

NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2015

EDITORIAL

Dear readers,

Welcome to yet another edition of CAWN's Newsletter in which we provide you with updates on our activities, a round-up of news from the region and information about some recent books, articles and videos available on issues relating to women's issues in the Central America region. We have also included a first-hand account from a young female volunteer talking about her recent volunteer experience of volunteering in El Salvador where she met and was inspired by members of MSM – the Movimiento Salvadoreño de Mujeres. Alongside stories of repression of human rights activists and women protesting against large mining companies whose actions are threatening the environment and livelihoods of local residents in many countries in the region, we include more uplifting news about successful struggles and recognition of women's work.

In the Newsletter, you will also find some Calls to Action relating to various causes, such as the Global Day of Action for Women's Health on May 28th. We report on the developments in the campaign to free the 17 Salvadorean Women – *Las 17* – facing long prison sentences (up to 30 years) for alleged abortion attempts after having miscarried. Two women jailed after having obstetric complications have been freed, but, despite this success, the pressure must be kept up and your ongoing support for the campaign is called upon. We are also looking for supporters and volunteers to help in the planning and organisation of the Festival of Choice, a day of poetry, song and music around the theme of Women's reproductive choice.

Since the end of April, our long-standing volunteer Margarita Rebolledo, who has recently returned from a long trip to her homeland, Chile, has agreed to help coordinate CAWN's activities on a part-time basis. Please join us in welcoming Marga on board! Meanwhile Virginia, our former coordinator, has just taken up a new position campaigning around trade justice issues, whilst still actively supporting CAWN's work in a voluntary capacity. Congratulations Virginia!

As many of you are aware, these are hard times for small feminist campaigning groups like CAWN. Vigorous fundraising efforts sustained over the last few years have failed to yield fruit. To keep CAWN alive and kicking, we are counting on YOU to support us in whatever way you can. If you value our work, please spread the word around. [Click here to make your donation now.](#)



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CAWN NEWS

Updates, shout-outs, past and upcoming activities, and more

RECENT ACTIONS



CAWN members marched in London

International Women's Day

On the 8th March, CAWN members marched for the International Women's Day as part of the Million Women Rise movement to end male violence against women. Women only marches took place all over Europe and globally on the same day, with the participation of individuals, women's organisations and union representatives.

Advocacy on Abortion Rights and Justice for 'Las 17' in El Salvador

In our campaign demanding justice for the 17 women in prison in El Salvador we collected over 300 signatures supporting our petition to free them. These were delivered to the Salvadoran Ambassador in March and at our meeting we expressed our concerns over the criminalisation of abortion and the denial of women's reproductive rights as a result of this draconian legislation. Letters have been sent to the President of El Salvador and the Legislative Assembly.

We also wrote to the UK Minister responsible for Human Rights and received a reply from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) stating that the UK Government has consistently raised issues relating to women's human rights with the Government of El Salvador. During the recent UN Human Rights Universal Periodic Review in October/ November 2014 they had urged the Government of El Salvador to review laws

regarding abortion and the treatment of women who had abortions or miscarriages. The FCO also assured us that the Embassy in El Salvador is committed to promoting women's rights, especially violence against women, and will continue to raise these issues with government institutions in El Salvador and through the UN Human Rights Council. (For further information on this Campaign, refer to previous editions of the CAWN Newsletter)



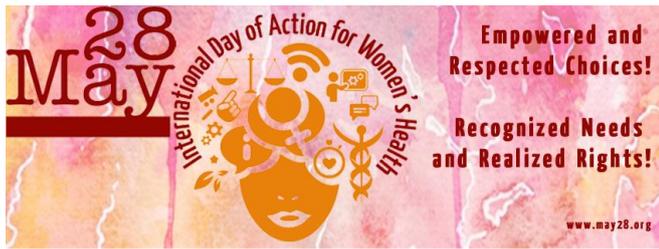
The Salvadoran Ambassador receiving the signatures

Call for Action | Send a letter of solidarity to Las 17

On January 21st 2015, we celebrated an important victory when El Salvador approved the pardon of Guadalupe, one of Las 17. In spite of this tremendous achievement, remarkable civil society mobilisations, and the recent recommendation from a group of United Nations' Special Rapporteurs urging El Salvador to pardon all women jailed for pregnancy complications, most of the remaining pardon requests for Las 17 could soon be denied.

In light of these recent developments it is vitally important that these and other Salvadoran women do not lose hope, and that the international community continues to call on El Salvador to uphold its human rights commitments. The Women Global Network for Reproductive Rights invites allies to [send your "Words of Hope" through postcards and letters until May 28](#). These will be forwarded to the remaining Las 17 and other incarcerated women.

UPCOMING EVENTS



May 28: Global day of action for Women's Health

May 28 is the International Day of Action for Women's Health and it provides a great opportunity to remind government leaders that Women's Health Matters.

Institutional violence takes place when women are denied their right to health and are unable to access sexual and reproductive health services, when they are forcibly sterilised or are not permitted to have control over their pregnancies.

Cases like the [Paraguayan 10-year-old girl forced to continue a pregnancy after being abused](#) or "Las 17", the 17 Salvadoran women jailed and charged with murder after having obstetric complications, should belong to the realm of fiction – but, regrettably, these are real cases involving the gross violation of the rights of girls and women at many different levels.

There are different ways in which you can take

action on May 28, from sending a letter to your government representatives to sharing your views in the blog parade on women's health. You can find some tips on types of action on [May 28's official site](#),

[Make sure you join the thunderclap](#) to make this resonate as much as possible in the social networks.

Join us in calling on governments and the international community to end violence against women in ALL its forms.

Festival of Choice - Call for collaboration

Following the success of last year's [Festival of Choice](#), CAWN is planning to organise a repeat of this event this autumn.

Each year, around September 28, women activists and collectives from around the globe organise to commemorate September 28, the Global Day of Action to Safe and Legal Abortion.

CAWN is aiming to organise, in collaboration with other groups, a series of events taking place in London during the last weeks of September. If you'd like to collaborate, whether as member of a women's collective or as an activist, please let us know by August 14 at info@cawn.org.

PUBLICATIONS

From hospital to jail: the impact on women of El Salvador's total criminalization of abortion

CAWN and Reproductive Health Matters (RHM) have recently translated a report by the Agrupación Ciudadana por la Despenalización del Aborto (Citizens Coalition for the Decriminalisation of Abortion), which was published in the November issue of RHM Journal and also includes extracts from an interview with one of the members of El Salvador's Agrupación Ciudadana. [You can access the abstract here](#). Full access to it requires registration, except in the case of organisations entitled to free access. [The original report \(Spanish\) is available here](#).



NEWS FROM THE REGION

News from external sources and analysis by CAWN supporters and members

EL SALVADOR

Justice for women wrongly imprisoned

On February 18 Guadalupe Vázquez, the first of at least 17 women unjustly imprisoned for allegedly having an abortion, was released from prison after being granted a pardon by El Salvador's Legislative Assembly. [More](#)

On April 23 Carmelina, a young Honduran woman who worked and lived in El Salvador, also regained her freedom after spending 15 months imprisoned. She was condemned for 35 years in prison for aggravated murder after having obstetric complications.

Guadalupe and Carmelina have finally received justice. But there are many more suffering the consequences of El Salvador's draconian abortion law, which not only criminalises women who seek to terminate their pregnancies, but also many others suffering from obstetric complications or who've had miscarriages.

In March 2014, the Asociación Ciudadana por la Decriminalización del Aborto (ACDATEE) started a campaign to demand pardons for 17 women who've suffered a similar luck to that of Carmelina. Fifteen of them are still behind the bars, awaiting for justice to be delivered.

You can show your solidarity with them (see call for action above). Read more on this in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).



Carmelina and her defence - by [Edgardo Ayala, IPS](#)

Defying the total ban on abortion in El Salvador

Morena Herrera, an ex-guerrilla fighter, is passionate about women's rights. Since 2009, she has been working on the issue of abortion rights and currently heads ACDATEE, the campaign to decriminalise abortion in El Salvador. In this [interview](#), she describes how she spent 3 days 'just smiling' after hearing of the release of one of the women from jail.



Morena Herrera - by Amnesty International

The [International Campaign for Women's Right to Safe Abortion \(IAHRC\)](#) accuses the Salvadorean government of human rights violations

The Salvadoran government has been ordered to respond to human rights violations and its role in the death of a woman known as "Manuela" in 2010 by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. The Commission issued a formal letter to the Salvadoran government on 20th April requesting a response to a petition filed by the Center for Reproductive Rights (CRR), ACDATEE (La Agrupación Ciudadana por la Despenalización del Aborto Terapéutico Ético y Eugenésico) and the Colectiva Feminista para el Desarrollo Local in March 2010 regarding the multiple human rights violations "Manuela" suffered because of the country's absolute abortion ban.

"Manuela", a 33-year-old Salvadoran woman and mother of two young children, suffered a complication when giving birth during her third trimester. From the moment she arrived at the hospital, doctors treated her as if she had attempted an abortion and immediately called the police. She was shackled to her hospital bed and accused of murder. She was sentenced to 30

years in prison without ever having had a chance to meet with her lawyer, and without having an opportunity to speak in her own defence. After several months in prison, it was discovered that she had advanced Hodgkin's lymphoma - a disease that could have been treated earlier had medical officials paid any attention to her condition. When she finally received chemotherapy it was too little, too late. Manuela died in jail in 2010.

CRR's regional director for Latin America and the Caribbean, Mónica Arango, said: "Pregnant women should never fear for their life or freedom when they go to a hospital for essential medical care, but that's the hostile situation women face under El Salvador's absolute abortion ban. Manuela's imprisonment and death are emblematic of the suffering of many others, and though it is too late to deliver justice to her personally, we can stop the injustices that too many others in El Salvador will continue to endure as long as this law remains in place. We will continue to press on in Manuela's name to hold the Salvadoran government accountable for its role in these human rights abuses, and to finally bring an end to its destructive anti-abortion laws."

GUATEMALA

On the front lines of mining protests with the Maya

La Puya, as the makeshift settlement is called, has stood for three years outside a gold mine owned by the Reno, Nevada-based Kappes, Cassidy & Associates. The resisters are "a thorn in the side of the company and the government," as one resident said, a protest against toxic contamination and a living demand that voices of those most affected be heard. La Puya is not unique but represents a global phenomenon in which local residents, often indigenous, almost invariably economically poor, are taking the lead in a struggle to protect the earth from harmful exploitation. [More](#)

Domestic Workers Try to Form Union for Rights, but blocks and fears deter

Centracap, a local advocacy group, estimates 186,000 domestic workers are in Guatemala and more than 50 percent have emigrated to Guatemala City from impoverished rural areas. Some earn an hourly wage; others live with their employers. The latter often work up to 14 hours a day and are usually paid \$150 a month, half of the national minimum monthly wage, which is currently \$304.68. Fidelia Castellanos is determined to fight

for better working conditions in Guatemala, where labour unionism is weak after the repression of workers' movements under the country's recent history of military dictatorships. [More](#)

HONDURAS

Action required | Intimidation of LGBT rights defender Esdra Yaveth Sosa Sierra

Ms Esdra Yaveth Sosa Sierra, Director of Asociación Arcoiris - a group promoting the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people (LGBT) - has faced further intimidation as she attends meetings to discuss her security situation following a series of threats and harassment. [Take action.](#)

Indigenous rights campaigner Berta Cáceres wins Goldman prize

Working in the most murderous country in the world for environmental activists, Berta Cáceres is facing down one of Central America's biggest hydro-power projects, powerful landowners, a US-funded police force, and a mercenary army of private security guards. [More](#)



CODEMUH marching on Workers' Day - May 1st

CODEMUH and REDCAM issue statements for Workers' Memorial Day (April 28) and International Workers' Day (pictures)

The Honduran Women Collective (CODEMUH) and the Central American Network of Maquila workers (REDCAM) have issued statements regarding the current work conditions of maquila workers in Honduras. They raise the lack of commitment of the Honduran government to take action against precarious contracts and long shifts

which do not meet regulations on the work limit per day. CODEMUH also makes a call to North American and European consumers, trade marks and government representatives, to take responsibility for the physical and psychological harm resulting from the appalling conditions in the maquila factories. You can read the statements in [English](#) or in [Spanish](#).



Gladys Lanza - by [Orlando Sierra/Getty](#)

Honduran Human Right Defender Gladys Lanza condemned for “defamation”

Gladys Lanza, a Honduran feminist activist from the Movimiento de Mujeres Visitación Padilla, was [recently convicted of defamation](#) for defending a woman who accused a Honduran government official of sexual harassment. The verdict is aimed at sending a powerful message to all defenders of women’s rights in the country: “If you don’t want to be prosecuted, stay silent.” In the most recent edition of the Gender Justice Uncovered Awards, [this verdict was nominated for the "Bludgeon Awards"](#) - those legal decisions that negatively affect gender inequality. [More](#)

MEXICO

Six women murdered each day as femicide nears a pandemic

According to the National Citizen Femicide Observatory, a coalition of 43 groups that document the crime of femicide, six women are assassinated every day. Yet only 24 percent of the 3,892 femicides the group identified in 2012 and 2013 were investigated by authorities and only 1.6 percent led to sentencing.

“Femicides are a pandemic in Mexico,” asserts Ana Güzmes, the local representative of United Nations Women, the agency devoted to gender issues. [More](#)

Legal Interruption of Pregnancy must be a right at a national level (Spanish)

After 8 years of the decriminalisation of abortion in Mexico DF, official data reveals the need for abortion to be legalised at a national level. Hear the [radio extract here](#).

NICARAGUA



Red de Mujeres de Matagalpa/Matagalpa Women’s Network.

The Nicaragua Canal – a ‘Very Bad Plan’

In this detailed [account](#), Brian Kevin, who visited Nicaragua in early 2015, talks about the serious implications of the plans to build a 173-mile canal linking Nicaragua’s Caribbean and Pacific coasts. For the President, Daniel Ortega, the canal represents an unrivalled opportunity for economic growth. The development, expected to cost \$50 billion, was approved by the parliament in June 2013 after just 3 days of debate and no public consultation. Soon after, the Government and the Hong Kong based Chinese company, HKND, signed a 50-year contract (renewable for another 50) to develop, operate and build infrastructure, including roads and ports to service the canal.

The implications for the environment and the livelihoods of hundreds of communities affected are potentially catastrophic. The biggest problem is that most people have no idea what it will mean for them and no one has bothered to ask them. On the eve of commencement of construction in December 2014, thousands of people gathered in the capital, Managua, to protest. Despite hostile reactions and the aggressive response from the authorities in Nicaragua, [popular protests continue unabated](#). Gender-focussed analysis is currently underway and CAWN will be keeping our readers informed as reports emerge from the women’s movement and research community.

Women Out Loud: Motherhood and Activism

Women Out Loud! is a podcast, produced by MADRE, that shares the stories of activists who are defining the future of women's human rights

worldwide. You can hear an excerpt from a recent conversation (in Spanish) with our partner in Nicaragua, Rose Cunningham Kain, who shared that her position as a community has inspired her son Otis to become an advocate for the rights of women and girls. [More](#)

VOLUNTEERING IN EL SALVADOR WITH PROGRESSIO: A FIRST HAND ACCOUNT



Juliana Giwa is a 20-year-old university student, currently studying Modern Languages with Latin American Studies. She has volunteered both locally and internationally and has a keen interest in women's and ethnic minority issues, especially in Latin America. She hopes to work for an NGO in order to help counter such matters.

Here, Juliana talks about her volunteer experience in El Salvador organised by Progressio, a London-based international NGO whose broad mission is to promote 'people powered development'. The volunteer programme, called ICS (International Citizen's Service), is funded by the Department for International Development. Progressio is one of a consortium of charities implementing this programme.

In July 2014, I spent 10 weeks in El Salvador as part of the ICS programme that has been run by Progressio since 2010.

I knew little about the project before going, just that we would be working with a women's group called Movimiento Salvadoreño de Mujeres (MSM) on a project related to eco-tourism. As we later found out, the work of our group was part of a bigger initiative leading to the development of an eco-tourism route that would attract tourists to the area and bring economic benefits to local communities.

We worked in a community called Nuevo Gualcho in the municipality of Nueva Granada in Usulután, Many of its inhabitants were ex-guerrilla fighters.

Three women - Estrela, Teodora and Roselia -shared their stories of involvement in community organisation as well as their role and hardships they faced during the civil war. It is clear that the MSM played an important role in the community during this period.

The work of the volunteers entailed quite a lot of hard labour. In our group, we had four female volunteers from El Salvador, who impressed us, as well as the male nationals, with their strength and ability to do heavy work, involving land clearance using *machetes*.

Personally, I was also struck by the confidence of the women in the community, many of whom played an important part in steering the project. Through this and other projects, Progressio has clearly encouraged women to take on leadership roles in their own communities alongside the men.

What I liked most about volunteering with ICS is that



Two of the volunteers



Volunteers and their finished work

you work alongside national volunteers from the community in which you are working. This is important because it means that the views and opinions of both the national and British volunteers and heard and taken into account.

I strongly encourage anyone who is looking for an enriching and inspiring experience working in El Salvador to consider enrolling to volunteer with ICS. You can find more about it [here](#).

OTHER RESOURCES

Report | Climate Justice And Women's Rights: A Guide To Supporting Grassroots Women's Action

[Climate Justice and Women's Rights](#) explains why supporting grassroots women is so important if we really want to make a difference on climate change. It is also the first report of its type to offer case studies and practical tips on how to get resources to local people working at the nexus of women's rights and climate change.

Film | Justice for My Sister – Guatemala Domestic Violence Case Challenges for Justice

'Justice for My Sister' follows one Guatemalan woman during her three-year battle to hold her sister's killer accountable. She encounters many obstacles: a police record that is missing, a judge who is accused of killing his own wife, and witnesses who are too afraid to testify. In the end, Rebeca emerges as a leader in her community with a message for others that justice is possible. Justice for My Sister film was shown in a special screening at the UN Commission on the Status of Women in NYC, sponsored by the US Mission to the UN and the Guatemalan Mission to the UN. [Watch the trailer here](#).

Film | El Eco del Dolor de Mucha Gente (The Echo of Pain of the Many)

"For over 30 years, members of the Cuevas family have been campaigning for justice for our son and brother Carlos, disappeared in 1984, and our sister-in-law Rosario Godoy de Cuevas and their family, abducted and murdered at the hands of the Guatemalan military." Ana Lucía Cuevas returned to Guatemala after learning in 2008 that a Secret Police Archive was found by accident in Guatemala City, and with new clues that could shed light on what happened to her brother. This documentary reveals the many other stories of pain that still resonate very vividly in Guatemala.

El Eco del Dolor de Mucha Gente was released in 2011 and is now [freely available in both English and Spanish](#).



Video | Twenty years of Central American feminisms (Spanish)

The feminist programme *La Corriente* has grown up over twenty years, working on the construction and strengthening of the women's and feminist movements in Central America. It was born as a Central American initiative and it still remains so 20 years later, although in recent years they have increased their focus on Nicaragua. [You can check their video that sums up this journey through 20 years of Central American feminisms](#).

Music | Tremble, patriarchy, tremble: Hip hop, rebelliousness and equality

On March 8 a [compiled work of 12 Latin American rappers](#) was launched. "We are women, we are Hip Hop" began in 2013 as an initiative in Ecuador, but from 2014 expanded into Latin America and aims to build activists processes through art that promote gender equality", says the Guatemalan artist Rebecca Lane. The launch of the video "[Latinoamerica Unida](#)" is part of the efforts of this group and as Rebecca Lane points out, this has helped her to strengthen her own work and short-

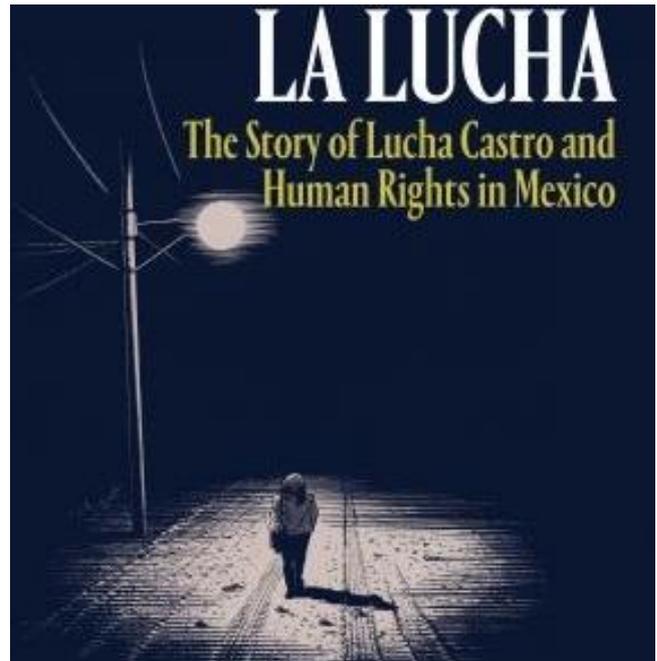
term plans. "I'm looking for the empowerment of women in the Central American Hip Hop culture, with workshops, presentations and events. Women are transforming the role that society has assigned to us and we are creating regional movements" asserts the artist and activist.

Book | La Lucha: The Story of Lucha Castro and Human Rights in Mexico

This is the first in a series of non-fiction graphic novels from Front Line Defenders documenting the stories of human rights defenders at risk around the world.

La Lucha recounts the stories of Lucha Castro, some of her colleagues at her organization – Centro de Derechos Humanos de las Mujeres – in Chihuahua, and of other Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) who sacrificed their lives in the defence of women's rights and human rights more generally, in their communities in Chihuahua and Juarez – two of the most dangerous cities in

the world over the last decade. [More](#)



If you believe in CAWN's work, please help us! These are hard times for small and brave organisations, and every donated pound will be wisely and efficiently used. [Click here](#) to make your donation now. Thank you for your support.

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