene in the social aspects of tourism development. Projects are being devised which explicitly aim to integrate women into tourism production 'without disrupting family structures'. This means that development projects such as the World Bank's *Regional Development in the Copán Valley* – which states 'increase gender equity' as one of its key objectives – are in many ways using tourism as a way in which to reinforce inequalities of gender and ethnicity in Central America. By incorporating women into tourism through *artesania* production social hierarchies are reinforced and traditional patriarchal family and community relations are maintained.

The case of tourism development raises some important questions about gender equality in Central America and the opportunities this presents for the empowerment of women. Tourism can make a positive contribution to women's lives in many ways – through interesting work, contact with a wide range of people and challenging the conservative values of communities. However, the current path of tourism development being pursued in the region should be viewed with caution and scepticism in terms of its potential to contribute to greater gender equality.

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This article is based on recent PhD research in Costa Rica, Honduras and Belize.



Photo: Rebecca Eileen Zuniga-Hamlin. Lake Cocibolca, Granada, Nicaragua.

“Ciudad Juárez, Mexico: Femicide and Anti-Violence Activism”

Kathleen Staudt*

Many people have become familiar with Mexico's large, infamous northern border city, Ciudad Juárez for horrifying femicide. Since 1993, over 400 women and girls have been murdered, according to Amnesty International, governmental, and non-governmental sources. A third of these murder victims, their bodies found mutilated in the desert periphery and on city streets, experienced the terror of rape and torture before death.

While the details are gruesome, an important part of the overall story involves growing civil society activism and increased awareness about violence against women, including the grim, everyday domestic violence that is all too common for women in many parts of the world. In this brief essay, I outline engaged research since 2002 about both violence against women and the strong social movements that challenge government, especially police impunity and ineffective law enforcement processes.

Many journalists have speculated about the possible murderers: foreigners (especially sex offenders), gang members, organ traffickers, drug cartels, snuff filmmakers, *los juniors* (sons of the rich), or all of the above. Evidence for any or all of these theories is scanty. What can be documented, however, is the government's inability to provide public security and its casual disregard for women's lives, especially those in the working-class majority.

After fifteen years of social movements, beginning with mothers of the victims and moving to human rights and feminist activists on both sides of the border, politicians no longer 'blame the victims,' their clothing and behavior. But local and state police, public prosecutors, and judges have been slow to investigate and sloppy about following professional procedures; they also treat families of the victims with disregard and disrespect. Law enforcement is resistant to change.

In the United States, it took three decades of persistent feminist activism to change laws and make police practices more responsive to victims and survivors. Still, U.S. law enforcement is flawed, fragmented and bureaucratic in efforts to deal with survivors and serial batterers.

In Ciudad Juárez, activists and the wider public are keenly aware and critical of broadly defined violence against women, both femicide victims and survivors of domestic violence. In surveys and workshops with a representative sample of 404 women aged 15-39 that I conducted in collaboration with a large health NGO in Ciudad Juárez in 2004-5, participants expressed near-uniform awareness about the criminality of domestic



Photo: mexico.indymedia.org

violence and rape along with cynicism about batterers' promises to change or their excuses for such behavior because of alcohol.

The research documented the extent of violence and the women at greatest risk for domestic violence. Over one in four women reported physical violence in their lives and one in ten, sexual assault (and half of the latter, rape at the hands of partners). The majority of participants live in households with meager economic resources (earning incomes of less than US\$100 weekly) whose education levels reach *primaria* (Grade 6) or less. Seventy percent of the participants were born outside of Ciudad Juárez, a city of migrants, most of them from Mexico's north-central interior. Without extended family and friends, migrants lack social capital that might provide safety nets should they exit relationships.

Survivors of domestic violence fit the profile of many women in the city: low income, primary education, and migrant. However, a special feature stands out compared to women who report lives free of physical violence. The survivors are far more likely to report verbal and psychological abuse from their partners. Such abuse also undermines women's wherewithal to leave dangerous households.

Women in Ciudad Juárez are also at risk for domestic-violence homicide, i.e. femicide. And police impunity also reigns for these crimes as well. Most participants in the research study and workshops neither trust the police, nor denounce crimes to the authorities. In the rare situations where men face accountability for domestic violence,

they pay fines for marks of physical abuse, the size of fines dependent on visible scars and bruises more or less than two weeks.

Anti-violence activists have produced some changes. Increasingly, powerful business, industrial and corporate elites call for reforms in law enforcement. Their motivation is primarily to cleanse the image of the city. Some cosmetic changes have been made in problematic law enforcement institutions. Occasional bi-national, Mexico-U.S. government cooperation has occurred over training or tracking potential sex offenders. But batterers move about freely.

Transnational activists once flocked to Ciudad Juárez in solidarity with the victims and their families, the peak point for which was 2003-4. The anti-violence dramatic production, *Vagina Monologues*, has been performed in Spanish and English on both sides of the border, and its author Eve Ensler wrote a monologue focused on femicide. In 2004, the largest-ever cross-border march between El Paso and Ciudad Juárez drew up to 8,000 people, including some Mexico City and Hollywood film stars, to denounce the violence.

Dramatic, high-visibility activism is difficult to sustain without tremendous energy, resources, and continuous media attention. In its place on both sides of the international border, one finds other kinds of NGOs—nonprofit organisations such as shelters, counseling centres, advocacy groups, and civil rights organisations that provide assistance to immigrants in the U.S. under the Violence Against Women Act. When the social movement activists, most of them volunteers, move to other issues and places, or retreat from activism, the only NGOs remaining tend to be nonprofit staff, themselves struggling for resources to sustain their services.

In 2005 and thereafter, international human rights groups turned their attention to a femicide trail through the Americas, a trail of tragedy that seems to run parallel with international drug routes. Meanwhile, some local and cross-border anti-violence activists, many from nonprofit NGOs, continue their everyday work and less dramatic pressure on law enforcement institutions that are long overdue for change.

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“Femicide Crossing Boundaries: Art, Gender and Resistance”

by Rolando Longoria*

In March of 2002, in commemoration of International Women’s Day, a group of protesters clad in black erected a large cross on the international bridge between Juárez, Mexico and El Paso, Texas (Santa Fe Bridge; Wright 283). Transported by a group of women marching from Chihuahua city, the large black cross contained a sign reading, “¡Ni Una Más!” [“Not One More!”], 268 nails commemorating the femicidal deaths of countless women throughout Juárez, photographs and clothes of the victims, and a mutilated mannequin torso (Wright 283). As an act of disruption, this protest sought to bring attention to an issue that has been silenced by Mexican and U.S. governments and communities alike. A collaboration between grassroots organisation in Ciudad Juárez and Ciudad Chihuahua, this protest marked an important act of resistance against widespread sexual violence, mutilation, torture, and murder invoking attention at the local, national, and international levels. By marching from Ciudad Chihuahua to Ciudad Juárez and onto international territory, these women re-enacted the often treacherous migration from the interior of Mexico to the border, where thousands of immigrants from rural Mexico settle for work. Simultaneously, this act sought to make the presence of femicide visible to Mexican and U.S. citizens alike, challenging the idea that violence is located/contained by a particular national border. By placing the cross on the international bridge, the *Mujeres de Negro* [Women in Black] noted that violence in one nation is a concern for all nations.

In November 2002, set to correspond with the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, nine artists collaborating with grassroots activist groups released a number of posters denouncing the murders and demanding justice (Sarhandi 2003). After displaying these images in Juárez, artists continued working together to produce over sixty images denouncing the murders, displaying them in Metro stations throughout Mexico city in order to reach a wider audience than galleries and museums could provide. Each image was donated by the artist, who allowed activists to place their own text on them. The posters are tied together by a common slogan of “Las Muertas de Juárez Demandan Justicia” [The Dead Women of Juárez Demand Justice], yet each poster takes on its own theme, design style, and subject. For artist Patricia Hordoñez, creator of “Ya Basta,” breaking the silence surrounding the murders seems to be the central subject. Her image features a black and white background with a red mouth screaming “Ya Basta!” [Stop!]. Emerging from the mouth the words



“mutilation, violation, bites, punches,” and “impunity.” Mutilation, rape, bite marks, brutality, and government-sponsored impunity have been common occurrences in Juárez’s cases of femicide, yet these facts have been actively suppressed and refuted by the Juárez government’s investigative forces. A number of scholars note that questioning victims’ sexual character, intimidation, torture, and maligning activists and grassroots organisations have been used to discredit claims of violence and the struggle to end femicide. Ordoñez’s poster is literally a call-to-action that breaks government-imposed and socially-reinforced silences, a call to end the assassination and murder of women on the Texas-Mexico border and globally.

Luis Fernando’s image also grapples with a different sort of silence. Central to the image, we see a young woman standing in front of hundreds of tally marks. Superimposed over her is a red target, and while the text above her repeats the slogan calling for justice, the text below her notes, “The living women of Juárez demand safety.” Fernando’s image is important in that it challenges discourses that dehumanize victims in favor of statistics. Countless figures regarding the murders exist, ranging from 200 to 500. Sometimes the impact of these figures is deepened by noting the number of disappeared women, ranging somewhere between 400 to 4,000. I must admit that I have referred to such information in my writing as well, hoping to convey the magnitude and severity of the situation. In fact, I believe that in the earliest years when this phenomenon began, scholars, investigators, and reporters counted the dead carefully with the best of intentions. Such methods are required in areas of intense violence, war, and genocide. Yet while it began with the best of intentions, we can

easily see that this has become a completely different phenomenon that silences critical discourse regarding femicide.

Scholars who have been lured towards the tactic of relying on figures become entangled in a vicious game of numbers that constantly shift and change. Notions of socio-cultural, historical, economic, legal, and even international factors leading towards the creation of a femicidal atmosphere are erased in favor of a number. The diversity of the victims, their unique situations, origins, movements through the country and information about their attacks are silenced, forcing critical thinkers to reduce data to a set of assumed social implications. Articles relying on such data remain uncritical of the situation, shirking important analysis of trends, systems, and structures of violence in favor of their outcomes. Fernando’s image effectively pulls this analytical tactic into question by humanizing the face of the victim as a woman who still lives. As it foregrounds the victim, the image communicates an invisible threat by superimposing a target on the subject. This image can be seen in to ways, the first being that all women currently residing in femicidal atmospheres are potential targets of sexual and gender violence. The second reading of this image demands action from the viewer, constructing the viewer as targeting the woman within the image. This visual construction notes society as complicit in sustaining atmospheres of femicide, either through inaction regarding sexual and gendered violence, silence in reference to sexual and gendered violence, or by committing criminal. As a call to action, this poster poses a corollary: we may realize the humanity of the victims, but we must also protect those women who are alive. Effectively, Fernando’s image posits the analytical tactic of counting the dead as a deflective tactic that delays the struggle for safety and justice in favor of statistical data.

Many scholars approach femicide globally (and specifically in Juárez) as an issue isolated to the Third World seen as existing separately from the First World. Femicide is popularly conceived of as obeying geographic and national boundaries, as a phenomenon confined to Latin America. The subject of study within the Third World has been framed as the Third World itself spawning femicidal trends and atmospheres separate from a global network, rather than such trends and atmospheres as inherently transnationally linked and globally reinforced.

When I was a senior in high school, a classmate’s sister went missing from her dorm room in nearby Las Cruces, New Mexico. Her family, friends, and activists blanketed the city with missing person’s posters; the news continually aired her photograph, description, and law enforcement

contact information. Our televised high school announcements also featured her photograph and description daily. On March 24, 1998, police released a statement confirming that a body found in the Las Cruces desert was indeed our classmate's sister Carly. Her attackers, who police apprehended through eyewitness accounts and DNA evidence, confessed to killing her together, leaving the body in the desert to continue partying, then returning a few days later to burn her clothes and all of her belongings. One defendant claims there was enough time in-between the murder and his return for him to return home, rest, go to work at his father's maquiladora in Juárez, and return to the site later with his accomplice. We cannot take Carly's case lightly, as the simple occurrence of a student's murder. Carly was abducted, attacked, brutalized, and murdered in the same fashion as victims of femicide in Juárez. Carly's death bears many resemblances to the Juárez murders, including a tie to a Juárez maquiladora, which one perpetrator's father owned and where he was employed. This is clearly a phenomenon of femicidal violence and sadistic masculinity crossing borders. Martinez's attacker literally symbolizes violent and sadistic masculinity's ability to cross geographic and national



borders, to select victims at multiple locations with little hindrance.

I would like to pose a call to action, asking activists and scholars to critically examine and extend our notions of sexual and gender-

based violence, resistance, and justice past pre-conceived borders that may be hindering our sense of global sexual justice. In calling for an end to violent and sadistic masculinity, impunity, and femicide, let us be vigorous in pushing past notions of violence as geographically, nationally, or socioculturally specific. The violence posed by femicide uses a range of tactics to target and brutalize a range of identities and bodies, and we must be vigorous in making inroads into these often neglected realities in our scholarship. Violence against women in one nation is of concern to all nations. Likewise, violence against a specific sex, gender, identity, or body is of concern to all people, for it symbolizes the gradual and targeted degradation of the human identity by forces harboring violent, sadistic masculine identities against feminine identities.

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The CAWF Supporting Innovative and Vital Work for Women's Rights in Central America

by Molly Keefe and Millie Brobston

Karla Lisseth García, a university student and member of the Network of Human Rights Promoters in Matagalpa, Nicaragua, speaks of the impact that her work with this group has had on her life and surroundings: *"In my community girls are breaking the age old cycle of staying at home, and we are beginning to dream about different possibilities for our lives. Adults and our families have a more open mind and listen to what we say: where once I was just another member of my village, I am now seen as a leader"*.

The Network of Human Rights Promoters provides a space for girls and young women to reflect on their lives and promote their rights as young women. Through the Network, young women and girls find opportunities to develop leadership and confidence despite the prevailing conservative attitudes in their communities that seek to limit their potential.

This is just one example of the groups that the Central American Women's Fund was created to support. Founded in 2003, the Fund is the first grantmaking organisation in the region that is committed exclusively to supporting the innovative and vital work of diverse groups of women – especially young

women - in defending and promoting their human rights.

The vision of the Central American Women's Fund is a Central America in which women – especially young women - are guaranteed their right to physical and emotional integrity, to economic justice and to participate as leaders in making decisions that will affect their lives and their communities.

The Fund is committed to being a source of funding and support for groups that have little or no access to financial resources, such as young women's groups, groups in underserved areas such as rural communities and Central America's Caribbean Coast, and groups comprised of especially marginalised women. The themes that these groups focus on in their work are diverse and include respect for sexual diversity, Indigenous and Afro-Caribbean women, training and support for sex workers, domestic and sexual violence, advocacy for incarcerated women, HIV prevention and advocacy, economic justice, and participation and leadership development.

In the first year of grantmaking five groups in Nicaragua received support from the Fund; in current grantmaking cycle, the Fund's fourth, grants were given to 56 groups of women in Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala. This year the



Fund expands to Belize and Costa Rica, with plans to support approximately 85 groups in the next funding cycle. Grantees are selected using a participatory process, and new applicants and current grantees vote for the projects that they feel are most important for women in Central America. Through grantmaking, scholarships and support for regional events, the Fund distributed a total of \$418,209 in 2006-2007.

The Fund's core program, *Ola Joven* (Young Wave), prioritises groups with young women ages 15 to 30 in leadership positions. Encouraging young women's leadership is critical in Central America today, as young people comprise the majority of their respective populations: in Nicaragua 70% of the population is under the age of 30, and

in Honduras an estimated 50% of the total population is under the age of 18.

The support shared with young women's groups through the *Ola Joven* program goes beyond grants and extends to ongoing capacity-building and networking opportunities, such as training workshops, experience exchanges and mid-term site visits. At the end of each grantmaking cycle, all grantees come together and evaluate the social change impact of their work in their personal lives and in their communities.

Guadalupe Cosigua Meletz and Vilma Leticia Tuy, from the Guatemalan group Association for the Integral Development of Mayan Guatemala (ASODIGUA), reflected on their experience during a recent exchange for Indigenous and Afro-Caribbean women: *"The themes that we discussed have allowed us to look within, and rediscover our true selves and our pride in being a part of the many diverse indigenous communities in the world. Through this experience we have come to know ourselves better and we have learned to respond with clarity and in celebration of being a part of Guatemala's indigenous community"*.

Tackling Urgent Human Rights Issues

On October 26, 2006, Nicaragua's National Assembly voted to criminalize therapeutic abortion, a legal resource that saved hundreds of women with life-threatening pregnancies every year. Doctors now face up to 8 of years in prison if they interrupt a pregnancy, even when they are trying to save a woman's life. Since the National Assembly voted to penalize therapeutic abortion, 80 women have died from life-threatening pregnancies; their deaths could have been prevented if therapeutic abortion were available.

The Fund responded to this urgent human rights threat by creating the Therapeutic Abortion program. Central America has become a region whose countries are



Photo: Mikkel Iversen



Photo: ASODIGUA

counted among those worldwide with the strictest laws on abortion and medical abortion procedures, especially in the case of Nicaragua and El Salvador. After the penalisation of therapeutic abortion in Nicaragua, the Fund created this program and through a participative selection process 22 national organisations and local initiatives working to raise awareness about the need to guarantee a woman's right to this life-saving procedure were granted \$84,000 in February of this year.

The Fund also supports urgent human rights initiatives through its other grantmaking programs, Sexuality and Rights, Labor Rights and Rapid Response.

Fundraising for Women's Human Rights

In a region where most philanthropy is based on charity and giving to religious institutions, the Fund is creating a culture of philanthropy in Central America that advances women's rights. Committed to the idea that philanthropy is not just for the wealthy, and that everyone can contribute to social change in their communities, the Fund uses creative and inclusive fundraising strategies to mobilise resources.

The Fund leads an annual 100-day fundraising campaign, which begins on November 25th, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, and

ends on March 8th, International Women's Day. This campaign captivates international as well as regional attention, and fundraising efforts in the United States and Europe include lively house parties thrown by donors and friends of the Fund.

Fund grantees are active participants in the campaign, voluntarily carrying out diverse and innovative fundraising activities in their communities. Grantee groups feel inspired to join in the fundraising efforts to support new groups of women that apply for funding. As one young grantee told us last year, *"We want to ensure that new groups have the opportunity to receive support from the Fund, and to know that we have contributed 'our little grain of sand' to the campaign"*.

This year the Fund inaugurated a new office in San Francisco, California as part of its strategy to increase diaspora fundraising and involve Central Americans living outside of the region in mobilising support for women's rights and social change in their home countries.

The Central American Women's Fund's innovative grantmaking strategies have contributed to building a young women's movement across borders that is beginning to revitalise the women's movement in the region. The Fund is leveraging more money for women's human rights in Central America so that women organising to defend and promote their human rights can continue to come together and make their voices heard.

Making Invisible Work Visible - Household Workers get Organised

by Marilyn Thomson

Throughout Latin America an army of women work in private homes¹ cleaning, ironing, washing and doing other household chores, but their labour rights are not always recognised nor respected. Household workers themselves are often unaware that they have rights, even if these are inadequate.

Since 1988 the Confederación Latinoamericana y del Caribe de Trabajadoras del Hogar – CONLACTRAHO has been trying to rectify this situation. The Confederation was set up by household workers who are involved in organisations and trade unions in different countries in the region. They aim is to gather information, share experiences and lobby for international recognition of their sector and of their rights. They now have members in fourteen countries in Latin America: including Guatemala, Costa Rica and Mexico, as well as migrant *Latina* workers organisations in the USA and Canada. Since its creation they have held 5 congresses in different countries; they meet every 4 or 5 years and agree a plan of action and elect a new secretariat. Members agree to support the setting up of new organisations, to find



spaces in which to make visible the issues for household workers in their own countries and internationally and to strengthen new leaders and members through training and other capacity building activities.

They have received some financial support from the regional office of the ILO for their activities, which has helped them to

move forward and to develop their strategy as a regional organisation.

“Women in the sectors don’t have the culture of organising, of making demands and often don’t want to take on commitments as a they are scared or don’t want the additional responsibility”

*Marcelina Bautista
current General Secretary of
CONLACTRAHO*

On a recent visit to Mexico I spoke to Marcelina and a report of our interview and an article on the issues for migrant domestic workers in Central America will be in the next edition of the CAWN newsletter look out for it early in 2008.

1 As part of a campaign in Mexico City in 2000 that aimed to “dignify” domestic service, women working in domestic work were asked how they wanted to be referred to, as it is common for them to be called servants, maids or more pejorative names. The first choice of the majority of the over 2,000 surveyed was *empleada del hogar* or household employee; followed by *trabajadora en servicio domestico* or worker in domestic service, then *trabajadora del hogar* or home worker. In English we tend to use the term domestic worker or household worker.

Civil Society Strengthens the State to Protect Women’s Rights

by Centro de Estudios de la Mujer

Violence Against Women continues to be a serious problem in Honduras, with only 17.6 percent of the 10,116 domestic violence cases presented to the Courts in 2006 have had legal resolution. This was an increase of 44.6% from the prior year. While insufficient, the slight increase can be attributed partly to the actions of women’s groups and civil society organisations, who are advocating for improvements in the quality of state institutions.

Among the efforts was the CEMH and CAWN project Challenge Violence Against Women funded by the Big Lottery Fund. Through that project, civil servants participated in Inter-institutional Committees, forums and workshops. A total of 33 government officials were sensitised with respect to gender based violence, gaining knowledge of the legal framework of the Law against Domestic Violence, and learning to apply protection and prevention measures.

The methodology applied during the workshops was “Step by Step” or *Caminando en tus zapatos*. *Caminando en tus zapatos* is a methodology where each workshop participant is given a heavy rucksack and a baby size doll with the idea that they could identify with the real and daily situation that women face in their critical route through state institutions seeking a response to stop violence. Participants role-played the justice operators and make decisions for different situations that they confront.

Each of the decisions they take has a consequence for the victim. Participants were trained to recognize incorrect decisions including errors, failure to apply safety measures on time, leaving victims unprotected by police monitoring, or dismissing their complaints. For each incorrect decision that could imply a bigger risk for the victim, the participant acting the role received a plaster that is stuck on different visible parts from their body; face, hands, arms, etc. The idea was for civil servants to identify the injuries and beatings

that women experience from their aggressors as a result of decisions that create greater risks for battered women.

The workshop was extremely successful; the participants were sensitised; they made commitments to improve the quality of service; and they learned about common failures within the system. In the department where the justice operators were trained, Intibucá, there is an indication that this learning is having an impact. For the first time, three perpetrators of domestic violence have been sanctioned.



Women's Rights in the Informal Economy

By Tiana Doht*

The second instalment in the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) seminar series on poverty and workers' rights reconvened representatives from NGOs, trade unions and academia to discuss issues around women's labour organisation in the informal economy.

The seminar, titled 'Richer or Poorer? Globalisation, International Trade and Women's Work,' was held on 8 June 2007 at City University, London. Participants from War on Want, Transport and General Workers Union, and Central America Women's Network (CAWN) were among those sharing information and opinions on the challenges facing women workers today.

Talks centred on the struggles around organising in defence of workers' rights in the informal economy. Vinita Singh (Ethical Trading Initiative) stressed the high numbers and percentage of women working in casual, temporary and sub-contracted positions that characterise the informal economy. The vulnerability of many women to exploitation and abuse is exacerbated by their isolation, irregular hours, low pay and insecurity.

Throughout the day, presentations gave

names and faces to women working under the radar of rights regulation and enforcement as homeworkers, subcontracted employees and domestic servants. Examples ranged from Tesco workers in Africa to house cleaners in Ireland. The issue of undocumented migration highlighted the role of globalisation and the increasing fluidity between national boundaries as another challenge to organisation.

Amid the disheartening statistics and stories, inspiration and strength were also conveyed as seminar participants strategised ways forward. To reach women workers in the informal economy, Inez McCormack (Global Coalition for Women's Rights) argued that organisation strategies must begin with 'the shape of women's lives'. According to McCormack, this means moving away from structures based on 'skilled male sectionalism' that have historically dominated trade unions. Organisation must be coordinated around the various lifestyles, hours and priorities of women who work not only as employees but as mothers.

For Jane Wills of Queen Mary University, protecting the rights of women workers also means rallying around the common threads that connect people, including religion and communities.

A re-emerging topic was how to narrow the gap between official corporate policy and the realities of the informal economy's 'invisible workforce'. The weak enforcement of protective measures on the ground calls for new forms of labour regulation, according to seminar attendees. For some participants, this demands a stronger collaboration between existing trade unions and community organisations. For others, it requires a revolutionary transformation in the power structures of labour rights activism.

It is unclear what form organisation will take to more effectively establish and protect the rights of women workers. However, forums such as 'Richer or Poorer' represent the progress being made in facilitating dialogue between parties and making women's rights a priority for all.

The ESRC seminar series includes eight seminars on international labour and poverty. It is co-hosted by the Trade Union Congress (TUC), City University and Leeds University.

*Tiana Doht is a volunteer at CAWN, she can be contacted at tiana_doht@yahoo.com

Photo: CONLACTRAHO



Mexico, Independent Union wins Vote

Published on maquilasolidarity.org

Despite employer harassment and intimidation, mass firings, and threats of a factory closure, on Friday, November 23, workers at the Vaqueros Navarra jean factory in Tehuacan, Mexico stood up to their employer and voted in favour of the independent September 19 Union, which is affiliated with the Authentic Labour Front (FAT). The final vote count, which included the votes of approximately 45 dismissed workers, was 263 for the September 19 Union, 187 for the CROM, and 3 for the CROC. Both the CROM and the CROC are "official unions" supported by the employer and the state PRI government. The CROC currently holds the title to the collective agreement at the factory.

The victory is even more impressive considering the nature of the election. Each individual worker had to walk up to a table where a representative of his/her employer, the official unions, and the state labour authorities were standing, and verbally state which union he/she supported.

Despite this blatantly undemocratic process, the workers, most of whom are young, indigenous women, stood up to the powers that be and voiced their vote for the independent union.

Despite this precedent-setting victory, the struggle is far from over. Both official unions and the employer have contested the votes of the approximately 45 dismissed workers, and the CROM is challenging the September 19 Union's legal status.

The Vaqueros Navarra campaign will now shift focus to pressuring the employer to accept the election results and negotiate with September 19, take no retaliatory action against the workers who voted their conscience, reinstate the unjustly fired workers, and keep the factory open.

For further information and how to support this initiative visit:
<http://en.maquilasolidarity.org>

California jury awards US\$3.3 million to Nicaraguan banana workers

Published on www.nicanet.org

A Los Angeles jury awarded US\$3.3 million to six Nicaraguan workers who had said they were sterile as a result of pesticide used on a banana plantation operated by Dole Fresh Fruit Co. The suit accused Dole and Standard Fruit Co., now part of Dole, of acting negligently and of attempting to hide its use of the pesticide DBCP (known as Nemagon or Fumazone) and of hiding the consequences of its use during the 1970s. The pesticide was used to kill a microscopic worm which can damage the roots of the banana trees.

Dow Chemical and Amvac Chemical

Corp., producers of the pesticide were also accused of "actively withholding information about the toxicity of DBCP to the reproductive system." Amvac arrived at an agreement before the case went to court to pay the workers US\$300,000, according to spokesperson Kelly Kozuma. The six workers, who will receive between US\$311,200 and US\$834,000, were part of a group of 12 workers who had sued Dole and Dow. The jury found that both companies contributed to the damage caused to the workers.

IRENE is set up to strengthen international workers solidarity. By organising international seminars and workshops it gives attention to new areas of work and provides new inputs in existing work. IRENEs activities stimulate the exchange between organisations in the South and the North and within Europe (also Eastern Europe).

In 2007, The Global Union IUF and IRENE built up an international network "...NAME..", on "RESPECT AND RIGHTS FOR DOMESTIC WORKERS" a project for which the IUF takes the responsibility and which is based on the recommendations of the international conference 'Protection for Domestic Workers'. For further information contact:
AvLuijken@irene-network.nl
or visit:
http://www.irene-network.nl/workers_is/workeris.htm

President of AMNLAE speaks out against ban on therapeutic abortion

Published on www.nicanet.org

Dora Zeledón, president of the Luisa Amanda Espinoza Women's Movement (AMNLAE), said on Nov. 23 that "Each day the state goes backwards in terms of women's rights. In the last 16 years there has not been one law that answers to the

needs of women. And now even our right to life has been penalized."

Zeledón lamented that the National Assembly, along with banning therapeutic abortion which had been permitted in Nicaragua for more than 100 years, also refused to include the crime of femicide in the new Penal Code. She urged the legislators to pass the Family Code which has been "locked in a drawer for years," to decriminalise therapeutic abortion, and to pass a budget with a gender focus. She said that the Ministries of Health and Education should carry out campaigns to raise awareness about violence against women and improve a woman's access to the justice system when she is a victim of violence. She noted that violence against women affects not only women but children as well which impacts the whole society. Thousands of women participated in marches in Managua and in the various departments to stop violence against women during the week preceding Nov. 25.

Meanwhile, the Nicaraguan Pro-Human Rights Association (ANPDH) filed an accusation with a Managua public prosecutor against nine women members of the Nicaraguan Network of Women Against Violence including the coordinator of that organisation, Violeta Delgado, and other women's organisations accusing them of covering up a crime and conspiracy to commit a crime, evidently with relation to the struggle several years ago to obtain a therapeutic abortion for a Nicaraguan child raped in Costa Rica. A communiqué read at a press conference by Sofia Montenegro of the Autonomous Women's Movement, said that the ANPDH had been inactive for some time but was under the control of Bishop Abelardo Mata of Estelí. Montenegro alleged that President Daniel Ortega and his wife Rosario Murillo were behind the accusations. ANPDH was the contra "human rights" organisation set up and funded by the US government during the 1980's contra war.



UPCOMING EVENTS

CAWN SPEAKERS TOUR. March 2008

The Central America Women's Network (CAWN) will be inviting two Nicaraguan women's rights activists from the women's organisation *Movimiento de Mujeres Trabajadoras y Desempleadas 'María Elena Cuadra'* (MEC) to visit UK in March 2008.

MEC is a grass-roots non-profit organisation with some 30,000 members working for the full and equal incorporation and participation of women in Nicaraguan society. MEC aims to promote the human, social and economic rights of women in situations of economic vulnerability by lobbying and campaigning public policy-makers to increase women's civic participation and development. The organisation's work depends on mass consultations with women all over Nicaragua in order to bring their voices to the decision-making table.

In 2006 MEC successfully lobbied for the incorporation of a gender perspective in the new Nicaraguan National Employment Policy. Basing their demands on feedback from women gained through municipal and departmental consultations, MEC entered into dialogue with the Nicaraguan government in 2005 claiming that "for an effective employment policy there must be an end to discrimination against women in work place". Following a march attended by 500 women on 1st May 2006, the National Employment Policy, that incorporates MEC's demands regarding women's rights, was formally approved by the Nicaraguan President. Recently, MEC's work has focused on raising awareness and protecting the rights of women working in free trade zones through the campaign "Empleo sí, pero...con dignidad" (Employment yes, but...with dignity!). Through the Economic Literacy project, over the next 5 years 1,500 women will be trained in the dynamics of economic integration and open markets, so that they will be able to influence public policy appropriately. A revolving funds project assists poor women to improve their economic and social conditions.

For further information and to schedule activities, please contact:

Julie Porter at info@cawn.org
Tel: 0207 833 4174

MILLION WOMEN MARCH. 8th March 2008.

Calling all women to stand united Million Women Rise against violence, discrimination and oppression. A day of remembrance, empowerment and action.

For more information visit:
millionwomenrise.blogspot.com

Birds Eye View is looking for documentaries, features, short films and more to screen at the 2008 Festival

The Birds Eye View Film Festival 2008 will open

on March 6th with 6 days of shorts, features, documentaries and special events, panels and parties. All events will be held at leading London film venues.

The festival will be dedicated to a strand of films made by women from developing countries and are looking for a variety of material to raise awareness of international issues affecting these countries and to showcase the artistic vision of female filmmakers living and working in these underrepresented corners of the world.

If you're a woman director, please send a screener (DVD) with English subtitles of the film to the address below or email jahlia.osha@gmail.com with any questions. Attn: Jahlia Osha, Birds Eye View, Unit 306, Aberdeen Centre, 22-24 Highbury Grove, London N5 2EA, UK

T: 020 7704 6500 | F: 020 7704 9435
or visit: www.birds-eye-view.co.uk

CALL FOR PANELS AND PAPERS

LOVA International Conference 3 - 4 July 2008. Amsterdam
Ethnographies of Gender and Globalisation.

Gender and feminist anthropology is a discipline par excellence that can make understandable how globalisation and everyday life are interrelated, especially through its ethnographical methodology. Feminist scholarship has shown that globalisation is not a gender-neutral phenomenon. LOVA invites social science scholars to participate in this international conference by presenting their research in an individual paper or panel.

For more information visit our website:
www.lovanetwork.nl

Women's World / Mundo de Mujeres 2008. 3 - 9 July 2008.

The Universidad Complutense of Madrid in Spain is organising their 10th International Interdisciplinary congress on women. New Frontiers: Dares and Advancements.

For more information visit:
<http://www.mmww08.org/>

RESOURCES

The International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics (iKNOW Politics) is an on-line workspace designed to serve the needs of elected officials, candidates, political party leaders and members, researchers, students and practitioners interested in advancing women in politics. For more information visit: www.iKNOWpolitics.org

The "Siyanda Update" is a monthly newsletter featuring the latest gender mainstreaming resources available on the Siyanda website: <http://www.siyanda.org> Siyanda aims to assist

busy gender practitioners to locate essential gender mainstreaming resources quickly and easily. It is also an interactive space where practitioners can share ideas, experiences and resources with like-minded colleagues.

Globally, about eight women die each hour as a result of unsafe abortions. How can we ensure that the right of all women to safe and legal abortion is realised? The following resources are a selection from over 25 resources added to the Siyanda database on abortion rights.

Unsafe Abortion, id21, August 2007

What is the cost of unsafe abortion? This issue of id21 'health focus' tackles this question. http://www.siyanda.org/static/id21_abortion.htm?em=0710&tag=QG

Decide - Youth Coalition for Sexual Citizenship (in Spanish), This website provides young people with information on sexual and reproductive health and rights and has a special section on abortion rights. http://www.siyanda.org/static/decidir_youth_coalition.htm?em=0710&tag=QG

International Data for Evaluation of Abortion Services, Ipas, January 2007

Information about abortion can be hard to access and difficult to compare. This online database provides a single central point for obtaining reliable and standardised data from over 20 countries divided into five categories, and supported by a glossary and other tools. <http://www.siyanda.org/static/ideas.htm?em=0710&tag=QG>

It is our Decision. Abortion: a Right to Save Women's Lives. (in Spanish), Ipas Centroamérica, June 2006

This training manual aims to support awareness raising, information dissemination and capacity building on abortion issues. It combines a medical approach with human rights and theological perspectives. http://www.siyanda.org/static/blandon_save_lives.htm?em=0710&tag=QG

Death and Denial: Unsafe Abortion and Poverty, International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), January 2006

This report highlights the key issues related to abortion in countries where it is restricted or illegal. http://www.siyanda.org/static/IPPF_abortion_poverty.htm?em=0710&tag=QG

You can find additional resources related to realising rights to safe and legal abortion in Siyanda at:
http://www.siyanda.org/search/results_adv.cfm?Keywords=abortion07&Subject=0&Donor=0&Langu=E&StartRow=1&em=0710&tag=QG

Appeal on Behalf of Nicaraguan Miskito Women

According to official figures published a week after Hurricane Felix hit the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua, 37 people died in the Miskito Keys. According to survivors, houses were torn from their foundations; members of the fishing community were lost in their boats; mothers floating for days in the open sea watched their children slip from their arms; men that tied themselves to trees against fierce winds drowned as waters rose above their heads. At least 80 women died; at least 50 bodies washed up on the coast of Honduras. The discrepancy in numbers is typical of a part of the country where people are ignored while government reserves exact calculation for things like the \$20 million it spent on a legal dispute over ownership of the Keys. It is time to reverse priorities.

Eight days after Felix, in the coastal capital of Bilwi, hundreds of women marched to the governor palace with the names of victims written on placards, sheets, and papers. The concentration of women continued a central role they had acquired in the social and economic life of the Keys. With prejudice and myth forbidding them from work directly on the sea, women had gravitated to the heart of commercial and communal activism, engaging in services, commerce, and trading for the fish and lobster being brought to market by male fishers. A complex gender division of labour characterised the Miskito culture, and communities were held together through closely knit extended family networks.

The hurricane tore apart these networks, as no notice of an impending storm was communicated to the people of the Keys. The large fishing companies based in Managua protected their boats from danger, but took no



Photo: CISAS (www.cisas.org.ni)

responsibility for the people that worked the boats and lived in the region. Army and navy resources, placed in the Keys to pursue drug-runners on their way to the US, concentrated on saving their own agents, and did little to save fishers or others. Government response to the destruction and death of the hurricane includes a cynical proposal to promote adoption of orphans by parents in other countries.

The protest of the women in Bilwi was a demand to right these wrongs. They have been ignored and denied their human rights. They are asking for access to a sustainable livelihood, rooted in their own culture and traditions, independent of the large fishing companies that care little for them as human beings. They are asking for fair government treatment, including the same priority

received by individuals on the mainland, the same privileges afforded economic elites, and the same security priority afforded the drug trade. The Miskito women of the Keys have risen to demand their rights, and those of us in the CAWN community have an opportunity and an obligation to support them.

This is an appeal for help from friends and supporters of the Central America Women's Network. We would be grateful for any money that can be donated. The money raised will be sent to the Women of the Cayos Miskitos through the reconstruction initiative lead by URACCAN. Please write cheques to Central America Women's Network send to CAWN c/o OWA, Bradley Close, White Lion St. London. N1 9PF. Marking the envelope "Women of Los Cayos Appeal"



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